Rationales and Rationalizations: United States Government Policy Towards Iraqi Noncompliance with United Nations-Mandated Inspections and Monitoring

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Recommended Citation

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Abstract. This article identifies apparent inconsistencies in United States Government explanations for its current policy towards Iraqi noncompliance with the inspection and monitoring requirements of the United Nations. The article then posits an explanation for these inconsistencies in explanation.

For many months United States Government (USG) public policy has constituted a vow to launch a military attack--unilateral or bilateral--against Iraq if the latter interfered with the inspection and monitoring functions of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The rationale for this policy seems to involve the need to prevent and deter Iraq from operationalizing biological, chemical, nuclear, and ballistic missile assets, technology, and knowledge. The need to identify and destroy what had been or could be accomplished in Iraqi efforts to operationalize has constituted UNSCOM's and IAEA's inspection and monitoring goals towards prevention and deterrence.

Now, however, the USG criterion for military attack has moved temporally closer to a noxious Iraqi behavioral endpoint--from interfering with inspections to actually producing weapons of mass destruction. The rationales for this change--per se and as inconsistent with previous policy--present yet additional inconsistencies.

For example, if the main purpose of inspection and monitoring is to prevent and deter weapons production through robust identification and destruction, how can one even know that production has occurred if inspection and monitoring cannot occur? Yet again, USG officials have stated that USG intelligence assets--apparently human, satellite, and aircraft--are sufficient at least for monitoring Iraqi activities. If this is the case, why require UNSCOM and IAEA to engage in inspection and monitoring at all?

A further quote attributed to a senior USG official: "A confrontation…in Iraq may prove a point, but it doesn't get you closer to what you want to accomplish, which is to help UNSCOM do what it needs to do" (Erlanger, August 15). The problem here is that historical data suggest that confrontation--e.g., stopping very short of military intervention--seems to have facilitated Iraqi noninterference with UNSCOM and IAEA. What novel event or analytic tour de force allows one to arrive at a different conclusion at present?

US Secretary of State Albright has tried to confront the above inconsistencies in two ways. First, she contends that these inconsistencies are not inconsistencies. By not engaging in a military attack on Iraq, the USG is allowing for a critical mass of concern to build on the UN Security Council that will lead to a military attack. Also, by not engaging in a military attack on Iraq and allowing Iraqi interference with UNSCOM and IAEA to continue, the USG is ensuring the continuation of sanctions that also hinder Iraqi operationalization of weapons of mass destruction. A counter to her contentions? In both cases, time seems to be working on the side of the Iraqis as nation-states with varying economic, social, cultural, and political agendas seek to return to the status quo that existed before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

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Moreover, a strong case can be made that Saddam Hussein seems willing to tolerate sanctions in return for no or less inspections and/or monitoring.

The advancing of apparently inconsistent rationales through time--each rationale embellished with the trappings of logic--suggest that something illogical may be fueling USG decisionmaking. (Beyond Lewinskian rational and irrational considerations). Rationalization--the unconscious utilization of logic as a compromise expression of illogical and irrational conflict--may be that something. The USG political dynamic towards Iraq may involve less the serious and conscious concerns of Iraqi weapons proliferation and employment and more the contamination of unconscious enemy images--the latter rendering an enemy more dangerous in the political world and in the world of the psyche. (See Erlanger, S. (August 14, 1998). U.S. retreats from vow to use force if Iraq blocks inspectors. The New York Times, p. A4; Erlanger, S. (August 15, 1998). U.S. urged arms monitor to back off from clash with Iraq. The New York Times, p. A5; Fointiat, V. (1998). Rationalization in act and problematic behaviour justification. European Journal of Social Psychology, 28, 471-474; Gillett, E. (1998). Relativism and the social constructivist paradigm. Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology, 5, 37-48; von Hecker, U. (1997). How do logical inference rules help construct social mental models? Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 33, 367-400.)(Keywords: Ballistic Missiles, Biological Warfare, Chemical Warfare, Iraq, Nuclear Warfare.)

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