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Trends. Predicting an Iraqi Insurrection: A Contribution From Balance Theory

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Abstract: This Trends article evaluates the problematic of concept of enemies and supposed allies among supporters of a United States-led military intervention in Iraq.

Some supporters of a United States (US)-led military intervention against Iraq have asserted that "the Iraqis" might engage in much less fighting than "one might think." One set of assertions supporting this assertion is that (according to a US congressman) "Nobody supports Saddam Hussein in Iraq. He has almost zero support among the people. They are waiting for us to help them free themselves. They are and will be friends of the United States."

The problem with this line of thought is that an enemy of one's enemy is not always one's friend. For example, an enemy of one's enemy might be viewed as potentially a greater enemy to the viewer than the latter, so that the latter becomes or can become much less of an enemy as long as the former is salient as the greater threat. This thinking in terms of balancing triads, tetrads, etc., as opposed to only dyads, is seemingly absent from some rabid supporters of US military intervention.

Some of the elements that might make the US Government (USG) and its military representatives be perceived quite negatively, even when contrasted with the regime of Saddam Hussein, include beliefs concerning Iraqi nationalism, USG anti-Islam bias, USG desires to control oil and engage in politically imperial ambitions, USG cultural imperialism and sinfulness, USG selectivity in what "evil" to punish, and USG plans for the aftermath of war against Iraq. On balance, then, the assertion of a collective craving of Iraqis for US military intervention in Iraq, a craving that will attenuate serious military resistance, is off balance. (See Alessio, J.C. (1990). A synthesis and formalization of Heiderian balance and social exchange theory. Social Forces, 68, 1267-1286; Excerpts from House debate on the use of military force against Iraq. (October 9, 2002). The New York Times, p. A14; Greenwald, A.G., Banaji, M.R., Rudman, L.A., Farnham, S.D., Nosek, B.A., & Mellott, D.S. (2002). Psychological Review, 109, 3-25; Thompson, J. (1989). Assessment of family interactions using Heider's Balance Theory. Journal of Human Behavior and Learning, 6,, 62-70.) (Keywords: Balance Theory, Iraq, Military Strategy, Nationalism, Saddam Hussein.)

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