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President * News * Vice President * History & Tours * First Lady * Mrs. Cheney

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Printer-Friendly Version

In Focus

- Medicare
- Iraq
- National Security
- Economic Security
- Homeland Security
- More Issues
- En Español

News

- Current News
- Video
- Press Briefings
- Proclamations
- Executive Orders
- Radio Addresses

News by Date

- October 2003
- September 2003
- August 2003
- July 2003
- June 2003
- May 2003
- April 2003
- March 2003
- February 2003
- January 2003
- December 2002
- November 2002
- October 2002
- September 2002
- August 2002
- July 2002
- June 2002
- May 2002
- April 2002
- March 2002
- February 2002
- January 2002
- December 2001
- November 2001
- October 2001
- September 2001
- August 2001
- July 2001
- June 2001
- May 2001
- April 2001
- March 2001
- February 2001
- January 2001

Appointments

- Nominations
- Application

[Home](#) > [News & Policies](#) > [October 2003](#)

For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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President Bush, Police Commissioner Kerik Discuss Police Force in Iraq

Remarks by the President After a Meeting with Former New York City Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik
The South Lawn

8:44 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all for coming. I'll make a couple of statements. I'm going to ask Bernie Kerik to make a statement, and I'll answer two questions before I go to Milwaukee.

First, I want to welcome Bernie Kerik to the South Lawn, and to the Oval Office. We just had a fascinating discussion about what he did in Iraq, what he saw in Iraq. He can speak for himself. But let me characterize it this way, that he went to help the Iraqis organize a police force. He showed up at times of chaos and confusion. Because of his leadership, his knowledge and his experience, he was able to stand up a police force in Baghdad in a very quick period of time. I think he told me opened up 37 different precinct stations -- 35 different precinct stations. They activated and trained 35,000 Iraqi police force. And that's important because the ultimate solution to the security issues in Iraq is for the Iraqi citizens to manage their own affairs.

Bernie went there and made a big difference. And for that our nation is very grateful. We appreciate it a lot.

MR. KERICK: Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: We're going to start training police officers in Jordan soon. As well, tomorrow, 750 new Iraqi army soldiers will graduate from training. Part of our strategy is to enable the Iraqis to protect themselves. Mr. Kerik can speak to this, but in a very short period of time, we're making great progress. Iraq is becoming more secure, and that is good.

That is good for our overall mission because a free and peaceful Iraq will mean that America is more secure. I'll make one other comment, then Bernie will say a few words.

Mr. David Kay reported to the nation. I want to thank him for his good work. He is a thoughtful man. He and his team have worked under very difficult circumstances. They have done a lot of work in three months, and he reported on an interim basis.

The report states that Saddam Hussein's regime had a clandestine network of biological laboratories, a live strain of deadly agent botulinum, sophisticated concealment efforts, and advanced design work on prohibited longer range missiles. The report summarized the regime's efforts in this way, and I quote from the report:

"Iraq's WMD programs spanned more than two decades, involved thousands of people, billions of dollars, and was elaborately shielded by security and deception operations that continued even beyond the end of



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[view](#)

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Federal Facts

■ [Federal Statistics](#)

West Wing

■ [History](#)

Operation Iraqi Freedom."

That is what the report said. Specifically, Dr. Kay's team discovered what the report calls, and I quote, "dozens of WMD-related program activities and significant amounts of equipment that Iraq concealed from the United Nations during the inspections that began in late 2002."

In addition to these extensive concealment efforts, Dr. Kay found systematic destruction of evidence of these illegal activities. This interim progress report is not final. Extensive work remains to be done on his biological, chemical and nuclear weapons programs. But these findings already make clear that Saddam Hussein actively deceived the international community, that Saddam Hussein was in clear violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441, and that Saddam Hussein was a danger to the world.



The Commissioner will say a few words.

MR. KERIK: Thank you. I just -- first, I want to take this opportunity to thank the President for giving me the honor, and allowing me to go to Iraq -- to go to Iraq and help the Iraqi people, give the Iraq people back their country.

And we did so -- and we did so quite quickly, and that continues on a daily basis. Four months ago -- four-and-a-half months ago, when I arrived in Iraq, there were no police -- very few, if any. There were no police stations. There were no cars. There was no electricity. They didn't have telephones, communications, radios. They basically had nothing. They had no equipment. They had no weapons, except for those they had ordered kept on the side. In the last four months, we brought back more than 40,000 police, 450 cars in Baghdad, stood up 35 police stations in Baghdad.

But I know I constantly hear as I come back, I listen to the press, and I listen to some of the public, some of the criticism. And they talk about, it's taking too long. Well, try to stand up 35 police stations in New York City. It would take you about 11 years, depending on who is in the city council. It takes a while. You only have 24 hours in a day. But they have made tremendous progress. The police are working; they're working in conjunction with the military. They are arresting the Fedayeen Saddam and the Baathists.

And I read some of the articles about this, about Dr. Kay's report today, in my opinion, there was one weapon of mass destruction in Iraq, and it was Saddam Hussein. I visited the mass graves. I watched the videos of the Mukhabarat, the intelligence services, interrogate, torture, abuse and execute people day after day. I watched them tie grenades to the necks of people, or stuff grenades in the pockets of people as they interviewed them, and then detonate those grenades and watch the people disappear. I watched a video of Saddam sitting in an office and allowing two Doberman Pinschers to eat alive a general, a military general because he did not trust his loyalty. There was one weapon of mass destruction -- he's no longer in power. And I think that's what counts today.

I understand, probably more than anyone, what a threat Iraq was and the people that threatened Iraq was. I was beneath the towers on September 11th when they fell. And I -- again, I just -- I want to thank the President for the honor in allowing me to go there, because I lost 23 people. I wear this -- this memorial band for the 23 I lost. They were defending the freedom of our country. I got to go on their behalf to Iraq, to bring freedom to Iraq and take one less threat away from us in this country. So, Mr. President



THE PRESIDENT: I'll answer a couple of questions.

Q Mr. President, are you still confident that you'll -- that weapons of mass destruction will be found in Iraq? And how long do you think that that search will go on? Is that an open-ended search until something is

found?

THE PRESIDENT: That's a question you can ask David Kay. He'll be interviewing with the press today -- his opinion. I can only report to what his interim report says.

Q Well --

THE PRESIDENT: Let me -- let me finish, please.

Q Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: His interim report said that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program spanned more than two decades. That's what he said. See, he's over there under difficult circumstances and reports back. He says that the WMD program involved thousands of people, billions of dollars and was elaborately shielded by security and deception operations that continued even beyond the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In other words, he's saying Saddam Hussein was a threat, a serious danger.

Q There's a poll out in which a lot of people today are wondering whether the war was really worth the cost.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q How do you respond to that, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I don't make decisions based upon polls. I make decisions based upon what I think is important for the security of the American people. And I'm not going to forget the lessons of 9/11, September 2001. I'm not going to forget what Mr. Kerick described, the bombing that killed innocent life. This administration will deal with gathering dangers where we find them. The interim report of Mr. Kay showed that Saddam defied 1441 and was a danger. We gave him ample time to deal with his weapons of mass destruction -- he refused. So he's no longer in power and the world is better off for it.

I can't think of any people who think that the world would be a safe place with Saddam Hussein in power. Sometimes the American people like the decisions I make, sometimes they don't. But they need to know I'll make tough decisions based upon what I think is right, given the intelligence that I know, in order to do my job, which is secure this country, and to bring peace.

Thank you all.

Q But isn't the issue that you overstated the threat in the view of critics --

THE PRESIDENT: Bernie, you're a good man.

MR. KERIK: Thank you, Mr. President.

END 8:54 A.M. EDT

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