

# Hussein's 'justifiable' actions reassert his Arab leadership

By GRANT THOMPSON  
Staff Writer

A wide range of economic, historic and social factors may make the actions of Saddam Hussein appear justifiable and even praiseworthy in the eyes of the Arab world.

"The Gulf crisis is a source of great hope and expectation," said Herbert Bodman, UNC professor of history.

By standing up to Western powers, Hussein appeals to Arab nationalist sentiment.

"He has said at least that he wants to unite other Arabs to confront Israel," said Bodman. "These people have lived all their lives with the frustration of the existence of Israel."

Hussein also fills a vacuum in Arab leadership, he said. "The Arabs hoped for Nasser but he botched it. They hoped for Qaddafi but didn't take him seriously. Now, Qaddafi has been upstaged



by Hussein."

An additional issue that Saddam Hussein has used to his advantage is the vast difference between rich and poor in the Arab world.

"He's appealing to the Arab masses, many of whom feel that some of the oil

wealth should be distributed elsewhere," said Christopher Van Hollen, vice president of the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C.

The view of Saddam Hussein as a champion of the lower class is buttressed by the more equitable distribution of wealth in Iraq than in Saudi Arabia, Van Hollen said.

Many poor Arabs are appalled "that a lot of that oil money is being spent on Mercedes and gambling on the Riviera," said Curtis Jones, a retired Foreign Ser-

vice officer with 29 years of experience in the Middle East.

Hussein has accomplished some positive achievements as leader of Iraq. "Saddam has established a relatively honest government. You don't find the bribery and general incompetence that you find in many Arab nations," Jones said.

"Saddam developed Iraq substantially. He has made it into a modern state," Van Hollen said.

Arabs have not only seen Kuwait as an oil cheater, reducing the wealth of

other nations, but many see the history of Kuwait as unalterably intertwined with Iraq.

"Iraq has a historic claim to Kuwait," said Bodman. During the days of the Ottoman empire, Kuwait was ruled by Iraq.

Jones said, "Boundaries were drawn by the West, particularly by the British. Colonial powers tried to leave behind regimes through which they could still control the region."

Hussein also benefits from Muslim concerns that the Holy Land is being defiled by the Western presence, particularly the predominately American military force stationed in Saudi Arabia. However, Hussein is leader of one of the few secular governments in the Middle East.

"His claim to be protector of the Holy Land is ironic because he is one of the least Muslim leaders in the Arab world," Van Hollen said.

## Iraqi leader expected to give Kuwait self-rule

From Associated Press reports

AMMAN, Jordan — President Saddam Hussein of Iraq is expected to declare federated self-rule for Kuwait in a bid to ease the gulf crisis and allow the United States to withdraw in partial victory, senior Arab military officials said Wednesday.

The idea, already floated to the Soviet Union and the United States, sources said, may figure in talks Thursday between Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz and U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar in Amman.

The officials, who spoke on the understanding that neither they nor their countries be identified, said Saddam was likely to announce the move before the end of September.

Under a plan being considered, they said, Kuwait might have autonomy — perhaps with a bloc of parliament seats and positions in the Iraqi national Cabinet. Saddam would accept a timetable and conditions to protect U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf, they said.

Such a plan would have little appeal to the Kuwaiti government now in exile in Saudi Arabia. Saddam's centralized government is not likely to allow much political or economic leeway.

According to the officials' analysis, neither Saddam nor President Bush can withdraw from the lines they have drawn in the desert sand. Both are buying time until some flexibility can be found.

Iraq invaded Kuwait Aug. 2. Six days later, Saddam annexed Kuwait despite universal condemnation and an American military buildup in Saudi Arabia. On Aug. 28, he declared Kuwait as Iraq's 19th province.

The officials said Iraq was still working on the details of its federation plan which, presumably, would provide a different statute for Kuwait.

The idea was passed to Soviet officials who, in turn, relayed it to Washington, the Arab sources said. Perez de Cuellar is expected to sound out Aziz and report to Washington.

"Iraq's move will take some time," an official said. "There should be a surprise in three to four weeks."

Bush has repeatedly rejected out of hand any solution but the withdrawal of Iraqi forces and restoration of the Kuwaiti government. U.S. officials have made no public acknowledgment of flexibility.

But the Arab sources said that privately the Americans are looking for some compromise that would make their

point, assure stability in the gulf oilfields and allow an honorable disengagement.

"The Americans must bear in mind that Iraq will never let go of Kuwait," one official said.

If no solution could be found, others said, Kuwait would be retaken by force.

The officials considered the next three weeks to be crucial to Washington. U.S. forces can wait until late September when desert temperatures cool; when more units and heavy weapons, particularly tanks, arrive; and when troops are acclimated to the terrain.

But after that, Saddam's message of Arab unity, along with his linking of Kuwait to the Israeli-occupied territories, will bolster his support in the Arab world. Facing off a superpower would impress the undecided in the Arab world.

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