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America’s war against Iraq, and battered women who kill their sleeping abusers, both present challenges to the imminence requirement in self-defense. In both cases, the actors claim the imminence requirement is too restrictive because to be successful, the defender may need to act prior to the threat becoming “imminent.” Many criminal law scholars are willing to jettison imminence, reasoning that the imminence requirement’s *raison d’etre* is to establish the necessity of defensive force and thus imminence should not trump necessity.

This Article maintains the imminence requirement is more than simply a proxy for necessity: imminence has independent substantive significance. By modifying the type of threats sufficient to trigger defensive force, imminence effectively serves as an *actus reus* for aggression. Without the imminence requirement, inchoate and contingent threats could justify self-defensive action, thereby eliding the distinction between self-defense and self-preference and abrogating the distinction between defense and offense.

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