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Trends. The Psychology of Self-Preemptive Language and Action: Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Abstract: This Trends article discusses the difficulties the Bush Administration encountered when attempting to sell the invasion of Iraq to the rest of the world. Language, action, and global perceptions are discussed.

Regardless of one's stance on the appropriateness of a preemptive and/or preventive military invasion of Iraq by the United States (US), by the US and a few allies, or by a broader alliance with or without the imprimatur of the United Nations, a consensus observation might be that the Bush Administration is having a problem selling an invasion to the world.

Part of the problem is one of language. For example, the US Secretary of Defense asserts that US intelligence has "bulletproof" evidence of links between Al Qaeda and the Iraqi government, but he also asserts that "We're not going to have everything beyond a reasonable doubt. The data are "not photographs," but are "assessments from limited number of sources. It's as if the US does not have enough to convict, but enough to sentence. And the concurrent assertion of certainty and uncertainty does not bode well for creating True Believers in the US Way.

Another part of the problem is action. The US predilection for military intervention in Iraq often focuses on the threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) for terrorist employment. But given that it's much cheaper and easier to attenuate a WMD threat at its source than in reacting to WMD employment, the lesser attention of the US throughout the world in focusing on securing WMD and related materiel and accounting for and managing individuals with WMD-related expertise belies the notion of a WMD threat from Iraq impelling a US military response. Additional US Government assertions and protestations about other Iraqi misbehaviors, e.g., sanctions-busting and prisoner-holding, largely seem to unfocus and distract from pro-military intervention.

The Bush Administration may be completely on the mark in its statement of the problem(s) and of the cure. In an era of globalization, including the perceptions of a global village, the Administration is missing by a mile. (See Clarke, S. (2001). The Kleinian position: Phantasy, splitting and the language of psychic violence. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, 6, 289-297; Hauksson, J. (2000). Mentality is half of perception: Gudmundur Finnbogason-Icelandic pioneer in sociology. *Acta Sociologica*, 43, 307-315; Sopory, P., & Dillard, J. P. (2002). The persuasive effects of metaphor: A meta-analysis. *Human Communication Research*, 28, 382-419; Vaes, J., & Wicklund, R. A. (2002). General threat leading to defensive reactions: A field experiment on linguistic features. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 41, 271-280.)