

ideological diplomacy, while Ball is an agnostic persuaded that foreign relations should be conducted from largely rational economic and strategic considerations. Nevertheless, it is probably more important that both

men came to international relations from the perspectives of global law practices. Both spent much of their careers advocating Western political and economic unity against barbarous threats from without the main-

stream of Western civilization. Both were keenly aware that economic separatism and protectionism were ultimately disastrous to Western prosperity and political strength. In today's demoralized world, with

many Western nations dangerously lured by the superficial attractions of neutralism and economic isolationism, the assumptions they held in common appear far more critical than those which divided them. □

## S P E C T A T O R ' S J O U R N A L

### IRAQ'S PHONY WAR

by John Train

The President was in a singular humor.

"Tell me your criticisms of my country," he began our meeting. Since I had only been there for a day, it was hard to respond.

"Have you been able to see everything you want?" he continued.

How about visiting the front?

"You shall see it. You shall see everything. You need only ask. We have nothing to hide. All I request is

*John Train is author of The Money Masters, Remarkable Names, and other books, and is a columnist in Le Matin (Paris), Harvard Magazine, and Investors Chronicle (London).*

that you tell the truth," responded the President.

President Saddam Hussein, who has been in power in Iraq since 1979 (although the Baath Socialist Party has ruled since 1968), is always with you as you travel in his country. Not in person, but through his photographs, which, as in all dictatorships, are posted in every restaurant, every hotel, almost every shop and office. The President, in uniform (he is actually a civilian), is exhorting the troops; the President, surprisingly for an Arabic country, is smoking a cigar (perhaps provided by the fraternal government of Cuba); the President poses with his family; the President, in magnificent official

regalia, rests his hand on his sword. Every newspaper is filled with fervid encomiums to the President, at least three on each front page: "Iraqi Masses Demonstrate to Show Solidarity with President Saddam Hussein"; "President Saddam Hussein Decorates Soldiers for Bravery"; "President Saddam Hussein Decorates More Soldiers for Bravery"; "President Saddam Hussein Declares War Will Be Continued Until Total Victory Achieved"; "Delegation of Workers Praises Wisdom and Courage of President Saddam Hussein."

Still, he delivered on his promise. Off we went that very afternoon to Mandali, east of Baghdad, scene of a battle a day earlier in which, we were assured by the Lieutenant General commanding the area, out of 8,000 Iranian attackers, 3,000 had been killed. Three thousand? Astonishing! That's more than the Allied dead in the initial Normandy landings on D-Day.

On the way to the scene of this prodigious feat of arms we pulled over to let a miles-long cavalcade of armored vehicles roar past in the opposite direction—away from the front. Russian T-62 tanks, Brazilian Cascavel armored personnel carriers, anti-aircraft weapons, Mercedes trucks carrying infantry. (The tanks and APCs were carried on transporters: a tank fights on its own wheels in battle, but like a heavyweight boxer, it is if at all possible carried to and from the scene of the match.) The soldiers waved cheerfully and I waved back. But wait a minute! When you win a victory don't you follow up your advantage? Having taken the Germans by surprise at D-Day, did the Allies withdraw back across the channel to England? And something else: there was not the slightest mark on any of the vehicles. Except for dirt on the treads, they might have been on parade.

Finally, we reached Mandali itself, a prosperous town. We stopped in the main square. "We cannot go

beyond here," our escort announced. "Enemy is 7 kilometers away."

"But President Saddam himself told me I could see the front!"

As the escorts trotted off to the local military commander's headquarters for further instructions, I interrogated the townspeople. "Has there been fighting here?"

"No."

"Have the Iranians been here?"

"No."

"Have they shelled the town?"

"No."

"Has there been any war damage?"

"No."

After a while, the escort returned. "We cannot take you beyond this point. The area is under observation. This vehicle is too conspicuous. It would attract shelling."

"Then let's go in one of those camouflaged vehicles. Let's walk!"

"We cannot."

The next day we set forth on the five-hour drive to another part of the front, near Asmara. Here, indeed, one saw vast preparations: line after line of sandbagged gun emplacements, tanks dug in behind protective earth shelters. Occasionally there was a crash of artillery to the rear, and from time to time shells would burst on distant hills.

At an observation outpost, I asked an officer, "Where are the Iranians?"

"Behind those hills"—about five miles away—"and in that grove of trees"—about seven miles. "Near where three tanks are burning."

My field glasses revealed no tanks. I borrowed a huge spotting scope from an officer and searched the area. No tanks. And again, all these sandbags, these revetments, those gun emplacements, were impeccable. There was no trace of damage. Moreover, there was *not one plane* in the sky. Clearly, there had been no action in the area. One might as well have been on a picnic.

A day later, the Baghdad Observer carried an article with the following words: "The delegation

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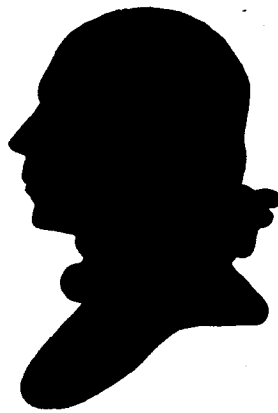
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J. MADISON

*The Federalist Society is a nationwide organization of conservative and libertarian lawyers and law students dedicated to the principles of limited government and a limited judiciary. The Society is represented at over 65 law schools.*

also saw the enemy's corpses, weapons, tanks and other material, left on the battlefield." There was no truth to this whatever. We had witnessed none of those things. And yet, the start of the war, notably the siege of Khorramsharh, had produced frightfully bloody encounters. What's going on here? In a government paper, these Arabian Nights fantasies are no reporter's error. Perhaps, as so often, economics lies behind it.

That rabid fanatic, Ayatollah Khomeini, would like to tear down not only the government of Iraq but also the conservative regimes of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. They, in turn, are well pleased to have Iraq draining off some of his energy. Iraq's tough troops, fighting in defense of their own territory, do seem to be able to chew up Khomeini's ragtag legions of student volunteers.

Two years ago, doubtless at Russian urging, Syria cut the Korshou-Bania pipeline that carried most of Iraq's oil production to the sea. So Saudi Arabia is believed to be sending Iraq up to a billion dollars a month to make up the difference.

Since Syria cut the pipeline, Iraq's oil exports have dropped from over three million barrels a day to under one million, which pass mostly through Turkey. Saudi Arabia wants Syria to open the line, which would do wonders for Iraq's economy. Can it be that like a dog barking at an approaching stranger and then looking around for approval, President Saddam is making these ferocious noises to convince the Saudis that their billions are well spent?

Ironically, Saudi Arabia's heavy support for Iraq's war effort goes in large part to buy arms from the

Soviet Union. (The other major supplier is France.)

Having observed other military episodes of this sort, notably the India-Pakistan war of 1965, in which, like two Japanese Sumo wrestlers, after months of grunting and pushing neither contestant was ever pushed away from the center of the ring, let me venture a prediction.

The "war" will drag on, slowly losing vigor, since it no longer has any point, except the doubtful one of providing an excuse to rally the respective populations behind their revolutionary governments. When the Ayatollah gets tired of the game or departs, it will stop. And though on the map Baghdad looks close to the battle lines, it might as well be Timbuktu. The Iranians will never get close to it. The whole vast area from the city to the front is a flat, treeless

plain, strewn with minefields, a perfect killing ground. Armor, bereft of concealment and without air cover (which the Iranians cannot provide), would be pounded to pieces before advancing a quarter of the way.

And some day, Iraq will be enormously rich. With immense oil reserves and a small (14 million) population, its economic prospects are among the most promising in the Middle East. Though a visitor to Baghdad and its surroundings notices many projects where work has been suspended, many others are going forward, and in general one does not receive the impression of a beleaguered economy. Far from it.

Even so, Iraq's reserves have fallen by two-thirds—from \$30 billion to \$10 billion. So if it's no longer a fighting war, it's no less a real war of economic attrition. □

## C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

### Bethell Intrigues

I am afraid that in his February column, "Sound Minds," Tom Bethell has fallen from his usual standards. He uses the tiresome game, usually played by the more inane members of the Left, of denouncing his foes as "old-fashioned," whereas his friends are "modern," then gives us an exasperating non sequiter. It is true that in GNP accounts, government services are evaluated at input prices, rather than at output prices, because there usually are no output prices for those services. But it is certainly wrong to conclude, as Bethell does, that the value of a dollar spent on government services is therefore less than that dollar's value in the private sector.

Using input prices would tend to overvalue the services of unprofitable firms and undervalue the services of profitable firms. If government services are worth more than they cost, the GNP accounts will underestimate their value. I may be willing to pay the government to set up defenses to keep the Soviets out of Seattle, and so might my neighbor, but each of us has a strong incentive not to pay but let everyone else pay, because we get the benefits regardless of whether we pay for the service of national defense. There is substantial evi-

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dence that property taxes often increase the value of homes, because the taxes are spent on valuable projects such as sewer systems and parks, which are more valuable than their cost. Moreover, I confess to a bit of difficulty with the notion that a dollar invested in the company that makes Pac-man is worth more than a dollar given to help feed a starving family. It hardly requires that one be a bloated bureaucrat shamelessly defending his perquisites to see that Bethell's argument is confused.

There are real difficulties with using GNP as a measure of the value of government services, and I would probably share Bethell's attitude toward the vast majority of those services, but little is gained by the sort of dogmatic rhetoric Bethell uses. At his worst he is better than Hobart Rowen at his best (is that an oxymoron?), but he would do his readers better service by more careful analysis and less dogmatism.

—William Sjostrom  
Department of Economics  
University of Washington  
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Tom Bethell's column in the February *American Spectator*, touching on immigration and the illegal immigrant, intrigued me greatly, coming as it did on the heels of news (rumors, rather) coming out of Miami that something strange and wonderful is happening there. As you doubtless know, in addition to the tens of thousands of Cubans who have fled to Florida, in recent years

there has been a hefty influx of refugees from Haiti, all of whom are just about as illegal as they come. These unfortunate people come mostly in overcrowded, open, leaky sailing craft with frayed halliards, torn sails, and cracked rudders; a hundred in a vessel which should carry twenty at the most. That they get here at all is a credit to their seamanship, and they land, usually on the beach, anywhere from Fernandina to Key West. They are promptly rounded up by the authorities and ultimately land with their predecessors in abandoned government buildings near Miami.

These people are all coal black, and most of them are illiterate, and nobody at all speaks English, their language being a combination of seventeenth-century French and tribal expletives with overtones of gullah. Nobody in Miami has done very much about them except to keep them rounded up. Only a few of them have found regular employment, but the amazing thing is that the Haitian colony has created its own economy. None has heard of OSHA or FTC or Minimum Wage, and the IRS will have a tough time since most of their transactions are cash or barter. They sell their handicrafts, have created their own markets, and perform a multitude of services for one another, all entirely outside of the regular, controlled economy. They are as busy as bird dogs, and creating little trouble for anyone. The professional do-gooders are beginning to discover them, and to wring their hands, but

the illegal Haitians are reveling in a luxury they have never known. How long it will take the liberals to get these people disgruntled is unknown, but right now, it seems, they're happy as clams. —William Davies  
Melbourne, Florida

### Standard Gold

Whatever better things Vic Gold may find to do with his life, let us hope that he will always find the time to write book reviews as perceptive and as entertaining as his review of Hamilton Jordan's *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency* (TAS, February 1983). —Arlene N. Heath  
San Francisco, California

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