6-6-2003

An Apocryphal Discourse: Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

Recommended Citation

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Abstract. This article contests a global, public discourse wherein the United States Government's (USG) foreign policy credibility will be severely damaged without the discovery of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) developed by the Saddam Hussein government.

Simple analogies based on competitive games often comprise public discourse on political Issues. On the political Issues of the accuracy and good faith of USG claims that the Saddam Hussein government had developed and maintained some combination of WMD—viz., nuclear, chemical, biological, and radiological weapons—incipient to the 2003 USG-led military invasion of Iraq, the competitive game analogy has been one of Gotcha!.

Here's how Gotcha! works. According to analogy proponents, the USG publicy stated that it led the invasion of Iraq because of the threat from Iraqi WMD. (A second professed reason concerning Iraqi/al Qaeda linkages will not be developed in this article, even if the same sort of analysis will aptly apply.) The apparent fact that, as of this writing, no Iraqi WMD have been found exposes the USG rationale as unsupported by empirical data and as intentionally false. The intentional falsehood allegedly is masking several other true rationales including the desires to bring democracy to the Mideast; restructure power correlations in the Mideast to the benefit of the USG; establish a more robust, long-term presence of the USG in the Mideast; globally, regionally, and locally influence policies of foreign political actors— state and non-state—to the benefit of the USG; and more adequately control oil resources.

However, the plain fact of the matter is that a hunt is not necessary, even as the continuing discourse about a hunt is supportive of the political and psychological needs of many of the discourse's purveyors. In actuality, the USG did claim that there was a WMD threat from Iraq and that such a threat was already well established before the USG-led invasion. This threat was founded on incontrovertible data concerning past Iraqi development, possession, and/or employment of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons against its own residents and against foreign (Iranian) military personnel; ongoing Iraqi obtainment, possession, and development of human and material resources that could be at any time applied towards WMD employment; and ongoing Iraqi covert political, economic, and paramilitary support for terrorist individuals and entities both within and outside of Iraq—including sharing of knowledge that could be used to support terrorist operations employing WMD.

These data support the hypothesis of a significant WMD threat stemming from Iraq—a threat that responsible political leaders of a representative democracy would ethically need to resolve. One might arguably contest the necessity of a USG military invasion to resolve this threat in the place of United Nation (UN)-led inspections that were ongoing until right before the invasion. However, one might also contest the contestation by noting that the UN version of Gotcha!—wherein the target was finding employable Iraqi WMD or Iraqi WMD development resources that were not dual usage in nature—was a game that the Iraqi government could afford to encourage, for it was virtually guaranteed to mask the game that the Iraqi government actually was playing. One might also note that the option of ongoing UN inspections would likely preclude the other potential benefits—e.g., the spread of democracy and the favorable influence on foreign political actors—that might come with a successful USG-led invasion

1

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

and post-war reconstruction of Iraq. (That these might be appropriate strategic objectives in their own right does not necessarily impact negatively on the validity of the Iraqi WMD threat.)

In conclusion, the hunt for WMD may turn them up or not. And the validity of the pre-war Iraqi WMD threat does not turn on what turns up or on ultimate determinations concerning the advisability of the invasion, the success or failure of post-war reconstruction, concurrent USG public affairs strategies and operations, and the quality of strategic and tactical intelligence concerning estimates of employable WMD. (See Dao, J., & Shanker, T. (May 31, 2003). Powell defends information he used to justify Iraq war. The New York Times, p. A6; Huddy, L., Feldman, S., Capelos, T., & Provost, C. (2002). The consequences of terrorism: Disentangling the effects of personal and national threat. Political Psychology, 23, 485-509; Lyall, S. (May 31, 2003). Blair denies Britain distorted reports on Iraqi weapons. The New York Times, p. A6; Sherman, D. K., & Cohen, G. L. (2002). Accepting threatening information: Self-affirmation and the reduction of defensive biases. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 11, 119-123.) (Keywords: Iraq, Weapons of Mass Destruction)

2