

11-21-1997

Trends. The Inspection Crisis: The Iraqi-US Scorecard

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Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (1997) "Trends. The Inspection Crisis: The Iraqi-US Scorecard," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 17 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol3/iss17/6>

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Author: Editor

Volume: 3

Issue: 17

Date: 1997-11-21

Keywords: United States, Iraq, Inspections, Nuclear, United Nations, Strategy

(IBPP Note: Students of Embry-Riddle University's Security and Globalization Seminar helped develop the following analysis.)

As of this writing (November 20, 1997, 5pm EDT the Iraqi Government professes to have reversed policy--allowing United States (US) citizens back into Iraq to participate in the inspections of the United Nations (UN) Special Commission. Stephen Erlanger of The New York Times writes that "If....Saddam Hussein does back down without warfare, it will represent an important victory for American and Russian diplomacy." Really?

So far it seems that Iraq has been able to: (1) secure promises to be able to sell more oil for more humanitarian purposes--some of the latter stretching the limits of what can charitably be called humanitarian; (2) increase perceptions throughout large populaces in the Third World that he "has what it takes" to "hang tough" against the world's only superpower and has actually achieved a great victory against it; (3) demonstrate that the UN, the US, and various other countries do not have the stomach, staying power, and persistence to engage in politico-military conflict; (4) demonstrate the very real conflicts about Iraq among members of the UN Security Council and the General Assembly; (5) highlight that the US attempts to bend the UN to its will while owing it a relatively vast amount of money; (6) buy more time to continue various practices of cover, camouflage, deception, and engagement in proscribed activities--some of this through the UN itself discontinuing inspections even as it has allowed leaders of other countries to successfully contest the make-up of UN teams, viz., in the former Zaire; (7) demonstrate that the DESERT STORM coalition is truly in tatters; (8) create psychological anchoring effects hindering effective future inspections and the maintenance of sanctions--probably through increasing the probability that time limits and very imperfect criteria defining inspection "success" may be instituted, as is if objective success could ever be realized; (9) impede the implicit US policy of maintaining sanctions until Saddam Hussein is no longer in power; (10) effect a purported change in UN inspection team composition--probably through increasing the overall number of team members thereby decreasing the percentage of US citizens; and (11) caused the US to expend tax dollars by building up military assets and increasing alert status throughout the Persian Gulf and other relevant geographical regions.

With US victories like this, its adversaries do not need defeat it. (See Bennet, J. (November 20, 1997). Behind the scenes, Clinton firmly guiding Iraq policy. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Crossette, B. (November 20, 1997). U.N. council gets evidence of Iraqi illicit arms buildup. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Erlanger, S. (November 20, 1997). Iraq reportedly will allow return of all weapons inspectors. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>.)