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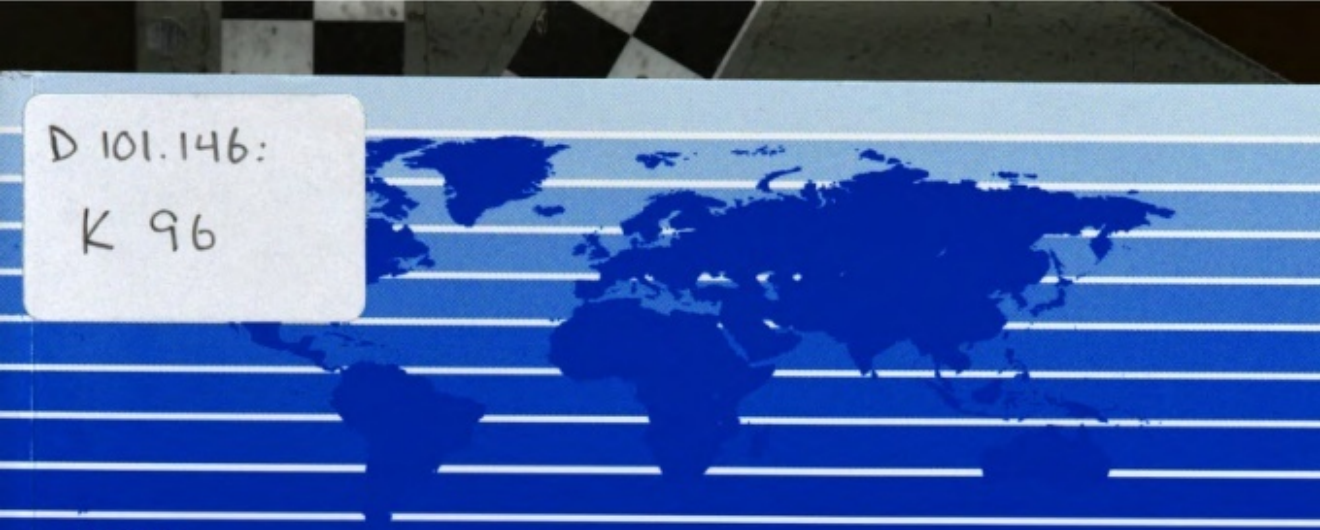

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KUWAITI NATIONAL SECURITY AND THE U.S.-KUWAITI STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP AFTER SADDAM

W. Andrew Terrill

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September 2007

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Comments pertaining to this report are invited and should be forwarded to: Director, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Ave, Carlisle, PA 17013-5244.

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FOREWORD

The United States has found no shortage of difficulties in recent years as it has moved forward in implementing its security policies toward the Middle East and especially the Persian/Arabian Gulf. Security threats resulting from an Iraq in turmoil and an assertive Iran are near the top of U.S. concerns about its future security. Efforts to deal with terrorism and to encourage and support the efforts of regional states to stem the rise of violent terrorist groups are also important. Kuwait, while a small country with a limited population, nevertheless has many of the same concerns as the United States in that part of the world. While Kuwait cannot act as a major regional power, it can nevertheless still serve as a valuable ally, whose contributions to regional security and democratization should not be overlooked. These contributions center on strategic geography, economic strength, and a willingness to host U.S. forces that is long-standing in a region where such actions can sometimes be seen as controversial.

In this monograph, Dr. W. Andrew Terrill provides a comprehensive and nuanced examination of Kuwait defense and security issues including a consideration of the importance of the current security relationship with the United States. He approaches this task by carefully documenting historical and ongoing security threats to Kuwait. Of special importance, Dr. Terrill considers the history of difficulties seen in Iraqi-Kuwaiti history and illustrates in detail how Kuwait's problems with Iraq which culminated with Saddam Hussein are much larger and more complex than the ruthlessness of one individual. Dr. Terrill outlines the

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ongoing territorial tension between Iraq and Kuwait since before the later country was independent, as well as the various Kuwaiti attempts to control Iraqi demands through diplomacy, regional consensus, and foreign aid. Dr. Terrill also examines the historical basis for Iraq's claims against Kuwait noting that they have no serious legal basis, but also noting that many Iraqis appear to be open to the idea that all or part of Kuwait should belong to Iraq. Kuwait's current relations with post-Saddam Iraq are not without notable problems, and the Kuwaitis look at their northern neighbor with great uncertainty. Iraq will continue to be of concern to both Kuwait and the United States in forthcoming years, and cooperation between the United States and Kuwait will be valuable in addressing Iraq-related problems. Kuwait, moreover, has the double difficulty of facing expected critical problems from either a strong, nationalistic Iraq or an Iraq that has collapsed into anarchy.

Dr. Terrill also considers how an assertive Iran is interacting with Kuwait at the present time and how the two nations have a historic pattern of widely fluctuating relations. While Kuwait and Iran are currently superficially friendly to each other, they nevertheless have strong conflicting interests. In particular, Iran is not pleased with the close U.S.-Kuwait military relationship and would like to replace U.S. influence in the Gulf with its own. Kuwait, conversely, feels the need to maintain open and friendly relations with its much larger neighbor to limit Iranian intrigue and to assuage Kuwaiti Shi'ites who view the Islamic Republic with some warmth. Nevertheless, the Kuwaiti leadership knows not to trust Iranian intentions and is sometimes appalled by Tehran's assertive rhetoric. Kuwaitis, like the other Gulf Arabs, are deeply disturbed about the

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Iranian move to acquire nuclear capabilities, which they view as an environmental and security threat. Nor would Kuwaitis like to see the United States depart from the Gulf and thereby remove the most serious countervailing influence to Iranian dominance.

Turning to the issue of terrorism, Dr. Terrill notes that Kuwait has shown considerable flexibility in managing actual and potential problems. The Kuwaitis have been especially effective in managing groups such as the Peninsula Lions who have sought to overthrow the Kuwaiti government and have also attempted to kill U.S. troops stationed in Kuwait. This Kuwaiti governmental dexterity needs to continue. Should future problems develop between Kuwait and Iran or southern Iraqi Shi'ite radicals, Kuwait must respond to those problems in ways that do not alienate its own large Shi'ite minority. A crisis in Kuwait's Sunni-Shi'ite relations would be a catastrophic setback to the region, since Kuwait currently is universally viewed as having the best Sunni-Shi'ite relations of any Arab Gulf state containing large elements of both communities.

Finally, on the issues of reform and democracy, Dr. Terrill notes the ongoing efforts at Kuwaiti political modernization and inclusiveness. Kuwait represents an important example to the region of a partial democracy that is expanding and further entrenching democratic approaches and procedures to contemporary problems. Such moves are not easy, and backsliding is always possible. Nevertheless, the Kuwaiti approach illustrates the potential of the kind of evolutionary reform that too often fails to interest political theorists and journalists examining the region since such occurrences are much less dramatic than violent regime change and revolution, both of which are processes that do not carry an automatic default to post-revolutionary democracy.

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The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer this monograph as a contribution to the national security debate on this important subject as our nation continues to grapple with a variety of problems associated with the U.S. presence in the Middle East. This analysis should be especially useful to U.S. military strategic leaders as they seek to address the complicated interplay of issues related to Middle Eastern security in what our local allies would see as a politically acceptable and constructive manner. Some of the historical analysis particularly regarding Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations will also help U.S. leaders place current issues and perceptions in a larger context that may help them work with Kuwait and other Arab allies. It is hoped that this work will benefit officers of all services visiting Kuwait or the larger Gulf region, and that it will contribute to strengthening the U.S.-Kuwait relationship.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

W. ANDREW TERRILL joined the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) in October 2001, and is the General Douglas MacArthur Professor of National Security Affairs. Prior to his appointment, he served as a Middle East nonproliferation analyst for the International Assessments Division of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL). In 1998-99, Dr. Terrill also served as a Visiting Professor at the U.S. Air War College on assignment from LLNL. He is a former faculty member at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, and has taught adjunct at a variety of other colleges and universities. He is a retired U.S. Army Reserve lieutenant colonel and Foreign Area Officer (Middle East). Dr. Terrill has published in numerous academic journals on topics including nuclear proliferation, the Iran-Iraq War, Operation DESERT STORM, Middle Eastern chemical weapons, and ballistic missile proliferation, terrorism, and commando operations. Since 1994, at U.S. State Department invitation, Dr. Terrill has participated in the Middle Eastern Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Track 2 talks, which are part of the Middle East Peace Process. He also served as a member of the military and security working group of the Baker/Hamilton Iraq Study Group throughout its existence in 2006. Dr. Terrill holds a B.A. from California State Polytechnic University and an M.A. from the University of California, Riverside, both in Political Science. He also holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California.

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SUMMARY

The U.S.-Kuwait military relationship has been of considerable value to both countries since at least 1990. This alliance was formed in the aftermath of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's brutal invasion of Kuwait and the U.S. decision to free Kuwait with military force in 1991. Saddam's later defeat and removal from power in 2003 eliminated an important rationale for the alliance, but a close look at current strategic realities in the Gulf suggests that Kuwait remains an important U.S. ally. It is also an ally that faces a number of serious national security concerns in the turbulent post-Saddam era, some of which will require both Kuwaitis and Americans to rethink and revise previous security approaches, particularly to meet the shared goals of reducing terrorism and regional instability.

Since its independence in 1961, Kuwait has struggled to manage a number of difficult challenges related to protecting its citizens and its territory from the predatory designs of large and dangerous neighbors. The most menacing neighbors have been Iraq and Iran. While Iran has proven a threatening and subversive enemy on key occasions, Iraq is even more problematic. Kuwait has maintained a long and often extremely difficult relationship with Iraq, and a series of Iraqi governments have either pressured Kuwait for territorial concessions or suggested that Kuwait is a lost province of Iraq. Additionally, within Kuwait a widely held belief is that large, if not overwhelming, portions of the Iraqi public share this viewpoint. Iraq-Kuwait tensions are therefore unlikely to disappear in the aftermath of Saddam's trial and execution. Iraq, even without Saddam, is often viewed as a danger to Kuwait

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given this history, and ongoing Kuwaiti concerns about Iraq underscore the need for continuing U.S.-Kuwait security ties. Furthermore, both Kuwait and the United States fear a rise in region-wide terrorism and sectarian violence resulting from the current civil strife in Iraq, as well as other factors. Should Iraqi's sectarian strife reach new levels of intensity, it is important that it does not spread to other nations such as Kuwait. Kuwaiti diplomacy and security planning must seek ways to minimize the impact of the Iraq civil war in ways that do not cause the vast majority of loyal Kuwaiti Shi'ites to become alienated from their government.

Kuwait must also cope with a newly-empowered Iran which has at least partially filled the Gulf power vacuum created by Iraq's political crisis. Kuwait, as a small country, has little desire to offend a major regional power such as Iran, and has occasionally sought Iranian support in its dealings with Iraq. Good Kuwaiti relations with Iran are often viewed with favor by significant elements of Kuwait's Shi'ite community and therefore can be viewed as supporting Kuwaiti national unity. Nevertheless, the Kuwaiti leadership fears Iranian interest in domination of the Gulf and is especially opposed to Iranian efforts to compel the United States to withdraw its military forces from the region. For that reason, Kuwait and Iran will never fully trust each other. Moreover, the Kuwaitis, like other Gulf Arabs, are deeply concerned about the Iranian nuclear program, although they also oppose U.S. military strikes against Iran, fearing that they will be placed in the middle of an intense cycle of regional violence. Kuwait would probably view such strikes as an appalling breech of faith unless all diplomatic and economic options for dealing with the crisis were thoroughly explored and exhausted first.

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The United States also has a vested interest in regional political reform and ongoing democratization in Kuwait. Beyond being a valuable strategic ally, Kuwait has also shown a commitment to expanding democracy in an evolutionary way that supports U.S. aspirations for both stability and more inclusive government within the region. Kuwaitis have a long-standing democratic tradition that they have attempted to blend with the continued authority of a ruling monarchy that has been in power since the 1750s. The existence of this monarchy and the history of democratic expression are key components of the Kuwaiti national identity. Additionally, Kuwaitis may be especially concerned about maintaining their democratic image abroad because of their continuing need for international support against potential enemies. Kuwait is clearly the most democratic country among the Gulf Arab states, and the Kuwait democratization effort serves as an important if still incomplete example to the region. Kuwaiti democratization has shown particular vitality over the last year, and the United States needs to continue supporting such efforts to ensure that they are not ephemeral. The United States must also remain aware that democracy and moderation are not the same thing, and that elections in Kuwait have empowered a number of Islamists who appear deeply unsympathetic to U.S. goals for the region.

This monograph notes that the United States can, if insufficiently careful, neglect the Kuwaiti relationship and fail to adequately consult the leadership and take Kuwaiti interests into account. Kuwaitis have the potential to become more jaded and less cooperative in their relations with the United States if they view themselves as taken for granted or dealt with as subordinates. The United States has a long history

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of resentful allies carefully measuring the degree of cooperation they will give in return for security guarantees. There is no need for this to occur with Kuwait. Moves to strengthen U.S.-Kuwait relations thus become important and may become especially vital if setbacks in Iraq eventually prompt a U.S. withdrawal under less than optimal conditions. Strong efforts should be made to prevent sectarian warfare in Iraq from spreading to Kuwait under such scenarios. Such efforts may require a great deal of new and creative thinking by both Kuwaitis and Americans as the threat of a conventional Iraq attack has now been overshadowed by the dangers of spillover from an Iraqi civil war, new and deadlier terrorism, and large-scale subversion.

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KUWAITI NATIONAL SECURITY AND THE U.S.-KUWAITI STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP AFTER SADDAM

> Kuwait cannot overcome the basic strategic reality that it is a small country with immense wealth with the wrong neighbors.
>
> Anthony H. Cordesman[1]

> We fear civil wars. We fear that the situation in Iraq [will] slide into a civil war.
>
> Ahmad al Fahd al Sabah
> Chief, Kuwaiti National Security Service[2]
> February 13, 2007

Introduction.

Kuwait has been a close military partner of the United States since a U.S.-led military coalition liberated it from the iron grip of Iraqi occupation in 1991. The U.S.-Kuwait relationship since that time has been consolidated as an important alliance for both countries. Although Kuwait is a small country, it is also strategically located and supports ongoing security relations with the United States. The importance of Kuwait's strategic position can be expected to increase as the United States reduces its presence in post-Saddam Iraq but still seeks to influence events there and throughout the Gulf region. Kuwait's strategic importance also increased following the U.S. decision to remove its combat forces from Saudi Arabia in 2003.[3] Additionally, Kuwait rests upon approximately 10 percent of the world's known oil reserves and is expanding its efforts to explore for natural gas, making

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it a vital economic ally. More recently, and also of interest to the United States, the Kuwaiti experience is emerging as an especially important ongoing experiment in democratic institution-building and the expansion of democratic practices. This approach to governance is being implemented in ways that support U.S. goals for increased democratization of the region, although elections have also helped to empower some extremely conservative Islamists, such as members of the Kuwaiti Islamic Constitutional Movement, which is the political arm of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood.[4]

In April 2003 the United States and Kuwait reached an important milestone in their national security relationship due to the ouster of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in a U.S.-led military invasion of Iraq. From Kuwait's 1991 liberation until Saddam's ouster from power in 2003, Kuwaiti fear of Ba'athist Iraq decisively influenced virtually all of that country's major foreign and defense policy decisions. The removal of Saddam is consequently a significant development for the strategic situation in the Gulf in general and most especially for Kuwait. More than just a hostile and dangerous tyrant, Saddam was viewed by most Kuwaitis as an archenemy. In large part, these views were a direct result of the 1990-91 Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in which Saddam ruled by torture, fear, and execution. Nevertheless, his standing as Kuwait's primary enemy had other aspects to it. He came to power and remained Iraq's undisputed leader despite that country's previous vulnerability to recurring coups. As dictator, Saddam was able to maintain power through a wide array of rewards and sanctions directed at the Iraqi population. Part of his system of control was to avenge every slight to both punish his enemies and more importantly to deter potential foreign and

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domestic plotters from moving against him. Revenge for Saddam was a fundamental aspect of practical governance that helped him maintain his unyielding domination of the Iraqi military and population. Consequently, in the 1991-2003 time frame, Saddam was widely viewed as harboring hopes that he would eventually be able to punish and perhaps destroy Kuwait for its unwillingness to accept Iraqi rule and its ability to rouse the world against the Iraqi dictator in 1990-91. Saddam's removal from power in March 2003 eliminated this personality-specific aspect of Kuwait's Iraq policy and provided at least a temporary respite from the terror generated by a known enemy. His execution by hanging in 2006 was greeted with undisguised joy in Kuwait.[5]

Yet, despite an enormous sense of relief, Kuwait's national security problems have not disappeared with Saddam's removal and death on the gallows. Rather, the end of his dictatorship has created new and extremely serious national security challenges for Kuwait. Iran has viewed Saddam's replacement with a weak and divided Iraqi government as an opportunity to expand its political influence throughout the Gulf in ways that are potentially threatening to Kuwait. Moreover, a variety of alternative Iraqi political futures concern Kuwait, and whatever future Iraq eventually finds will occur only after a prolonged period of instability and violence that could well involve Kuwait. Additionally, Kuwaitis are concerned about an expansion of terrorism in the Gulf due to increased regional sectarianism and radicalism that may emerge as a by-product of Iraqi factional and intercommunal warfare. All of these problems are of special concern to the United States as well, and addressing them effectively is vital to both nations.

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The Structure of the Kuwaiti Political System.

Kuwait has a citizen population of just over one million. Most Kuwaitis are Sunni Muslims, but there is also a large minority of Shi'ites that has been estimated to include 25-30 percent of the citizen population.[6] There is also a mostly noncitizen Iranian community, which is estimated at around 60,000 residents. Approximately 900,000 foreign private sector workers and another 450,000 foreign domestic workers are also in Kuwait.[7] Members of these last two groups are almost never granted Kuwaiti citizenship, and under most circumstances they will never have the opportunity to apply. Additionally, Kuwait has around 90,000 *bidoons*, stateless individuals who live in that country but do not have paperwork indicating that they are eligible for Kuwaiti citizenship.[8] Most of the *bidoons* deeply desire Kuwaiti citizenship, and many feel a strong sense of injustice that it has been denied to them.[9]

The Kuwaiti political system is dynamic and complex, but at present it is clearly the most democratic approach to governance within the Gulf. According to political scientist Jill Crystal, "The one historical gift geography gave the tribes of the Gulf before oil was a gift of default: an outward orientation."[10] This more cosmopolitan understanding of the world has led to a continuing conflict between traditional and modern values in Kuwait's political culture. Mary Ann Tetreault, another leading scholar on Kuwait, elaborates on this situation by suggesting that, "[p]olitical life in Kuwait oscillates between traditional monarchy and oligarchic democracy."[11] In this regard, Kuwaitis often refer to their country as a constitutional monarchy and stress that Kuwait has a democratic tradition, while admitting that their country does not follow a Western-

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style model of government due to the dominant role of the ruling family in the country's governance. The other important component of the political system is the National Assembly (often called the parliament), which was created by the 1962 Constitution and serves as the legislative arm of the government. As will be discussed below, this body has been a vital institution with a turbulent history since it was formed shortly after Kuwait's 1961 independence.

Kuwait's ruling Sabah family has been in power since the mid-1700s, although there have often been formal and informal curbs on the family's authority to govern. Foreign policy was the responsibility of the British under a protectorate relationship that was applied to Kuwait from 1899 until 1961. Other curbs on the ruling family were a direct result of the internal distribution of power within the emirate. Kuwaitis, throughout their history, have shown respect for the special historical role and leadership of the Sabah family, while frequently rejecting the concept of absolutist rule.[12] Kuwait also developed a strong system of consultation and consensus in part due to the influence of the local merchant class and also because of the leveling effects of pre-oil poverty. In the early 20th century, successful Kuwaiti merchants, upon whom the economy rested, usually considered themselves the social equals of the ruling family, and they often successfully demanded to be treated that way. The power of the merchants later faded as oil wealth strengthened the autonomy of the ruling family and allowed them to gain further popular support through the provision of increasingly lavish government services.

Prior to its 1961 independence, Kuwait had ongoing experience with various quasi-democratic institutions, and the establishment of the 1962 Kuwaiti

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Constitution was widely viewed as continuing and codifying indigenous Kuwaiti values of democracy and consultation. Newly-independent Kuwaitis did not regard democracy as imported or imposed from abroad.[13] Rather, many citizens viewed it as indigenous and important. Previous experiments in pluralism included various advisory councils to the emir, some of which were quite assertive.[14] Moreover, on November 1, 1960, elections took place for the first time in Kuwaiti history. These were for the position of "mukhtar," a kind of local leader in each of Kuwait's villages and municipalities. Every Kuwaiti citizen male over age 21 had the right to participate.[15] Another strong and viable democratic pillar is the *diwaniya*. The *diwaniya* is a Kuwaiti custom whereby friends and acquaintances gather to discuss various, often political, subjects, sometimes with particular speakers, and with dinner for those attending. In recent years, these gatherings have sometimes been covered by the press.[16] Traditionally, only men attend *diwaniyas*, but this situation now seems likely to change since women were granted the right to vote and hold office in 2006 (see below). As women become more involved in political life as a result of their newly-established rights, it is expected that either mixed gender or parallel *diwaniyas* for women will become more important to Kuwaiti political life.

On November 11, 1962, Emir Abdullah al Salim al Sabah signed the newly created constitution, thus becoming the first constitutional monarch in the Gulf.[17] The Kuwaiti Constitution specified that succession to the position of emir is limited to members of the Sabah family who are descendents of Emir Mubarak al Sabah, known as Mubarak the Great (1896-1915). Emir Mubarak broke with the Ottoman Empire in 1899 and is considered to be the founder of modern Kuwait. The

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monarchy also has an unusual tradition of succession which, when called upon, makes direct father-to-son succession unlikely. Tradition, but not the Constitution, stipulates that an effort should be made to alternate the position of emir between members of the two main branches of the Sabah family. These branches are the Jabir branch and the Salim branch, which trace their lineage back to separate sons of Emir Mubarak. After a serious 2005 succession crisis, the ruling family decided that this approach would not be used in empowering the current leadership.[18] Sheikh Sabah al Ahmad al Sabah, the current emir, appointed Sheikh Nawaf al Ahmad al Jabir al Sabah, his younger brother as crown prince, thus seemingly ignoring the long-standing principle of alternating succession.[19] Both the current emir and crown prince belong to the Jabir branch of the royal family. An earlier change that now appears to be increasingly institutionalized is the separation of the offices of the crown prince and prime minister. Previously, both offices were held by one individual. In the aftermath of the most recent succession, the offices remained separated, at least for the time being.

The prime minister presides over the constitutionally-established unicameral National Assembly which both Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis often refer to as the parliament. Kuwait held its first national legislative elections in 1963, and the existence of the parliament remains a continuing source of pride for most Kuwaitis. There is, however, an ongoing conflict between those Kuwaitis who seek a strong and viable parliament providing oversight of the ruling family's public policy, and those who would prefer to see it reduced to a rubber stamp and democratic ornament to impress foreign countries, such as the United States, that publicly support global democratic development.

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This division has sometimes had regional implications as the often confrontational Kuwaiti style of politics has occasionally scandalized neighboring states with more powerful and traditional monarchies. Such states occasionally view Kuwait as a worrisome example for their own population.[20]

The Kuwaiti parliament and the democratic process in Kuwait have also experienced serious setbacks. The royal government suspended parliament from 1976 until 1981 and then again from 1986 until 1992. According to the Constitution, such suspensions are legal if they are followed by new elections within 60 days, a provision which was ignored in each of these cases. The parliament was briefly suspended again in 1999 over problems resulting from misprints in free copies of the Koran published by the state.[21] Another brief suspension occurred in 2006. Both of these later suspensions were constitutional since they were followed by elections in the allotted time frame.

Kuwait's parliament includes 50 directly elected members, but their influence is diluted by the Cabinet, which is appointed by the emir and must include at least one elected member of the Assembly. Each member of the 15-person cabinet has a vote in the parliament. Additional cabinet ministers may be appointed from the assembly, but there is no requirement for the government to do so beyond the one constitutionally-stipulated position. The government thus begins any political debate with a virtually automatic 15-vote advantage. This edge has been useful and even decisive to the government on a number of occasions such as the July 2006 reelection of incumbent speaker of the assembly, Jassem al Khorafi, over his challenger, Ahmed al Saddoun, in a 36-28 vote.[22] Political parties are illegal in Kuwait, although political blocs exist

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and function under the guise of associations, cultural groups, and other fronts.

Who can vote is also an important issue in Kuwaiti politics. For most of Kuwait's history, the right to vote was denied to women, recently naturalized citizens, and members of the armed forces.[23] Kuwaiti women received equal political rights in 2005, including the rights to vote and run for office, through an amendment to the election law. They voted in national legislative elections for the first time in June 2006 when they officially represented 57 percent of the electorate.[24] Previously, women had voted in the April 2006 local elections.[25] Following this reform, the parliament is seeking to expand the franchise to military personnel and lower the voting age from 21 to 18.[26] Both moves are controversial, with a number of active duty and retired military officers opposing extending the franchise to the armed forces, due to a fear of politicization and strongly-held views on the meaning of nonpolitical military professionalism. Nevertheless, the search for reform and greater government accountability has been a recurring theme of Kuwait politics which has reached a particularly important stage in recent years and is examined in more detail later. Additionally, for purposes of this monograph, it is important to understand that Kuwaitis maintain a strong sense of national identity and patriotism. Kuwait is not an artificial state, nor does it lack a legitimate indigenous political structure.

The Nature of Iraqi Claims against Kuwait.

Kuwait has faced numerous actual and potential enemies throughout its existence and has been forced to develop strategies to identify its most dangerous adversaries at any particular time and then respond to

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them. Scholar and former senior Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official Graham Fuller has stated that prior to the 1990 Iraqi invasion, Kuwait maintained a "rotating enemies list" of countries seeking to dominate, overthrow, or subvert the government.[27] According to Fuller, this list has at times included Iraq, Iran, Egypt (under President Nasser), and even Saudi Arabia and Syria.[28] In more contemporary times, Saudi Arabia has been an ally rather than an enemy, although a radical change in the Saudi government could lead to existential danger for Kuwait. Syria currently has limited ability and no clear interest in subverting the government of Kuwait. In recent years, the most dangerous adversaries Kuwait has faced are Iran and especially Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Unfortunately, Iraq-Kuwait relations have been so dominated by the figure of Saddam Hussein in recent years that it is possible to lose sight of the larger trends and problems, which are significant. Moreover, it is often easy to assume that Saddam's departure from the scene is the beginning of an inevitable upward trend in Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations. Such developments are by no means assured.

While Kuwait has maintained historic differences with a number of nations, only Iraq has a history of intermittent but nevertheless overt challenges to the right of the Kuwaiti state to exist as a sovereign entity. There are several key reasons for this antagonism. Kuwait has an approximately 120-mile land border with Iraq, and Kuwaiti territory severely limits Iraqi access to the sea. Iraq's quasi-landlocked status has been a source of frustration and resentment to a variety of Iraqi regimes, and this situation becomes especially problematic for Baghdad when difficulties exist with Iran, with which it shares the Shatt al Arab waterway. Perhaps not surprisingly, under these circumstances,

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there are some key historical instances where Iraqi leaders have claimed all or part of Kuwait. These events will be examined later. At this point, it is important to highlight that the case for Iraqi ownership of Kuwait, for reasons noted below, is not based on any valid interpretation of history or international law, although it is often viewed as credible by Iraqi writers, politicians, and probably many ordinary Iraqi citizens.

Iraqi claims to Kuwait are based upon Kuwait's former status as a *qaza* (lesser district or dependency) of the v*ilayet* (province) of Basra under the Ottoman Empire. Since Basra is now part of Iraq, various Iraqi leaders have asserted that past links between the two areas serve as a basis for claims that Kuwait is a part of their territory. Unfortunately for these same leaders, such assertions do not capture the actual nature of Ottoman-Kuwaiti relations. According to historian Frederick F. Anscombe, who has conducted extensive archival research using Ottoman documents, Kuwait was not integrated with or dependent upon Ottoman Basra. Moreover, Ottoman officials in Basra were quick to express their unhappiness about this situation during the period of Ottoman sovereignty. Kuwaiti possession of the best port in the area was a continuing irritation to Basra officials who complained that Kuwait was independently ruled by sheikhs, and not "proper officials."[29] This historical research suggests that during the Ottoman period, Kuwait was not ruled from the territory included in present day Iraq, and its status as a *qaza* was administrative convenience rather than a working relationship. Ottoman officials in Basra wanted control of Kuwait and were disgruntled that they did not have it. To the extent that they were subordinate to any other authority, Kuwaiti rulers were subordinate to the Sultan in Istanbul. In contrast

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to Iraq, modern Turkey has unequivocally renounced sovereignty over the Arab countries that were once part of the Ottoman Empire.[30]

Just as important, Kuwait severed its political ties to the Ottoman Empire in 1896 and asserted this independence by concluding a treaty with the United Kingdom in 1899. The driving force behind this change was Emir Mubarak the Great, who was able to bargain with the British for some significant concessions in exchange for the protectorate relationship that both sides sought. The United Kingdom (UK)-Kuwait agreement, which was initially secret, included written guarantees that the UK would intervene with military force should Kuwait be attacked by a foreign power. The Kuwaitis also received some British financial support and placed their foreign and defense policies in UK hands. The demise of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 led to an increasingly public relationship between Kuwait and the UK, with British forces occasionally being used to protect the Kuwaitis from attacking tribal enemies in the 1920s and 1930s.[31]

Finally, and perhaps most importantly in assessing the validity of Iraqi territorial claims, Kuwait has a vastly different political culture and history than Iraq. Kuwaiti nationalism has sometimes been described as more developed and nuanced than that of Iraq, and Kuwaiti citizens do not view themselves as a lost province of Iraq. Historical claims of one state seeking to absorb another seldom outweigh the will of the population, even in much more compelling and legally valid instances than the Iraq-Kuwait case.[32] In this regard, Kuwait's ties with the UK did not interfere with the continuing development of an indigenous political culture or distinct Kuwaiti national identity vastly different from that of Iraq. The British were

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primarily concerned with supporting and protecting their trade route to India and ensuring that no other external powers attempted to displace their influence in Kuwait. So long as these goals were met, they usually did not bother to interfere with Kuwaiti internal politics or political development.[33]

The Looming Threat: Iraq's Long-standing Interest in Kuwait.

Iraqi interest in Kuwait predates the later country's independence going back to the era when both nations had special relations with the British. Iraq was created from the unification of three Ottoman provinces in 1920 and was made a British mandate until 1932. It was also placed under the governance of key members of the Hashemite family, which had supported the British military during World War I, and continued to rule Iraq until 1958. The discovery of oil in Kuwait in 1937-38 (and suspicions that it existed prior to that time) seems to have led to a strong upsurge in Iraqi interest in the future of the emirate and may have been the basis for later calls to annex Kuwait by Iraqi government leaders.[34] Although oil was not to be exploited until after World War II, Kuwait was beginning to show real economic potential, which was of interest to the Iraqis.

Hashemite calls for Kuwaiti unification with Iraq are closely associated with Iraq's second monarch, King Ghazi ibn Faisal. Ghazi became king in 1933 following the death of his father, King Faisal. According to Hanna Batatu, a leading historian of this era of Iraqi history, Ghazi had "little experience" in governance and "no political understanding."[35] He did, however, have strong anti-imperialist views as well as a predatory

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interest in Kuwait. King Ghazi made public statements demanding the annexation of Kuwait and attempted to incite Kuwaitis against the al Sabah family through his tirades made from a private radio station maintained in his Baghdad palace.[36] No serious consequences resulted from these broadcasts, and King Ghazi's 1939 death in an automobile accident led to a respite in Iraqi claims against Kuwait. Ghazi's death also led to an upsurge in Arab nationalist speculation that the king had really been murdered by the British for opposing an array of their interests.[37] There were also suspicions that British plots against Ghazi's life might have been abetted by veteran Iraqi politician Nuri al Said. The two Iraqi leaders were known to detest one another for a variety of personal as well as political reasons.[38] Nevertheless, as late as January 1939, the British opposed the removal of Ghazi from the throne when they were apprised of maneuverings by Nuri to do so.[39] The exact circumstances of Ghazi's death remain controversial, and the conspiracy theories remain unproven. Although the Kuwaitis were in no position to influence these events, it is difficult to imagine that Ghazi's death was a cause of sadness for them.

Kuwait, in partial reaction to Ghazi's earlier threatening behavior, continued to reach out to the Iraqis during its later years as a British protectorate in an effort to establish normal relations and thereby reduce the danger of Iraqi subversion or military action against it. In March 1952, the Kuwaiti ruler visited Baghdad as a guest of the Hashemite government, where he hoped to improve relations between the two countries to the point that Iraq would no longer question Kuwait's right to exist as a separate, independent state.[40] This visit went well and gave the Kuwaitis some hope for better relations. Unfortunately, in early 1958 the Iraqi

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monarchy again indicated how quickly Baghdad's goodwill could dissipate when Kuwait was viewed as insufficiently supportive of Iraqi priorities. At this time, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al Said became especially interested in encouraging Kuwait to become part of a projected union of Jordan and Iraq in what was called the "Arab Union."[41] This effort was designed by the Iraqi and Jordanian monarchies to help to limit the Egyptian propaganda victory resulting from the 1958 Egyptian/Syrian union into one country, the United Arab Republic (UAR). The Baghdad government was then engaged in a bitter, losing struggle for Arab leadership with President Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, and the Egyptian merger with Syria helped Nasser to consolidate his already lofty image as a pan-Arab hero.[42] The Arab Union scheme was designed to negate some of the propaganda value of the formation of the UAR, while building a foundation for a conservative, anti-Nasser Arab bloc.

The 1958 Iraqi revolution destroyed the Baghdad monarchy and ended plans for the union with Jordan, thereby halting the pressure on Kuwait to associate itself with this effort. During the early stages of the uprising, key members of the royal family, including the young king, were massacred at the palace. Prime Minister Nuri al Said, the consummate symbol of the old regime, was killed in the street by an Iraqi Air Force sergeant, while attempting to flee the country.[43] After burial, his body was disinterred by an angry crowd and dragged through the streets, hanged, torn to pieces, and finally burned.[44] While this revolution ended the Iraqi monarchy's pressure on Kuwait, it also set the stage for a new and more threatening encounter with a much more dangerous regime. The leader of the Iraqi revolutionaries who became prime minister

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after the Hashemites' fall was Brigadier Abdul Karim Qassim, an erratic and unpredictable army officer who was to emerge as one of Kuwait's most threatening enemies, just as the small emirate was preparing for independence.

On June 19, 1961, the Anglo-Kuwaiti Treaty of 1899 was terminated and replaced by a treaty of friendship in which the UK acknowledged Kuwaiti independence. Six days later, Prime Minister Qassim pounced on the situation by stating that Kuwait was an "integral part of Iraq" and that the UK had "declared an oil well a state" by granting Kuwait full independence.[45] The Iraqis declared the 1899 agreement between Britain and Kuwait illegal on the grounds that Kuwait did not have the right to end its relationship with the Ottoman Empire or Iraq as a successor sovereign. While Qassim did not clearly threaten an immediate military invasion, some of his public statements were so confusing and contradictory that it was difficult to discern how he planned to unify Kuwait with Iraq and what the Iraqi military's role was to be in implementing such a unification.[46] More ominously, June press reports stated that Iraqi troops had moved towards the frontier. These reports were later discredited, but the prudent path at the time was to treat the danger of invasion as serious.[47]

As the crisis unfolded, it is possible that Qassim may have believed that average Kuwaitis sought liberation from the rule of the Sabahs and hoped that Kuwait would be unified with Iraq. It is not clear how the Iraqi leader might have arrived at this belief, although the late 1950s were a heyday of Arab unity rhetoric, and Qassim's own hatred of the Iraqi monarchy might have led him to believe that such beliefs were ubiquitous throughout the Middle East. One senior

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Iraqi army officer, on his own initiative, contacted a Kuwaiti friend in Beirut during the crisis in order to ascertain the correctness of Qassim's assumption.[48] He was told that Kuwait was viewed as a distinct country by its citizens who had no interest in becoming part of Iraq.[49] The Iraqi colonel considered this answer surprising and quickly conveyed it to Qassim.[50] There is no evidence that Qassim was prepared to be receptive to this information, but no evidence that he made any effort to look into the matter more deeply, either.

In the face of the Iraqi threat, the Kuwaiti government sought British military assistance, and the UK responded with Operation VANTAGE, the deployment of 8,000 troops in or near Kuwait along with supporting air units.[51] This was a serious deterrent force at the time. The size of the Iraqi army was then around 60,000 troops, although most of these were far from first rate. Iraq was further undergoing the difficult process of transitioning from Western to Soviet weapons and equipment. Moreover, Iraq's already limited ability to conduct a military invasion was quickly complicated by domestic problems. Just as Qassim was attempting to present a credible threat to Kuwait, Iraq's Kurds, who had initially welcomed the new Iraqi regime, were increasingly at odds with Baghdad over the issue of Kurdish autonomy. When Qassim issued his claim to Kuwait, many Kurdish leaders saw this as an opportunity to rollback government authority in the Kurdish regions of northern Iraq.[52] By September 1961, Iraqi military forces were in open conflict with Kurdish militias, and Iraqi Air Force units were bombing Kurdish villages. The new military requirements of a Kurdish rebellion enormously complicated any potential invasion of Kuwait.

The Kuwaitis, for their part, were uneasy about relying on British troops for their protection, since

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this dependency harmed their country's claim to have emerged from a colonial relationship. In addition to seeking military protection from an outside invasion, Kuwait also sought world recognition as an independent, sovereign state. A major pillar of this goal was achieved when Kuwait was unanimously accepted for membership in the Arab League on July 20, 1961.[53] Iraq, the only state opposing this action, made the surprising blunder of not having a representative present for the proceedings that allowed Kuwait to join the League.[54] Had the Iraqis attended these meetings, they should have been able to prevent Kuwaiti membership since the acceptance of new members is supposed to be unanimous under Arab League rules. Kuwait was, however, blocked in its efforts to join the United Nations (UN). The Soviets contended that Kuwait remained a British colony in all but name due to the British military presence. Moscow correspondingly vetoed Kuwaiti membership in the UN until October 1963 after the death of Qassim and the establishment of a new and more constructive Iraqi-Kuwaiti relationship. While the Soviets had based their objections to Kuwaiti UN membership on the issue of British influence, the primary reason for their actions was to support their ally in Baghdad.[55] In addition to being anti-Western, Qassim usually had excellent relations with the large and important Communist Party of Iraq.[56]

Kuwait responded to these difficulties by seeking an Arab League military force which would politically overshadow although not actually replace the British military deterrent. This action would clear the way for Kuwaiti UN membership and wider global acceptance. Egypt's President Nasser strongly supported the concept of an Arab League force for Kuwait due to

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an ongoing Egyptian rivalry with Iraq over Arab leadership. The Arab League eventually deployed around 3,300 troops to protect Kuwait. Around 1,200 troops were from the UAR and another 1,200 were sent from Saudi Arabia. Jordan, which bore a special grudge against the Qassim government, sent a contingent of 300 troops as part of the force to protect Kuwait.[57] Other nations contributing troops included Sudan and Tunisia. President Nasser withdrew the Egyptian contingent in December 1961 following a coup in Damascus, ending the union between Egypt and Syria. An additional unstated reason for the Egyptian withdrawal may have been that Nasser took offense upon hearing of an interview where the Kuwaiti emir stated that he "actually relied basically on the British for protection."[58] Jordanian and Saudi troops were withdrawn in January 1963, and the remainder of the Arab League forces left on February 19, 1963, by which time the crisis appeared to have subsided.[59]

Iraqi Prime Minister Qassim was overthrown and executed in a military coup on February 8, 1963. He was replaced by a new military junta of Arab nationalist and Ba'athist conspirators led by Colonel 'Abdul Salam Arif. Qassim's death offered some immediate opportunities for Kuwaiti-Iraqi reconciliation, although it remained uncertain if the new Iraqi government would be receptive to improved relations. From a practical point of view, the new regime would have had at least as many problems invading Kuwait as the old one. The Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq had continued to present a serious threat to the central government as various Kurdish parties joined forces to demand autonomy from Iraq's central government. While this fighting was punctuated with a series of truces, it was still a central concern for the Iraqi government.

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Moreover, and perhaps almost as serious, Iraq had now embarked upon its second military coup since independence. This action indicated an increasing politicized military that had twice overcome any reservations about taking control of the government. Such a situation substantially escalated the potential for new coup plotters to seize the government using rationales similar to those already in power. The collapse of a taboo against coups can become a staggering problem for military professionalism. Under these circumstances, the best Iraqi army units were needed for regime protection, and the military remained subject to continuing vetting and purging which undermined military efficiency and morale.

While Kuwaitis were not convinced that the Iraqi threat should be viewed as an eccentricity of only one man, Qassim's execution did provide the emirate with a chance to redefine relations with Iraq. Timing was important to this effort. The possibility that the Arif government would either consolidate its power or inflict a decisive defeat on the Kurds presented Kuwait with significant strategic concerns about the emergence of a re-energized and focused Iraqi threat. Consequently, the Kuwaitis took advantage of the change in governments to seek improved relations with Baghdad and to try to establish normal bilateral relations. In particular, the government made it known that it was willing to provide Iraq with financial aid as a way to defuse ongoing difficulties.[60] This approach seemed to yield significant dividends for both countries as the Kuwaitis and Iraqis quietly negotiated a long-term loan for Baghdad. Iraq correspondingly recognized Kuwait as an independent country on October 4, 1963.[61]

After the 1963 coup and Qassim's death, Iraq's approach to Kuwait shifted from demands for total

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annexation to an interest in border modifications and adjustments. When Kuwait's emir visited Baghdad in March 1965, he was asked to relinquish Bubiyan and Warba islands which Iraq claimed it required for national security. The emir refused, but the Kuwaitis did provide Iraq with a continuing flow of foreign aid and made other economic concessions which helped to limit their problems with Baghdad.[62] If Iraq could not obtain the islands outright, the new Iraqi leadership was especially interested in leasing Warba and at least part of the larger island of Bubiyan as a way of mitigating Iraq's nearly landlocked status. The Kuwaitis strongly resisted these overtures in the belief that such an Iraqi presence would evolve into a permanent occupation if Baghdad was ever allowed such a foothold. Iraq was unable to press its claims as it remained interested in Kuwaiti aid and also fell victim to a series of internal coups, eventually leading to a Ba'ath party government in 1968. This government included Saddam Hussein, who built and consolidated his power until he publicly established himself as undisputed leader in 1979.

Against this background, another important incident occurred in March 1973 when Kuwaiti and Iraqi troops became engaged in a border clash at an Iraqi military installation inside Kuwait at *al Samita*.[63] The Iraqi soldiers had been stationed within Kuwaiti territory since 1969 with the passive acceptance of the Kuwaiti government on the grounds that this presence was a temporary response to Iraqi problems with Iran. In March 1973, Baghdad attempted to expand this presence and perhaps make it permanent leading to a skirmish in which two Kuwaiti troops and one Iraqi soldier were killed. Kuwait responded to the incursion by declaring a state of emergency, closing the border, and recalling its ambassador to Iraq. The Iraqi foreign

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minister then made matters worse by declaring that "the whole of Kuwait is disputed territory."[64] He also reiterated the Iraqi interest in Warba and Bubiyan, stating, "We are not taking them from Kuwait; rather we are giving up Kuwait for the sake of the two islands."[65] The Iraqi belief that they remained entitled to the whole of Kuwait thus never seemed far from the surface and kept coming out in times of Iraqi-Kuwaiti stress, regardless of what government was in power in Baghdad.

Relations between Iraq and Kuwait improved significantly following the July 1977 visit of the Kuwaiti defense minister to Baghdad. When the Iran-Iraq war began in September 1980, Iraqi interest in Warba and Bubiyan increased dramatically due to the military requirements of the ongoing conflict. The Kuwaitis resisted this pressure, but did support the Iraqi war effort in a variety of significant ways including massive financial aid to Baghdad. In 1989, after the war had ended, the Kuwaiti Crown Prince visited Baghdad where he expected that the issue would be less divisive because of Iraq's strong support during the war.[66] The Iraqis, however, displayed no gratitude and immediately began demanding an Iraqi role in the disposition of the islands. Later, in an Arab League meeting in Baghdad in May 1990, Saddam demanded a number of Kuwaiti concessions, including the leasing of the two islands to Iraq.[67] Relations with Iraq collapsed as Saddam prepared to resolve his difference with Kuwait by invasion.

Kuwait Security Policies and Relations with the United States before the 1990 Iraqi Invasion.

The looming invasion threat of 1990 raised important questions about how Kuwait was prepared to

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guarantee its sovereignty and protect its borders prior to the attack. Iraq, as has been seen, posed a danger to Kuwait even prior to Kuwaiti independence, while a number of other regional states also presented serious security concerns. Normally, a small state attempting to protect itself from large regional neighbors seeks to do so through alliances and where possible through the development of indigenous military capabilities. The ability to develop such capabilities will be examined later, but this has always been limited due to Kuwait's small population base. Alliances are a more complex matter.

When Kuwait became independent in June 1961, the United States, which had maintained a consulate there since October 1951, formally upgraded its representation to that of an embassy.[68] Nevertheless, as has already been noted, the UK, not the United States, was Kuwait's most important ally in the early years of that country's independence. The United States was interested in commercial relations with the emirate but played no serious role in defending Kuwait during this time frame. In the years between 1961 and 1990, relations between the United States and Kuwait were usually normal and sometimes good, although never special. The Kuwaitis wanted to avoid the charge of being overly supportive of Western rather than Arab regional interests. The strong and vociferous support that Kuwait gave the Palestinians also led the government to condemn the pro-Israeli policies of the United States.[69] Kuwait continuously sought to polish its Arab nationalist credentials through strong support of the Palestinian guerrilla organizations and by allowing Palestinians preferential entry to Kuwait as noncitizen workers. Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat launched his Fatah movement from Kuwait in the late 1950s, and

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the Kuwaitis gave him financial support from at least the mid-1960s until 1990 when he betrayed them by siding with Saddam Hussein in the 1990-91 conflict.[70]

The Arab League's strong support for Kuwait in the 1961 crisis may also have helped to ensure that the government maintained its consistent hard line on the Arab-Israeli conflict. In June 1967, Kuwait, as well as a variety of other Arab states, briefly suspended oil deliveries to the United States and the UK due to the support these countries provided to Israel in the June 1967 War.[71] Just prior to that conflict, Kuwait also announced that it was sending troops to fight beside the other Arab states.[72] These troops never saw combat since the war was short and decisive, ending in the rapid defeat of Arab military forces. Additionally, the small size of the Kuwaiti military meant that such a contribution would have been primarily symbolic. There were, however, limits to Kuwaiti support for Arab nationalist causes, and Kuwait would not allow them to get in the way of more serious national security concerns. In the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Kuwait refused to sever diplomatic relations with Washington or London despite the urgings of a number of Arab states to do so.[73]

Kuwait and the United States became more interested in working together as a result of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war when both countries feared an overwhelming Iranian victory. For reasons to be discussed later, Kuwait initially maintained strict neutrality in this conflict but later began to provide economic, logistical, and diplomatic support to Iraq. As Kuwaiti support for Baghdad grew, so did difficulties with Tehran. By summer 1986, the Iranians responded by escalating their attacks on Kuwaiti vessels in the Gulf. In December 1986, the Kuwaitis privately requested that the vessels

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be allowed to fly the American flag and thereby be placed under the protection of the U.S. Navy. The request was formalized in January 1987 and Kuwait's 11 supertankers were placed under the U.S. flag.[74] During the escort operations, the Kuwaiti government paid some of the fuel costs for U.S. ships and aircraft involved in the effort.[75] Iranian attacks against Kuwaiti ships ended.

At the beginning of the 1990 Iraq-Kuwait crisis but prior to the invasion, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Middle East Affairs John Kelly was asked about U.S. defense obligations to Kuwait during a congressional hearing. He responded that the United States had no formal obligations to Kuwait, despite the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers in 1987.[76] The reflagging, he explained, was a discrete agreement that did not carry any larger implications for defending the emirate. This answer was merely a factual response to a specific question about U.S. legal obligations rather than a statement of policy. Nevertheless, Saddam heard an Arabic translation of the response within a few minutes of the statement being made, and was obviously encouraged. Kuwait, at this point, had reason to deeply regret the lack of formal security ties with major global powers.

The Iraqi Invasion, Operation DESERT STORM, and the Emergence of the U.S.-Kuwaiti Alliance.

The August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a defining moment in that country's history. Shortly before the invasion, Saddam accused Kuwait of waging an economic war on Iraq. The Iraqi dictator claimed that Kuwait was cheating on its Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil production quota and was thereby flooding the international oil market with

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cheap oil. Such actions, according to Baghdad, played a critical role in reducing the price that Iraq was able to obtain for its oil. Saddam also claimed that Kuwait was "slant drilling" into Iraqi oil fields, and then stealing Iraqi oil along the Kuwaiti border.[77] While Kuwait was almost certainly involved in oil overproduction, it was not the worst violator of OPEC quotas, and Saddam had clearly over-dramatized the influence of Kuwaiti actions on the Iraqi economy.[78] Additionally, no evidence exists that Kuwait was involved in slant drilling into Iraqi oil fields.

The leadership, for its part, did not seem to comprehend the danger Kuwait faced from Iraqi troops massed on the border. Many other Arab leaders, such as Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States Prince Bandar, also believed that Saddam was merely flexing his military muscles to intimidate the Kuwaitis into financial concessions while not planning to invade.[79] Kuwaiti leaders may have believed that the $13-20 billion they supplied to Iraq during the war with Iran had purchased them some good will. More gravely, they may have fundamentally misunderstood the criminal nature of Saddam's personality and regime. Kuwaitis may also have felt that high-level efforts at Arab mediation would calm the situation. Egyptian President Mubarak and Saudi King Fahd were fully engaged in an effort to reach a diplomatic compromise between Iraq and Kuwait. As a result of what seemed to be diplomatic progress, the emir stood down the army to avoid provoking Saddam. Until the last minute, the Kuwaitis seemed to have believed Saddam could have been bought off. So far as they were concerned, it was only a question of price.[80]

Saddam's forces invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and rapidly brushed aside disorganized Kuwaiti

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resistance. By the end of the day, Kuwait had been fully conquered, and Saddam, through his dominance of the Iraqi and Kuwaiti economies, controlled one-fifth of the world's known oil reserves. Iraqi spokesmen declared that the invasion had occurred in response to pleas from Kuwaiti revolutionaries for support in establishing a new and "free" government. This story quickly fell flat, and no Kuwaitis of any stature were prepared to cooperate with the Iraqis. While Saddam at first appointed a puppet government, he rapidly changed his mind and annexed Kuwait on August 8. After Kuwait was annexed, members of the Iraqi-appointed Kuwaiti government disappeared from public view. Their leader, "Colonel" Ala Hussein Ali, was not someone Kuwaitis or members of the world community had ever heard of, and his actions did nothing to bolster the legitimacy of the invasion. The annexation was widely perceived as even more illegitimate than the installation of a puppet government and declared null and void by the UN Security Council. Tellingly, some informed commentators suggested that most ordinary Iraqis believed that Kuwait was part of Iraq, and they supported Saddam's decision to seize the small country.[81]

Saddam apparently believed that he could obtain worldwide acceptance or at least tolerance for the invasion, perhaps with a minimum of trouble. Kuwait was small and often unpopular since its vast wealth was often a source of jealousy and resentment to the poorer countries of the Arab World, despite an expansive foreign aid program carried out by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED).[82] Saddam further maintained that he would be a better and more authentically Arab custodian of Kuwait's oil wealth than the Kuwaitis would be. Saddam's self-image as a man of action in command of a powerful emerging

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regional power was buttressed by the additional resources he seized from Kuwait. Saddam hoped that those Arabs who were looking for a champion would look towards him, and see his increased power as serving those seeking to confront Israel and the West. Indeed, some leftist Arab commentators responded to these events by suggesting that a "cash-register coalition" had been put together to destroy Arab and Iraqi power, with the liberation of Kuwait serving as a convenient excuse.[83]

The Iraqi dictator also seemed to believe that deposing the monarchy would be widely accepted in Kuwait or that there would at least be a significant minority of anti-Sabah Kuwaitis willing to work with the Iraqi occupation forces. Unfortunately for Saddam, Kuwaiti nationalism turned out to be a more serious factor than he had expected. Iraqi efforts to co-opt some of the more vocal opposition members of parliament failed even though this body had been suspended by the Kuwaiti government in 1986, creating a clear grievance in the eyes of many Kuwaiti legislators and their supporters. No prominent Kuwaitis were willing to ally themselves with the invaders, thus infuriating the Iraqi dictator. Kuwait's Shi'ite community was also uncooperative and hostile, despite grievances that they held concerning government discrimination. Saddam's continuing inability to find prominent Kuwaiti support was a serious setback, since a denunciation of Sabah rule by such people may have initially added some credibility to his otherwise transparent claims that he was liberating Kuwait. In an unpleasant surprise for Saddam, nationalism was proving to be a powerful force. Moreover, Kuwaitis were clearly indicating that they were united in their opposition to Iraqi rule regardless of the disagreements that they might have

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among themselves on political issues. This approach was consolidated in October 1990 when the emir met with Kuwaiti opposition groups in Jedda, Saudi Arabia, and they agreed to present a united front against Iraqi aggression. Around 1,200 Kuwaiti oppositionists attended this meeting, where the emir promised to restore parliament and expand political participation in the government. Both sides would work together to gain international political support for the liberation of Kuwait.[84]

Kuwaitis remained uncertain about the prospects that the world community would take meaningful steps to rollback the Iraqi aggression against their country. U.S. political and military leadership was united behind the need to protect Saudi Arabia from Iraq, but there appeared to be much more uncertainty about the need to invade and liberate Kuwait. It was by no means certain that the United States would be willing to commit itself to a military solution to the occupation, and it was doubtful that any other approach would work. It also remained to be seen if the United States was interested in reinstating the Sabah ruling family rather than some Kuwaiti opposition figures. President George H. W. Bush's "This will not stand" statement of August 5, 1990, staked out the President's anger, but not his approach. Yet, even as the situation was becoming more complicated, Saddam increasingly foreclosed some of his own options for leaving Kuwait without a war against the U.S.-led coalition. The Iraqi leader was especially unwilling to withdraw from Kuwait after he made significant territorial concessions to Iran in order to be able to move his troops away from the Iranian border and into the Kuwaiti theater of operations.[85] Saddam's intransigence meant that President Bush was not faced with any subtle or reasonable sounding proposals that may have split the coalition.

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Kuwait's wealth was systematically plundered, and the Iraqi military also engaged in gratuitous vandalism and destruction of the Kuwaiti infrastructure. Iraqi forces conducted summary executions and made extensive use of torture against any Kuwaitis showing resistance, and against Kuwaitis at random as a way of terrorizing the population into submission. Much of the violence against Kuwaitis and the large numbers of reported murders and rapes may have appeared to be as much the fault of the Iraqi army as of Saddam Hussein.[86] Some Iraqi soldiers may have hated the Kuwaitis because of their wealth and opportunities, which contrasted greatly with the years of Iraqi deprivation and suffering during the 1980-88 war with Iran. Supplementing random violence, special Iraqi military units appeared to have been assigned the task of ensuring that the occupation quickly broke the Kuwaitis' will to resist incorporation into Iraq. Saddam may have been attempting to eradicate the concept of a separate Kuwaiti identity, and he may have been personally angered over the Kuwaiti unwillingness to play the role he had scripted for them as grateful subjects who wished to be reunited with the Iraqi homeland.

Saddam also remained unconvinced that the Americans would attack him for the sake of Kuwait. A constant theme in the Iraqi media was that the Americans could not cope with the demands of a long war such as he expected that a new Iraq conflict could become.[87] Additionally, the Iraqi dictator may have wondered how much the United States cared about who ruled Kuwait so long as cheap oil continued to flow from the region and so long as other U.S. regional allies such as Saudi Arabia were protected and placed off limits to any further predatory inclinations by

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Saddam. The dictator strongly indicated that Kuwait was a special case, and Iraqi history seemed to indicate a pattern of interest in Kuwait that was not matched by territorial aspirations elsewhere (except along the Iranian border). Kuwaitis could perhaps be forgiven for being uncertain that the United States would confront rather than accommodate the dictator.

The U.S. congressional decision to authorize potential military action against Iraq by President Bush was a close series of votes that may have failed had it not been for a final U.S. effort at a diplomatic solution in Geneva that was not accepted by the Iraqis. The Senate vote to authorize military action passed by a narrow 52-47 margin, while the House passed a similar measure by a much stronger vote of 250 to 183.[88] The war began on January 17, 1991, with a prolonged air campaign followed by 100 hours of ground combat in which the Iraqis were defeated and driven from Kuwait. Later, when Iraqi Army units surrendered *en mass* to the U.S.-led coalition forces, many Iraqi soldiers claimed that they never believed in the war. As suggested earlier, this is not a claim that is subject to easy confirmation or denial. During the occupation, Saddam hanged an Iraqi colonel who was widely believed to have been helping the Kuwaiti resistance, indicating some level of humanity by a high ranking military officer in Kuwait.[89] Additionally, some Kuwaitis reported other instances of collaboration of Iraqi soldiers with Kuwaitis under occupation.[90]

As they prepared to retreat, Iraqi forces set 732 oil wells on fire. Some observers suggested that the torching of the Kuwaiti oil fields was done for military reasons such as the effort to obscure troop movements. The Iraqis would have been especially interested in masking troop movements from overhead aircraft and mounted

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a ground counterattack against U.S. forces from the oil fields. Nevertheless, the oil well fires had virtually no tactical effect. The counterattack was quickly defeated, and aircraft operations were not seriously disrupted by the smoke. It is also possible that the Iraqis had some economic motives in seeking to destroy the Kuwaiti oil industry to help enable Baghdad to continue selling oil after the war. A final possibility was that the operation was carried forward in revenge against the Kuwaitis for gaining U.S. help to best the Iraqi dictator. This revenge-oriented aspect of Saddam's personality is, as previously noted, one of the reasons he was able to rise to the top of the unforgiving Iraqi political system and then maintain himself in power.

Additionally, Saddam's suspected hatred for Kuwaitis was further reflected in his decision to return all Western and Saudi prisoners of war under the provisions of the 1991 ceasefire, while claiming that Iraq was unable to account for a number of Kuwaiti prisoners.[91] The Iraqis admitted taking prisoners from Kuwait back to Iraq but claimed to have lost track of them during the post-war Shi'ite uprising in southern Iraq.[92] Later, after Saddam was ousted in April 2003, the remains of around 250 Kuwaitis were recovered at various sites in Iraq. Post-mortems established that they had been the victims of summary execution by being shot in the head.[93] The search for the remains of other captives has continued since that time, but the Kuwaitis have suggested that they are disappointed with the results of this effort.[94]

After the war, Kuwaitis were deeply disappointed that Saddam managed to continue in power despite several apparently serious attempts by Iraqi military officers to overthrow him in the early 1990s.[95] UN sanctions were maintained on the regime from 1990-

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2003, and the regime was treated as an international outcast by a number of states throughout that time. Later, in 1995, military officers affiliated with the large and important Dulaim tribal federation revolted against Saddam's rule, but the dictator was able the suppress the uprising and executed 120-130 officers associated with it.[96]

The Evolution of the Kuwaiti Military and Its Capabilities.

The 1990 Iraqi invasion left an indelible mark on Kuwaiti attitudes about the country's vulnerability. It led the Kuwaitis to conclude a 1991 military security agreement with the United States and defense cooperation agreements with a number of other powerful countries. It also led to an effort to expand and improve the Kuwaiti military. Yet, Kuwait has faced and will continue to face a number of difficulties with national defense. As a small nation with a limited citizen population, the Kuwaitis have often had serious problems maintaining a formidable military that can serve as even a partial deterrent to the country's larger neighbors. This has created something of a cycle in Kuwaiti attitudes toward national security issues. In times of crisis or a looming threat, Kuwait has expanded its military, although it has never been strong enough to deter or defeat aggression from a major regional power without significant outside help. Until the 1990 invasion, Kuwait preferred to address national security threats through diplomacy and efforts to play off rival powers against each other. It did not take the route of attempting to transform itself into a small but well-armed and mobilized society (such as Israel or Cuba) that could exact a costly price on any potential invader.

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The Kuwaiti leadership also had important reasons for opposing a strong military even if it was able to overcome the structural problems inhibiting such development. In this regard, Kuwait became independent at a time when several key Arab monarchies had recently been overthrown by military coups. Egypt's King Farouk had been ousted by a "free officers" coup in 1952, and the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq had been overthrown in 1958. Jordan managed to put down several nearly successful coup attempts, and many commentators at that time assumed that the Jordanian monarchy's chances for survival were poor.[97] In this environment, the idea of becoming an Arab Sparta, always anathema to Kuwaitis, seemed even more unacceptable. Whether because of these concerns or for other reasons, Kuwait is not known to have ever faced a serious military coup attempt throughout its history. Expansion of the military and a more forceful mobilization of the society for war clearly had its threatening aspects for the Kuwaiti leadership as well as for the population.

Ongoing attempts to improve military capabilities did, of course, exist despite Kuwaitis' understandable lack of interest in a militarized society. In 1969 Kuwait began defense cooperation with France, including a number of significant contracts for military equipment and weapons. These included small arms; artillery; and *Gazelle, Puma,* and *Super Puma* helicopters.[98] Manpower problems remained a constant concern during this time frame, and enlisted ranks were impossible to fill without noncitizen *bidoon* and foreign Arab soldiers, including Palestinians. In 1978 Kuwait moved to strengthen its army by introducing conscription, which lasted in various forms until it was indefinitely suspended in the 1990s.[99] Young Kuwaiti males were supposed

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to serve 2 years in the military, except for university students who were slated to serve 1 year. The practice was introduced because the Kuwaiti military could not support its manpower needs through volunteers, although so many Kuwaitis obtained exemptions that conscription was reduced to a hollow shell.[100] A variety of other opportunities, especially commercial ones, make a military career less appealing than it would be in other societies. Moreover, prior to the 1990 invasion, Kuwait's military was composed of about 12,000 personnel. Saddam had a million-man battle-hardened military.

The Kuwaiti Armed Forces never had a chance against the large columns of invading Iraqi troops. Kuwaiti forces were not organized well for defense and were quickly overwhelmed by massive numbers of Iraqi troops. Some instances of especially heroic resistance, nevertheless, did occur, particularly among combat aircraft pilots who bombed the advancing Iraqi forces, and in some cases were shot down resisting the invaders.[101] Likewise, a Kuwaiti armored brigade fought very well near the Jahra' ridge.[102] Later, as it became important for government legitimacy and public relations to suggest to the world that the Kuwaiti military had made a decent stand against the invaders, the reported valor of the emir's half-brother, Sheikh Fahd al Ahmad, became significant. Sheikh Fahd was the commander of an elite airborne regiment who stayed behind to lead his unit and was subsequently killed in battle.[103] Extremely heroic accounts of his last days and hours have emerged as recounted by an Iraqi deserter who claims to have been an eye witness. This ex-soldier claims that the Sheikh led his soldiers gallantly against the much larger force of Iraqis and personally killed several enemy soldiers.

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Many Kuwaitis emphatically believe this story and are inspired by it, while others have expressed doubt.[104] Clearly, this is "how Kuwait's leaders and defenders ought to have acted," but beyond that, events become very difficult to verify.[105]

After liberation by a U.S.-led international coalition in 1991, the Kuwaitis had to develop a new approach to national security that addressed many of the same problems that they had encountered in the pre-war era and now included an array of additional difficulties. While the Kuwaitis did not plan or expect to defend their country alone, they nevertheless needed to make it clear they would do their share of the fighting in any future conflict as an important part of alliance maintenance. Thus, Kuwait faced the task of rebuilding its army and air force to the point that it could contribute more effectively to the national defense of the country. In doing so, the Kuwaitis did not wish to be seen as asking their allies to make sacrifices that they were unprepared to make themselves. Additionally, rebuilding and improving the Kuwaiti military after the war was a staggering challenge. Kuwait's wartime losses complicated the pre-war readiness problems associated with limited human resources. Kuwait's military infrastructure was intensively bombed by coalition forces during the war since Iraqi troops were using Kuwaiti bases.[106]

Kuwaiti military rebuilding goals were exceptionally ambitious, especially given the staggering nature of their wartime losses. The bulk of Kuwait's weapons and military equipment were lost, destroyed, or stolen driving the Iraqi invasion and its aftermath. Some combat aircraft and limited supplies of land forces equipment were saved in the retreat to Saudi Arabia. Otherwise, the Kuwaitis were essentially starting

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over in efforts to equip their forces. Military spending went from 12 percent of the national budget to 42 percent in the first year after liberation.[107] While this dramatic jump reflected "start-up costs" and was not sustained, it signaled Kuwait's commitment to build a military that could much more effectively defend against Iraqi aggression than had been seen in 1990. In September 1991 the Kuwaitis signed a contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to rebuild and upgrade Ali al Salim and Ahmed al Jaber air bases, two major military installations that had been extensively damaged. The Kuwaitis also engaged in a massive military purchasing drive including hundreds of U.S.-built M1A2 *Abrams* tanks and 40 F-18 *Hornet* aircraft to serve as the backbone of their new air force. The first batch of six F-18 *Hornet* aircraft arrived in January 1992. In early 1992, Kuwait also purchased a number of U.S.-built air defense systems, including both *Hawk* and *Patriot* missile systems.[108] The Kuwaitis further engaged in extensive joint training with a number of allies, including the United States, as a way of helping to ensure broad-based political support for Kuwait in any future confrontation.[109] Defense cooperation agreements were signed with France in 1991, the UK in 1992, Russia in 1993, and China in 1994. All of these have been renewed as necessary to keep them in force. These agreements involve the sale of military equipment to Kuwait, joint military exercises, and other forms of military cooperation.

Continuing problems with Iraq following 1991 also encouraged Kuwaiti military spending. Elements of the Iraqi military, for example, repeatedly crossed the Kuwaiti border in the first year after Operation DESERT STORM to forage for some of their own abandoned equipment left on the battlefield. Since UN

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sanctions prohibited the purchase of new and modern equipment and smuggling could not make up for this loss in militarily significant quantities, foraging became a marginally useful supplemental stopgap measure for maintaining the vastly reduced Iraqi military. The Kuwaitis dealt with this problem by building a security fence along the border with Iraq in the immediate aftermath of the UN's official demarcation of the border.[110] More serious problems with the Iraqis were still to come.

In April 1993 former President George H. W. Bush made a ceremonial visit to Kuwait to commemorate the coalition victory in the 1991 war. Shortly after the event, the Kuwaiti government announced that Iraqi intelligence had plotted to assassinate President Bush during his trip and that 13 Iraqi agents had been arrested. The forensics of the explosives have been described as suggesting Iraqi involvement.[111] President Clinton retaliated against the Iraqis by firing 23 *Tomahawk* cruise missiles against military and security targets in Baghdad on June 26, 1993. The assassination story is, nevertheless, doubted by some experts who suggest that the Iraqis may have been apprehended during routine smuggling and framed with planted explosives.[112] Some authors have further challenged the authenticity of the information on the assassination provided by the Kuwaitis.[113] The motives for the Kuwaiti police to undertake such an operation are uncertain unless the Kuwaiti leadership believed the United States, under President Clinton, was losing interest in forcefully addressing Iraq-related issues. In any event, U.S. and Kuwaiti concerns about Saddam remained high after the incident. Another equally chilling military confrontation occurred in October 1994 when the United States was required to rush troops

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to Kuwait in response to Saddam's decision to move a two division Republican Guard force toward the Kuwaiti border with the apparent aim of undermining the sanctions regime directed at Iraq.[114] While this effort was unsuccessful in achieving Saddam's goals, it deeply alarmed both the Kuwaitis and the United States.

As the problems with Iraq continued, the effort to rebuild and upgrade Kuwaiti defenses proved to be much more difficult than first had been expected. Kuwait's revenue flow was initially disrupted by the need to repair the nation's oil infrastructure and pay for a variety of costs associated with the 1991 Gulf war. These problems were partially dealt with through Kuwaiti funds deposited in foreign banks, investment income, and loans. Some purchases were also delayed by differences between the Sabah family government and the parliament. These disagreements centered on the parliament's demands for a more transparent military purchasing procedure. Clearly, some members of parliament believed there was considerable corruption in the conduct of military purchases which involved billions of dollars.[115]

The Kuwaiti military rebuilding effort therefore went forward but took time. The effort at military rehabilitation was also backed by the Desert Spring series of training exercises which defense writer Michael Knights describes as maturing in the late 1990s.[116] Kuwaiti military purchasing programs continued throughout this time frame, but the levels at which they could be supported were vulnerable to fluctuations in the international oil market. The "Intrinsic Action" exercise rotations of U.S. combat forces into Kuwait also provided valuable joint training and interface as well as deterrent value.

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The George W. Bush administration further designated Kuwait a major U.S. non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally on April 1, 2004. Part of the reason for this change in status may have been to show appreciation for Kuwaiti support during the invasion of Iraq. The value of this designation includes expedited delivery of military equipment and more favorable purchasing arrangements.[117] The Kuwaitis continue to support U.S. and coalition operations in Iraq. The large and impressive Camp Arifjan is about 40 miles south of Kuwait City and has replaced Camp Doha as the center of U.S. military activity in Kuwait.[118] The current defense pact with the United States runs until 2012 and is expected to be renewed at that time.

The Kuwaiti army currently has around 11,000 personnel, and the air force has about 2,500, according to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.[119] The Navy has 10 patrol and coastal craft, and there are also 23,000 reservists for all services. There are 6,600 paramilitary Kuwaiti National Guard forces. Anthony Cordesman and Khalid al Rodhan note that although Kuwaiti's armed forces remain small, training and military readiness are taken seriously, and training is effective at the brigade and squadron level.[120] According to Cordesman and Rodhan, at least two of the Kuwaiti Army brigades are capable of deploying with the full equipment set, although logistical support becomes problematic if they deploy far from their home bases in Kuwait. Military procurement and upgrading also continues, although it has slowed dramatically over the last few years. In 2006 Kuwait purchased 24 *Apache Longbow* attack helicopters, which they began receiving in November.[121] The Kuwaitis are also planning to select a builder in 2008 for two fast attack boats in an agreement that is expected to be worth around $350 million.[122]

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The End of the Saddam Hussein Regime and Legacies of the Sanctions Years.

It is safe to say that of all of the Arab nations, Kuwait was clearly the most supportive of U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was largely launched from Kuwait. Kuwaitis continued to live in fear of Iraq even though Saddam was contained by "no-fly" zones and economic sanctions after the Gulf war of 1991. When asked in 2000 if Kuwaitis still felt threatened by Saddam, Kuwait Defense Minister Sheikh Salem al Sabah asserted, "Yes, we do; yes, we do; yes, we do. It is built into the [Iraqi] mind and their thoughts that Kuwait is a part of Iraq, and Kuwait being rich and more advanced, with technologies and what have you, they feel jealous from it. And they will keep threatening the Kuwaiti security."[123] Interestingly, Defense Minister Sabah did not limit his assertions merely to Saddam's mind. He spoke of Iraqis in general terms. These types of statements are not surprising given the history of Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations that have already been noted in this text, but it is also noteworthy that the Iraq education system from 1990 onward emphasized the Iraqi claim to the ownership of Kuwait.[124] Maps of Iraq used for "educational" purposes did not acknowledge Kuwait as an independent country.[125] While these materials are no longer used, a large number of Iraqi students were exposed to exceptionally crude propaganda about Kuwait for a number of years.

Kuwaitis consequently viewed the possible U.S. removal of Saddam from power with a great deal of interest. Officially, the Kuwaiti government maintained that it would not take part in the 2003 fighting unless Iraqi forces threatened Kuwaiti territory.[126] They were, however, willing to provide indispensable support

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for the U.S. build-up prior to the war, stating that this activity was based on a UN Security Council Resolution and was therefore both legal and important.[127] The Kuwaitis also closed off at least one-third of their territory for assembly and training areas for the U.S.-led coalition. Kuwait further provided base support and supplies to the coalition forces including food, fuel, and laundry services.[128] In allowing the United States this sort of latitude, Kuwait opened itself to criticism from elsewhere in the Arab World. Many Kuwaitis, however, were deeply encouraged by the prospect of ridding themselves of their deadliest enemy.

The leadership maintained that Kuwaiti military forces would contribute directly to what they called the "Iraq Liberation War" by defending their own territory and helping Iraqi civilian refugees in southern Iraq, while keeping them out of Kuwaiti territory.[129] Kuwaitis also maintained that, by helping the United States, they were in fact helping the Iraqi people oppressed by Saddam.[130] Moreover, many Kuwaitis thought that they might be attacked by missiles with chemical or even biological warheads. During the war, Kuwaiti *Patriot* missile units appear to have shot down a number of Iraqi missiles fired at their country.[131] These Iraqi systems were probably *Silkworm* and *al Samood* missiles, which could easily have been fired into Kuwait from Iraq. All of these Iraqi systems had conventional warheads, but the strikes strongly vindicated the decision to acquire the *Patriot* system from the United States. Additionally, U.S. *Patriot* batteries stationed in Kuwait (and especially near U.S. military assembly areas) provided a great deal of additional support in defending Kuwaiti airspace.[132]

The destruction of the Saddam Hussein regime created the potential for a new and positive set of

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relationships between Iraq and Kuwait. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, Kuwait and Iraq have an extremely troubled history that pre-dates not only the Iraqi invasion in 1990, but even Kuwait's formal independence in 1961. The Kuwaiti-Iraqi relationship was thoroughly poisoned by Saddam's 1990 invasion and remained frozen without any serious potential to improve until Saddam's removal in 2003. His arrest and imprisonment were extremely popular in Kuwait, and his conviction by an Iraqi court was cause for celebration by many Kuwaitis.[133] One Kuwaiti member of parliament stated that no other verdict was possible.[134] Other Kuwaiti legislators sought to withdraw economic aid from regional countries that criticized the conduct of Saddam's execution for sectarian chanting and other procedural irregularities.[135] This policy was not actually implemented, but the anger expressed in the parliament was genuine and searing.[136] Nevertheless, Saddam's conviction and execution has not ended Kuwaiti concerns about Iraq, regardless of whether it emerges as an intact nation or is instead reduced to ongoing civil war and anarchy.

A key factor influencing ongoing problems remains the legacy of UN sanctions imposed on Iraq between 1990 and 2003. While Kuwaitis remember the occupation of their country with horror and fear, Iraqis view the era of sanctions as a continuation of their own national nightmare. In the 1970s, Iraq had a steadily rising standard of living due to its oil wealth, and many Iraqis hoped for a prosperous future that approached that of the small oil-rich Gulf States, including Kuwait.[137] The Iran-Iraq War and the 1991 Gulf war ended these dreams and the chance of recovering even to the economic level of the 1970s was foreclosed after the war due to UN sanctions. Kuwait

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was seen by some Iraqis as having a significant role in the maintenance of these sanctions, perhaps for the sake of spite and revenge as well as national security.[138] Kuwait strongly denied that it held any animosity towards the Iraqi population. In a 1999 interview, Kuwaiti Defense Minister Salim al Sabah stated, "We stand with the Iraqi people and their right to live, and we oppose the attempt to starve them . . . What we are against is the Saddamite clique, not the Iraqi people."[139] This is virtually identical to the U.S. position over these years, but the U.S. position on sanctions was anathema to Iraqis and was also unpopular throughout the wider region. Almost no Iraqi citizens approved of the sanctions which impoverished them, even though the purpose of these measures was to oust Saddam.

Regardless of the reasons for its actions, Kuwait appeared to be an important force in maintaining the sanctions. During the years between 1991 and 2003, Kuwait went forward with a serious diplomatic effort to support UN sanctions against Iraq and to isolate Iraq politically and economically. While Kuwait is a small country, it advocated the isolation of Saddam's Iraq as a central feature of its foreign policy and viewed any effort to rehabilitate the Iraqi image as morally and strategically unacceptable. This situation is not surprising since Saddam continued to evoke fear among Kuwaitis. Furthermore, the Iraqi dictator periodically renewed his threats against Kuwait such as in late 2000, when Iraq accused Kuwait of stealing Iraqi oil in border areas. This accusation was disturbing in Kuwait since the same charge was raised shortly before the 1990 invasion.[140]

The Kuwaitis also attempted to improve relations with Saddam's former allies (such as Jordan and Yemen) in the mid-1990s in an effort to keep Iraq

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isolated and ensure that Saddam could not reach out to the same countries in a future regional crisis. The U.S.-Kuwaiti struggle to isolate Iraq nevertheless faced considerable regional opposition. Most Arab states and publics considered UN sanctions to be excessive and unfairly punishing to the Iraqi people more than the Iraqi regime.[141] Like the United States, Kuwait did not always appear to find this distinction valuable, and many Kuwaitis may have felt that all Iraqis were not simply the innocent victims of the Saddam regime. Moreover, the Iraqi government stressed to its public that the sanctions impoverishing them were advocated and enabled by Kuwait.[142] After the December 1998 Operation DESERT FOX air raids against Iraq, Saddam's puppet parliament stated that it held Kuwait and Saudi Arabia "fully responsible" for the U.S. and British attacks since these air strikes were launched from their territory.[143]

During the sanctions years, the issue of the Iraq-Kuwait border again became important, and a special UN Iraq/Kuwait Boundary Demarcation Commission was established to seek clarification of this issue. The commission issued its final report on May 20, 1993, noting that the original border markings had disappeared, and that Iraqi farmers had expanded their date farms beyond the old border in a way that caused Iraq to intrude into Kuwaiti territory.[144] The revised border offered Kuwait some important new advantages, while creating additional problems for Iraq. The adjusted boundary gave Kuwait increased control over the Rumalia and Ratga oil field, while reducing Iraqi access to the port facilities at their city of Umm Qasr. Saddam's government, not surprisingly, was livid at the time, but there was nothing Baghdad could do to alter the situation. Under severe international pressure,

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Iraq accepted the border modification. Since that time, the Kuwait leadership has stated that it views the 1993 demarcation as final, and it will therefore refuse to enter into new border discussions with Iraq.[145]

Following Saddam's ouster, Kuwait was not in an apparent hurry to reestablish diplomatic relations with Iraq, and relations with post-Saddam governments have not been without problems. In July 2005, the Kuwaiti government agreed to allow the establishment of an Iraqi embassy in Kuwait, but only when pressed to do by Prime Minister Ayad Allawi.[146] Kuwait does not yet have an ambassador in Baghdad, and appears reluctant to appoint one until larger Arab states set a precedent and violence in that city declines significantly. At the time of this writing, no Arab state except Jordan is represented in Baghdad at the ambassadorial level. Iran, conversely, appointed an ambassador in May 2006.[147] Some Kuwaiti business leaders were previously reported to be eager to reopen trade with post-Saddam Iraq, but ongoing violence makes that impossible and interest has subsequently faded.[148]

The issue of debt also continues to divide Iraq and Kuwait. In early 2004, Kuwait told U.S. special envoy James A. Baker III that it would forgive a substantial amount of the $25 billon owed to Kuwait, but many Iraqis feel that Kuwait has yet to offer them a generous settlement of debts incurred during Saddam's regime.[149] Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki and numerous other Iraqi leaders have expressed public disappointment that Kuwaitis are not prepared to be more forgiving in their approach to debt resulting from Saddam Hussein's years of misrule. The Kuwaiti government, in contrast, noted that while some Iraqi debts acquired during the Iran-Iraq War will be written off, debt forgiveness will not include reparations which Iraq is still to pay

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as a result of the 1990-91 occupation of Kuwait.[150] The Kuwaitis are particularly adamant that the families of those killed or missing in the 1990-91 invasion and occupation must be compensated.[151]

In even more striking contrast to the Iraqi requests for debt forgiveness, some Kuwaiti members of parliament have objected to the generosity of their government's current policy on this issue and have suggested that Iraq should pay its entire debt in a timely manner.[152] This is not a realistic proposal due to the sectarian crisis in Iraq and the existence of numerous Iraqi priorities higher than debt repayment. It is even possible that at some point the Kuwaitis will again consider aid to Iraq if they feel that this is being done in conjunction with other wealthy states and has a reasonable chance of helping to stabilize Iraq. Nevertheless, the unresolved anger with Iraq remains and will influence any plan to ease Iraqi financial difficulties. Moreover, there are other budget priorities of interest to various Kuwaiti constituencies that government leaders will also have to consider. Military leaders, for example, have suggested that they would like a larger budget to be used in "refurbishing the army."[153] Of even more interest are various schemes to provide cash awards or pay off the bank loans of Kuwaiti citizens. There are also proposals to raise the salaries of government employees who comprise the majority of the Kuwaiti citizen workforce. Debt forgiveness or aid to Iraq is not particularly popular when matched against these programs.[154]

Iraq's new leaders have publicly renounced the idea that Kuwait is part of Iraq, but sometimes they have done this in the ways that concern Kuwaitis. In July 2005, Iraq's then National Security Advisor Muwaffaq al Rubei stated:

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> The fascist Ba'athist ideology of the past era fed the thought that Kuwait is part of Iraq. I admit that there are still some who have been influenced with the propaganda of the defunct regime and continue to harbor this thought in their minds. Therefore, we in Iraq and Kuwait have to work together to foster the idea of twining and integration between the two countries and nurture Kuwait's pioneer role in the reconstruction of Iraq because this is the only way to debunk this idea.[155]

Such statements seem more like a veiled threat about the need for Kuwaiti aid for Iraq than a final renunciation of territorial claims to Kuwait.

Adding to current problems, the end of Saddam Hussein's regime did not lead to a resolution of many of the outstanding problems between Iraq and Kuwait.[156] Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki, for example, has been a critic of the current Kuwaiti-Iraqi border, as have other leading figures in the Iraqi government.[157] Maliki suggests that the border was adjusted in 1993 as a way of punishing the Saddam regime, and that the original reason for the adjustment no longer exists. Now that Saddam has been executed, the border should be renegotiated in Iraq's favor. While there is a certain logic to Maliki's arguments, this is a familiar and disconcerting line of reasoning to most Kuwaitis. To some, Maliki looks like one more in a long line of Iraqi leaders casting envious eyes on Kuwaiti territory. The reassuring thing about Maliki for Kuwaitis is that he is not in a position to press for border changes.

At the time of this writing, Kuwait is clearly safe from an Iraqi conventional military attack even without the U.S. alliance. The Bagdad government is currently unable to control its own capital and is certainly not in a position to undertake foreign military adventures. The Iraqi Army is weak and divided, and the Iraqi Air Force has very little offensive capability (beyond

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a few helicopters).[158] Nevertheless, the Kuwaitis are psychologically unable to rule out a future threat from Iraq. The current Iraqi political system is widely viewed in Kuwait and the world as transitional, and it is not impossible that a strong and dictatorial government will once again emerge. This may occur only after a prolonged civil war in which a victor emerges and consolidates power. While Iraq is in turmoil now, it may eventually become much stronger. Moreover, if the future of Iraq is defined by intense and protracted civil war, the parties left standing are likely to be radical, militarized, and inclined to violent confrontation. Radical Iraqi cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, for example, is a strong Iraqi nationalist who could conceivably threaten Kuwait in the future, although he would almost certainly be deterred from a direct conventional invasion. Sadr has called upon Kuwait to end its relationship with the United States and evict the U.S. troops currently in that country on the grounds that they are no longer necessary to protect the emirate from Saddam.[159]

Kuwaiti Concerns about Iraqi Insurgency and Sectarian Warfare.

The Iraqi insurgency, which began in 2003, introduced a major new element into the U.S.-Kuwaiti strategic relationship in which both parties retain a stake. Despite overwhelming Kuwaiti enthusiasm for Saddam's ouster, some Kuwaitis for a considerable time have blamed the United States for what they describe as a mismanaged occupation.[160] This blame is often private, and some Kuwaitis also temper it with a belief that Iraq is an inherently violent society that is almost impossible to rehabilitate. Additionally, the Kuwaiti

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leadership has been especially reluctant to criticize the United States in public on this issue. In 2004, for example, Speaker of the Parliament Jasem al Kharafi responded to Kuwaiti public criticisms of U.S. actions in Falluja by calling upon citizens "to stay out of other states' business to spare [Kuwait] unwarranted and uncalled for tensions and confrontations."[161] Kuwaiti leaders did, however, feel compelled to speak out in the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib scandal.[162] Saddam had previously held a number of Kuwaitis at the prison, leaving Kuwaitis especially sensitive about human rights abuses there.

In Kuwait fear is increasing that the United States will leave Iraq in anarchy due to domestic political pressure, and Iraq will subsequently devolve into a large and uncontrollable civil war.[163] According to a November 30, 2006, statement by the emir, "Under the current circumstances, an American withdrawal would not help at all in bringing back stability [to Iraq]. On the contrary, the situation would get worse, and we would be looking at a very intense civil war."[164] This concern has been reiterated at various other meetings of Kuwaitis and U.S. officials.[165] The Kuwaitis have also publicly supported President Bush's "surge" option into Baghdad, although they have also indicated that they would like to see the United States open a dialogue on Iraq with all regional powers including Iran and Syria.[166]

The Kuwaiti government is also seriously concerned about an Iraqi refugee crisis should the United States leave that country and an uncontrolled civil war break out. While the Kuwaiti border is fenced and provided with a number of security measures, it is not unbreachable. This problem is especially serious since Kuwait is a small country unable to absorb or provide facilities for large numbers of Iraqi citizens within

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its borders. Thus, the Kuwaitis are not expected to allow refugee camps within Kuwait but would under proper circumstances support the administration of Iraqi refugee camps outside Kuwaiti borders. This effort would probably be conducted in collaboration with other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states that are concerned about Iraqi refugees, including Saudi Arabia.[167] Kuwaitis also worry that large numbers of refugees on their borders could lead to increased problems with crime and especially smuggling arms and drugs either by land or sea.

Some would-be insurgents from outside Iraq have coordinated with a handful of radicals from the fringes of Kuwaiti society. These Kuwaiti extremists helped them infiltrate into Iraq and, to the extent possible, provided them with money and logistical support. One radical group that has been identified as active in facilitating the movement of terrorists into Iraq calls itself the "Kuwait Mujahideen." This group may be affiliated with al-Qai'da but does not appear to be engaged in terrorist operations within Kuwait. Another group, the "Peninsula Lions," has previously attacked targets within Kuwait, and some scholars speculate there may have been a "division of labor" between the two groups. Many of the Peninsula Lions were arrested or killed in January 2005, and it is possible that the group has been largely wiped out.[168]

Another set of problems can be seen on the internet. Iraqi insurgents using jihadist websites have sometimes specifically threatened Kuwait and Kuwaitis inside Iraq.[169] These threats are increasingly irrelevant since very few Kuwaitis are currently interested in traveling to Iraq. Threats against Kuwait itself are another matter. In this regard, many Kuwaitis are extremely worried about the claim that Iraq has replaced Afghanistan as

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the chief training ground for the next generation of "professionalized" terrorists.[170] In particular, a danger is that radical Kuwaitis who infiltrate into Iraq will then return and apply their terrorist skills against the Kuwaiti government and society.[171] Such a situation would recreate the problems that Saudi Arabia and other Arab states had in coping with returning veterans from the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan. These individuals in many cases were both radicalized and professionalized with a variety of military and terrorist skills. Currently, there are believed to be about 120 Kuwaitis who participated in the Soviet-Afghan war living at home in Kuwait.[172] A handful of Kuwaitis have also participated in various other Islamic military causes such as the wars in Bosnia and Chechnya. All of these individuals are believed to be under surveillance, and they currently present no clear threat to the Kuwaiti government.[173] An uncontrolled civil war in Iraq's near future could change everything. Such a conflict would attract much more serious attention from Kuwait's radical fringe, and present a significantly less manageable problem for Kuwait authorities once these radicals begin returning home.

Many Kuwaitis also fear a possible spillover of Sunni-Shi'ite sectarian warfare from Iraq through the incitement of intercommunal hatreds within Kuwait. In his opening address to Parliament in October 2006, Emir Sheikh Sabah al Ahmed urged his people to put aside any sectarian differences that could endanger Kuwait security. The emir asserted that, "Kuwait does not belong to one group only or to one sect only, it is for everybody."[174] He further urged Kuwaitis to shun "any behavior that results in division."[175] These statements were widely interpreted as a renunciation of divisiveness over sectarian issues. In Kuwait, unlike

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Iraq, members of the two sects seldom intermarry, and the major Kuwaiti tribes do not include a mix of Sunnis and Shi'ites in their ranks.[176] Moreover, the Kuwaiti government is concerned that it will not be able to generate an Iraq policy that would please both Sunni and Shi'ite Kuwaitis during a full scale Iraqi civil war. Conservative Kuwaiti Sunnis, including Wahhabis, have serious doctrinal differences with Shi'ites and would find themselves deeply concerned about a Shi'ite government in Iraq in general and especially concerned about one that actively and perhaps brutally imposes its authority on Iraq's Sunni Arabs. Conversely, Kuwaiti Shi'ites are also deeply interested in the welfare of the Shi'ite community in Iraq. Many Kuwaiti Shi'ites view Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani as their *maraja-e taqlid* (source of emulation) for religious questions.[177]

The emir's call for overcoming sectarian differences has been echoed by other responsible individuals and groups within Kuwaiti society. Additionally, Abdulhadi al Saleh, minister of state for national assembly affairs in early 2007, has been particularly outspoken, speaking as both a Kuwaiti and a Shi'ite.[178] Kuwaiti women's rights activists have also urged vigilance against "abhorrent sectarian rifts."[179] Containing sectarian anger will nevertheless be a challenge as problems in Iraq continue to provoke international reactions. One Sunni Islamist member of the Kuwaiti parliament, for example, accused the Iranians of abetting the "sectarian liquidation" of Iraq's Sunni Muslims by Shi'ite militias.[180] This statement, which borders on an accusation of genocide, seems to take a fairly one-sided view of the nature of the conflict in Iraq. Should a large number of Kuwaiti citizens start assigning exclusive blame for Iraq's trouble on the "other" Iraq sect, problems can be expected to develop in Kuwaiti inter-community relations.

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On the positive side, Kuwait is often viewed as having the best Sunni-Shi'ite relations of any Gulf state, and Kuwaiti Shi'ites publicly acknowledge that they are better off than their brethren elsewhere in the Gulf.[181] Shi'ites are free to practice most of their religious rituals in public and to educate their children according to Shi'ite religious precepts. They have also played an important role in the Kuwaiti business sector, and a number of Shi'ites have become extremely wealthy as a result of their economic activities. This prosperity has provided the Kuwaiti Shi'ites with a significant "stake in the system" which helps to ensure their loyalty to the state. Kuwaiti Shi'ites are also consistently elected to the parliament, although not in the numbers that might be expected as a result of their proportion of the population. There is also a continuing effort to appoint at least one Shi'ite minister to the government. Further, many of the problems that developed between the two Kuwaiti communities during the Iran-Iraq war were quickly and decisively put to rest as a result of Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the unswerving Shi'ite loyalty to their country. The Iraqi invasion and its aftermath powerfully vindicated the Shi'ite distaste for the policy of supporting Saddam in the conflict with Iran. While the Shi'ites still have a long way to go before achieving complete political equality, they nevertheless have a great deal of encouragement to work within the system so long as Kuwait does not adopt an Iraq policy that they would view as completely one-sided in favor of Iraq's Sunnis.

Some Kuwaitis have suggested that a division of Iraq may be an acceptable outcome. One prominent Kuwaiti Sunni attorney has stated,

> In terms of the division of Iraq and its impact on the neighboring Gulf countries, particularly Kuwait and

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> Saudi Arabia, I think it is in Kuwait's strategic interests for Iraq to remain weak . . . I am not worried about the establishment of a Shiite state in southern Iraq on the border with Kuwait because such a country would not be strong enough to harm Kuwait, no matter how influential Iran might be.[182]

There is a clear logic to this approach since another conventional invasion is Kuwait's greatest nightmare. Yet, there is no evidence that this viewpoint has a significant following, and it stands in contradiction to official Kuwaiti policy. Moreover, other Kuwaitis have suggested that a divided Iraq would further empower Iran which would seek to dominate the Shi'ite rump state in the south.[183]

Contemporary Political Differences between Kuwait and the United States.

Although relations between the United States and Kuwait remain strong, differences occasionally flare over issues that are not related to Iraq, Iran, or Gulf security. Recently this has involved Kuwaiti views on Israeli and Palestinian issues. Kuwait, as has been noted, was one of the strongest supporters of the rights of the Palestinians prior to the 1990 invasion. Yassir Arafat's decision to side with Saddam in that crisis was never forgiven by the majority of Kuwaitis, and various Kuwaiti officials were sometimes criticized by the Kuwaiti press for even speaking to Arafat in a civil manner at international gatherings. Additionally, many Palestinians living in Kuwait during the 1990 invasion were widely viewed as supporting Saddam and Arafat, although there were notable and heroic exceptions to this approach. Either fairly or unfairly, Kuwaiti anger against the Palestinians in the early 1990s was white

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hot, and almost all Palestinian workers were required to leave the country.

Against this legacy of lingering distrust and anger the Kuwaitis do evince some concern about the Palestinian population. Young Kuwaitis do not remember all of the problems of 1990-91 well and often tend to get a lot of their information about Israeli-Palestinian issues from Arab satellite television. Some such sources include both the Israeli and Palestinian points of view, and various Arab editorialists have criticized the Qatar-based *al Jazeera* station for speaking to Israelis and giving them large blocks of time to explain their views and priorities.[184] Nevertheless, a great deal of extremely disturbing footage finds its way to these cable programs, and the influence on young Gulf Arabs is undeniable. An increasing number of Kuwaitis are critical of U.S. support for Israel, although others are more open to normalization with the Israelis.[185] The official Kuwaiti policy is that they will not fully normalize relations with the Israelis until a successful settlement of the Palestinian issue occurs.

Serious differences with Kuwait have also emerged over U.S. support for Israel's summer 2006 confrontation with the Lebanese Hizballah. In protest of U.S. support for Israel's strikes into Lebanon, hundreds of people rallied outside of the U.S. Embassy, burned the U.S. flag, and demanded the expulsion of the U.S. Ambassador. Chants of "Death to America" were joined by a number of members of the Kuwaiti parliament, and various speakers in the parliament denounced the United States.[186] There are a number of reasons for this flare-up, including the anger of Shi'ite Kuwaitis and Lebanese residents within Kuwait who might feel special sympathy for the Lebanese Shi'ite organization Hizballah. Such people appear to have

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led the demonstrations, and there would have been considerable pressure on Kuwaiti Sunnis to show solidarity with their Shi'ite countrymen. Nevertheless, the Kuwaiti political culture seems to be growing less tolerant of both U.S. and Israeli actions that threaten the Palestinians or states bordering Israel. Additionally, the Kuwaitis were apparently never tempted to mute their criticism of Israel during the conflict because it was attacking a Shi'ite enemy in Lebanon. Various other Sunni-led states were viewed by the world press as somewhat subdued in their criticism of Israel because of their fear that a Hizballah victory would aggravate an already difficult situation of advancing Shi'ite power.[187] Some Kuwaiti Sunni Islamists and others have become more critical of Hizballah following the end of the summer 2006 war with Israel.[188]

Another problem that has sometimes bothered Kuwaitis is the perception that the United States does not make a serious effort to consult them or their Gulf neighbors on regional issues. Pique over this issue was apparent in a remark by Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Mohammad Sabah stating, "Yes we are allies of the U.S. but we are not its puppies . . . . Our interests compel transparency in delivering our concerns . . . and to cooperate with the U.S. only where this is needed."[189] This demand for respect is especially compelling since it comes from one of Kuwait's most pro-American political figures. The Kuwaitis have also made it clear that they do not like to be harshly scolded by the United States over such issues as the price of fuel for the U.S. military. The Kuwaitis supplied free fuel to the military during the 2003 war against Saddam, but did request payment for some fuel at a preferential rate of $21 per barrel as the conflict in Iraq continued. The U.S. leadership agreed to pay $7 per barrel, but they did so

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only after the Kuwaiti leadership received a letter from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) scolding them for their ingratitude for the 1991 liberation.[190] This matter could have been settled satisfactorily without such harshness which is often more painful when a powerful state addresses a weaker ally, since it implies a subordinate status relationship.

Other problems exist as well, including a past tendency of some policymakers to stop in Kuwait on the way to Iraq without spending any time there. This approach has sometimes caused the Kuwaitis to feel their views are not appreciated. Recently, significant progress was made in reversing this perception when the United States helped to organize a January 2007 conference with America's Gulf allies (and Egypt and Jordan) to discuss Iraq and Iraq-related problems. The U.S. Secretary of State attended this conference to present President Bush's priorities and to listen to the concerns of the attending Arab states. While some disagreement occurred on the issue of Iran (discussed later), all parties considered the discussions important, and the value of these sorts of activities should not be underestimated.[191] Additionally, congressional delegations are showing a much increased interest in Kuwaiti opinions on regional security, probably as a result of ongoing problems in Iraq. Previously, Kuwaitis would at times become irritated at U.S. political leaders who would call for a strategic redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq to Kuwait without any hint that the Kuwaitis might seek input into such a matter.

Kuwait and Iran.

In addition to the United States and Iraq, Kuwait's interactions with Iran are especially significant. In

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the years following Kuwait's 1991 liberation, there was a strong effort to improve relations with Iran. As a long-standing enemy of Saddam Hussein, Iran seemed something of a natural ally to the traumatized Kuwaitis in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion. Yet, the working relationship between Kuwait and Tehran that flourished after the 1991 liberation should not obscure Iran's previous role as a major source of concern for Kuwait. Additionally, Iran's revolutionary ideology and political interest in dominating the Gulf are not often seen as in Kuwaiti interests. The Kuwait-Iranian relationship is therefore complex and nuanced and must be understood within the context of a number of recent historical events.

When Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980 igniting the Iran-Iraq War, Kuwait was initially interested in maintaining strict neutrality. At the beginning of the war and probably for some time afterwards, the Kuwaitis hoped that the two sides would exhaust each other, and that neither would emerge as a strong vibrant Gulf power in the wake of the other's defeat.[192] If Kuwait backed a party that later lost the war, it feared facing the wrath of an angry and militarily victorious enemy. Strict neutrality seemed like an effective way to avoid this problem. This thinking appears to have changed in 1982 when it looked as though Iraq was in danger of being overrun by the forces of an Iranian regime euphoric over its battlefield victories. Additionally, Kuwaiti leaders became especially concerned about the increasing empowerment of Iranian revolutionary and anti-monarchist ideology through military victory. The Kuwaiti leadership thus reversed its earlier policies and began tilting towards Iraq. As part of this initial tilt, the government allowed the Kuwaiti media to take a strong pro-Iraqi stand, while not allowing its officials

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to assert the same values in public.[193] Later, the Kuwaiti government provided Iraq with strong rhetorical, financial, logistical, and diplomatic support. The GCC, composed of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Oman, was formed in 1980 largely as a response to Iranian activism in the Gulf after the 1979 Iranian revolution. It was during this time when Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini was most emphatic about Islam and monarchy being incompatible.[194]

Kuwaiti leaders at this time also increasingly feared that their Shi'ite citizens could be influenced or manipulated by Iran. After the 1979 Iranian revolution, Shi'ites in Kuwait were more assertive about demanding equal rights, and some were viewed by the government as receptive to the radical messages of Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. As noted, the two Kuwaiti religious communities tend to live apart from each other in distinct areas, and this lack of interaction may have increased intercommunal suspicions.[195] As the Kuwaiti leadership showed more doubt about Shi'ite loyalty (resulting in employment discrimination), the Shi'ites became vulnerable to increased alienation from the system as a result of government distrust.[196] The previously close ties between the al Sabah family and the Shi'ite merchant class led the new policies to appear to some as a serious disappointment to many Shi'ites. Discrimination against Kuwaiti Shi'ites involved excluding many of them from sensitive government positions. These exclusions included not only defense and internal security positions but also many jobs within the oil industry which is Kuwait's primary employer.[197]

Almost all of Kuwait's Shi'ites chose not to respond to the new situation with violence against their government, but the Iranians were nevertheless able

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to unleash a wave of terrorism within Kuwait through the use of proxies. This campaign was designed to pressure Kuwait into renouncing pro-Iraqi policies. Exiled members of the anti-Saddam Iraqi *Dawa* party and Lebanese radicals in Kuwait apparently led this campaign at the operational level. These individuals had close ties to Iran and considerable experience in setting up clandestine anti-government networks. They were also able to recruit a few local Shi'ites and *bidoons* to the cause. The Kuwaiti government wisely did not pursue policies of wholesale persecution of the Shi'ites, which the Iranians may have hoped to provoke. They did, however, deport foreign Shi'ites who had questionable pasts and increased surveillance on the Shi'ite community as a whole.[198]

The Iranian-sponsored terrorist campaign was waged within Kuwait from 1983 until 1989 with attacks against a range of targets. On December 12, 1983, pro-Iranian terrorists bombed the U.S. and French embassies. Seventeen people were later convicted of the bombing, which harmed Iranian relations with the United States and France as well as Kuwait. In May 1985 an unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of the emir by pro-Iranian Shi'ites who threw bombs at his car. While the emir was not harmed, the attack killed four other people including one bodyguard.[199] Six weeks later two seaside resorts were bombed, and at least 12 people were killed. Militants inspired by Khomeini may have struck at these targets because men and women were freely mixing at outdoor cafes. In June 1986, saboteurs set explosive charges in oil pipelines and at the head of a high-pressure oil well. Subversion and terrorism in Kuwait also continued following the cease-fire that ended the Iran-Iraq war in August 1988, finally ending in 1989.[200]

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Nor were Iranian actions confined to the activities of its terrorist surrogates. Iran's military also attacked Kuwaiti targets while either claiming the attacks were Iraqi or that they were the result of battlefield mistakes or miscalculations. In May 1984 Iran attacked and damaged two Kuwaiti oil tankers and then denied they had done so.[201] As these problems continued, Kuwait sought the reflagging of its ships as noted earlier. There were also "accidental" Iranian bombing strikes against Kuwaiti territory, although these were not as serious as the attacks against tankers. The end of the Iran-Iraq War removed the immediate cause of conflict from Kuwaiti-Iranian relations, although each side continued to view the other with the utmost suspicion.

After the Iran-Iraq War, the Kuwaitis almost certainly believed that Iran would not make an acceptable ally and that its potential for political extremism made it an undependable neighbor at best. This outlook changed dramatically in August 1990 when virtually all Kuwaitis realized that Iran was not their deadliest foe. At this time of crisis, Kuwaitis were grateful for Iran's neutrality in the emerging conflict between the anti-Iraq coalition and the Baghdad regime despite Saddam's strong efforts to seek wider support from Tehran by offering the Iranians a number of key concessions. The Iraqi leader surrendered previously touted Iraqi wartime gains including control of the Shatt al Arab waterway. Tehran accepted Iraqi concessions and formally reestablished diplomatic relations with Iraq, but Iran did not side with Iraq in the conflict.

The Iranians did not issue the ferocious condemnations of the U.S. and coalition deployments to Saudi Arabia, although that might have been expected given their past history. Rather, they portrayed the operation

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as designed to "safeguard Arabia" in the face of Iraqi threats.[202] Moreover, in the aftermath of the 1991 Iraq war, both Kuwait and Iran saw value in cooperating to ensure the containment of Iraqi military power. During the 1990s, Kuwait often appeared willing to overlook Iranian ties to some Gulf terrorist groups because the Kuwaitis did not want differences over these groups to undermine relations with Tehran. Kuwait's post-1990 relations with Iran also follow the traditional Kuwaiti approach of seeking to moderate potential enemies through dialogue and economic interaction. Kuwait hopes to use this approach to head off any Iranian tendency to reinvigorate efforts to export revolution such as occurred during the first years of the Islamic Republic. This approach worked well during the years in which Iranian President Khatami sought to establish better relations with Iran's regional neighbors.[203] The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president in 2005 made things more difficult since he was both confrontational and a chauvinistic Iranian nationalist. The Kuwaiti press has sometimes indicated that Ahmadinejad treats the Gulf states with a lack of respect, although they are aware that he and his supporters do not control Iranian foreign and defense policy.[204]

Kuwait remains unwilling to accept an ongoing Iranian effort to establish a new regional security pact in which Iran replaces the United States as the chief protector of the Gulf Arab states. Iranian leaders have stated that the Gulf Arabs have more in common with the interests advocated by Tehran than those advocated by the United States. The proposed Iranian pact includes a provision whereby the Gulf states would require the United States to leave bases within their territory.[205] It is consequently difficult for Kuwaiti-

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Iranian relations to become cordial because of the U.S.-Kuwaiti relationship.

The Iranians are extremely interested in ensuring that Kuwait refuses to cooperate with any potential U.S. plan to bomb or otherwise attack Iran. On an April 2006 visit to Kuwait, former Iranian president Rafsanjani stated, "We are certain the Gulf countries will not back the United States in waging an attack on Iran."[206] Various other Iranian leaders have also reassured the public that the position of the Kuwaiti government is that it will not allow its bases to be used against Tehran for a military strike again their nuclear facilities. Kuwaiti officials let these public statements pass without direct comment, although they have publicly stated their opposition to a U.S. attack on Iran. It is not clear what they would do to try to prevent it or to distance themselves from the United States if such an attack occurs. Mostly, Kuwait spokesmen such as Speaker of the National Assembly Jassem al Khorafi have stressed that "[t]he region cannot bear the serious consequences of military action."[207]

Kuwait and the other Gulf Arab states are known to be deeply apprehensive about the Iranian interest in acquiring nuclear technology, although they are also worried about appearing too confrontational with Tehran.[208] The concern about an Iranian nuclear weapons capability is not surprising given that such a system could increase Iranian self-confidence and strongly embolden Tehran in its desire to play a more assertive regional role with conventional and unconventional forces. While Kuwaitis probably do not fear being attacked with nuclear weapons, they are aware that the large and powerful Iranian army is a serious threat that may be employed more readily if Tehran has a nuclear option to protect itself from

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"regime change" by the United States.[209] Moreover, the Iranian danger could be amplified if the United States is seen to be faltering in its commitment to Kuwaiti security due to isolationism that could result from Iraq war setbacks and traumas. The Kuwaitis and other Gulf Arabs have sought techniques to express their concern about an Iranian nuclear capability without implying a threat of Iranian aggression. One of the central ways in which they have done this is to treat the Iranian program as an environmental issue rather than a security issue in their overt diplomacy. In particular, they suggest that a nuclear accident in Iran would have dramatic implications for their own countries if massive amounts of radiation were released into the atmosphere as a result of such an occurrence.[210] The Kuwaitis also stress dangers to their desalination plants which are their primary source of fresh water. This approach to the problem also allows Kuwaiti diplomacy and that of the other Gulf states to sidestep the issue of whether or not the Iranian nuclear energy program is also a nuclear weapons program.

Not surprisingly, the Gulf states do not have much ability to slow down the Iranian quest for nuclear weapons. Some thought has been given to a GCC declaration of a nuclear free zone in the region in the hopes of pressuring Iran to renounce nuclear technology, but this effort is unlikely to show the slightest sign of success.[211] Additionally, there is every reason to believe that the Kuwaitis are sincere in their public opposition to U.S. military strikes against Iranian suspect facilities. Such an action would force the Kuwaiti leadership to choose publicly between the United States and Iran rather than to try to maintain good ties with both states. While they would certainly choose to maintain the U.S. alliance, Kuwaiti leaders

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would prefer not be presented with such a dilemma. The Iranians could also find a variety of ways of retaliate against Kuwait for hosting U.S. forces during a U.S.-Iranian war.[212] Kuwaiti national security analysts are aware that a U.S.-Iranian war would have extremely serious consequences for their country, including possible Iranian missile attacks against U.S. military forces on Kuwaiti soil.[213] Thus, the Kuwaitis are without any good options in dealing with the Iranian nuclear weapons effort beyond continuing their current policy of attempting to balance their relations with Iran and the West.

Many Kuwaitis have also been concerned about the Iranian role in post-Saddam Iraq.[214] A recent response to this concern was a January 16, 2007, Kuwaiti-hosted Foreign Ministers Conference on Iraq which included U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as well as representatives of the GCC states and Egypt and Jordan. The conference issued a statement that expressed support for the "principle of noninterference" in Iraq's internal affairs, as well as the need for "mutual respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states" in the region.[215] Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad al Sabah acknowledged to the press that the joint statement was aimed at Iran.[216] Nevertheless, at that same conference the Kuwaitis encouraged the United States to seek dialogue with both Iran and Syria as recommended by the Baker/Hamilton Iraq Study Group.[217] The Kuwaiti emir stated that dialogue with both countries was important, and that a dialogue with Iran was in the "interest of Gulf security in general."[218] Kuwaiti calls for U.S.-Iranian dialogue may be designed to impress the Iranians with the potential of Kuwaiti "good offices" as well as to seek to minimize tensions between two countries that the Kuwaiti leadership views as important to its future. Tehran has sometimes

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been reported to be interested in using the Arab monarchies as an intermediary to help ease tensions with Washington.[219] Additionally, the Kuwaitis may have sought to soften the appearance of siding with the United States against Iran over the issue of Iraq in the U.S./GCC/Egyptian/Jordanian joint statement.

Kuwaiti-Iranian relations may face an additional challenge due to the changing nature of political activity in Shi'ite-dominated southern Iraq. Pro-Iranian political organizations are particularly strong in this area which is geographically close to Kuwait.[220] Further complicating the situation is the February 2007 British decision to drawdown their troops in Iraq, seen by some as leading to the potential expansion of Iranian influence in the area. This drawdown is projected to lead to a near-term drop in the number of British forces in and near Basra from 7,100 to 5,500, and then possibly below 5,000 by the end of the year.[221] The Iraqi government is expected to assume greater responsibility as the British soldiers leave, but it is unclear to the Kuwaitis that the Iraqis will measure up to these new responsibilities.[222] In response to such concerns, Basra governor Muhammad al Wa'Ili has stated that "our border with Kuwait is secure" and noted that there is a "new plan" for border security with Kuwait and other neighboring states.[223] The Kuwaitis, nevertheless, remain concerned about a more chaotic situation in southern Iraq that may spillover into their country.[224] Kuwaitis also worry that Basra may become a center of intense military combat should war break out between the United States and Iran in the near future. Such a scenario is continuously discussed in the Middle East press regardless of how unlikely it may appear to many Americans.

Another aspect of current Kuwaiti-Iranian relations is a vigorous outreach program by Tehran to

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present Kuwaiti citizens with its point of view on a number of regional and international questions. Tehran's ambassador to Kuwait is Ali Jannati, the son of Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the hardline chairman of Iran's powerful Guardian's Council.[225] In Kuwait, Ali Jannati speaks to the local press and strongly maintains Tehran's position that Sunni-Shi'ite troubles in the region have been provoked by the United States and Israel.[226] He and others also continuously reiterate that Iran is not seeking nuclear weapons and is helping resistance against the "crimes and atrocities of the Zionist regime."[227] Both official and academic Iranian speakers also address university audiences and sometimes give presentations at Kuwaiti *diwaniyas*.[228] Kuwait's approach to education and politics often encourages a variety of points of view and Iran's actions in this realm are only part of a much wider effort to present large numbers of divergent views within these sorts of forums.

The Terrorist Threat in Kuwait.

Kuwait has faced a number of dangers from terrorism and subversion throughout its existence, as has been noted earlier. Fears of Nasserite subversion were taken seriously in the early days of Kuwaiti independence, although the newly independent government managed to play off Nasser and the Iraqis to some extent. The Iranian-backed terrorist campaign in the 1980s was another instance of a serious internal security threat. Moreover, from 1991-2003 the Kuwaiti intelligence services were especially concerned about the dangers from Saddam Hussein's agents. Now, with Saddam gone, new threats have come to the forefront of Kuwaiti concerns. Additionally, a small

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number of violent Kuwaiti extremists have engaged in isolated and usually ineffective attacks on U.S. military personnel in Kuwait. These actual and planned attacks have occurred both before and after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. In most cases, they appear to be the work of a few disgruntled radicals rather than a highly organized terrorist network. Most of the plots are broken up prior to being implemented due to the amateurish operational security of the would-be terrorists.[229] A few attacks have caused American injuries, and a U.S. Marine was killed by terrorists on October 8, 2003, on Faylaka Island.[230]

Kuwait may have been slow in recognizing an internal Sunni extremist terrorist threat due to its preoccupation with Saddam and a belief that Kuwait's democratic institutions would channel dissent in nonviolent directions.[231] Some informed observers have suggested that Kuwaiti counterterrorism capabilities have been slow to adapt to the new threat. Anthony Cordesman and Khalid R. al Rodhan have stated that Kuwait's internal security apparatus largely has the same force structure that it had in 1990, and the Kuwaitis have a serious need to "start rethinking their internal security apparatus."[232] The fact that Kuwait is a small country is sometimes considered to give security forces a counterterrorism advantage.

A few Kuwaitis became members of al-Qai'da prior to the September 11, 2001 (9/11), attacks and participated in al-Qai'da operations outside of Kuwait before the government fully realized the danger posed by this organization.[233] The spokesman for al-Qai'da, Suleiman Abu Ghaith, was a native Kuwaiti citizen until the government stripped him of his citizenship in 2001 after he appeared on television threatening Westerners with attack. As noted earlier, a limited

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number of Kuwaitis have fought for Islamic armed groups in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Bosnia, and a few Kuwaitis have been arrested in Afghanistan and sent to Guantanamo Bay. Since the facility was created, eight Kuwaitis have been returned to the emirate for trial, with five cleared of all charges, one sentenced to 5 years in prison, and two awaiting trial at the time of this report.[234] Nevertheless, al-Qai'da does not seem to have a presence in Kuwait, and other terrorists groups that are similar to al-Qai'da appear weak and perhaps broken. Kuwaiti security officials do an excellent job of addressing security problems inside Kuwait, but it is unclear that they are as closely focused on the activities of Kuwaiti subversives outside their country.

Like much of the rest of the world, the 9/11 attacks jolted Kuwaitis into a new understanding of the dangers of terrorism. This tragedy caused them to reconsider some earlier and more worrisome assessments of the threat. Some Kuwaitis and other observers had previously expressed concern that charitable donations might have been insufficiently regulated in the years before the 9/11 strikes and therefore found their way into the hands of terrorists.[235] After 9/11, Kuwait enacted major new regulations for banking and other financial transactions.[236] The Kuwaitis have frozen suspected terrorist funds, and they cooperated with the UN finance watch list. The Kuwaiti government has also established a ministerial committee to revise and strengthen money laundering laws and procedures and to criminalize the financing of terrorism.[237] The government also formed a ministerial committee chaired by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in October 2004 to develop strategies to confront terrorism and extremism. This committee has developed an outreach program to encourage

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moderation among Kuwaiti youth. It has further co-coordinated with the Ministry of Information to close Kuwaiti-based internet sites that disseminate extremist ideology.[238] Nevertheless, both the United States and Kuwaiti liberals continue to express concern about the financial activities of radical Islamists. Liberals regard the Islamists as brilliant opportunists who will take advantage of any loopholes in the laws governing financial transactions. U.S. State Department officials have expressed concern about Kuwaiti radicals who may carry large amounts of money out of the country on their person and then distribute it as they see fit.[239]

In the aftermath of both the 9/11 attacks and a series of attempted and actual attacks on U.S. troops, the Kuwaitis announced in November 2002 that they would "develop and modernize school curricula." Liberal Kuwaitis had consistently argued that this step was necessary because rigid school textbooks on Islam have partly contributed to the danger of extremism.[240] The Kuwaitis might also have initiated such measures because of a fear that their relationship with the United States could be damaged if they were seen as tolerating an extremist educational system. After 9/11, the Kuwaitis had the opportunity to see a great deal of ugly rhetoric being directed at Saudi Arabia by American neoconservatives with numerous grievances against the Saudi government. Such polemics also came from elsewhere in the U.S. political spectrum as can be seen in long and virulently anti-Saudi portions of the American movie, "Fahrenheit 9/11." Clearly Kuwait did not want to be on the wrong side of the terrorism or the democracy issue in ways that weakened or even undermined the alliance with the United States, but it also did not wish to alienate nonviolent, but very radical members of Kuwaiti society. To this end, the Kuwaitis

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did not permanently close an important jihadist web site that operated from their country.[241]

Moreover, Kuwaiti concerns about radicalism were later given a boost by domestic events. In early 2005, there was a serious spike in terrorist activity in Kuwait. This began with a January 2005 clash in a Kuwait City suburb between the security police and the Peninsula Lions. The Kuwaitis responded forcefully to these problems. Eight extremists were killed in a series of gunfights with Kuwaiti authorities.[242] The potential dangers of the Lions may have been amplified by the timing of the violence which occurred just as Saudi Arabia was engaged in a major struggle against al-Qai'da forces waging war within the Kingdom.[243] Furthermore, one of the militants killed in a January 15, 2006, gunbattle in Kuwait was a Saudi.[244] This gunfight was the first such attack in Kuwait that involved a Saudi militant. Fortunately, the Peninsula Lions have not shown much capacity for regenerating their strength, and they may have been wiped out. No large scale or spectacular terrorism has been evidenced in Kuwait since that time, although poorly organized plots by amateurs probably inspired by the internet have occurred.

A little earlier, in December 16, 2005, Osama bin Laden called for his supporters to attack oil installations throughout the Gulf states as well as in Iraq.[245] As of early 2007, Kuwait leaders felt that they had good reasons to remain deeply concerned about this threat. The Kuwait press claimed in February 2007 that friendly foreign Arab intelligence officials had warned the government that Kuwait was considered a priority target for al-Qai'da operatives seeking to strike at the Gulf states as ordered by Osama bin Laden.[246] This reportedly was viewed "very seriously" by Kuwait's

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Ministry of the Interior.[247] Border penetration by land or sea is also a serious concern of Kuwaiti authorities.[248] Therefore this is hardly a time for Kuwaiti authorities to become complacent about terrorism. Nevertheless, small countries such as Kuwait may find it much easier to establish security—especially since Kuwait is wealthy enough to meet a variety of expensive security tasks and has a manageable land mass and population where it can apply anti-terrorist measures.

Political Tensions and Political Reform in Kuwait.

Kuwait's tenuous but steady movement toward a more democratic political system is not well-understood in the West, although it is important for the overall process of Middle East democratization. According to Mary Ann Tetreault, "Serious news about Kuwait rarely penetrates far beyond the region in the best of times. When the story is about democratization rather than invasion or terrorism, even the most encouraging news can evaporate without a trace."[249] In considering Professor Tetreault's critique, this problem frequently tends to be a shortcoming of the Western media rather than the U.S. Government. The media seems unimpressed by slow, evolutionary changes despite their importance. Unfortunately, these democratic developments are not irreversible, and Kuwait could still choose to go backwards rather than moving forward to consolidate and expand reform.

It should also be noted that at least some Kuwaitis view democratization as a national security as well as a political development concern. Kuwait remains interested in maintaining the backing and support of the United States and other nonregional allies against any regional states that might threaten it. These

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relationships may become vulnerable if Kuwait is perceived as increasingly undemocratic. It has already been noted that the more autocratic Saudi Arabia has experienced tremendous U.S. public criticism in recent years. Whatever the validity of many of the complaints, they would have certainly been mitigated by the existence of a Saudi parliament. Kuwait thus has a strong advantage in reaching out to the United States, but this advantage would vanish if Kuwait was viewed by Americans and others as retreating from democracy. Additionally, reform-minded Kuwaitis are quick to point out that a stable, democratic system in Kuwait serves to promote foreign investments.[250] Increased foreign investment in Kuwait has political as well as economic considerations since a number of large corporations would gain a stake in Kuwait's future.

Domestically, reform is also linked to national security since it is viewed as a way of ensuring that Kuwaitis have a chance to participate in the political system. Such policies may be valuable in undercutting the attraction of extra-constitutional activity and violent extremism. Unfortunately, some nonviolent but ultra-conservative Kuwaitis have been elected to parliament including a member of parliament who has stated that he refuses to call bin Laden a terrorist.[251] Democratization should not be confused (as it often is in the United States) with the empowerment of moderates. One of the chief goals of the Islamic opposition may be to impose Islamic law on the nation.[252] Domestic critics of the Islamists maintain that they wish to divide the society into "pious" and "lax" Muslims and take steps to reform the lax Muslims. These critics further maintain that the Islamists seek a segregated system of education as well as powerful morals enforcement police such as

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those found in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan under the Taliban.[253] Within the parliament, the Islamist bloc is quite strong and can make common cause with other traditionalists. Some analysts suggest that the Kuwaiti government inadvertently supported the rise of radical Islamic organizations when it closed liberal societies and associations in 1986 because they strongly opposed the dissolution of parliament at that time.[254] Other liberal Kuwaiti reformers have indicated a deep concern about the increasing influence, organizational skills, and militancy of self-described Salafists and other ultra-conservative Islamists throughout Kuwaiti society.[255] Some oppose the legalization of political parties in Kuwait at this time because they realize such a move would strengthen the power of the Islamists.

The inclusiveness strategy, despite its drawbacks, does appear to be showing some results for the system's legitimacy. Key opposition leaders in Kuwait do not appear interested in overthrowing al Sabah rule and at least, for the time being, seem interested in reforming Kuwaiti politics and making it more responsive and transparent to popular will. Moreover, the decision of an overwhelming number of Kuwaitis, including oppositionists, to rally to the royal family in exile after the 1990 invasion has been treated by some scholars as something of an acid test for al Sabah legitimacy so long as the al Sabahs respect the Kuwaiti constitution.[256] In the initial aftermath of the 1991 war, the government (consisting most prominently of the emir and his cabinet) and National Assembly often had notable disagreements. Nevertheless, each side saw value in cooperation with the other, and neither side wanted to appear anything less than united in the face of the Iraqi enemy.

One of the central points of debate on democratization has consistently involved the respective roles

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of the executive government of the emir and the legislative role of the National Assembly. In particular, the parliament has sought to maintain and expand its authority to oversee and criticize the government, with a special focus on government spending so as to prevent and expose corruption, ineptitude, and overspending. An elected body willing and able to challenge the government over the issue of corruption is not the usual way of doing business in the Gulf. Nevertheless, the system of divided power often presents the danger of a stalemated and bickering political leadership which the Kuwaitis continue to accept as part of the price of democratic rule. More annoyingly, bickering members of the ruling family have sometimes enlisted members of the National Assembly and the press in their efforts to discredit rivals. These problems reached the point where Emir Sabah al Ahmed al Sabah convened an April 2007 meeting of 190 senior members of the ruling family above the age of 40 in an effort to calm the situation. At this gathering, he stated, "Every one of you wants to become a minister, and all of you are fighting this out in the media."[257] The emir's decision to confront this issue in such a public way is quite striking.

At the time of the last election in 2006, Kuwait had 25 small electoral districts. This has now changed, with the number of districts reduced to 5, which will be utilized in the next parliamentary election regardless of when it occurs. According to a number of critics, there have been serious problems with vote buying in Kuwaiti elections, and the sharp reduction in the number of voting districts is expected to help reverse this trend.[258] There is also a possibility that larger districts will help to overcome Sunni-Shiite differences in Kuwait by cutting across religiously divided urban

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areas. The two groups often tend to live in different neighborhoods, creating a situation where candidates may be tempted to use polarizing rhetoric in a way that would not occur in a larger and more diverse district.[259] The reduction of the number of districts was a major demand of the Kuwaiti reform movement and especially the young people who demonstrated in favor of these reforms and identified their political movement with the color Orange.[260]

The most recent elections in Kuwait have been lively with opposition candidates who feel free to criticize the Sabah family for such things as failing to provide adequate services and sponsoring corruption.[261] No major candidates have seriously challenged the legitimacy of Sabah authority, but they have criticized its behavior, sometimes in exceptionally tough terms. One candidate even criticized the "dictatorial behavior" of Prime Minister Nasser Mohammad al Ahmad al Sabah.[262] Such statements would be swiftly and brutally punished in a variety of other Middle Eastern states. Kuwaiti political culture is much more generous, perhaps because of the strength of Kuwaiti institutions.

Additionally, a significant amount of the initiative for certain types of reform comes from the ruling family rather than the parliament. This is the case with the effort to provide women with the vote. The motives for this move may have had an idealistic component, but the Sabahs may also have believed that women voters would produce a friendly parliament with fewer hardline Islamists. This trend did not materialize in 2006 to the clear surprise of some liberal candidates who had counted on the "women's vote."[263] Instead, many women voted for Islamists, who ironically had opposed giving them the right to vote in the first place.

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It is unclear what long-term impact women voters will have on the make-up of parliament. A best case scenario would suggest that a majority of women will eventually emerge as less tolerant of Islamic extremism, but this scenario has yet to be played out.

Beyond the 2006 election, other evidence has been put forward suggesting that women voters may not cause the increased liberalization of parliament in the near term. Kuwait University's student union, the elected student government, is dominated by Islamists despite the fact that both men and women students (totally 18,000) may vote in the student elections.[264] Some members of the Islamist groups dominating the campus harass young women over what they consider non-Islamic dress and have forced the university to build expensive separate facilities for male and female students.[265] Moreover, the women who vote for the Islamist student government are college students who would normally be expected to be more liberal and nontraditional than other less educated Kuwaiti women. Nevertheless, another important trend must be considered before reading too much into these votes. This factor is the large number of Kuwaiti students choosing to go abroad for education, especially to the United States and Europe. Thousands of students attend overseas schools each year, often on state scholarships. Such students, almost by definition, are more open to liberal ideas, and some have returned to become leaders in the reform movement. Both men and women who study overseas are not included in the Kuwait University Student Union voting, and their absence from the country during their educational years naturally skews the voting. A number of Kuwaiti women students have risen to become student officers in the overseas branches of the National Association of

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Kuwaiti students, with some moving on to important academic, political, and other leadership roles in Kuwait once they return.

Unfortunately, by 2007 the number of Kuwaiti students studying in the United States was only around 2,500, and this low figure may show the lingering effects of Kuwaiti concerns about U.S. perceptions of the Arab world after 9/11. The U.S. Embassy in Kuwait has responded to this problem by strongly and continuously assuring Kuwaiti students that they are welcome in the United States, supporting educational fairs, and simplifying on-line application procedures for students interested in study in the United States.[266] Some students, however, continue to believe that they will face serious problems with visas and that unreasonable security demands against them will occur while on travel to the United States.[267] Clearly, it is in U.S. interest to have large numbers of Kuwaitis study in the United States and gain a strong and nuanced view of U.S. policies. Everything that can reasonably be done to help support this goal would appear to be worth consideration.

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly when considering reform, the Kuwaiti parliament continues to press forward in asserting its constitutional role. In early 2007 parliamentarians were moving forward with a vote of no-confidence on Health Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah al Sabah, of the ruling family, to determine the validity of accusations of incompetence and mismanagement. Sheikh Ahmad had been questioned in parliament on February 19, 2007, but failed to convince a number of legislators not to call the vote which centered on issues of financial mismanagement and "grave medical errors that led to the death of several patients."[268] Rather than allow this

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to happen, the emir dissolved the Kuwaiti cabinet and instructed Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohammad al Ahmad al Sabah (who was retained) to put together a new cabinet. No minister has ever been voted out of office in Kuwaiti history, although several resigned to avoid no-confidence votes.[269] Some Kuwaitis have suggested that the country needs a more reformist cabinet that is no longer so overwhelming dominated by members of the ruling family.[270] Others have expressed disappointment with the continuing disagreement and governmental deadlock.[271]

Conclusion.

This monograph has illustrated that the destruction of the Saddam Hussein regime will not undermine the basis for U.S.-Kuwaiti military cooperation. Both sides continue to have important security needs that are well-served by the continuation of the relationship. Both the U.S. and Kuwaiti leadership need to understand that the U.S.-Kuwaiti military and security partnership can continue to serve the needs of both countries in the post-Saddam era. This alliance should be understood to be more than a temporary marriage of convenience brought about by the problem of Saddam Hussein. With these factors in mind, the following recommendations are offered.

1. **The U.S. leadership must continue to bear in mind that Kuwait is a more important ally than its small territory and population would imply.** Moreover, Kuwait may be especially important during the current time frame as the United States and the region attempt to cope with continuing problems with Iraq, Iran, democratization, and counterterrorism. Kuwait, as has been noted throughout this monograph,

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can contribute significantly to managing all of these problems. Kuwait's possession of one of the region's best harbors, as well as its continued willingness to host U.S. troops, stands as an invitation for U.S. military personnel to be the best possible guests.

2. **The U.S. Government must avoid making statements that appear to take the Kuwaitis for granted.** U.S. politicians that speak of redeploying from Iraq to Kuwait, for example, might do well to note that such a move would only be done after a careful exchange of views with the Kuwaitis and with Kuwaiti permission. Proclaiming a policy that intensely involves Kuwait while assuming that the Kuwaitis will do just about anything that U.S. leaders say is inappropriate and portrays Kuwait as an unequal ally. Such an image will ultimately be resented and could product a backlash that harms smooth U.S.-Kuwaiti coordination.

3. **The United States needs to speak out in favor of Kuwaiti democracy and note the positive lessons of Kuwaiti democratization.** With all of the setbacks that have taken place in the Middle Eastern drive for democracy, it is important to note that Kuwaiti progress in democratization and possible lessons of the Kuwaiti model are too often virtually ignored. This process of speaking out will not only be of interest to the Kuwaitis, but it may also help to educate the American public about the value of U.S.-Kuwaiti national security ties. In the West, Kuwait is widely known to have a parliament but it is not clear if the strength of this parliament is fully understood or appreciated. The United States must also accept that democracy is still democracy when politicians we do not like are elected—so long as these people also respect democratic institutions. We cannot fairly support democracy only in cases where the United States approves of the candidates

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who are elected. Parliaments support evolutionary change in most instances and the Kuwaiti model may prepare citizens for an ever expanding and deepening democratic outlook.

4. **Both the United States and Kuwait must continue to understand that the dominant threat to Kuwait is no longer a conventional Iraqi attack**. The United States must continue to work with Kuwait to meet evolving national security challenges with the understanding that subversion, terrorism, and huge refugee problems are becoming more important. Further complications in Iraq leading to an escalating civil war must not be allowed to spill over into Kuwait. Rather, Kuwait must be a force for helping the United States and the world deal with ongoing Iraqi political problems and humanitarian challenges.

5. **The United States cannot expect endless gratitude for the 1991 liberation to be the basis of policy towards Kuwait.** Gratitude, a highly perishable asset in most cases, is often easy to rationalize away. In this instance, Kuwaitis can plausibly maintain that the United States liberated their country in 1991 for its own geopolitical reasons and concerns about oil rather than because of any special concern about the Kuwaiti population. Kuwaitis should not be thought of as ungrateful when all they seek is to present their views to U.S. leaders or when they disagree with U.S. policies based on a reasonable perception of their own national interest. Clearly, more areas of agreement than disagreement exist between the United States and Kuwait on important issues now and in the foreseeable future.

6. **The United States needs to be aware that Kuwaiti-Iraqi differences will continue despite Saddam's removal from power. While Kuwait will hopefully never have another enemy such as Saddam**

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Hussein, its problems with Iraq could, under certain circumstances, reach extremely high levels. Kuwaitis need to be given strong signals that the United States is pro-Kuwait and not just anti-Saddam. This partnership is not simply a marriage of convenience based on controlling the predations of one dictator. Additionally, the United States must try to remain aware of any emerging Iraq-Kuwait differences and do whatever is possible to contain them before a flashpoint is reached.

7. **The United States needs to appreciate and understand that Kuwait's geographical position and Sunni-Shi'ite sectarian mix often compel it to seek normal relations with Tehran, while nevertheless not trusting the Iranians.** Iran, despite its worrisome foreign policy, remains an important neighbor, and the United States must not overreact to reasonable levels of Kuwaiti-Iranian cooperation. This tendency will probably remain strong while Iraq appears unstable, but may also be important if Iraq is eventually unified under a strong central government.

8. **The United States must continue to do all that it can to support Kuwaiti counterterrorism efforts.** This policy is important since terrorism in Kuwait may rise in response to continuing instability in Iraq. Any effort to strengthen Kuwait might involve major efforts at intelligence sharing about aspects of the internal Iraq situation. Kuwait's national security needs may change as the situation in Iraq evolves and may become particularly severe should the United States choose to withdraw substantial numbers of its forces. The United States, to the extent it can, needs to help Kuwait develop policies that target dangerous terrorists without alienating significant segments of the Kuwaiti population. The ideal response to pro-Iranian

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terrorism would be to confront such outrages without implying the Kuwait's entire Shi'ite population is under suspicion.

9. **The U.S. Government should continue to strongly support efforts by educational organizations to bring Kuwaiti students to the United States to study.** Kuwaiti students trained in the United States often seem more willing to embrace the concept of reform and are able to see past Iranian and other one-dimensional caricatures of Western values and U.S. foreign policy. Early, strong, and consistent efforts by the U.S. Embassy to support this goal have been vital, but the embassy cannot do this job alone. To the extent possible, efforts should be made to determine how homeland security requirements can be maximized while minimizing the perceptions that Kuwaitis and other Arabs are disliked and unwelcome in the United States. Both the United States and the region may pay a terrible price if Kuwaiti and other Arab students chose to stop coming to the United States in significant numbers.

10. **The U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of the Army should continue to seek out ways to improve military-to-military coordination with the Kuwaitis.** Such efforts would include policies to keep the Kuwaitis involved in joint and multilateral military exercises with the United States and other friendly nations. Continuing efforts to welcome Kuwaiti officers to the United States for military training and education are also important. A special effort should also be made to ensure that those U.S. offices most involved with Kuwaiti liaison duties remain fully staffed with top notch personnel.

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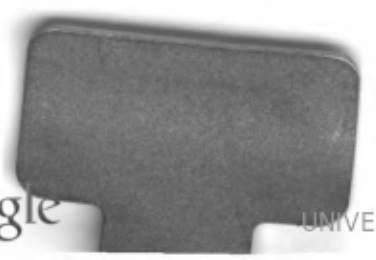

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September 2007

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