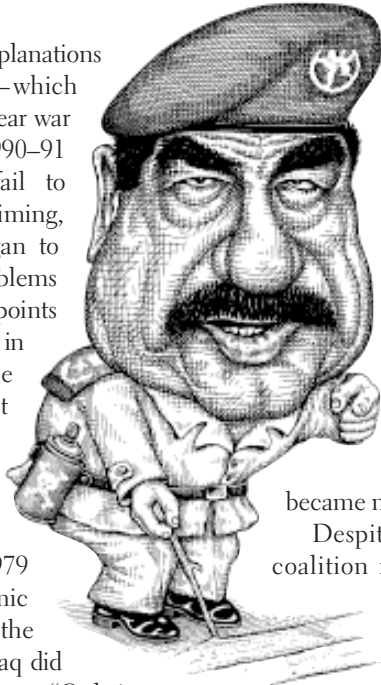


The Devil Made Him Do It

“Iraq’s Decisions to Go to War, 1980 and 1990” by F. Gregory Gause III, in *The Middle East Journal* (Winter 2002), 1761 N St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-2882.

Why did Saddam Hussein decide in 1980 to attack Iran and then, 10 years later, to invade Kuwait? The usual answer is that the Iraqi dictator mistakenly thought they’d be easy pickings. But Gause, a political scientist at the University of Vermont, contends that Saddam in both instances sought mainly to counter what he perceived as foreign efforts to undermine his grip on power at home.

The conventional explanations for Saddam’s actions—which led to the costly eight-year war with Iraq and the 1990–91 Persian Gulf War—fail to account for their timing, Gause says. “Iran began to experience internal problems as early as 1977,” he points out. “While the Shah was in power the Iraqi regime not only did not exploit his weakness, but sought to support his rule.” Even after Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi fell in early 1979 and the new Islamic Republic devastated the Iranian officer corps, Iraq did not move to take advantage. “Only in September 1980,” Gause writes, “after numerous statements by the new Iranian leaders encouraging revolt in Iraq, tangible efforts by Iran to encourage such revolt, and serious evidence of domestic discontent by Iraqi Shi’ites did Iraq go to war.”



As for the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, Baghdad had long claimed the country as part of Iraq and had long enjoyed decisive military superiority. Indeed, had Saddam just waited a year or two, he would have possessed a small arsenal of nuclear weapons. So the timing made no sense. But Saddam felt under immense pressure to act as a result of what he believed to be “an international conspiracy” against Iraq. He blamed Iraq’s economic woes in the wake of the war with Iran on “lower oil prices, which were in turn blamed on the ‘overproduction’ of Kuwait and the [United Arab Emirates], clients of the United States.” Saddam saw other signs of U.S. hostility toward Iraq and also feared a new Israeli strike against his nascent nuclear establishment. “As he began to perceive that the future could hold serious challenges for his rule,” says Gause, “his foreign policy became more aggressive.”

Despite the buildup of American and coalition forces after Iraq’s occupation of Kuwait on August 2, Saddam continued to believe he could avoid defeat. Even after the air war started in January 1991 he still refused to withdraw from Kuwait and seek a diplomatic solution. Why? Because, says Gause, the dictator did not believe that withdrawal would end the perceived “international conspiracy” to weaken Iraq and destabilize his regime.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Engulf and Devour?

“Are Giant Companies Taking Over the U.S. Economy?” by Lawrence J. White, in *The Milken Institute Review* (Second Quarter 2002), 1250 Fourth St., 2nd fl., Santa Monica, Calif. 90401-1353.

The American merger and acquisition binge of the 1990s revived the old specter of an economy dominated by a relative handful of titanic corporations. Last year, the \$181.6 billion AOL-Time Warner merger suggested that the creep-

ing giantism is continuing.

Not to worry, says White, an economist at New York University’s Stern School of Business. Whether you look at the biggest 100, 500, or 1,000 U.S. corporations, the result is the same: They