

# BRAVE

## *New World?*



# SHEIK, *Rattle* *and* ROLL

*Australia's intervention in the Gulf crisis was hasty and muddled. Sanctions don't necessarily need force to back them up, argues Richard Leaver. And a new, more contemporary role for the UN is needed.*

**T**he best strategic advice to come out of Canberra about the Gulf Crisis came too late and was sent in the wrong direction. When it was clear that Iraqi forces were actively rounding up western hostages, Australian nationals in Kuwait were advised "to consider the advantages of maintaining a low profile".

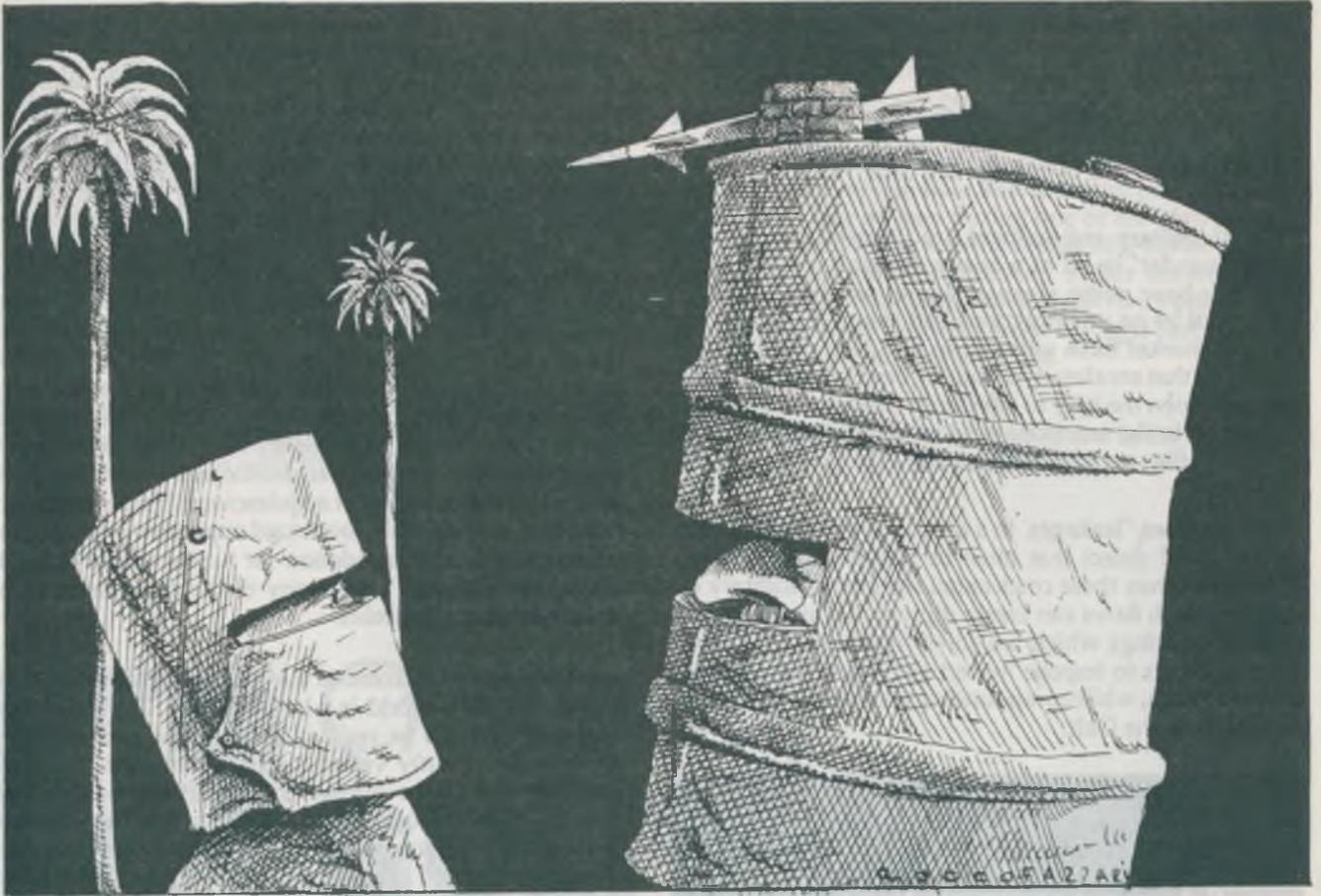
The acute dilemma which our nationals now confront individually is largely due to the fact that no one gave similar advice to Mr Hawke two weeks earlier.

Given our status as an important Iraqi trading partner, it is possible that a low profile coupled with quiet diplomacy through the initial stages of the Gulf crisis could have

secured the release of those citizens who are now trapped in what looks like a war zone. In any case, a lower profile would have left us free to think more rationally - and with more information to hand - about how best to respond to the 'problem of world order' which the flagrant use of force by Iraq undoubtedly raises.

Even if we had subsequently decided to send ships, we could at least have entered the fray with clearer purpose - and perhaps with cleaner hands.

However, the passage of time suggests a number of good reasons why we might have thought twice before committing Australian ships to the multilateral force which now exists. First, the structure of that force confuses what is necessary to achieve two quite distinct tasks - the need to reassure the Gulf states in the face of an Iraqi military



threat, and the need to gain leverage through an economic embargo. The multilateral force currently in place goes much further than is necessary for either of these ends. The consequence is not only a dangerous escalation in offensive force levels, but also the crowding out of opportunities for diplomacy and political solutions.

The military threat which Iraq poses to the Gulf States comes mainly from large tank forces. But it is questionable whether Iraq has the air superiority necessary to put those tanks to use. The Iraqi air force performed badly in the Iranian war even when its adversary had trouble getting planes off the ground. The air-to-air capabilities of the existing air force of the Gulf States are already in an entirely different league and could be supplemented. The Saudi kingdom also needs the specific anti-tank capability which A-10s and heavy helicopters can give.

Stealth weapons, marines and carrier battlegroups overachieve this objective of reassurance in a manner which is dangerously offensive in the short run and, almost certainly, politically counterproductive in the long run.

None of the 'boys' own' talk of 'surgical strikes' satisfactorily discusses the likely state of the Iraqi body politic on the day after surgery, or the damage - both physical and political - which surgery would conceivably inflict, possibly through an Iraqi scorched earth policy, upon the centre of gravity of the world's oil industry.

Second, the necessity to enforce UN-mandated economic sanctions at the point of the gun - the specific task for which Australian ships have been committed, even if they will not initiate hostilities - has never been clearly explained. The fact that there are only three exit routes for significant quantities of Iraqi oil exports makes it superficially appealing to think of sanctions enforcement in terms of a military blockade.

But even if the sanctions net can be made perfectly watertight, Iraq has sufficient stocks of food to last at least several months. Time is not in itself an issue of great urgency.

It is wise to remember that sanctions do not need to be applied to 'the producer end' of a market in order to exert useful effects. The single most successful case of the manipulation of the oil market for political ends - the shut out of the Mossadegh regime - was achieved by denying Iran its traditional markets within the vertically-integrated oil market of the 1950s. The example is well worth further investigation.

Significantly higher levels of production will now be forthcoming from some OPEC states, and there are record levels of private and IEA stockpiles. It is technically possible to substitute these sources for Iraqi-Kuwaiti exports. Since Iraq's international customers have vigorously condemned the invasion, we can presume that they will choose to avail themselves of such supplies as they become available. As with the Rhodesian sanctions, the UN would

establish a committee to monitor compliance with its mandated sanctions.

In this way, a boycott organised from the consumer end of the oil market could be just about as economically efficient as sanctions backed by force in the Gulf.

Without military enforcement, Iraq would undoubtedly try to 'launder' its oil at a heavy discount, and it would probably have some success. Some 'sanctions leakage' would not be an unambiguous bad thing. It would keep the spot market flush with oil, so building a ceiling over price rises that are already assuming ominous proportions. It would open the way to effectively linking the degree of 'tightness' in the sanctions net to multilateral diplomatic efforts to effect an Iraqi withdrawal.

In these senses, 'leakages' in a sanctions net are not necessarily a fatal defect that must be plugged at all costs - especially when these costs entail dangerous military escalation. Such flaws can create diplomatic openings - the sorts of openings which are sorely needed in this crisis. Present efforts to impose 'watertight sanctions' foreclose such openings, while compounding the sources of military instability in the Gulf.

***"A consumer boycott could be as efficient as sanctions backed by force."***

Third, the government's attempt to sell their decision 'to be seen to be there' in terms of a rejuvenation of the UN is an ill-conceived and cheap ploy which diverts attention from actions that might better serve this worthy end.

From what we already know of the decision-making processes on the Gulf crisis, the Hawke government clearly revealed a preference for 'good American citizenship' over 'good international citizenship' which it has verbally espoused through recent years. Among other things, this preference seriously undercuts the always fragile domestic legitimacy which successive defence ministers have been trying to piece together around the theme of 'the defence of Australia'. If we were, for instance, at the beginning rather than the end of the ANZAC frigate debate, it would today probably look like a rerun of the carrier debate of the early 1980s. And since that preference comes on top of an already exposed position over the Johnson Atoll issue, we can rest assured that our citizenship credentials will be carefully analysed around the Pacific and South East Asia.

It is naive to see the manner in which this crisis has been managed as signalling some sort of rebirth for the United Nations to which we must 'bear witness'. The breaking of the usual deadlock which binds the Security Council to inaction is new, but there are good reasons for doubting whether the key that has opened that lock will prove durable and robust in future crises. It may not even survive the full course of this crisis. That will largely depend on how the US actually uses its forces currently in the Gulf. The fact that none of the Security Council resolutions explicitly mentions the use of force, and that the USSR subsequently announced it would not be contributing to the multilateral force, suggests that the veil of UN legitimacy is paper thin. But it is necessary to be fully aware of the specific conditions which have provided the key to the deadlock. It is highly likely that promises of side-payments - possibly economic aid - were made to secure this minimal Soviet acquiescence. If side-payments from one economically moribund superpower to another are to provide the foundation for a new world order, it would not seem to have many of the characteristics of stability that are desirable.

A more effective and central role for the United Nations in a post Cold War world is a laudable aim. That objective, however, will not be realised through the sort of heavy unilateralism thinly veiled as multilateralism that was precisely one of the primary characteristics of the Cold War. One can be forgiven for thinking that the management of this crisis looks more like a victory celebration over the race to 'the end of history' than a serious effort to build more effective international institutions.

It is also clear that an improved UN will not be realised so long as it remains wedded to principles of international law that are built on lessons handed down from the Munich era. The principle that the use of force is not an acceptable way to redraw state boundaries is important, but it is only the beginning of legal order appropriate to a post Cold War world.

When this principle is used to defend 'the divine right of kings', it immediately becomes apparent that any adequate conception of social justice is sadly lacking in current international law. If the UN is to have a useful role to play in the brave new world - where a major issue is likely to be the redrawing of state borders through much of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc - then an equally important place will have to be found for notions of citizenship.

An important part of the heritage of the Labor government is built on memories of a better international legal order. In the years before the Cold War became the governing principle of international politics, Evatt made a distinguished effort to redress inequalities of power within the UN and broaden the legitimacy of its rule of law. If the international system is indeed beginning to escape from the jaws of the superpower vise, then Canberra should be giving serious thought about how this lapsed agenda could be reactivated.

Finally, some breathing space might have saved the government from digging in behind highly questionable

general arguments which are potentially damaging to future Australian regional interests. In recent years our defence ministers have been talking of the more complex - and allegedly more dangerous - world which lies at the end of the Cold War. This reminds me of the words with which Neville Meaney concluded his documentary study of Australian foreign policy published several years ago: "Australians have allowed sentiment to dictate the lessons from experience. The result has been that, lacking a proper perspective, they have often pursued a crude 'realism'...which in its one dimensional single-mindedness has often threatened to bring on the very events that it professes to avert."

The invasion of Kuwait now provides the first semi-plausible evidence for this romantic hypothesis about the stability which went with the Cold War, and about the

dangers which are said to lie ahead. The quarantining of defence spending in the recent federal budget, and its subsequent supplementation, are evidence that this hypothesis has already been taken on board as fact.

But if that is so, then perhaps the believers in these facts would care to explain how Saddam managed to unleash a murderous war on Iran during one of the high points of the Cold War. Where was the restraining influence of superpower rule on that occasion? A fair answer to that anomaly might then lead them to think twice before deciding that the ability to wage war is the single best guarantor of peace in our corner of the globe.

**RICHARD LEAVER** is a research fellow in the Department of International Relations at ANU.



## Credibility GULF

*Saddam Hussein is posing as the champion of a resurgent Arab nationalism. Michael Humphrey isn't convinced.*

**W**hen Lawrence of Arabia led the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Turks in 1916, Arab nationalism was put in the service of Western imperialist goals in the Middle East. When Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in 1980 in pursuit of secular Arab nationalism, the West was willingly persuaded that Iraq's war aims were compatible with theirs. They permitted themselves to believe Saddam was acting as their client, protecting the conservative, oil-rich Gulf states. From this Western clientist perspective, Saddam has bitten the hand that fed him by invading Kuwait. What he has done is to declare that he was acting in his own interests all along.

Saddam Hussein has sought to justify his occupation and annexation of Kuwait on the grounds of historic territorial rights and the unification of the Arab nation. At a strategic

level these claims are pragmatic and designed to undermine the Arab governments opposing Iraq's annexation of Kuwait - especially Egypt and Syria - by promoting popular dissent against them. Saddam's post-hoc appeal to Arab nationalism seeks to rekindle populist support for the Arab cause to regain dignity, autonomy and control over their own destinies.

The populist nature of pan-Arabism has been the creation of the state of Israel in the Arab world at the expense of the Palestinians. The other main issue has been control over resources, especially oil. At the height of support for pan-Arabism under Nasser from 1956 to 1967 the grand anti-imperialist causes were the 'liberation of Palestine' and control over the Suez canal.

In inter-Arab state politics one's pan-Arab credentials and aspirations for leadership of the Arab world have been measured by one's words and actions towards Israel and the Palestinian cause. Successive Iraqi regimes have certainly championed the Arab cause against Israel by supporting the PLO, sending troops into Syria during 1973