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Trends. Iraq: To Bomb or not to Bomb?

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Last week's Issue of IBPP provided an analysis against initiating an "air war" employing bombs and missiles against Iraq as a punishment for violating United Nations directives. The Issue did advocate the use of bombs and missiles in a manner compatible with cost-benefit criteria to destroy Iraqi biological, chemical, nuclear, and missile assets that pose a local, regional, and--through terrorism--even a global threat. Here "cost benefit" implies that Iraq's attackers have some fair idea where the assets are, that these assets can be destroyed or damaged via bombs and missiles, and that the cost of attack and its consequences is acceptable in the face of benefits--political, social, cultural, economic, as well as military.

However, several costs of an attack seem to be minimized or discounted by attack advocates. (1) As with the Gulf War itself, an attack may well free biological and chemical warfare agents into the atmosphere endangering Iraqi citizens and, perhaps, citizens of adjacent countries and beyond. (2) Given that an attack will destroy or damage only a part of Iraq's proscribed assets, is there the political will for attacking again and again? With a very low probability of complete success? (3) Are the Iraqis who will be killed via collateral damage considered acceptable losses? United States (US) Government authorities and those of other nations have focused on attributing responsibility for these deaths to Saddam, not on the moral and ethical Issues of the deaths. (4) If there is enough damage to the Republican Guards and other pillars of the Saddam regime to precipitate Saddam's assassination or overthrow--or if Saddam dies in the onslaught of bombs and missiles--will the resulting political, military, and other consequences be better or worse than what they replace? (5) If bombing and even ground forces are to employed until Saddam is "removed from office one way or another" (attributed by The New York Times to US Senate majority leader, Trent Lott, what will the consequences be for the rule of law--internationally and otherwise?

There appears to be a greater momentum to engage in military attack than there is to anticipate its likely proximal and distal consequences. Perhaps things will work out. Then again, perhaps not. Is this politico-military planning at its best? (Addendum: Political psychologists interested in informing policy on this Issue might consider existing research on the consequences of continuous versus intermittent punishment, the conscious and subconscious meanings of self-injurious behavior, attributions and ascriptions regarding obedience to authority, and the intergenerational transmission of discipline styles.) (See Blass, T. (1995). Right wing authoritarianism and role as predictors about obedience to authority. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 19, 99-100; Covell, K., Grusec, J.E., & King, G. (1995). The intergenerational transmission of maternal discipline and standards for behavior. *Social Development*, 4, 32-43; Lerman, D.C., Iwata, B.A., Shore, B.A., & DeLeon, I.G. (1997). Effects of intermittent punishment on self-injurious behavior: An evaluation of schedule training. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 30, 187-201; Myers, S.L. (February 5, 1998). The President and the GOP diverge on Iraq. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Why Bombing Iraq as Punishment is Contraindicated. (January 30, 1998). IBPP, 4(4).)