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Comments on Iraq, the United Nations (UN), and the Inspection Crisis: What Iraqi error in judgment?

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Last week's IBPP provided an analysis illustrating that the Iraqi-UN inspection crisis is not a creation of Iraqi misjudgment but of wit, guile, and strong logic. Events this week further support this position. (1) Emilio Cardenas, the Argentinean member of the three-envoy team sent to Iraq last week has been quoted stating that "(in Iraq) people are thinking daily about their fight for survival" and has been described as advocating for alleviation of hardships for average Iraqis, adjusting the UN's humanitarian oil for food agreement, and allowing some public services to be repaired. (2) An official familiar with UN inspection team activities has stated that "(the Iraqis) wait until confronted with such overwhelming evidence that they are forced to confess their concealment and their lying." (Even with a non-credible story, time is gained.) (3) An impending UN resolution may ban international flights of Iraqi officials--a very minor consequence to violating UN inspection criteria and impeding inspection procedures. (4) It is becoming more commonly known that Iraq has retained and even further procured and developed proscribed military assets and technology and materiel to produce and develop such assets. (5) There seems to be little UN support for military intervention at this time. (6) Some of the United States Government's (USG) allies from the Persian Gulf War are publicly supporting Iraq's demands for ending economic sanctions, stating that an attack on Iraq is an attack on them, and minimizing the nature of Iraqi inspection violations. (7) The economic conference to be held this weekend in Dohar, Qatar will include few Arab participants. (8) Concern for the reactions of many Arab states seems to be causing the USG to be less forceful than it might otherwise be towards Iraq.

As written in IBPP last week, Saddam may have decided that he's in an avoidance-avoidance situation--viz., complying with inspections and still experiencing sanctions or not complying and still experiencing the sanctions. Thus, publicly challenging the US component of inspections may present little significant risk. The possibility for gain through "anchoring" and through the very real political pressures to relax or disestablish sanctions present significant possibility for gain--a way out of the avoidance-avoidance situation. Misjudgment does not seem to characterize Iraqi political decisionmaking at this time. (Note: An additional observation is that the Iraqi threats to attack U-2 aircraft are just that--threats only. The induce a more visible US military posture that is perceived negatively by most members of the UN--thereby contributing to pressures consonant with Iraqi political goals. The threats also play well in many sectors of the Arab world. And while all the above may be occurring, time is being gained for additional violations of developing, procuring, hiding, and maintaining proscribed assets. The Iraqi Government has created a situation in which it can now--at least temporarily--bar US citizens from being part of the inspection teams.) (See Armus, H. L. (1986). Startle and reward-based avoidance-avoidance conflict. *Psychological Reports*, 59, 483-486; Bavelas, J.B., Black, A., Bryson, L., & Mullett, J. (1988). Political equivocation: A situational explanation. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 7, 137-145; Campbell, B.A., Smith, N. F., & Misanin, J. R. (1966). Effects of punishment on extinction of avoidance behavior: Avoidance-avoidance conflict or vicious circle behavior? *Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology*, 62, 495-498; Crossette, B. (November 12, 1997). U.N. Council moves to block travel by Iraqis. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Crossette, B. (November 11, 1997). Iraqi assails U.S. and calls Albright a liar. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Miscalculating miscalculations: Why Iraqi threats against the United States (US) make sense. IBPP, 3(15); Jehl, D.

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