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Trends, Personalities, Motivations, and Capabilities: The Iraq-North Korea Distinction

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Abstract: This Trends article discusses and evaluates the handling of public affairs and justifications for military intervention in Iraq by the United States Secretary of State.

As this week's IBPP goes to press, those people engaged in public discourse on a go/no-go decision for military intervention in Iraq are focusing on the presentation made at the United Nations on February 5, 2003 by the United States (US) Secretary of State. A less salient, but also important, presentation was made to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee by the US Deputy Secretary of State on February 4, 2003.

Commentary on this latter presentation included a distinction between the alleged motivations of the Iraqi and North Korean regimes as to weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Simply, the Iraqi regime has the motivation to intimidate, dominate, and attack, while the North Korean regime has the motivation to garner economic benefits through selling WMD. And the former motivation supports the military go decision, while the latter does not.

Even if accurate, the distinction on motivations does not necessitate the tilt towards Iraq to effect a military intervention. The putative North Korean motivation to garner economic benefits would result in an expansive, global proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The proliferation would significantly heighten terrorist threat against the US and its allies.

It is the case that in developing go/no-go decisions for military intervention, one should not only seek to identify motivations but also the capabilities and personality style of threatening regimes. The Deputy Secretary may have not only erred in the decision-making implications of Iraqi and North Korean motivations, but in not adding in capabilities and personality styles.

There may be a strong case beyond ideological and personal rationales for military intervention against Iraq--and even beyond the observation that the North Koreans could much more easily counter with unacceptable military damage than the Iraqis. But this case has not yet been publicly and coherently made. If a military intervention against Iraq is the right move, the public affairs shortfall is unfortunate. (See Armitage, R. (February 4, 2003). Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC. <http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/17170.htm>; Dowding, K. (2002). Revealed preference and external reference. *Rationality & Society*, 14, 259-284; Miller, D. T., & Nelson, L. D. (2002). Seeing approach motivation in the avoidance behavior of others: Implications for an understanding of pluralistic ignorance. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 83, 1066-1075; Rousseau, D.L. (2002). Motivations for choice: The salience of relative gains in international politics. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46, (3) 394-426 (Keywords: Iraq, Military Intervention, North Korea, Weapons of Mass Destruction.)