

Paul Rogers traces a dictator's rise to power

Saddam Busters

All books written in rapid response to events run the risk of superficiality and poor organisation. **Saddam's War**, by John Bulloch and Harvey Morris (*Faber and Faber, hbk £13.99*), avoids the first, runs slap into the second, yet still has much to offer. Written as a journalistic offering without benefit of references or even a bibliography, it still manages to inform the reader on many of the internal features of Saddam Hussein's rise to power, though it has an infuriating tendency to dart back and forth over the past 30 years, too much like a 1960s film trying to be clever.

Saddam's War takes us up as far as the back-end of last year, but the core of the book is concerned with Saddam's rise to power and his success in surviving the Iran-Iraq War and turning Iraq into the most heavily armed state in the Arab world. It is well-informed on those early years and also gives a perceptive analysis of the various Arab reactions to the invasion of Kuwait.

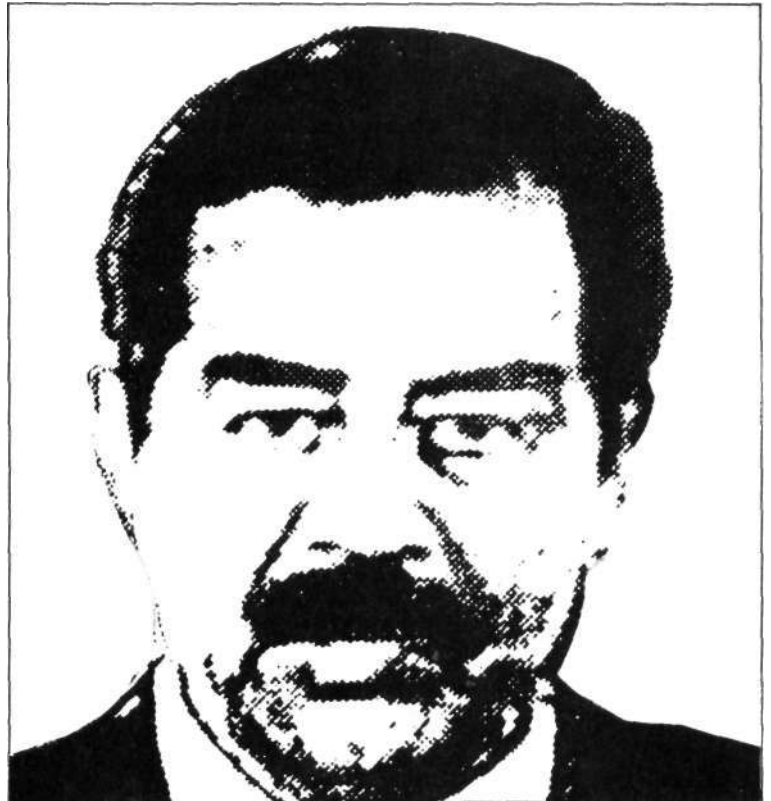
As a rounded account of the rise of Saddam it has one serious failing in that it pays far too little attention to the

economic and social development of Iraq over the past 20 years. The development of a health service, an education system and a formidable economic infrastructure were as much a feature of Ba'ath rule as the ruthless and consistent suppression of opposition, and they help explain the continued support for Saddam from much of the population of Iraq.

Although *Saddam's War* is essentially about his rise to power, it does also consider the nature of the US response to the crisis last August. In doing so, it does point out the importance of the Gulf oil reserves, yet it strangely fails to relate this to the massive forces available to Bush through the presence of US central command in the Middle East.

One of the key determinants of US policy towards Iraq last August was that it believed it had the military forces sufficient to evict Iraq from Kuwait. Without that perception, the US would have taken the sanctions route alone, and the outcome of the crisis would have been very different.

Saddam's War gives some idea of the ruthlessness of the man, but also points to his



central aims of survival and aggrandisement, the latter based on long-range planning which went largely unrecognised by the US military. Within Iraq, all too many of his political opponents managed to underestimate his capabilities, and for most of them it was fatal.

At the international level,

the US went into the crisis thinking that it was dealing with a second-division military power led by an incompetent petty dictator. Within a month of the start of the war it was beginning to appreciate its mistake, but the consequences will be with us for a long time to come.