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.

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Credibility
GULF

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

When 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 hightide 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

Yom Kippur war with Israel, developing hi-tech weapons which could threaten Israeli territory, and holding the radical confrontationist line on peace negotiations with Israel. Yet its geographical position removed from the frontline with Israel has meant that Iraq could never assume leadership of Arab causes as Egypt had done under Nasser. Thus, despite Saddam's strong anti-Israeli rhetoric his pan-Arab politics have been practically directed towards maximising returns from oil. Since 1980 when Iraq invaded Iran the locus of Saddam's pan-Arab interests and ambitions has been the Gulf, an area which contains some 40% of the world's known oil resources.

> ## "Saddam's pan-Arab politics have been directed at maximising returns from oil."

In Iraq pan-Arabism has always been a populist ideology with variable political content. It has been inherited by each generation and championed by conservative and radical politics alike. It was claimed as the basis of legitimacy for the Hashemite monarchy imposed by the British after 1920 just as it was the justification of the Free Officers who overthrew the monarchy in the army's July 14 Revolution (1958). Even the Iraqi Communist Party found it had to Arabise its program in the 1950s. For the Iraqi Ba'ath Party, which describes itself as Arab socialist, Arab nationalism has always been its icon of legitimacy. Ba'athist ideology spiritualises the idea of unity as the source of renewal of Arab power and the defeat of imperialism in the region.

There has always been an inherent tension in Arab nationalist politics over the nature of political objectives. Success by pan-Arab parties and leaders in achieving state power places demands on them to subordinate local national interests to pan-Arab ones. The same tension exists in Islamic parties that achieve state power as the coming to power of the Islamic Republican Party in Iran has shown.

Since the July 14 Revolution in Iraq, pan-Arab parties have experienced this tension as one between national integration and development and aspirations for leadership in the Arab world. The strategy for national development fol-

lowed a common pattern of military regimes that have emerged in peasant-based societies. Successive regimes championed socialism, which they equated with land reform, and the nationalisation of oil. Policies for national integration were formulated in terms of pan-Arab ideology - they spoke of 'Arab socialism' - aimed at gaining control over resources and deposing traditional political elites formerly associated with the monarchy and the British.

National integration was further complicated by the culturally heterogeneous character of Iraqi society. A majority are Shi'a Arabs (55%) while Sunni Arabs (25%) and Kurds (20%) form minority populations. Historically these were located in the rural north and south of the country respectively with the Sunni concentrated mainly in the centre and in the cities. Forging a national cultural identity confronted the reality that any proposal for union with Syria would make the Iraqi Shi'a majority a minority. Moreover, the level of radical mobilisation of the Shi'a and their recruitment into the Iraqi Communist Party made them very wary of submitting to any planned union with Arab states dominated by Arab nationalist parties and leaders.

In Iraqi politics the tensions between programs for national integration and pan-Arabism have split parties, precipitated military coups and led to purges of the ruling elite. These crises have always divided along the lines of loyalty to the state versus loyalty to pan-Arab projects. The most dramatic have been those occasions in 1958 and 1978 when union with Syria was on the agenda, i.e. when the Iraqi Ba'ath Party had a practical opportunity to realise some of its declared aims. These struggles assumed the form of competition between Ba'athists and Nasserists for pre-eminence in the pan-Arab movement, rivalry between the regional Ba'ath parties of Syria and Iraq, and competition between Arab socialists and communists.

The ferocity and vehemently ideological character of these struggles betray the narrowness of the social base of elite politics. Regimes were made and unmade by military coup d'etat and not through popular democratic movements. Politics was the struggle for control over key institutions of party, administration and military and the repression of any broadly based political movement. This, for observers of Iraqi politics, changes of personnel in the officer corps and the Revolutionary Command Council have been the barometers of change in Ba'athist Iraq.

The Ba'ath has been especially narrow in its social base because of its highly centralised system of recruitment and graded party cadres. In fact, the networks of the Ba'ath elite have been extremely localised based on Sunni families and clans from the Pakrit region. While these close ties proved invaluable in the factional politics of military and party struggles they presented problems for the establishment of national control. From 1968 when the Ba'ath established themselves in power, the Ba'ath sought to consolidate a one-party state organised down to the street level and to repress any popularly based political movements, especially the communists and the Kurds.

The opportunity for the Ba'athists to consolidate their hold over the state came with the oil price rises in 1973 which greatly increased incomes from the nationalised oil industry. Politically they set about extending their control by the formation of mass organisations of youth, women, peasants and workers. Until then they had had to pursue a policy which alternated between repression of and cooperation with its political opponents. The need of the Ba'athists to assert their radicalism while ruthlessly repressing the Iraqi Communist Party reflected the strength of the democratic movement mobilised by the communists and the centralised and narrow base of the Ba'ath party.

Ba'athist political rhetoric remained radical and socialist but their program for national development saw the economy become more capitalist and its political alliances more conservative. Oil wealth did not lead to the diversification of the economy through industrialisation and improved standards of living for the workforce. In fact, during the 1970s the wages of ordinary workers fell in real terms. Agricultural incomes declined, falling to less than 6% of GDP by the late 70s when they had been 23% of GDP in the early 60s. The decline of agriculture and the demand for labour in the cities created by government expenditure in investment and consumption saw a massive rural-urban migration. More than a million Egyptian workers were imported to work in agriculture in the name of Arab nationalism. Permanent relocation and settlement of entire Egyptian villages took place in the cause of Arab solidarity. In fact, the impact of these workers was to maintain low wages in agriculture.

The model of national development embraced by the Ba'ath Party focused on big, impressive projects such as dam building, land reclamation, the development of nuclear energy and the purchase of hi-tech weaponry. A system of contracting based on political patronage from the Ba'ath Party saw the emergence of a new Iraqi bourgeoisie who undertook contracts themselves (funded by the state) or acted as intermediaries for multinational companies. The result was that Ba'athist 'socialist' development perpetuated the dependence on technological imports and multinational companies - many were turnkey projects - as well as the militarisation of the economy and reliance on crude oil exports to fund national development.

When Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in 1980 in defence of Arab secular nationalism he was indicating clearly the role he saw for Iraq in the Gulf. Iraq, driven along by a development strategy which depended heavily on crude oil exports and resulted in the militarisation of the economy, was seeking to establish itself as the protector of the Gulf oil states. Oil incomes and military power would make up for the failures of national economic development and national integration. Through military victory he would make them, willingly or not, dependent on Iraq and thereby further enhance his control over the price of oil in OPEC. As it turned out, a military stalemate and the survival of Saddam's leadership was sufficient. Iraq received more than $30 billion from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to sustain the war effort which Iraq had become increasingly reluctant to pay back.

The invasion of Iran served Saddam's pan-Arab and national aims and, happily for him, coincided with Western interests in the Gulf of seeing the defeat of the Islamic regime in Iran. By seeking to militarily defeat the Islamic regime in Iran, Saddam sought to undermine growing radicalisation of his own Shi'a majority and to emerge as the undisputed power in the Gulf. During the later stages of the war it became almost conceivable that Iraq might fill the shoes of US client state that had been vacated by the Shah of Iran. Certainly, the US expressed the view that the defeat of Iraq would be a major threat to US interests in the Gulf.

Saddam's appeal to Arab nationalism may appear contradictory since he has attacked a state he was previously claiming to defend. However, his aims are consistent with those he pursued in the war with Iran. He wants to achieve hegemony in the Gulf in order to maximise access to oil

> **"Oil wealth did not lead to the diversification of the economy."**

and control over the price of oil, in part because his path of dependent development has led him there. While before he sought to achieve this by imposing military dependence on the Gulf states, he now seeks to achieve it through direct military control. But, as the scope of his pan-Arab utterances on Israel, the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and the avarice of the royal households demonstrate, the varied symbols and causes can stir memories in many parts of the Arab world for different reasons.

Saddam has challenged the complacency of the US in the post-Cold War era, and turned the idea of arms reduction on its head. If the US wants a world policeman in the 90s, we will probably witness an expansion of conventional military forces. Superpowers can no longer rely on imagined clients to behave themselves anywhere.

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