

THE IRAQI INVASION OF KUWAIT

RELIGION, IDENTITY AND OTHERNESS IN
THE ANALYSIS OF WAR AND CONFLICT

HAMDI A. HASSAN

Pluto  Press
LONDON • STERLING, VIRGINIA

First published 1999 by Pluto Press
345 Archway Road, London N6 5AA
and 22883 Quicksilver Drive,
Sterling, VA 20166–2012, USA

Copyright © Hamdi A. Hassan 1999

The right of Hamdi A. Hassan to be identified as the author
of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library

ISBN 0 7453 1416 3 hbk

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Hassan, Hamdi A.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait : religion, identity, and otherness
in the analysis of war and conflict / Hamdi A. Hassan.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0–7453–1416–3 (hc.)

1. Persian Gulf War, 1991. 2. Persian Gulf Region—Politics
and government. 3. Panarabism. I. Title.

DS79.72H425 1999

956.7044'2—dc21

99–40502

CIP

Designed and produced for Pluto Press by
Chase Production Services, Chadlington, OX7 3LN
Typeset from disk by Stanford DTP Services, Northampton
Printed in the EC by TJ International, Padstow

CONTENTS

1	Understanding the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait	1
	Introduction	1
	The Realist Perspective	6
	The Institutional Perspective	7
	The Reflective Perspective	8
2	The Realist Perspective	13
	Introduction	13
	The Realist Perspective: A Theoretical Outline	14
	Iraq's Assessment When Invading Kuwait	21
	American–Iraqi relations 1984–90	36
3	The Institutional Perspective	55
	Introduction	55
	The Institutional Perspective: A Theoretical Outline	57
	The Overlapping of Identities	63
	The Domestic Sources of the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait	77
	The Genealogy of the Political Elites in the Arab World	89
	The Question of Mitigating Iraq's Economic Needs	102
4	The Reflective Perspective	113
	Introduction	113
	The Reflective Perspective: A Theoretical Outline	114
	Islam and Arabism: The Genealogy of a Discursive Regime	119
	The Arabic Political Discourse and the Invasion of Kuwait	137
	<i>Epilogue</i>	179
	<i>Appendix: Writing to Understand or Mapping to Conquer:</i> De/constructing the Myth of <i>Homo Arabicus</i>	191
	<i>Notes</i>	200
	<i>Bibliography</i>	249
	<i>Index</i>	272

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Working on this book has been invigorating, maddening and wonderful. It would have been impossible without the meticulous support of three individuals: Dr Azza M. Karam, Professor Ziauddin Sardar, the editors of this series, and Roger van Zwanenberg, Pluto press' publisher. I would like to thank Azza and Zia for the rare gifts of good counsel and continuing faith. They both sustained me throughout, but especially when crossing dark and barren terrain. Azza was not only a sharp, discerning and untiring reader of several versions of the manuscript but also an unfailing source of encouragement and wisdom. She helped me to refine the book's sentences and notions with astute and penetrating comments. I am more moved than I can say by the great amount of time Azza spent on my work, generously sharing her wide knowledge with me.

Roger van Zwanenberg is not only a talented publisher, but also a committed intellectual whose prompt and considerate feedback helped me to clarify my thinking and yielded suggestions that significantly strengthened the manuscript. Roger's quick eye for what does and does not work moved things swiftly along. He delivered me, as promised, 'a personal and professional service'. In this context I am deeply grateful to Anne Beech and Robert Webb who (together with Roger) made my experience with Pluto a fruitful and enjoyable one. Thanks also to Helen Skelton who meticulously copy-edited the book and vastly improved the quality of the text.

A number of people through the years have helped in different ways while working with this book. I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues Kjell Engelbrekt, Jacob Westberg, Kristina Boréus, Eric Stern and Welat Songür who read and thoroughly commented on earlier drafts of the manuscript. Parts of Chapter three have been presented at the Nordic Society for Middle East Studies' conference (June 1995) in Joensuu, Finland, where Professor Saad Eddin Ibrahim

of the American University in Cairo and Dr Jørgen Bæck Simonsen of the University of Copenhagen (among many others) gave insightful comments on the similarities and differences between Arabism and European nationalism. Part of Chapter four was presented at the conference on The Peace Process and Future Vision of the Middle East (September 1997) at Lund University, Sweden. Many people gave valuable comments on the significance of the contrasted collective identities of Islam/Arabism and Zionism to Middle Eastern politics. I am particularly grateful to Professor Jan Hjärpe and Khaled Bayomi of Lund University; Professor Osama al-Ghazali Harb of Al-Ahram Foundation; Professor Raymond Cohen and Dr Paul Rivlin of the Hebrew University; and Dr. Helena Lindholm Schultz of Gutenberg University.

Dr Essmat Abdul al-Maguid, The Arab League's Secretary General and Egypt's Foreign Minister 1987–91, was very generous in granting me time on several occasions to interview him and discuss the events that took place before the invasion of Kuwait. In this context, I would like to thank Egypt's ambassador to Sweden, my friend Hamdi Nada, and before him ambassador Ibrahim Alaam, who helped to facilitate my contacts with Arab officials. Mr Abdullah Jasem al-Sane, Under-secretary for Scholarship and Cultural Relations in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education, showed a great interest in my research. Besides sending me much valuable material pertaining to the Iraqi-Kuwaiti dispute before the crisis, Mr. al-Sane has helped to grant me a six month scholarship in 1993 from the Amir Sabah al-Salem Foundation, which helped to facilitate my travel around the Middle East to collect much-needed material and documents. My friend Zaid al-Sherida, the Kuwaiti ambassador to Sweden, was an invaluable source of moral support and encouragement, who during our frequent discussions enriched my knowledge of Kuwaiti and inter-Arab politics. In addition, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Mr. al-Sane, the Amir Sabah al-Salem Foundation and to Ambassador al-Sherida.

Many people have offered very different kinds of help. My close friends Dr Ibrahim Gouda, (Golfpro) Sayed Cherif, Samir al-Rafie, Taha Mowafi, Dr Gail Ramsay and Dr Ali Yaklef have shared their vision of the world with me. Their generous support was decisive in times of near-despair. In this context, I would like to express my gratitude to Lise-Lott Åhman, Omar Sheikhmous, Donald Levery and Alan Dixon. Despite the intensity of the daily focus on the rehabili-

tation of people with multiple handicaps, my current workplace, Arbetsmarknadsinstitutet-Haninge, has provided an atmosphere most conducive to finishing this book. In particular, I would like to thank Ann-Kristin von Euler for her kind consideration.

My partner in life, Kristin Hammer, and my two daughters, Rosa-Linn and Camilia, have always provided me with a warm emotional base upon which such extensive an intellectual undertaking is profoundly dependent. Their spirit is my essential nourishment and I am privileged to have them around me. I have the extraordinary good fortune to have Camilia, P.L. de Silva, Rosa-Linn, Azza and Kristin, whose individual and collective friendships always keep me so firmly rooted in the things that really matter.

For Edward W. Said
and
Nasr H. Abu Zaid

My foremost exemplars of intellectual integrity
and brilliant scholarship

1 UNDERSTANDING THE IRAQI INVASION OF KUWAIT

INTRODUCTION

At the time of writing, the latest figures indicate that since 1991 4,500 children have died in Iraq every month as a result of UN sanctions.¹ Each time yet another debacle between the UNSCOM team, led by Richard Butler, and the Iraqi regime (primarily portrayed as Saddam Hussein) takes place, we all hold our breath in trepidation. The US and the UK carry out air bombing missions almost every day and, in the Western world, the media reports the ‘safety’ of the American and British pilots and the ‘minimum casualties’ suffered by Iraqi civilians. This news has become so commonplace that we do not even pause to think it through. Even other Arab regimes, who once stood divided over the 1991 Gulf War, seem now to distance themselves from events in the Gulf, preferring instead to focus either on their borders or pledge consistent support for ‘the other’ Middle East (Israeli) peace process. But in many respects, what is taking place in the Middle East today is simply a replay of the complex web of events that unfolded prior to and in the immediate aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

The unprecedented Arab support for Iraq and for the leadership of Saddam Hussein during the 1990–91 Gulf crisis should be viewed within the framework of Middle Eastern political discourse and the regional state of affairs during June and July 1990. At that time all the agitated and volatile forces of discontent throughout the Arab world waited for a leader to deliver. The Middle East was in turmoil, immersed in a *status quo* of economic misery and frustration with the political stalemate – the ‘seamless web of significance’² was so thick that something dramatic had to happen. The situation was further

aggravated by the growing prominence of Israel following the huge Soviet-Jewish immigration. The indignation of Arab intellectuals and activists at the United States, Zionism and the Gulf rulers, also manifested in grass-roots demonstrations on the streets of Arab cities, should be understood within the context of the unique discursive formation of Arabism. This discursive formation, involving a holistic self-image on the one hand and prejudice and bias about 'others' on the other, can be seen as setting the context for the decisive moments that led to the invasion of Kuwait, the crisis that followed and the devastating outcome for the Iraqi people and state. The political manoeuvrability of the Iraqi regime became very limited as a consequence of its decision to invade Kuwait. The Iraqi state's infrastructure was extinguished. It was likened by a United Nations report to conditions in premodern societies. Even worse, since 1991 the Iraqi people have objected to the severe punishment received both from their own regime and as a result of the United States and other Western powers' over-militarization in the Gulf region. The public discourse about Iraq in the West sees it as 'thirsty for wars against lesser, dehumanized enemies'.³ The media coverage is so obsessed with the *homo Arabicus*, Saddam Hussein, that one gets the impression that Saddam is the only inhabitant of Iraq. The terrorized women and children of Iraq all appear as 'blank spaces'⁴ characterized by ontological emptiness (see the Appendix).

The aim of this book is to *discuss and understand the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait*. The point of departure is that: in order to account fully for the invasion of Kuwait, it is of fundamental importance not only to discuss the motivations of Iraq, but also to understand the conditions that accelerated and facilitated this decision, namely the Arabic political discourse. The focus will be on the events that brought about this decision, as well as on the *discourse* (Foucault, 1972: 7, 21–30) through which the actors involved understood their world and acted accordingly.

During the spring and summer of 1990, so it seemed, Saddam Hussein understood that in order to realize his aim of reviving a charismatic pan-Arab role for himself he had to concentrate, primarily, on demonizing Zionism and the American attitude of indifference towards the Arabs. The language used by Saddam was carefully chosen, seeming to convey metaphoric pan-Arab and Islamic sentiments. The target in focus was the West, and in particular the United States and

Zionism which had been blamed for a long and abominable history with disastrous implications for the Arabs. By the same token, Kuwait, the main target of dispute and conflict, was almost invisible. This always resonates with the mainstream Arabs who held the view that the United States was being manipulated by international Zionism, partly in favour of Israel and definitely against Arab interests. There is also a firm belief that United States' policy in the Middle East is influenced by the biased pro-Israeli lobby and, therefore, completely manipulated by Israel. Indeed, US officials and policy-makers throughout the history of American involvement in the region have never missed the opportunity to confirm this widely held perception.⁵ The situation was aggravated by the Israeli election in June 1990, which resulted in the first, most extreme right-wing coalition in the history of the Jewish state, headed by Prime Minister Shamir.⁶ Moreover, on 4 February 1990, the Israeli cabinet accepted as a new member of the government Rehavi Zeevi, leader of the right-wing Moledet Party which advocates the mass expulsion of Palestinians from the occupied territories. For the first time, the Palestinians were depicted by Israeli government officials as animals devoid of any human traits. Israeli polls in 1990 found that 52 per cent of Jewish citizens of Israel supported the expulsion of Palestinians from the occupied territories in order to preserve the Jewishness and democratic character of the state after the annexation of the occupied territories (Mattar, 1994: 39). Moreover, three years of *Intifada* (uprising against political oppression) and almost two years of intensive diplomatic efforts by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were to no avail, despite the PLO's recognition of Israel, its acceptance of UN Resolution 424,⁷ and its renunciation of terrorism. It was the Iraqi president who could offer them hope, however illusive, by using stern and self-confident language that could intimidate Israel, and by promising to challenge and destroy Israeli hegemony (Muslih, 1992). It is in this sense that the invasion of Kuwait is more closely, and indeed vividly, linked, on the one hand, to the United States' indifference toward the Arabs and its staunch support for Israel and, on the other, to the Jewish state's existence and behaviour in the region as such.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 unleashed the Gulf crisis, in which the Middle East witnessed an unprecedented projection of power by the United States. What was considered as a purely internal 'Arab affair' became a global concern involving the United

Nations, almost all the major world powers and world public opinion, in a rare moment of Western consensus. The Iraqi leadership seriously underrated this fundamental transformation of the international system, which was to prove a major miscalculation. It was not, however, the fatal one.⁸ Judging by the analysis of how the Iraqi leadership reasoned when it decided to invade Kuwait, the American response was thus far the most significant development. First, the US was able to rally the United Nations and world opinion against Iraq. Second, against all odds and against the history of repeated failures by US policy-makers to comprehend inter-Arab politics, the United States persuaded Saudi Arabia to allow a massive American-Western army onto its territory, something the Iraqi leadership failed to foresee (Viorst, 1991; Al-Gosaibi, 1992). By this shrewd strategic move, which proved decisive in ejecting Iraq from Kuwait, the US breached a covenant in Arab politics (Brown, 1992; Telhami, 1994). It was widely believed that such an action would be impossible and would trigger and provoke a powerful anti-Western reaction in the Arab and Muslim world. It was feared, too, that such an action would be seen as an intervention by Western forces in the Holy land of Islam. As such, it would unify the Arabs and Muslims against the West and in particular the United States. Saddam Hussein did in fact attempt to exploit this situation, but to no avail.

The Iraqi strategy to keep the crisis 'an Arab affair' totally failed. Thus, Iraq was exposed to world opinion and to the military might of the most powerful nations in history. Iraq, it seemed, had never considered that the Saudi government or any other Arab state would collaborate with the United States and the West.⁹ Whereas it took a few weeks in September 1980 for the Iraqi leadership to discover that the 'Blitzkrieg' it was waging against Iran had turned into a devastating and prolonged 'Sietzkrieg', it took only few days for them to find out that the invasion of Kuwait was a major miscalculation, and that the situation was much more complicated than they had assumed it would be. To be sure, all these developments are landmarks in modern Middle Eastern history, and even more in the way world politics had been hitherto conceived by analysts and practitioners alike.

The personality of the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein has attracted much attention, generating an impressive amount of media coverage as well as academic research (see the Appendix). The assumption of several analysts that his enigmatic personality and leadership style is,

among many other considerations, essential for understanding the crisis in the Gulf has certain grounds and appeal. However, it would be inadequate to treat the initiation of crises and waging war as if it were the making of 'isolated utility maximizers'. Rather, decision-makers are part and parcel of their society, and when dealing with foreign states they actually reflect their societal culture and values (Robinson, 1994: 417).

Having said that, the economic problems that faced Iraq after the war with Iran, the territorial disputes with Kuwait and even the Iraqi claims on the whole or part of Kuwait,¹⁰ and the conflict over oil quotas with OPEC and Iraq's accusation and Kuwait's counter-accusation over exploiting the Rumailah oil field, all are critical factors in the crisis. Similarly, the endemic instability of the Iraqi state and its intensive culture of violence, as well as the regime's alienation from society and its lack of political and social legitimacy, are factors of definite relevance to the analysis. These features, however, are common traits to most authoritarian states and governments, and have to be put within the Arabic political discourse in order to comprehend Iraq's decision. The political and cultural identification of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi polity, and the way it is manifested, are far more appealing to our analysis. Arab leaders usually do seek backing for their policies and legitimize their state-centred actions by invoking transstate factors (i.e. Arabism). Moreover, political actions are designed to satisfy the expectations of the far-flung pan-Arab audience.

The Gulf crisis stemmed to a great extent from the internal dynamics of the Arab world. It was linked to state formation, the imperative of nation-building as well as the establishment of the state as a sovereign territorial unit, the regime's political legitimacy, and the lack of coherent sociopolitical institutions. The invasion of Kuwait and the crisis that ensued have asserted anew the centrality of Islam as a constructed cultural domain entwined with Arabism (the way Arabs collectively conceive of who they are) and, by implication, the societal and political crisis in the Arab world. There was unprecedented sympathy, even enthusiasm, from many Arabs – politicians, the grass roots, intellectual and Muslim activists – from Morocco to the Gulf, in support of Iraq's illegal (in any possible sense of the term) occupation of the state of Kuwait. This Arabism was manifest in people throughout the region expressing their rejection of the boundaries between states in the Arab world as artificial colonial arrangements. For many Arabs,

the division of the Arab world into several political units is the exception not the rule. Moreover, there are social and economic divisions that separate the 'haves' of the Gulf royal families and their wealth from the 'have-nots' of the rest of the Arab world, and these divisions are the most unpopular of all. The entire course of the Gulf crisis should be seen within the context of Arab linguistic unity, political discourse, collective identity and the psychological union of sympathy – variables which mark the discursive formation of Arabs, and thus render their consideration significant. Using this approach, the book is organized into three different yet related perspectives: the realist, the institutional and the reflective. Each perspective is situated analytically and explained empirically. In fact, each one constitutes a different pair of lenses for the glasses through which one can perceive the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

THE REALIST PERSPECTIVE

The motivations behind Iraq's invasion of Kuwait could be analysed in the following manner. First, the relationship between Iraq and Kuwait could fit perfectly into a power preponderance framework, in the sense that Kuwait, as a much weaker and a vastly richer neighbour, seemed at one point to be attractive booty for its resentful, egoistic, power-maximizing neighbour. Thus, for the Iraqi leadership harsh economic problems are on the way towards being solved; a geostrategic outlet to the deep water of the Persian Gulf, and the achievement of the much-longed-for political hegemony in the Gulf region and the Arab world, seemed to be imminent and forthcoming.

At this juncture, let me discuss the issue of the role of the individual decision-maker. The individual as an actor having active or leading roles in the policy process (e.g. the rational actor model) has always been a problematic enterprise in explaining the outcome of decision-making. Allison (1971: 166) in rather assertive and tautological terms, wrote that:

[t]he hardcore of the bureaucratic politics mix is personality. How each man manages to stand the heat in *his* kitchen, each player's basic operating style, and the complementarity or contradiction among personalities and styles in the inner circle are irreducible pieces of policy blend.

The question for our purposes in explaining the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait concerns the freedom of choice that individuals are assumed to have in forming decisions and executing policies. Are individuals (i.e. Saddam Hussein) essentially products of their environment and historical context? Or do decision-makers control the circumstances in reference to which they formulate and execute decisions? As far as this book is concerned, the superstructural factor, i.e. the identity of Arabism emanating from Islam, is assumed to be a major theme, in the sense that Islam and Arabism engendered and facilitated the conditions and gave focus to the frame of reference that triggered the invasion of Kuwait and the crisis that followed. The support at grass-roots level all over the Arab world for the Arab leaders' foreign policy decisions has always been instrumental in the motivations and outcomes of these decisions. One could say that certain types of claims and counter-claims, agitations, activities and events took place that render the theme of Islam/Arabism topical and meaningful in explaining and comprehending the political processes in the Arab world, as well as the particular Iraqi decision to invade Kuwait. Thus, the history and the political development of the personality of the Iraqi president are to be put in the wider framework of the Iraqi state and polity; and the environment with which they clearly identify themselves is Arabism. This is in line with the fact that political and military decisions, like other human actions, are common traits of the decision-makers and their external social, cultural and political conditions (Mathews, 1993: 4–5, 51).

THE INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter both the link between the Iraqi polity and its institutional impact, and the invasion of Kuwait will be accounted for by examining the implication of normative and material power. The link between domestic political conditions and the state's international behaviour – where authoritarian regimes usually exploit foreign adventure and aggression to divert attention away from home or simply to tighten their control of the internal political fronts – is a classical theme (Regan, 1994; Workman, 1994; Ayoob, 1995). Iraq is a case in point and provides qualified evidence for such an assumption as all the political and social ingredients have always been in place. Being

politically illegitimate the regime has always been virtually isolated from the majority of the population. Ethnic and civil strife against the central government in the north with the Kurdish uprisings since the early 1960s, and in the south with the pro-Iranian Shi'ite fundamentalist groups, had grown more intense. Such endemic political instability generates economic hardship that becomes more severe for an overstretched state with an obligation to meet its population's basic needs for day-to-day living. In fact, the invasion of Kuwait (like the assault on Iran ten years earlier) must be seen against the background of the political and social turmoil of modern Iraqi society and the unusual atmosphere of political violence that the Ba'ath regime created.

However, the interweaving of Iraqi polity with Arabism is considered not only to explore various dimensions in this canvass, but also to highlight the paradoxical nature of its intimate affinity with Arabism. In this vein, an attempt is made to explain the peculiarity of inter-Arab politics and the role of institutions, not only as the embodiment of the political processes (mechanisms of state policies), but also as a concrete manifestation of sociocultural realities. In other words, the articulation of Arabism as a collective identity is manifested in how individuals understand their role within institutions and the world around them (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). The entire Iraqi polity can only be approached, and therefore understood, within the way it relates, identifies and manifests itself, namely, in the framework of Arabism and its discourse. Social scientists familiar with the region have contended that 'Middle Eastern political processes defy observation, discourage generalization, and resist explanation' (Bill, 1996: 503). Otherwise, it would be like any classical authoritarian state that engages in foreign adventures to divert attention away from home, and would, thus, ignore an important dimension of the Gulf crisis.

THE REFLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE

The overriding objective of this chapter is to integrate the questions of identity of Arabism (with Islam as its core variable and the language as its clear manifestation) to Iraq's action against Kuwait. The point of departure here is that modern Arab leaders have always been eager to seek pan-Arab support for their policies, and the ultimate arbiter for their policy objective is that it should satisfy the expectations of

all Arabs. Arab leaders are always eager to present to the Arab peoples their political objectives (which are in essence immersed in egoism and the pursuit of personal power) under the guise of serving the common good of Arabism and Islam. Ironically, there are sets of historical experience, sociocultural realities, and the political make-up of the states and regimes that enhance this political behaviour. The connection between on the one hand the Arabic political discourse and on the other the Iraqi leadership's world view and the invasion of Kuwait will be presented and established within the following framework. Since the Iraqi leadership is seen to identify itself with the Arab nation, then Iraqi foreign policy-making and its outcome are to be seen as legitimate by all Arabs. They were, by the same token, motivated by purely *realpolitik* objectives. The Iraqi leadership, as it were, put their case within a pan-Arab framework which turned out to be their most effective weapon. The unprecedented support the grass-roots Arabs gave to Iraq (to an extent that had not happened during the war with Iran), came about after the Iraqi leadership introduced itself as a viable champion of the cause of the Arab Nation, opposed to the United States and Israel.

The basis of the reflective approach to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait suggested here is an understanding of Islam's connection with the identity of the Arabs. In this vein, the Islamic variable is suggested in so far as it is expressed in the arresting self-image of being who they are (i.e., pan-Arab identity), so that Iraq's political rationale and role enactment (or rather conflict) in invading Kuwait can be fully comprehended. The outbreak of wars and violent conflicts are the outcome, direct or indirect and intended or unintended, of actions taken by an array of factors, forces and individuals. Explaining or understanding such events requires not only the analysis of the immediate realities that generate conflicts and wars, or the mechanisms and procedures where the decisions (that lead to wars) are shaped and executed, but also the historical, societal, and political circumstances and their superstructural framework. In this book it is assumed that this framework consisted of the discursive formation of Arabism, and that this discursive formation was the instrumental variable (Stake, 1995) that engendered and facilitated the conditions for the invasion of Kuwait and the crisis that followed.

As is usually the case, crises and wars are the combined outcome of immediate or accidental societal, cultural and historical factors (i.e.

structural factors). These factors shape and influence what and how political actions are likely to be taken at any one time (Mathews, 1993: 51). They also determine the course of the crises and wars. While accidental circumstances determine which options are chosen in an immediate sense, it is the societal, historical and cultural factors that set the context within which crises arise, the pace at which wars are fought and, moreover, make up the outer context of choices that decision-makers face. There is, presumably, an interactive correspondence of relationships between the different variables. The modern experience of wars in the Middle East with non-Arab actors exhibits marked manifestations of the prevailing sentiments, feeling of solidarity (organic and psychological) with other Arabs who engage in conflicts with outside non-Arab powers. The Libyan war with Italy in 1911, the Arab–Israeli conflict with its many poignant episodes, and finally the Gulf crisis of 1990–91, are cases in point.

In short, what has to be emphasized is that inter-Arab politics has always been designed to underline Arabhood for the simple reason that ‘the Arab world still paradoxically constitutes a single area of psychological, emotional and intellectual resonance transcending state frontiers’ (Khalidi, 1991: 7). For Arabs, as we shall argue below, the conception of Arabism is the one single visible source that embodies their identity and unifies them irrespective of their sometimes striking differences in religious (here including ethnicity), regional, and social backgrounds. Moreover, for many Arabs, Arabism is synonymous with Islam. It is the fount of the culture. Arabism is not merely a modern political ideology articulated and pursued by modern and urbanized middle classes seeking to take over the state.¹¹ Pan-Arabism, like Islam, is part and parcel of being an Arab. This approach differs essentially from the discourse of Orientalism in the way Islam is related in the framework of this study; it is a genuine attempt to consciously understand Islam’s role and meaning in modern society.

The social meaning of the ‘hidden layers’ and ‘concealed motion’ of religion are significant to understanding socioeconomic and political developments and evolution¹² through the main efforts of the urban and commercial classes, which are the most active constellations of civil society. Hence the social transformation has to be assessed within the scope of the changing forms and substances in the meaning of Islam as a religion in so far as the middle class in Arab societies is concerned; the diversified forms and configurations of the religious

experience that are deliberately located over a broad spectrum of social transformation and politicoeconomic processes that have, through natural evolution or forceful integration, incorporated Arab societies into the modern global capitalist system.¹³ The picture that surfaces is rich, multifaceted and delicate. Viewed in this way, Islam is connected with the sociopolitical domain by virtue of its significance to these social groups and their collective self-image. Therefore it has to be integrated into the analysis of the political processes in the Arab world, and into the way states and political elites always identify themselves with Islam, by using its symbols and idioms, especially when they are in conflict with outsiders.

The supposition that understanding is made up of social interpretations rather than awareness of a given external reality constitutes an essential premise in our context. Such a constructivist approach prompts a solid basis and relevant material for generalization (Stake, 1995). The emphasis is on the related variables such as things, places, events and people, not only in the sense of a commonplace description, but in the sense of Geertz's (1973) 'thick description'. Hence this approach is sensitive to the complexity and significance of local diversity, the relevance of particularity and the rhetorical power of oral reasoning so that 'the native's point of view'¹⁴ is properly presented. Furthermore, the awareness, and employment, of 'local knowledge' is important to illuminate the relation between people's historical conceptions of community and their contemporary appeals for legitimacy. The ties and tensions between state sovereignty and forms of non-state authority emanated from kinship, religion or simply other factors, such as European colonialism (Turner, 1994: 85–6). To be sure, this approach is neither based on analytical particularism nor on outright relativism according to which reality is known in terms of the difference in how people perceive things (Stake, 1995).

This means that this method of accounting for and examining the society, politics or culture need not necessarily be peculiar to the Arab world. Rather, it is an attempt to substantiate an interpretation that aims to clarify the Arab world's special way of acting and reacting politically, and also how and in what way this peculiar make-up, in turn, conditions the behaviour of the various Arab states toward the outside world. The whole question of particularization would be fairly related with the uniqueness of the case, in so far as it helps to understand the course of the Gulf crisis. Therefore, the historical particularism of

the modern state of Iraq, the Ba'ath polity and the Arab world is a necessary methodological formula for this purpose. The idiosyncrasies of today's Arab world can only genuinely be comprehended in the context of the historical experience of the societies and the formation of modern states in that region. Therefore the Arab world is peculiar, not because the categories of analysis applicable elsewhere do not apply, but rather because of the very special historical experience to which the Arab peoples have been exposed (Halliday, 1995: 12ff.; Bill, 1996).

The invasion of Kuwait, therefore, is approached here by an eclectic method that assumes that political behaviour can be comprehended when interests and power are incorporated with a rich understanding of peoples' beliefs. To be sure, most human beings embrace and adapt to religious faiths, or ignore and even turn them down, not on the presumption that they are logically, practically or even intellectually sound, but for their relevance (or lack of it) to people's day-to-day feelings, demands and aspirations, and on top of that, to the way people identify themselves. Islam, with a discourse of culture that is lived, maintained and held through the Arabic language, is part and parcel of the identity of the Arabs. This is very much the *vis vitae* (spirit) in which this book has been conceived. It is hoped that its diverse and multifaceted approach to the invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf crisis will reveal the extent of the changing forms and substances in the political process in the Arab world – events that covered a wide range of social constellations, political institutions and individual activities with claims and counter-claims of deeply rooted ideas of the collective self-image and prejudices about 'others'. By illuminating this differentiated and complex sociopolitical course, this book aspires to be an important step away from the literature of political Orientalism; literature that, unfortunately, still dominates the public discourse about the history and politics of the Middle East, despite the severe blow it suffered from the appearance of *Orientalism*, Edward Said's masterpiece, more than two decades ago.

2 THE REALIST PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the invasion of Kuwait through the premises of realism and, more precisely, examines the question of how Saddam Hussein reasoned and calculated the various alternatives when he decided to invade Kuwait. Iraq, so it seemed, had very few illusions when it came to the intentions of the United States and Israel. The invasion of Kuwait can be seen as a typical case for political realism's account of two states in a relationship in which the balance of power was asymmetrical. On the one side Iraq has a larger population, more territory and more powerful military forces. As a classically styled authoritarian state it used the traditional (though outdated) method of military conquest to gain spatial expansion, regional domination and territorial imperialism. On the weaker side of the balance is Kuwait. Even though it has been an important and more significant actor within the global framework of money, goods and power, Kuwait has fewer people, less territory and a smaller military force. Most important, it possessed all that Iraq needed in the way of economic assets and territorial access to achieve its much-longed-for regional hegemony in the Arab world and the Gulf region. American policy in the Middle East, particularly toward Iraq, and the lack of defence or security arrangements in the Gulf, or between Kuwait and the United States, assuredly worked to Iraq's advantage.

This analysis focuses on the shortcomings of the realist premises when discussing the Iraqi leadership's assessment and the implications of its conception of Iraq's national role. American–Iraqi relations and the question of deterrence are then discussed. As will be demonstrated, there was no American deterrence effort, and even if there had been it was unlikely that it would have been successful, first and foremost because of the peculiarity of inter-Arab politics, but also due to the

American historical political record in the region. The interaction and behaviour of Saddam Hussein, the Kuwaiti government, and other Arab and foreign decision-makers, subscribe only partly to realism's assumption concerning the political conduct of human beings in achieving foreign policy goals. Individuals make choices on the basis of their conception of reality and in intimate relation to the nature of power. The impact of sociological and cultural factors upon political behaviour inevitably determines the practices that guide the approaches of political leaders in measuring and managing power. In short, if there are interests, there also beliefs. Likewise, if there are material and power capabilities there are the intentions, perceptions, images and world views of leaders (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993; Smith, 1995). These two dimensions (i.e., discourse and reality) that account for political behaviour are central both to the study of international politics and to the practice of statecraft, and so it is within this framework that the assessment of the invasion of Kuwait through the scientific assumptions of political realism is to be viewed.

THE REALIST PERSPECTIVE: A THEORETICAL OUTLINE

There is no school in international relations that has exerted so much influence or elicited such enormous criticism as political realism. The main enterprise of the realist school is to grasp the interaction of human beings (primarily as decision-makers); the nature, distribution and the use of power; the formulation and the implementation of foreign policy objectives; and the likely influence of the natural and societal environment on political behaviour. The realist school has sought to advance and establish a standard (normative) theory about the purposes and practices that guide policy-makers. John Vasquez (1983) identifies five directions within realist thought in international relations as follows: 1) foreign policy research programmes that seek to highlight the concept of national interest; 2) emphasis on the concept of power in developing models of national policy-making; 3) the systemic research of the mechanisms that regulate international conflicts and the causes of war; 4) deterrence as a strategy for peace and bargaining; 5) international organizations, international regimes and multilateralism. Let us sketch briefly the main assumptions of the realist school in international relations.

The anatomy of the international system

The international system is anarchic and based on the principles of self-help – if you do not get it on your own, no one does it for you. In comprehending the international system – how states act/react to one another and, by implication, ensure security – the political realists view and assess the relative power of states acting ‘rationally’ on the basis of ‘objective’ knowledge. Only flesh-and-blood material resources are considered in the assessment of power. Linked intimately with this is the assumption that ‘rational policy’, identified and determined by certain conditions such as the ability to select favourable moments at which to promote one’s own interests, presents the political edge for a self-aware decision-maker (Vasquez, 1983: 65–6). However, while it acknowledges the shortcomings and ambiguities displayed by games theories (non-zero-sum) and the speculative and conditional qualities of the concept of rationality, the scope and the limit of rationality have never been critically considered within the realist approach to world politics (Rapoport, 1982: 75; Vasquez, 1983: 205ff.; Nicholson, 1992: 4ff.). Within the realist perspective, the tension between internal conditions and international politics emerges in the form of contrasting subtraditions, with some evoking a Hobbesian account of the state of war, for example Kenneth Waltz’s (1959) clarification of what it is seen as the three images of the discourse of *Man, the State, and War*. War is ingrained in human nature, in the sense that people are essentially social ‘containers’ in which, like water in a boiler, they are made to ‘behave’ in different ways. Gradually, this view evolved as a prevailing framework in identifying the international system as one of anarchy. The implication of this is a taken-for-granted assumption: ‘wars occur because there is nothing to prevent them’ (Waltz, 1959: 332). The core of this approach has become intrinsic in realism’s assumptions of world politics as a perpetual fight for power.

The liberal school emphasizes elements of community, society, legitimacy and so on. In general, this perspective can be described in terms of a kind of international pluralism, through which individual actions and achievements are perceived in much less stark and clear-cut ways than those encapsulated in the realist vision. This does not mean that states become unimportant, rather that their position, their concerns and their methods of action need to be evaluated according

to changing contexts. Martin Wight (1966: 17–34), one of the major historians within traditional liberal theory, has argued that ‘where domestic politics is concerned with progress and convenient living, international politics is a realm of “recurrence and repetition,” one where the highest value is survival’. International political theory reflects only universalist themes from both Christian natural law (Grotius) and the Enlightenment (Kant), as well as the pluralist realism of Machiavelli. Hedley Bull’s (1977) use of the term ‘anarchical society’ points in the same direction, as do earlier accounts of the systematic or cultural (in this case ‘European’) coherence of international politics (Pasic, 1996). For both liberal and realism theory, these are all part and parcel of the international system and the way states act and react within it.¹ According to these classical liberal/realist accounts, the essence of world politics lies in its pluralism; war being the ultimate arbiter in the conflict between plural values and interests. Domestic political theory, by contrast, is said to be characterized by universalist values. For the realist, therefore, the transfer of domestic theory into the international context can lead only to naivety and wishful thinking.²

The state as the prime social organization

The state is the proper unit of analysis in world politics. Therefore international politics is to be understood on the basis of actions and interests of states. States, too, are the dominant and primary units of analysis in the international system and, thus, exclude domestic politics from the analysis of world politics. This assumption was modified by the neorealists. In this vein, Kenneth Waltz (1979: 93–7) asserts that states are unitary actors who, at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination. States, or those who act on behalf of them, endeavour, in more-or-less sensible ways, to use the means available in order to carry out and attain policy objectives. Those fall into two categories: first, internal efforts, moves to increase economic capability, to increase military strength, to develop sound and skilled strategies; second, external efforts, moves to strengthen and enlarge one’s own alliance, or to weaken and cripple (incapacitate) an opposing one. By the same token, Waltz (1979: 119, 1986: 339) ‘freely admit that states are in fact not unitary, purposive actors. States pursue many goals, which are often vaguely formulated

and inconsistent.’ As the international system is essentially anarchical, this means the absence of an overall central mechanism that rules over states.

Ruggie (1986, 1993) argues that Waltz and his acolytes within neorealism have not only ignored changes in the density of interactions that usually occur in the international system and other regional systems, but have also assumed prematurely that the differentiation in the conditions of the states, and within systems, can be abandoned as unnecessary in comprehending the structure of the international system. In the short term, states may be the principal actors and function in an identical pattern. By the same token, other actors, such as multinational firms and international regimes, have since the late 1960s become more prominent, and the situation in world politics has been genuinely altered. Ruggie (1986) points out that neorealist theory is too static to explain the evolution of the international system. This situation came about with the rise of non-state social forces, as a consequence of the fundamental transformation of territoriality; the notion of sovereignty since the seventeenth century is yet another example of such fertile transitions.

The outright consequences of these two aspects (i.e. an anarchical world system and the centrality of the state in the analysis of world politics) of the realists’ paradigm is the belief that once states have the objective facts, they (through their leaders) will act rationally. Actions are judged, more-or-less, rational by the degree to which they conform to the behaviour that, in one way or another, can be predicted by formal models (e.g. econometric analysis and games theory) that are based on objective facts. The data and knowledge that ought to be regarded and emphasized by decision-makers and, by implication, political scientists, must be well grounded on ‘objective’, that is ‘scientific’, facts. Most frequently, quantitative indices and tabulations of interstate relations are regarded as the hallmark of useful and, therefore, scientific knowledge (Rapoport, 1982; Nicholson, 1992: 4–5).³ Consequently, the specification of the differentiation of historical experience and anomalies of sociocultural context that states normally experience are secondary, or at best remain hidden, since states practise and operate identical activities (Waltz, 1979, 1986; Gilpin, 1986). The same applies to decision-makers. It follows that the Pericles of Athens, the Caesar of the Roman empire, the Caesar Borgia of Florence, the Bismarck of Germany, the Saddam Hussein of Iraq, will act in the same

manner in similar given circumstances that they may encounter. The realists claim that the specification of differentiation drops out because states as well as their leaders enact identical activities. Viewed in this way, the emphasis should be on what remains the same over time (Finnemore, 1996).

From a deeper perspective, Michael Williams (1992: 70) asserts that the epistemological implication of such an approach to the social sciences is that it identifies and treats cases of social realities as tangible facts. In order for us to grasp these facts, realism urges that we should follow the logic evolved for this purpose. At this juncture, realists are faced with a twofold dilemma: the first is the conception of the 'objects' of world politics in which it is determined by a self-evident stipulation that states are rational actors; the second is an ample postulation of this world of facts, where the postulation of the state as taken-for-granted actor, and the designation of the state as possessing a universal form of rationality, offer the epistemological basis for the assertion regarding objective science and knowledge. Such an approach defines and determines the standard of the essence and rationale of how world politics function and, thus, how states behave (or should behave). Following this line of theorization, the 'subjective' action (in that it is interwoven with many other variables unaccounted for by realism) of Iraq invading Kuwait is rendered objective. In a sense it can be understood by means of profit maximization logic in which there are no synthetic or empirical data requiring verification.

For example, questions of intergroup relations at levels other than the state, issues of meaning and symbolism and local-level views of the significance of crisis and conflict situations are almost completely ignored. The state, for realists, is the formal mechanism through which political power is exercised, and the organization which commands obedience (Gilpin, 1986). Yet if compulsory membership and the use of legal coercive power distinguishes the state from other organizations, the state is not the only organization that can compel behaviour or extract obedience. Many types of informal power may often be more binding than the formal kind. For example, despite the magnitude of its apparatus of violence and the dominance of public political and economic life, the state (or *dawla*) in the Arab world is not the focal point of loyalties – people are often more interested in their social, ethnic, religious groups. While not challenging the fact that the state (as a social organization) has an important role in world

affairs, it is as such a phenomenon subject to political analysis. The 'state' is far from the sole social construct that influences world politics. In the Arab world less loyalty is felt towards the 'state' than is felt towards ethnic, religious or regional constellations on the one hand, and is secondary to the flood of emotion, affection and the linguistic unity of Arabism on the other. On this level, there are a number of social, political, ethnic and religious units of analysis that have to be dealt with if we are to understand fully the nature of world politics (Anderson, 1987; Harik, 1990; Al-Azmeh, 1993).

The objectives and practices that ought to direct decision-makers

There is an often-repeated dictum that 'statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power' (Morgenthau, 1978: 5). *Realpolitik* contributes the principles for the methods used in such a paradigm: what statesmen conceive of as the state's interest provides the source of political behaviour. The necessity to promote, formulate and execute policy decisions originates from the inherently competitive structure of the international system, to which the state has to adapt itself. The assessments that allow for the complexion of the international system have to promote the state's best interest, and doing that successfully is the sign of success (Waltz, 1979: 117). Classical realists contend that human nature cannot sufficiently explain differentiation and so in order to develop a normative theory that accounts for political behaviour they seek to explain events in terms of goals and purpose. Waltz depreciates the controversial argument of classical realism that individuals seek power as an end in itself as disputable, even problematic. For him, individuals seek and pursue power only a means to an end, and this is a sufficient condition for a theory of world politics (Waltz, 1979; Keohane, 1986a). There are scholars who refute the claim that the injunctions of 'national security' have always shaped the source of national concerns and behaviour. And, by implication, the so called 'high politics' of the power struggle between states would be willy-nilly prioritized in the face of other issues in world politics also termed 'low politics' (Vasquez, 1983; Keohane, 1986b). On this point, Samuel Kim (1983: 15) notes that 'the concept of "power" in mainstream realism is excessively narrow and limited. Realism recognizes only material and physical power and is contemptuous of

“normative power,” and ... it denies the existence of the world normative system.’ Furthermore, the realists’ conception of ‘national interest’ is not as clear as they claim it to be. No one would dispute the fact that political leaders act and react in accordance with their nations’ best interests. But, since the choices facing human beings are usually identified with their conception of realities, the question then becomes, whose interests? And in what context? Moreover, as is usually the case, national interest is dictated by historical legacy and previous political arrangements manifested in sociocultural realities with which decision-makers have to be familiar. In the Arab world the national interest and the way it is perceived must be related to the fact that political leaders are exhorted to preserve or promote it not only by their own people in a strict sovereign and state-centred sense, but also by other states in the Arab world.

The techniques for measuring and managing foreign policy goals

As was indicated above the bulk of the studies that have appeared on Iraq and the Gulf crisis have as their main study object the personality and behaviour of the Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein. By invoking such an approach they might have in mind an ‘ideal type’ of the rational (or for that matter the irrational) actor model suggested by Graham Allison (1971). Allison’s rational actor model dominates the analysis of foreign policy decision-making and state behaviour in world politics. According to the model, the decision-making process is considered to be the outcome of unified and coherent decision units which function within political organizations that are structured to facilitate the execution of policy decisions in order to achieve clear, indeed, given objectives.⁴ At one point Allison (1971: 5) recognizes that the rational actor model does not completely account for, or fully explain, the decision-making process. Therefore ‘it must be supplemented, if not supplanted, by frames of references that focus on the governmental machine’. The first ‘frame of reference’ proposed by Allison is called the ‘organizational process model’. It contemplates the actions of governmental organizations that are not fully controlled by the top decision-makers. For government, as Allison (1971: 67) puts it, ‘[can] not substantially control the behaviour of these organisations’. Governmental organizations in a modern liberal democratic

society are usually regulated primarily by abstract and routinized operating courses of action. Only during major disasters do these organizations deviate from such procedures.

IRAQ'S ASSESSMENT WHEN INVADING KUWAIT

In line with the realist approach, when it decided to move against Kuwait the Iraqi leadership responded purposefully to what might have been identified as an external challenge and threat from 'those [Kuwaitis and by implication the United States and the 'Zionist entity'] who are stabbing Iraq in the back with poisoned daggers'.⁵ Saddam Hussein, in this perspective, is assumed to hold a clear objective, to weigh thoroughly the costs of each option, to pick the best option and to implement it to the full. In this respect we can assume, in an immediate sense, that the benefits that Iraq anticipated would justify the attendant costs and risks. These were as follows:

- 1 by 'adding Kuwait's fabulous wealth to the depleted Iraqi treasury, Hussein hoped to slash Iraq's foreign debt and launch the ambitious reconstruction programs he had promised his people in the wake of the war with Iran' (Karsh and Rautsi, 1991: 213);
- 2 the occupation of Kuwait 'could enhance Hussein's national prestige by portraying him as a liberator of usurped Iraqi lands' (ibid.);
- 3 in geostrategic terms, 'the capture of Kuwait could improve Iraq's access to the Gulf and give it a decisive say in the world market' (ibid.).

In this way of viewing world politics all states naturally seek to enhance their power and all are motivated by security concerns.

Iraq's economic recovery after a destructive eight-year war with Iran looked remote. The only option left that could save the Iraqi government from the economic and social consequences of that war was the possibility of selling oil at favourable prices. Iraq's economic recovery was seen as dependent on its ability to sell oil at high prices, but a surplus of oil on the international markets had depressed prices. The situation in OPEC and the policy the organization wanted to pursue in regard to overproduction and oil prices dashed Iraqi hope

of higher prices. At the same time, differences of opinion on oil-pricing policy within OPEC were beginning to surface. In brief, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, who had a higher production capacity than their export quotas, wished to maintain the existing oil price. As Iraq was producing well within its production capacity, it was keen to press for a price increase. Early in 1990 Iraqi officials lobbied the Gulf states to lower their production and to push the price up from \$18 to \$20 per barrel, which the Gulf states, for various reasons, were reluctant to do (Terzian, 1991; Ibrahim, 1992; Joffé, 1993).

Kuwait's implicit reluctance to abide by Iraqi demands might have provoked Iraq to revive the age-old territorial claims to part and later on to the whole of Kuwait. Also, in the name of the security of the Arab nation, Iraq (since it considers itself the shield of the nation), dictated its demands for access to the islands of Bubiyan and Werba – thus Iraq would have, as it deserved, a deep water anchorage outside the Shatt al-Arab. Last but not least may have been the desire to discipline and even punish Kuwait for daring to request Iraq to repay some of their debts (Karsh and Rautsi, 1991: 212–13).

So far, things have been placed in a power preponderance perspective: economic hardships, territorial disputes and unstable political tyranny on the one side, and a small, helpless neighbour on the other. All the ingredients that unleash conflicts, crises, and wars are in place. Yet to approach the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait only within this framework would be inadequate and would overlook the most fruitful and interesting historical experience, the societal realities and the political discourse from which the invasion of Kuwait emanated. At this juncture let us elaborate on the political realities of the Arab world that already reflect the impact of historical experience.

Iraq and the Arabic praxis of foreign policy

Arab states do not have a foreign policy-making system and process in the sense defined in the standard and traditional classification of foreign policy analysis (e.g. Rosenau, 1966, 1981; Brecher *et al.*, 1969; Dawisha, 1983). It was due to the Western powers' interference and involvement in the Middle East after World War II that the Arab states became, in one way or another, part of the international system.