

# **Self-Image and Role Definition as a Cause of War: Saddam Hussein, 1988-90**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 produced dramatic changes in the Gulf region and throughout the Middle East. This article addresses two different, though equally important, aspects of the 1990-91 Persian Gulf Crisis; namely how were Saddam Hussein's leadership aspirations of the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) and the Gulf region as a whole reflective of his behavior, and why did Saddam Hussein order the invasion of Kuwait when he did? A number of authors argue that Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait primarily in response to the economic crisis that the Iraqi regime found itself in at the end of the First Gulf War. This article offers an analysis of the decision to invade Kuwait that is based on self-image and role theory. In pursuit of this analysis, it shows how political economy interpretations do not adequately explain Iraqi behavior leading up to the invasion of Kuwait. Then, it provides a theoretical framework based on image and role theories that show how they contribute a pertinent interpretation of Saddam Hussein's behavior prior to the invasion and illustrate that such an interpretation is more reflective of the Iraqi leader's decision-making at the time.

## **DOMESTIC CRISIS AS A CAUSE OF WAR: THE IRAQI ECONOMY**

The argument that regimes facing domestic instability are likely to seek foreign wars is not new to international relations debates. Richard Rosecrance and Quincy Wright both argue that leaders facing internal domestic crisis resort to external conflict in the hope that a victory abroad would be the cure-all for their regimes.<sup>1</sup> Arno Mayer also argues that a primary motive for leaders who chose external war "is to restabilize political and civil society along lines favorable to the hegemonic bloc notably to certain factions, interests and individuals within the bloc."<sup>2</sup> Richard Lebow found that eight crises that led to war were initiated by elites facing domestic turbulence that made their regimes vulnerable.<sup>3</sup> Robert Jervis, Lebow and Janice Gross-Stein examine the advent of war through the process of misperception. They contend that the greater the domestic crisis, the greater the likelihood that motivated bias will lead the decision makers to feel the need for an external diversion that will both be successful and involve minimal risks.<sup>4</sup>

Fred Lawson applies Marxist analysis and couples it with diversionary war explanations to account for Syria's confrontations with her neighbors.<sup>5</sup> He argues that the Syrian elite engaged in bellicose foreign policy as diversionary measures at times when the regime faced a crisis of accumulation, domestic conflict and what he refers to as "contradictory regime responses."<sup>6</sup> He also argues that such policy is intended "not only to co-opt or suppress the regime's primary opponents, but also to ameliorate fundamental conflicts of interest among the members of the dominant coalition itself."<sup>7</sup> His course of analysis between domestic economic crisis and Syrian participation in foreign conflicts is one-

dimensional. He does not account for other intervening variables, such as the regional and international systems or even the identity dynamics of the Syrian elite, thus not reflecting the complexity of the Syrian political system.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Lawson leaves the causal links as concealed assumptions and does not connect political-economic crisis with Syrian foreign policy behavior.

A number of authors have used diversionary theory to explain Iraq's behavior leading up to the invasion of Kuwait focusing on the serious condition of the Iraqi economy after oil prices plummeted during the first quarter of 1990.<sup>9</sup> Amatzia Baram argued that Saddam sought to resolve his country's economic crisis through "foreign adventurism."<sup>10</sup> The biggest post-First Gulf War (GWI) gesture for the Gulf States in order to welcome Iraq into the regional order came in 1989 when Iraq's OPEC quota was increased from 1.2 million barrels per day (mb/d) to 2.64 mb/d.<sup>11</sup> This was especially so in light of Saddam's claim that Iraq had just defended the Gulf States from the Iranian threat in an eight-year war. While the increased oil quota improved Iraq's financial situation, Iraq remained interested in a larger market share because of its serious short-term liquidity problem. Its debt at the time was estimated to be \$80 billion and the economic reform plans that were enacted toward the end of the GWI to revitalize the economy through privatization had not proven successful.<sup>12</sup>

Because real economic power in Iraq lies in the state-owned oil industry, which accounts for 95 percent of all revenue, privatization was clearly limited in scope. Entrepreneurs were mistrustful of the regime's state control over the main economic sector.<sup>13</sup> When privatization began, state-owned factories produced 84 percent of all industrial output. Moreover, the state controlled all foreign trade and a substantial part of the retail market, the banking industry and other major services.<sup>14</sup> During GWI, the regime had encouraged the private sector by selling 47 state-owned factories that produced food stuffs, plastics, building materials and aluminum products, and 19 of 29 state-owned poultry farms, three of four fisheries and six of ten large dairy farms to local entrepreneurs.<sup>15</sup> However, the attempt to convert to a private sector economy led to high levels of inflation and unemployment that hurt government and non-government workers alike. The regime had to intervene to stabilize prices, since the Iraqi public had depended for decades on the government to maintain price stability.

The rise in prices proved to be a rude introduction to market economics and forced the government to import 80 percent of essential food items.<sup>16</sup> The regime, after a very brief window of relaxation of Ba'th Party control, responded to labor union pressures by simply dissolving them and thereby reduced membership in the General Union of Iraqi Labor from 1.75 million to a minimal 7,794 in 1989.<sup>17</sup> This massive reduction in membership curtailed the demand on government-subsidized stores and restricted access to consumer goods to the privileged few who were deemed loyal to the Ba'th. Marion Farouk-Sluglett, Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, Lawson and Tim Niblock point out that the regime could embark on an economic liberalization program without fear of political repercussions given the authoritarian nature of the regime.<sup>18</sup> However, they also suggest that Iraq invaded Kuwait as a result of economic desperation, which contradicts the earlier observation.<sup>19</sup> Kanan Makiya (aka Samir al-Khalil) discusses in ample detail how

the Iraqi regime left no room for security error on its hold on power by eliminating any possible forms of opposition.<sup>20</sup> How could such a brutal regime be in fear of domestic crisis when not too long before the end of the GWI it had used poison gas on its own Kurdish population?

Moreover, the Iraqi regime dealt separately with its international debtors and Iraq continued to be perceived as a good risk by international bankers. Peter Davies of Morgan Grenfell in England expressed confidence in Iraq's economy and its ability to recover, but noted that Iraq would definitely experience liquidity problems for the short-term. He added that Western companies were going after contracts in Iraq and structuring their own financial schemes in spite of Iraq's debt dilemma.<sup>21</sup> Britain extended a \$340 million loan in the form of export credits and the US extended \$1 billion worth of agricultural credits.<sup>22</sup> Trade relations between Iraq and Britain continued in spite of tensions that erupted after the execution in March 1990 of Farzad Bazoft, an alleged spy with ties to Britain. British companies argued that it would be too costly to cut trade relations with Iraq since European and Japanese companies would quickly step in and replace the British ones.<sup>23</sup> The US and Britain both sought to try to help the Iraqi economy in the short-term, believing Saddam's regime could tackle its liquidity crisis.

Furthermore, speakers at a 1989 Confederation of British Industry and Arab Bankers Association meeting argued that the Iraqi foreign debt should be rescheduled in order to preempt a repayment crisis similar to the one that had precipitated an economic and political crisis in Turkey in the 1970s.<sup>24</sup> Abdul Latif Al-Hamad, Kuwait's former Finance Minister who headed the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, argued that Iraq's debt ratio to GNP was 7.6 percent in 1986 and that the Iraqi economy was expected to grow between 5 and 10 percent in the following years. He also argued that Iraq's difficulties were due to a short-term cash shortage rather than to structural problems in the economy.<sup>25</sup> Al-Hamad stressed that his optimism was based on the "efficiency of Iraq's economic management, development under a war economy, and the country's vast human, natural and mineral resources," as well as Iraq's "proven oil reserves of about 100bn barrels."<sup>26</sup> Benoit Parisot argues convincingly that Saddam was spending excessively on large military projects and was not concerned about feeding his population or maintaining social peace.<sup>27</sup>

Domestically based arguments that stress that the Second Gulf War was motivated by the domestic/economic concerns of the Iraqi regime do not provide convincing evidence about the timing, nor a clear causal link between Saddam's decision-making and Iraq's foreign policy behavior. Jack Levy, Clifton Morgan and Kenneth Bickers show that explanations based exclusively on a linear relationship between domestic turmoil and external conflict are likely to generate weak conclusions reflecting a lack of complexity, limit the policy options available to decision makers and underestimate the degree of cohesion among the ruling elite.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, much of the empirical research fails to account for the time lag between domestic turmoil and external conflict, and thus fails to account for the correct causal mechanism and the direction of causality.<sup>29</sup> In the Iraqi case, political economy explanations limit discussion of the options available to Saddam's regime to the choice of generating external conflict in order to disguise internal crisis. In

reality, the regime used other measures. First, it expelled Egyptian laborers and thereby curtailed the amounts of remittances transferred from Iraqi banks to Egypt. Second, the regime used chemical weapons and brute force against its Kurdish population, which clearly illustrates the regime's ability to crush any form of opposition. Finally, with the US and Britain perceiving Saddam's regime as a security pillar against Iran, both countries were willing to aid his regime out of financial crisis up until the invasion of Kuwait.

## **CONCEPTUALIZING SELF-IMAGE AND ROLE DEFINITION AS A CAUSE OF WAR**

The perceptions and primary concerns of narrow elites have influenced foreign policy decisions of Middle Eastern states.<sup>30</sup> In order to study the impact of self-image and role definitions on Saddam's decision to invade Kuwait the perceptions of Iraqi policy makers, i.e., primarily Saddam Hussein and his close associates, are analyzed and tied to role theory.<sup>31</sup> Perception is analyzed through a set of intellectually constructed images that act as analytic devices that allow the juxtaposition of "different increments . . . to create a propositional view of the interactive process" between actors.<sup>32</sup> Richard Cottam, Richard Herrmann and Michael Fischerkeller suggest that images act as storage devices for information about the environment, which are presumed to be reflective of reality and through which incoming information is screened, helping the decision maker determine what information is correct, false or irrelevant.<sup>33</sup>

Image theory is applied primarily to Saddam Hussein and his associates who endorsed his self-image. The data derived from speeches and written statements allow the researcher to distinguish between the various images employed by the decision maker with their behavior. The construction of these images is based on three judgments that the decision makers assess against other actors. The first judgment is based on threat or opportunity, where decision makers are concerned with absolute loss from threat or relative gain from opportunity.<sup>34</sup> The second component is related to the "[p]erceived relative power [that] determines the options that are seen as available."<sup>35</sup> The final component is a cultural dimension. Policy choices are not simply a function of power capabilities or perceived threat or opportunity, but are also influenced by judgments "about the culture of other actors and what norms of behavior the other actor is likely to respect."<sup>36</sup>

The image types presented in this study are ideal types in order for us to be able to empirically discern Saddam's own self-image and overall strategy. Images as used here are intellectual constructs that do not necessarily correspond to reality but must be inferred from the data. Kiesler et al., argue that behavior offers relevant cues to beliefs.<sup>37</sup> Hence, three images are advanced to explain Saddam's strategic choices. The first and highest intensity value is attributed to Saddam's personal power drive as manifested in his nationalism, i.e., his self-image as the leader of the Arab World and his specific desire to fulfill this role in light of his self-proclaimed victory in GWI. Self-image in the political sense is linked with the nation to which a person gives his or her ultimate loyalty and is maintained through a combined political, cultural and psychological process.<sup>38</sup> Such identification is emotionally based, which influences the process of image formation of

the decision maker depending on the degree of cooperation or conflict between the other states and his/her own.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, a number of authors have shown that individuals seek cognitive consistency through their self-images and images of others allowing the decision maker to maintain a high level of stability over time.<sup>40</sup>

Saddam's second image was that the US was an imperialist nation.<sup>41</sup> An imperialistic state is perceived to be a threat due to its greater relative capability and cultural superiority.<sup>42</sup> The threat perception was heightened when Voice of America aired an editorial calling for the overthrow of police states and criticized Iraq's repressive record. Moreover, Saddam was focused on building his unconventional defensive capability due to the perceived threat of another surprise attack by Israel; similar to the one it carried out in 1981 on the Osirak nuclear site. Saddam's perception of threat intensified in May 1990 after the US canceled the Export-Import Bank loans that had been guaranteed by the Agriculture Department's Commodity Credit Corporation.<sup>43</sup> The final image driving Saddam was an economic threat directly related to the oil pricing structure in early 1990 and compounded by falling oil prices as a result of Kuwait and the UAE exceeding their production quotas. Here it should be pointed out that the crisis that ensued with Kuwait and the UAE was influenced by the previously discussed idealized self-image, role expectation and influence that Saddam sought and not only by the economic crisis. In this case, Saddam perceived that Kuwait and the UAE were unwilling to accept his leadership and thus, he sought to compel them to change their behavior toward Iraq's debt and oil pricing.

As an integrated whole, these three ideal images enable us to assess Saddam's strategic choices and drive for grandeur as reflected in an enhanced sense of efficacy. Stanley Renshon defines efficacy as "the belief that one has sufficient personal control over political processes to satisfy the need for control in relevant life areas."<sup>44</sup> This definition illustrates that efficacy is an attitudinal manifestation and focuses on the concept of personal control, which in Saddam Hussein's case is very crucial. Self-efficacy beliefs are crucial elements of self-image and influence the patterns that either enhance or undermine goal attainment. "The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goals people set for themselves and the firmer their commitment to them."<sup>45</sup> Albert Bandura adds that "efficacy-relevant information" is utilized to assess the extent to which an environment is "influenceable and controllable."<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, self-image and efficacy influence the degree of commitment the individual and/or national actor invests in their images and corresponding roles and influences the level of desire to control others. Decision makers with an idealized self-image are also narcissistic leaders. According to Jerrold Post, such leaders thirst for accolades, surrounding themselves with sycophants whose function is to support the leader's plans and assure him of the excellence of his judgments.<sup>47</sup> He adds that the narcissistic leader tends to identify with the state,

He will have a difficult time in separating national interest from self-interest. Thus, for the narcissist, the operant questions are not 'What are the threats to my country, and what can be done to counter them,' but 'How can I use the situation to enhance and protect my own reputation?'<sup>48</sup>

Narcissistic leaders who have idealized self-images become committed to certain policies not simply by betting their reputations on such policies "but by coming to believe that their policies are morally justified and politically necessary."<sup>49</sup> Self-image and policy commitment are reflected in the leader's role conception as exhibited by a country's missions in the international arena, the stability of these missions over time and the perceptions of interstate relations.<sup>50</sup> Monolithic conceptions of identity and role are ill conceived. Chih-yu Shih argues along with Kalvi Holsti that multiple identities are normal and can be held by the same group of decision makers or others battling for access to the decision-making process.<sup>51</sup> Roles are a product of an actor's biased understandings of what its behavior should be and the specific circumstance, such as societal demands, in which the role is being acted out.<sup>52</sup> Role analysis can be examined through vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension deals with the perceptions of the decision maker's role in the past, present and the future. The horizontal dimension focuses on regional relationships, since they are the most accessible target for diplomacy and a convenient place to confirm one's national self-image.<sup>53</sup> I argue that change at the international level can prompt a desire to extend the decision maker's self-image, role conception and the state's relationship to the wider identity community. Roles are neither endlessly stretchable nor totally deterministic.<sup>54</sup> Decision makers have multiple roles that change according to the relative centrality and salience of the roles and their degree of commitment to them at a particular time. What is more important then is not simply having a professed role associated with a particular identity or self-image but *the degree of centrality as reflected in the commitment to that particular self-image and role*, given the ratio of "extrinsic rewards" or costs associated with that self-image and associated role.<sup>55</sup> In order for self-image to affect policy preferences, commitment by a significant policy maker within the institutional structure is a necessary factor for that self-image to produce a change.

It follows that role is the product of an identification that prescribes anticipated behavior. In this case, Saddam acted in his self-anointed role as defender of the Gulf states from Iran and subsequently, of the Arab East from Israel. Saddam's idealized self-image and narcissistic persona were discernible in an interview, where he expressed the view that Iraq play a similar role to Nebuchadnezzar's state. He stated that:

any human being with broad horizons, . . . can act wisely but practically, attain his goals and become a great man who makes his country a great state. That is why whenever I remember [him] I like to remind the Arabs, Iraqis in particular, of their historical responsibilities. It is a burden that should not stop them from action, but rather spur them into action because of their history.<sup>56</sup>

The strategy employed by decision makers with this type of self-image and role conception is based on highly positive and grandiose self-images, with a fixation on complete wins requiring complete elimination of the perceived enemy. Saddam's self-image is also characterized by a belief of total efficacy and the capability to achieve total victory.<sup>57</sup> The following discussion illustrates how Saddam sought to impose his self-image on his regional environment, and by doing so, eliminate any perceived threats to the fulfillment of his self-image and role realization.

## SADDAM'S QUEST FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE ARAB EAST

The Iraqi victory in the Faw in 1988 boosted the Iraqi leadership's morale given the speed with which a large amount of territory was regained by Iraqi troops.<sup>58</sup> This tactical ground victory enhanced the Ba'th leadership's sense of efficacy. Iraqi advances were a result of the use of chemical weapons, forcing Iran to sign a truce on 18 July 1988. For Saddam Hussein both of these developments represented a symbolic victory for Iraq in the GWI and Iran's defeat under Khomeini. Saddam's self-perception was that the conflict was ended by the absolute humiliation of Iran, i.e., an outcome that would recognize Iraq's dominant role in the Gulf. However, in the eyes of the global community the war's outcome was perceived to be more like a draw. On the regional front Saddam's self-proclaimed victory in the GWI represented the ability of the secular regimes in the region to contain and temporarily halt the surging Islamist forces. It also opened the door for Iraq's Ba'th leadership to exercise its long-standing ambitions to influence the policies of the Gulf States and the Fertile Crescent.<sup>59</sup> The end of the GWI afforded Saddam the opportunity to pursue two types of policies. The first was to continue the modernization of Iraq's military capability and expand its research and development (R&D) efforts to attain a nuclear capability. (This is dealt with later in the article.) The second policy was to exercise influence in the Arab East and the Gulf region and fulfill the ideological aspirations the Ba'th leadership had held since 1968. This policy was extended from the Gulf region to the Fertile Crescent, and took the form of a strategic deterrent to Iran and Israel. Saddam's policy implementation tool was the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC), which was made up of Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and Yemen. Syria had strategically been left out of the ACC due to the enmity between Saddam and Assad. Through this loose cooperative Saddam Hussein hoped to lay the groundwork for an Arab coalition that would allow him to exercise influence in the region, particularly over the wealthy petroleum states grouped in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and isolate Syria.

Saddam's vision was solidified by his self-perceived victory in the eight-year GWI. Yezid Sayigh argues that because of Iraq's "ability to project power - long-range missiles, mid-air refueling, large fleet, airborne warning and command - it placed itself firmly as a principal contender for Arab primacy, a position once held by Egypt."<sup>60</sup> Saddam Hussein had hoped that by promoting his military capability he could influence his security-starved Gulf neighbors to first, forgive Iraq's massive debts; second, to continue to supply Iraq with the necessary funds to maintain his armed forces at a high state of readiness; and finally, to support Iraq with funds to continue its military R&D efforts and reduce its dependence on the industrialized nations for weapons systems.

Saddam's self-image and role definition were manifested in his diplomacy in the Arab East. He declared that his vision of a unified Arab nation was different from Nasser's.<sup>61</sup> He described his vision in the form of a metaphor of an overarching tent that would protect each of the smaller tents, i.e., states, without undermining their distinctiveness.<sup>62</sup> He envisioned himself as the leader of this overarching tent, with Iraq as the protector of the small tents. The following discussion of Iraqi-Arab relations in the post-GWI period focuses on the strategy employed by Saddam Hussein and the Ba'th leadership to maintain, and later enhance, the power position of Iraq within its Arab environment.

What is argued in this section is that the Ba'th leadership restructured their conception of Arab unity based on the opportunities presented to them in the aftermath of the GWI and by the decline of the Soviet Union.

Prior to the start of the GWI in 1980, Saddam Hussein had moved Iraq away from the radical Arab bloc. He sought to firm up his relations with the conservative monarchies of the Gulf and Jordan, who along with Egypt, were and are the United States' primary allies in the region. By allying Iraq with the moderate allies of the US, Saddam Hussein began his pursuit for uncontested leadership of the Eastern Arab Front.<sup>63</sup> This altered strategy intentionally left Syria isolated in the Arab East. More importantly, it signaled to the US the moderation in Iraqi foreign policy toward its allies, so that Washington would view Iraq as a pillar of security against a fundamentalist Iran.

The enmity between the two Ba'th leaders in Damascus and Baghdad is long-standing. After Saddam nullified the attempted union between the two Arab states in 1979<sup>64</sup> and Syria sided with Iran during the GWI, the enmity was raised to a higher level. Saddam couldn't reconcile Syria's betrayal of the Arab nation by siding with Iran in the GWI. The hatred between the two Ba'thist leaders prominently played itself out in the Lebanese political arena. Saddam provided financial and military assistance, including Soviet-made Frog missiles to General Aoun, Lebanon's strongman at the time, through Jordan.<sup>65</sup> Israel implicitly collaborated with Iraq by not intercepting the arms shipments in order to weaken Syria's position in Lebanon for its own purposes.<sup>66</sup> Asad perceived Iraq's actions as a threatening alliance between Israel, Iraq, Aoun and the US. Saddam calculated that if he could further embroil Syria in an armed conflict with General Aoun and the Maronite radicals in Lebanon, the Syrian officer corps would be exposed to terrorist attacks and thereby might be maneuvered into destabilizing Asad.<sup>67</sup>

Saddam Hussein endorsed the PLO's position of renouncing terrorism and opening a dialogue with the US.<sup>68</sup> In doing so, Saddam was hoping to further embellish his image as a moderate in the eyes of the US, as well as be confirmed as the guardian of the region from radical, uncompromising forces.<sup>69</sup> Bush administration officials believed that Saddam could indeed play a constructive role in the Arab-Israeli peace process. By siding with Arafat and the moderate responsible allies of the US, Saddam Hussein, with his growing influence, was able to project himself with some degree of legitimacy as the leader of the moderate bloc eager for a settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute.<sup>70</sup>

Iraqi-Jordanian relations in the 1980s were initially characterized by Iraq's dependence on Jordan's Red Sea port of Aqaba for import of war materiel and export of its oil. After the GWI ended, the process of dependence was reversed and Jordan was in need of Iraq's financial and strategic support. Laurie Brand also stresses that Iraq used economic aid in the form of grants and loans to gain further influence with Jordan and counter any Syrian leverage. King Hussein had suggested the formation of the ACC to Saddam in 1988 in the hope that it would enhance economic relations with Iraq.<sup>71</sup> Given Jordan's educated labor force, Egypt's manpower and Iraq's military and economic capability, the ACC would be a significant regional grouping.<sup>72</sup> For his part, Saddam Hussein perceived that the alliance with Egypt and Jordan would continue to isolate Syria and maintain Iraq's



continued access to the port of Aqaba and strengthen his leadership position.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Jordan had a more serious security dilemma emanating from her military weakness and vulnerability due to Israel's presence on her western border.<sup>74</sup> The influx of Soviet Jews into Israel accentuated Jordan's security dilemma. First, with the influx of Russian immigrants, Jordan was perceptually and literally threatened by the fact that a significant number of Palestinian displaced workers could in turn seek employment in Jordan, thus displacing Jordanian workers.

Second, Israel would be able to block them from returning to the occupied territories, and thus increase Jordan's permanent Palestinian population.<sup>75</sup> King Hussein feared that the then Likud led government would force West Bank/Gaza Palestinians into Jordan, bringing about the "Jordan is Palestine" option of Likud.<sup>76</sup> It was due to the above conditions that King Hussein perceived Iraq to be the sole deterrent to Israel.<sup>77</sup> Given the Jordanian-Iraqi undeclared alliance, Saddam offered his country's military capability as a deterrent to such an Israeli policy.<sup>78</sup>

Iraqi-Egyptian relations were characterized by a state of cooperation and competition that was mixed with mistrust. Egypt helped Iraq during the GWI with military hardware and ideological backing, which Iraq dearly needed from the onetime leader of the Arab nation. To show its appreciation, Iraq endorsed Egypt's attempts at reinstatement in several Arab organizations, particularly the Arab League.<sup>79</sup> The ACC Treaty also eased Egypt's reentry into the regional system. Saddam's strategy toward Egypt was predicated upon the interplay between Egypt's armament expertise and its symbolic role as the leader of the Arab world, i.e., the Nasserist myth. Saddam hoped that economic liberalization fostered by the ACC would bring in Egyptian contractors to help develop some of the needed small-scale industrial projects, particularly in construction. He also hoped to develop missile and armament technological exchanges between the two countries, with Egypt providing the expertise and Iraq the financing and the acquisition of smuggled technology.<sup>80</sup> But more importantly, Saddam hoped that his alliance with Egypt would foster a better relationship with Washington. The Baghdad Summit in May 1990 reflected a departure from this approach.

At the 1990 ACC meeting in Amman, Saddam articulated his vision of the Arab order in the post-Cold War period. He pointed out that Iraq and Saudi Arabia were successful in warning countries not to transfer their embassies to Jerusalem, adding that the Arabs needed to abandon their weakness and divisiveness or the US would gain control over the Gulf region and determine the amount of oil pumped from the region.<sup>81</sup> He acknowledged that the Soviet Union's decline was creating a vacuum that allowed the US to operate without restrictions on its power. Saddam expressed a desire for Iraq to fill this vacuum in the Middle East. He also argued that the US would decline as the superpower competition receded.<sup>82</sup> Saddam's desire to fill the strategic gap did not preclude an awareness that he needed to keep the US at ease, and he stressed that his leadership of the Arab world was not necessarily in opposition to US interests in the region. Moreover, Saddam perceived the US's continued presence in the region as an attempt to prevent Iraq from assuming its leadership and security role in the Gulf and from leading Arab

collective security. It was simply a matter of time before Iraq would challenge the US role in the Gulf in spite of his stated desire for cooperation.<sup>83</sup>

## PERCEPTIONS OF THREAT FROM ISRAEL AND GCC BEHAVIOR

In an interview with *Jane's Defence Weekly*, prior to the end of the GWI, then Israeli Chief of Staff Dan Shomron indicated that Israel was developing its missile technology to destroy Iraqi missiles on the ground and in the air, and to limit their damage on the ground if they landed. He added that if Iraq were to attack Israel, it would react with great force to punish Iraq. Ultimately, Shomron claimed that the Israeli objective was to deter Iraq.<sup>84</sup> Such warnings, especially in light of Israel's 1981 attack on Iraq's nuclear facilities in Osirak, illuminated the vulnerability of Iraq's territorial integrity to Israeli long-range bombing. Reflecting the threat from Israel, Saddam stated that a "direct aggression from Israel is expected."<sup>85</sup> For Saddam and his advisors, Shomron's remarks indicated that if any future Iraqi military capability, whether long-range conventional or unconventional weapons, were to be an effective deterrent vis-à-vis Israel, it would have to be developed quickly in spite of the overwhelming economic difficulties. Furthermore, the Iraqi leadership realized that they had to acquire conventional weapons systems in the short-term that could deter Israel from launching further preemptive attacks against Iraqi R&D facilities. The "supergun" was developed to deter such attacks on Iraq's nuclear facilities.<sup>86</sup>

Saddam Hussein, cognizant that Israel reacts to any change in Arab capability, perceived that any conventional or unconventional weapons systems acquired by Iraq that could inflict unacceptable destruction on the Israeli population would deter Israel from launching preemptive attacks against Iraq. As Iraq was not in a position to develop an immediate nuclear capability, Saddam Hussein attempted to compensate for this by acquiring the "supergun."<sup>87</sup> In short, he attempted to develop a conventional military capability and delivery system. Saddam sought to use the supergun to launch chemical/biological weapons or a crude nuclear device - if developed - which could inflict serious damage on Israel and Iran if either state launched a preemptive attack on Iraqi nuclear facilities or to deter such an attack from happening.<sup>88</sup>

By mid-1989, with Egyptian and Argentinean help, Iraq was developing the *Condor II* multi-stage rocket with a range of 1,000 km and capable of delivering a small atomic bomb.<sup>89</sup> Iraq's motivations for developing missile capability were not limited to deterring Israel but were also intended to strengthen its regional dominance of the Arab order through increased military and political cooperation. This was most evident in Iraq's relationship with Egypt. Since the start of the GWI, Egypt had been supplying Iraq with the military hardware that could no longer readily be gotten from the Soviet Union. Iraq, in turn, had developed its military industry as a result of the GWI. Given Egypt's lack of hard currency, heavy dependence on the US, and Iraq's ability to provide funds for R&D, the two countries joined efforts to produce the *Condor II* missile. An Egyptian-American scientist, who covertly supplied Egypt with material for the Condor project, indicated that "Iraq's role was to fund the project, while Egypt provided the technical expertise and Argentina did the assembly and testing during the initial phase."<sup>90</sup> In gaining Egyptian

expertise, Saddam Hussein sought to increase inter-Arab cooperation in the arms industry, when in 1989, Egypt and Iraq signed a deal to build two steel plants to help in manufacturing aircrafts, ships and vehicles.<sup>91</sup> Saddam wanted to insure closer R&D cooperation with Egypt, but with Iraqi dominance.

Iraq was eventually able to develop missiles with deterrent capability. In early 1990, Iraq test fired a missile modified from a Soviet-made Scud-B ground-to-ground missile. This modified missile, named *Al Abid*, with a supposed range of 1,850 km, followed other modified scuds that had ranges of 650 and 875 km. *Al Abid* was important for two reasons. First, it enabled Iraq to put a satellite in orbit,<sup>92</sup> and thus potentially provided Iraq with an early warning system in case of a preemptive attack. Second, it could be enhanced to carry warheads, thus serving as a deterrent to hostile attacks on Iraqi facilities.

Saddam Hussein invested large amounts of resources in the development of nuclear weapons. In fact, with Chinese help, the Iraqis built conventional explosives capable of detonating a nuclear device. *The Middle East* reported that the Iraqis "built production plants for high melting explosive (HMX) and rapid detonation explosive (RDX) at the Qaqa State Establishment, a state owned munitions company . . . south of Baghdad."<sup>93</sup> Evidence uncovered by UN nuclear inspectors in October 1991 indicated that Iraq was also attempting to develop an H-bomb capability.<sup>94</sup> The desire to achieve strategic deterrence with Israel should be seen within the ideological context of the Ba'th's pan-Arab vision and the Iraqi leader's self-image, both of which stress that the interests of the Arab nation correspond with those of Iraq.<sup>95</sup> Tariq Aziz reiterated that Iraq had the will and the capability to retaliate if Israel attacked Iraqi's R&D facilities again. He stressed that Iraq had achieved unprecedented parity with Israel, citing Saddam Hussein's threat to burn Israel with binary chemical weapons.<sup>96</sup> Seth Carus, a fellow at the Naval War College, suggests that Saddam's threat to burn half of Israel was the result of a perception of threat that Israel might take out R&D facilities.<sup>97</sup> Iraq's huge investment in all the weapons systems were intended to give Saddam leverage to exercise leadership in the Arab East.<sup>98</sup> But as oil prices plummeted in early 1990, Saddam could not continue to invest in his R&D to develop his unconventional weapons capability. This coupled with the Western media campaign against Iraq fueled Saddam's threat perception. He perceived the media's campaign as an attempt to justify a preemptive attack against Iraq.<sup>99</sup> This perception was made clear by Taha Yasin Ramadan, Iraq's First Deputy Prime Minister, who stated that the imperialist forces had not expected Iraq to win the GWI and had been plotting ever since to attack Iraq.<sup>100</sup> Ramadan was reflecting the mind-set of the collective leadership of Iraq, including Saddam Hussein. Tariq Aziz indicated that there was consensus within the leadership "and we decided the speech would be a deterrent."<sup>101</sup>

Since Saddam perceived Kuwait to have joined a conspiracy to cripple his regime, he was intent on sending them a message to change their minds by deploying troops on their border. In a memorandum sent on 16 July 1990, to the Arab League Secretary General, Chedli Kilbi, Tariq Aziz argued that Iraq had preserved the wealth and security of the Gulf States, as well as the freedom and security of the Arab nation through the blood of

their sons. He stressed that Kuwait's actions amounted to a premeditated policy of undermining Iraq's economy and the security of the Arab nation.<sup>102</sup> Hence, when talks between Iraq and Kuwait collapsed in Jeddah on 1 August 1990, the Iraqi leadership expressed its conviction that the Kuwaiti delegation had not come to the talks with any intentions of dealing. The Iraqi delegation argued that the Kuwaiti representatives were stalling for time to continue "her conspiratorial role" at undermining Iraq's economy at its most vulnerable state while the US Navy was there to protect Kuwait.<sup>103</sup> Given the conspiratorial thinking of the Iraqi leadership, they engaged in associative thinking, which relies on past habits and a low ability to detect conflicting information, resulting in rigidity and misrepresentation of relationships in the incoming information.<sup>104</sup>

One can infer that the Iraqi leadership engaged in two forms of threat calculation. Given the ease and frequency with which conspiratorial patterns appear to the Iraqi leadership one can easily see how the al-Sabah ruling family was perceived to be acting in collaboration with Iraq's enemies. They were first accused of refusing to place "a complete moratorium on Iraq's wartime loans," and second they were unwilling to discuss the OPEC quota.<sup>105</sup> In the memorandum of grievances submitted by Iraq to the Arab League, the Iraqi leadership listed their belief that the government of Kuwait had a premeditated scheme to glut the oil market by exceeding its quota, along with the UAE, and thus weaken the Iraqi economy. The second deliberate act the Iraqi leadership accused Kuwait of was stealing Iraqi oil from Iraq's al-Rumalia field in order to inflict a double blow to the Iraqi economy.<sup>106</sup>

Since the Kuwaitis were not influenced by Saddam's coercive diplomacy to change their oil policy, and with the breakdown of the Jeddah meetings, Saddam felt that the Kuwaiti leadership was out to humiliate him and Iraq. Due to his commitment to his self-image as a result of the GWI, he concluded that he could make Kuwait succumb to Iraqi pressures by invading and punishing the Kuwaiti ruling family at the same time for betraying Iraq and the Arab nation. The timing of the invasion and why it actually took place at the particular time it did was revealed in an article by Salah al-Mukhtar, the editor-in-chief of the government paper Al-Jumhuriyah. Al-Mukhtar's answer to why Kuwait was invaded reflects directly on the notions of honor, self-esteem, image and role definition by Iraq and consequently of Saddam Hussein. Al-Mukhtar explained that Iraq wanted "to punish those who dared to become a tool of conspiracy against Iraq."<sup>107</sup> He adds,

those rulers began to address Iraq in a manner that shows disrespect for a regional power that salvaged Kuwait when it faced the danger of being eliminated.

Hence, and to maintain the state's esteem and people's dignity, it was necessary to undertake effective disciplinary measures to make those who had exceeded their limits return to their normal size . . .

[T]he rude and provocative actions of the rulers of Kuwait against great Iraq necessitated an appropriate punitive reply to protect the Iraqi state's esteem and dignity, *and to give future generations an example of their great father's concern about the name and dignity of their state and homeland*, even when it necessitates great sacrifices.<sup>108</sup>

The evolving crisis precipitated a calculation of potential loss of all that Saddam believed he had achieved given his highly idealized self-image and leadership role in the Arab world in the post-GWI era. The actual and potential loss in oil revenue from the drop in prices would slow down Saddam's R&D program to achieve unconventional military capability to deter Israel and close the strategic gap as a result of Kuwait and UAE's unwillingness to cooperate in the OPEC quota. Given the narrow window of opportunity provided by the decline of the USSR, coupled with his failure to coerce Kuwait to reverse its oil policy, Saddam perceived an acute threat to his credibility and his leadership aspirations in the Arab world. Hence, Saddam Hussein ordered the invasion of Kuwait based on the way he framed the issue, as one in which the US, Kuwait and Israel were intent on subverting him from fulfilling his self-image and role in the Arab East and the Gulf region, and to redeem his honor which he believed was affronted by the Kuwaiti ruling family.

## CONCLUSION

Research on self-image and national role conception advances a better comprehension of foreign policy behavior and, in particular to this study, Saddam's pursuit of war and confrontation in his geopolitical environment. The previous discussion illustrates that contrary to the tenets of the diversionary theory of war, self-image and role definition can cause weak states led by authoritarian elites to initiate war given the leader's self-image and role definition coupled with limited windows of opportunity in the international system. I challenge the propositions advanced by those who rely solely on political economy reasons to explain why Saddam ordered the invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, particularly regarding issues of timing and the way in which the crisis is framed.<sup>109</sup>

At the time, Saddam Hussein and the Ba'th leadership believed that they had to make a choice between maintaining their current leadership position of the Arab world and the prospects of losing it in light of falling oil prices, which would hinder their power drive at the political and military levels. Saddam's definition of the situation with reference to the status quo following the GWI, was perceived as the opening of a narrow window of opportunity in the early-1990s that would allow him to achieve his long held goal of strategic parity with Israel and dominance in the Arab world. This suggests that decision makers do subjugate military strategy to political considerations as opposed to what T.V. Paul has argued.<sup>110</sup> Given the decline of the USSR, the Iraqi leader perceived a narrow window of opportunity to advance his prescribed self-image and role definition. This case bolsters Alexander Wendt's contention that some state identities and interests are derived from international society while others are derived from domestic society.<sup>111</sup> Both of these components are based on securing the interests of the state and domestically generated identities and related role expectations. Given Saddam Hussein and his ruling circle's role definition, they sought first to challenge the post-World War II Westphalian order that the European powers imposed on the Arab region. Second, Saddam and his ruling circle engaged in adventurist policies to signal to Europe and the US Iraq's desire to play a bigger role in world politics. Saddam believed he could tap what he perceived to be the most salient identity, i.e., Arab nationalism, in pursuit of his role and the actualization of his self-image.

As a result of Saddam's narcissistic personality and messianic power drive, he engaged in two types of decisional processes that led to decisional failure. In his case, the most relevant of these failures was the overvaluation of past performance, i.e., specifically calling his performance a victory in the GWI despite ample evidence to the contrary, which facilitated the false self-image that he sought. Second, he manifested overconfidence and a strong commitment to the policies that he was pursuing in the post-GWI period, which further isolated him from reality. Robert Jervis argues that given a decision maker's commitment to his policy, he is prone to concluding that he can achieve his goals "even if such a conclusion requires the distortion of information about what others will do."<sup>112</sup> Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the destruction of its military capability were a result of Saddam's personal ambitions with his ruling elite's acquiescence, and severe misperceptions of both the issues at hand and responses to opportunities and threats in the international system.

## Endnotes

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109. Lawson, *The Social Origins of Egyptian Expansionism*, pp. 156-71; Karsh and Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein*, pp. 201-04; idem, "Why Saddam Hussein Invaded Kuwait," pp. 18-31; Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990-1991*, pp. 37-41; Chaudhry, "On the Way to Market," pp. 14-23; and Niblock, "International and Domestic Factors in the Economic Liberalization Process in Arab Countries," pp. 78-83.

110. T. V. Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 16-20.

111. Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (June 1994), p. 385.

112. Robert Jervis, "War and Misperception," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XVIII, no. 4 (Spring 1988), p. 693; for a discussion of these pathologies see Lebow, *Between Peace and War*, pp. 111-15; and Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 128-30.