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THE STATE OF KUWAIT'S SECURITY POLICY

- FACING FUTURE CHALLENGES HEAD-ON -



By

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THE STATE OF KUWAIT'S SECURITY POLICY - FACING FUTURE CHALLENGES HEAD-ON -

Each state exists, in a sense, at the hub of a whole universe of threats. These threats define its insecurity, and set the agenda for national security as a policy problem. Countries can seek to reduce their insecurity either by reducing their vulnerability or lessening threats.

Barry Buzan¹



Introduction

The surrounding three countries, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia – that directly affect its security, dwarf the State of Kuwait. To the south and west is Saudi Arabia, a country covering 1,960,582 square kilometres (sq km) with a population of 24,293,844 million people. To the

¹ Barry Buzan, *Peoples States & Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Wheat Sheaf

west and north is Iraq, covering 437,072 sq km and with 24,683,313 million people. And finally, across the Arabian Gulf lies Iran, covering 1,648,000 sq km and with a population of 68,278,826 million people. All told, three countries with a combined population of some 117 million people literally surround Kuwait's 2 million people who occupy just 17,820 sq km of territory.²

There is little doubt that Kuwait is located in one of the most problematical regions of the world. In Iran, the former Shah was deposed in 1979 and in 1980 Iraq invaded Iran and the two countries fought a brutal and mostly indecisive war until 1988. Iraq, from 1958, was ruled by military strongmen, culminating most recently with Saddam Hussein who, in August 1990, seized Kuwait in a daring military strike. However, the result was his eventual defeat by a United States led coalition during the Gulf War in January 1991. From this date onward, a large American military presence remained in the region enforcing no-fly zones in Iraq.

More recently, Iraqi noncompliance with United Nations Security Council resolutions over a period of 12 years instigated another American led coalition to invade Iraq in March 2003 and oust the regime of Saddam Hussein. But this coalition victory did not put an end to the number of foreign troops in the region and today coalition forces remain in Iraq, helping to restore law, order and hopefully to bring about a new Iraqi government. While the situation in Saudi Arabia has been somewhat more stable in comparison to the present situation in Iraq and political upheaval in Iran, it too was affected greatly by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and faces its own concerns regarding the rise in Islamic extremism. In the end, all of these crises in the region have largely been about oil and since Kuwait has plenty of oil and access to the Gulf it has become a focal point for much of the trouble that impacts the region.

In 2004, with Saddam Hussein removed, what are the real threats and real issues that will affect Kuwait's security in the future? And more important, what is it that Kuwait should and must do to preserve its security as the 21st century unfolds? Answering these questions is not a simple matter and not something that can be regarded lightly. For example, although Iraq's invasion of Kuwait occurred some 14 years ago, it is not history for the people of Kuwait as the

Books Ltd, 1983), 88.

² CIA Factbook, Kuwait; available from <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/ku.html>; accessed 5 February 2004.

invasion shook the nation to its very foundation and the aftershocks have not entirely finished even today. A regime change in Iraq or even a more moderate government in Iran cannot and will not erase regional tension overnight.

Nonetheless, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the strategic challenges that will face Kuwait in the future and to offer a blueprint as to how Kuwait should posture its foreign security policy for the 21st century. In order to meet this paper's aim, Kuwait's recent history will be described as well as Kuwait's relationship with the United States and United Kingdom. Next, Kuwait's relationship with its regional partners and other Arab countries will be discussed followed by a review of the domestic Kuwaiti situation and the trends that will also impact on security in the future. I intend to argue that Kuwait's national security can best be assured through a balance of both regional relationship and multiple bilateral arrangements with the Permanent members of the United Nations (UN) of the Security Council. This dual approach will best assure the security of Kuwait, because it will not overly rely on any one partner. Finally, Kuwait's defence policy will be covered and then, most importantly, a blueprint will be offered as to what it actually is that Kuwait must consider and do in the future if it is to survive as a nation in the decades to come.

Understanding Kuwait's Recent History

Kuwait's modern history began in the early 18th century, when several clans from the Al Aniza tribe migrated to the northern shore of the Arabian Gulf from the Najd. Economic prosperity was based on fishing, pearling, and trade. Eventually, the Al Sabah emerged as the dominant clan, and it was formally established as ruler in 1756. By the late nineteenth century, fears of growing Ottoman influence led Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah or "Mubarak the Great" (r.1896-1915) to enter into an agreement with Great Britain, which effectively established Kuwait as an autonomous British protectorate. Under the 1899 agreement, Kuwait maintained control over its internal affairs, while Great Britain assumed responsibility for the country's security and foreign relations.

Oil was first discovered in Kuwait in 1938, but the development of the industry was interrupted by World War II. By 1945, drilling had resumed on a large scale, and the commercial export of crude oil began in June 1946. Oil production and revenues then grew

rapidly, fueling a dramatic expansion of the entire economy. Thus, when Kuwait gained full independence from Britain on 19 June 1961, Iraq initially threatened to annex its neighbor, falsely alleging that Kuwait had once been part of Iraq. Such military threats resulted in the deployment of British troops, which were soon replaced by an Arab League force, and the crisis subsided.

In August 1990, Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait and formally annexed the entire country, but a coalition led by the United States later restored Kuwait's sovereignty. The boundary was then demarcated in 1992, but it took until November 1994, for Iraq to recognize its border with Kuwait, as well as Kuwait's sovereignty and political independence.

Kuwait's security and super power interests

Since independence in June 1961, Kuwait's foreign relations have been dominated by three concerns: relations with its northern neighbour; security within the Gulf region; and access to its major oil markets in the Far East and Europe. However, of these three concerns, the one that has had the most serious impact on Kuwait has been the relationship with Iraq. In particular, the ability of Kuwait, its neighbours, and the West to deal with Iraqi intimidation or invasion largely determines the security of the upper Gulf and the containment of Iraq's political and military ambitions.³ In response to these issues, Kuwaiti decision makers have clearly identified their foreign policy objectives as follows:

- Maintaining state security.
- Ensuring the continuity and stability of the ruling family.
- Reinforcing relationships with Islamic and Arab nations.
- Maintaining strong economic ties world wide in order to increase support for Kuwait's long-term security.⁴

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the summer of 1990 was not just an accident or a separate policy towards its neighbour, but a natural result of a number of events and

³ Anthony H Cordesman, *Kuwait Recovery and Security After the Gulf War*, (Westview Press, 1997), 1.

⁴ A.K. Pasha, *Kuwait: Strategies of Survival*, (Har-anand Publications, 1995), 154.

complicated circumstances that were closely connected. The major Iraqi mistake on this occasion was the timing of the operation, which was not acceptable within a new international order. The former Iraqi government failed to understand this and clearly were surprised by the resulting reaction of the world.⁵

Today, circumstances in the region have forced Kuwait to adopt actions and policies that could be regarded as a deviation from its past - a past where Kuwait generally supported Arab economic and political affairs above all else. Indeed, and despite re-armament and reliance on the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) military support provisions,⁶ the Kuwaiti government now relies for more on external assistance to meet its security needs. And as the government is particularly concerned with a resurgent Iraq it now relies considerably on the US and UK.⁷

Kuwait needs the assistance of the US, and other members of the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, as they are the main guarantee for Kuwait's external security against any major threat until the year 2010. Kuwait recognised this fact when it signed a defence treaty with the US for a period of 10 years on 19 September 1991, and with the UK, France, Russia and China also in the 1990s.⁸ The agreement with the US allows America to preposition stocks and equipment on Kuwaiti territory and to deploy a squadron of combat aircraft in Kuwait, whilst giving the US access to its ports and airfields in an emergency.⁹ The agreement also includes the requirement to hold joint military exercises with Kuwaiti forces.¹⁰

The agreement with the UK provides for the presence of British troops in Kuwait, but for now the UK government has decided that a permanent British presence in Kuwait is unnecessary and may only provoke a hostile reaction from Iran. Kuwait and the UK also signed a memorandum of understanding for defence procurement in February 1993. This resulted in Kuwait buying armoured fighting vehicles and naval mine countermeasures vessels, and a

⁵ Sentinel - Gulf States, Janes, October 2001-March 2002, 232.

⁶ The GCC is comprised of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates.

⁷ Sentinel, 232.

⁸ Pasha, 221.

⁹ These agreements would likely be renewed after 2010 depending on the situation.

¹⁰ Sentinel, 232.

British military team was instrumental in drawing up the plans for the reorganisation of Kuwait's armed forces in the aftermath of the liberation.

The defence agreement with France, which is for 10 years, guarantees the direct defence of Kuwait by France without any prior consultation, in the event that Kuwait is subjected to an external threat. It also establishes military co-operation between the French and the Kuwaiti forces.¹¹ In addition, Kuwait has signed contracts with Russia and China to purchase weapons systems.¹² And the Kuwaiti government has tried in the past to discourage Russian support for Iraq at the UN by offering civil and military contracts to Russian companies. This may change with the current situation.

For a number of reasons, the policies noted above have been sharply attacked by the press in some Arab countries as irrational, unwise, suicidal and fraught with dangerous implications for the very existence of Kuwait.¹³ On one hand, any offensive action from either Iraq or Iran will be quick and the reaction from the US and the West will be slow because of the distance involved. On the other hand, defence treaties with different countries may pressure Kuwait into possibly unwise weapons and defence equipment procurement policies. Also, it is unclear how long Washington and London will maintain such a significant military presence and commitment in the defence of Kuwait and the wider Arab Gulf states, especially if Iran's pariah status diminishes. Similarly Iraq will not be isolated forever and alternative sources of oil, and perhaps energy, may affect the geo-strategic priorities of the great powers.

Undoubtedly, the Iraqi invasion compelled Kuwait to align with the West much more closely than it wished, and this policy has neutralised the Iraqi threat in the immediate and near future. However, the crisis went beyond American interests to impact on every region, from the European Community's attempt to turn itself into a substantial force in global political affairs as it is in economic affairs, to Eastern Europe's program of post-communist reconstruction, to Japan's sense of its international obligations, to China's attempt to integrate itself back into the

¹¹ Pasha, 161.

¹² Most recently, China has become involved heavily in the region by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar deep water port project, to build the most strategic port in the region, which the Chinese will provide US \$ 198 million and the government of Pakistan will provide US \$ 50 million (see: www.pakboi.gov.pk/html/Gawadar.html).

¹³ Pasha, 171

international community, to North Africa's political and economic neuroses, as well as the whole gamut of Middle Eastern disputes.¹⁴

It is therefore vital for Kuwait to consider other choices that can assist with security. The former US Secretary of State James Baker in testimony to the Senate said: "we will need to work together with governments in the Gulf and outside it to build a more durable order. We will want to ensure that our friends in the area have the means to deter aggression and defend themselves making it less necessary to send American men and women to help them."¹⁵ Moreover, as Paul Wolfowitz (professor of National Strategy at the National War College and current US Deputy Secretary of Defence) wrote: "we would like the states of the region to be able to defend themselves better than they could last August, but if they need our help again, we would like to be able to get back faster than we did."¹⁶

Kuwait's security and regional co-operation

On the surface, the GCC appears to be a 'natural' association. Upon its formation in 1981, the GCC formally bound together six monarchies that were on good terms, were socially analogous, were proceeding along similar lines in their economic development, and were equally unable to defend themselves. However, it soon became clear that, despite the quick profusion of fraternal agreements and joint organization, the member states disagreed fundamentally over the desired degree of co-ordination over security (both internal and external). This was, above all, the one paramount concern that worried five of the six states and caused them to hold back from closer integration. Kuwait long resisted acceding to the network of bilateral internal security agreements (providing for hot pursuit of suspects, among other things). In addition, the GCC Peninsula Shield force at Hafar Al-Batin never had more than symbolic contributions from the small five. In addition, at the bottom of it all lies the inescapable fact that all six GCC states combined can present only the slimmest deterrence to major aggression.¹⁷ Relations with Saudi Arabia remain good though, with ever closer defence

¹⁴ Lawrence Freedman & Efraim Kars, *The Gulf Conflict*, (Lawrence Freedman & Efraim Kar 1993), xlv .

¹⁵ Pasha, 154.

¹⁶ Ibid, 154.

¹⁷ The Peninsula Shield, created in 1986, is headquartered in Hafr Al-Baten, Saudi Arabia, and equipped with advanced weaponry. Meanwhile, its military forces have been expanded from the original 5,000 soldiers to the

co-operation resulting from the events of 1990-91. Border and resource disputes currently appear to have been settled or are being held in abeyance, however, Kuwait's Parliament continue to debate whether or not to sign an accord on internal security as requested by the Saudis.¹⁸

Certainly, the Kuwaiti government was deeply concerned that its membership in the GCC did not deter Iraq from invading in 1990. There was also considerable disappointment in Kuwait that no GCC member rendered immediate assistance when Iraqi forces crossed the border. As a result, there is little confidence that GCC nations can be trusted to provide a response or deterrence in the future.¹⁹ The idea of joint manoeuvres or even joint defence forces has been broached on a number of occasions, but because the views of the various states were so diverse, no one wanted to discuss something so controversial.²⁰

It may appear that Kuwait's bilateral defence agreements indicate a lack of confidence in the GCC states ability to safeguard its security, but Kuwaiti officials contend that these accords and any united force that the GCC may establish complement each other.²¹ Kuwait's bitter experience with "Peninsula Shield" and the lurking Iraqi threat coupled with the enormous loss of life and damage to property have compelled Kuwait to follow this two-track approach i.e., support for a GCC joint force and close links with the West. As Sheikh Saud Nasir, the former Kuwaiti Information Minister, said: "The Peninsula Shield forces have a permanent presence in Kuwait and they constantly hold joint exercises with Kuwaiti forces, a matter that does not need to be advertised."²²

current 22,000. According to the joint defense pacts signed by the six GCC member states, they are committed to defending any member state against external threat or danger.

¹⁸ Sentinel, 233.

¹⁹ The one taboo subject at the founding of the GCC at the Abu Dhabi summit in 1981 was "mutual defence".

²⁰ Dr. Michael Collins, "Can the Gulf Secure Itself?" Defense Foreign Affairs, July 1985, 9.

²¹ Pasha, 161

²² Ibid, 161.

The situation in Iraq

The current lack of security and political stability in Iraq makes the Kuwaiti government extremely cautious vis-à-vis its once powerful northern neighbor. The situation will likely remain unstable for a long period of time, because of the lack of control and the ever present sectarianism, which often fuels internal conflict. To explain, Iraq has three zones: Kurds in the north, Sunni Arabs in the center, and Shiites in the south. Oil is located in the north and in the south, but not in the center. Meanwhile, the Sunni Arabs have dominated every Iraqi government since the creation of the modern state, to the unhappiness of both the Kurds and the Shiites. Demographically, however, the Shiites are about 60% of the total population²³, and free, unfettered elections would undoubtedly result in a government heavily dominated by them, which the Sunni Arabs and even the Kurds would not appreciate. Further, from a Kuwaiti and the GCC view, it would likely also not be a good idea to have a Shiite Iraqi state neighboring Iran and supporting Syria and the Hizballah in Lebanon.²⁴

Kuwait will have to accept the status quo as the partition of Iraq for the sake of stability would be counter productive. Sunni Arabs would be violently opposed, since they would lose everything. And the Shiites would probably be opposed as well. Why should they settle for a Shiite state when they could dominate all Iraq? Nor would dividing up Iraq be all that easy. In the Kurdish north, there are significant minorities of Sunni Arabs and Turcomans. The Sunni Arabs would fight to have Kirkuk, the oil center, and a city in which many of them live, placed in the Sunni Arab state. And the Turcomans would welcome a Turkish invasion, which the Turkish government would seriously consider. The center of Iraq also has a significant Shiite and Kurdish minority. A Shiite state in the south (the most homogeneous of the three) would find it harder to keep its distance from Iran, which it could more easily do if Iraq were a unified state.²⁵

²³ According to the official Iraqi census taken by previous governments, if you add the Sunni Kurds and Turcomans together with the general Sunni population it equals 60% of Iraqi population. Shiites are not more than 40%.

²⁴ Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Future of Iraq" Commentary No. 126, Dec. 1, 2003 (Fernand Braudel Center, Binghamton University); available from <http://fbc.binghamton.edu/126en.htm>; accessed 20 February 2004.

²⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Future of Iraq" Commentary No. 126, Dec. 1, 2003 (Fernand Braudel Center, Binghamton University); available from <http://fbc.binghamton.edu/126en.htm>; accessed 20 February 2004.

In short, were the US to proceed with trying to chop up Iraq, there could be significant Iraqi-Iraqi violence to add to the guerrilla war against it that already exists. No one can be sure about the situation in Iraq at this time, but we all know there will be elections (more likely in 2005), which will probably put into power a regime that will call for a US withdrawal without expressing total hostility. With good fortune, the new Iraqi regime could gain enough legitimacy and enough force to put the guerrillas down while hopefully avoiding a resurgence of the Baathist party forces.²⁶ With good fortune a stable Iraq might also cease being a threat to Kuwait – but this is a question that cannot be answered for the foreseeable future.

Kuwait also faces potential hostility from Iraq over the alignment of their common border, and more fundamentally, the Iraqi claim to the state of Kuwait, despite Baghdad's formal acceptance of the UN imposed boundary settlement. Further problems are likely to arise because of Kuwaiti control of maritime access to the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr, part of which was also handed over to Kuwait under the UN border settlement. When recently, Modher Shawkat, deputy president of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) asked Kuwait to lease the islands of Bubyah and Wurba off the Iraqi coast to broaden Iraq's narrow sea outlet, he was simply following the same steps of Saddam Hussein in 1980.²⁷ Thus, even with a new regime, tensions are likely to continue over these issues.

In summary, once Iraq re-emerges as an independent regional power, it will not be resigned to the loss of part of its South Rumaila oil field to Kuwait, and tensions will continue no matter what political change occurs in Iraq. However, and for the moment, with the direct threat posed by Saddam Hussein removed, Kuwait and Iraq have begun to re-establish the strong Cultural and commercial relations that had existed previously. Kuwait also established a high-level task force in mid-2003, headed by Foreign Minister Sheikh Muhammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, to develop better relations with Iraq, particularly on the economic front.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid, 2.

²⁷ Hussain Hindawi, "Shaky start for new Kuwaiti-Iraqi ties," *United Press International*, January 15, 2004, 1-2.

²⁸ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, "The Gulf States, Kuwait" available from http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/sentinel/GULFS_doc_view.jsp?Sent_Country=Kuwait&Prod_Name=GULFS&K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/gulfsu/kuwts010.htm@current#section1; Internet; accessed 5 March 2004.

Kuwait and its relationship with Iran

The most difficult relationship for the Kuwaiti government exists with Iran despite its claims that it is to improve relations. For example, fear of Iran somehow inspiring Shiite unrest within the state of Kuwait has resulted in the Kuwaiti government being extremely cautious when dealing with Tehran, despite the election of the reformer Muhammad Khatami in 1997. Officially, Kuwait regards Iran as a 'friendly threat'. In spite of this view Kuwait's merchants are keen to maintain trading links. The much-publicised US\$10 billion Iranian rearmament program particularly concerns Kuwait, even though the actual scale of the re-equipping of the Iranian armed forces is far lower than initial projections. Also, Kuwaiti authorities continue to be on their guard for Iranian-inspired terrorism, as well as their attempts to build up their own intelligence networks.²⁹

In dealing with Iran, Kuwait has chosen dialogue over containment, and has done so with some success. It encouraged Iran to export to Kuwait, and imported \$87 million worth of goods from Iran in 1994, versus exports of \$6.6 million to \$10 million. Kuwait has also taken measures to improve its relations with Iran by creating its first free-trade zone at Kuwait City's Shweikh port. Thus, in recent times Kuwait's relations with Iran, which have been problematic since the Iranian Revolution, have improved. For example, since the second half of 2000, the two states have made greater efforts to improve security arrangements and bilateral links by signing a Memorandum of Understanding on interdicting drug smuggling and exchanging visits of defence ministers in 2002. Kuwait has been encouraging direct talks between Tehran and Washington with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Muhammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah stating directly that he hoped the United States would exclude Iran from the 'Axis of Evil'.³⁰

While Iran and Kuwait will continue to develop their economic links, the latter's dependence on the US for its security will ensure that their relationship will not develop on the political and military levels. Meanwhile, the quarrel over the offshore Dorra gas field will

²⁹ Sentinel, 231,232.

³⁰ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, "The Gulf States, Kuwait" available from http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/sentinel/GULFS_doc_view.jsp?Sent_Country=Kuwait&Prod_Name=GULFS&K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/gulfsu/kuwts010.htm@current#section1;Internet; accessed 5 March 2004.

remain a point of dispute. Although Iran stopped its drilling in 2001, there has been no forward negotiations since then. In November 2003, Energy Minister Sheikh Ahmed Fahed Al-Sabah stated that if bilateral talks fail to produce an agreement, then Kuwait would consider referring the case to international arbitration. This was met with complete rejection by the Iranian side. The dispute has not hindered other issues from moving forward, however, with the two sides signing an agreement in January 2004 to begin work on a 540 km, US\$2 billion pipeline that will pump 200 million gallons of water a day from Iran to Kuwait. Nevertheless, Kuwait cannot ignore the risk that Iran poses, as it may become more threatening in the future. Kuwait may also find it difficult to fully exploit its offshore oil and gas resources as long as it is unable to reach a firm agreement with Iran or faces the threat of Iranian attacks on its offshore facilities.³¹

As for the future of Iran, Dr. Gerald Green (an Associate Professor from the University of Florida) writes, “Iran is not of a mind either to abandon the powerful ideology that provides the state its doctrinal foundation, or to abandon political activities that it regards as synonymous with these values. Indeed, Iran regards its political canvas as not being restricted solely to its immediate environs”. Green does not equate Iran’s ambitions to export the Islamic revolution with a will to dominate the Gulf region militarily, as some would argue, and adds that it does not have the resources to do so at any rate. Nonetheless, he concludes that Iran will not be content to play a minor role in regional affairs and thus one of the key elements to Gulf regional stability in the 21st century is to find a constructive regional role in which Iran can be an active partner.³²

Despite Iran’s efforts in recent years to appear more moderate in an attempt to end its political isolation and to attract much needed foreign capital, its primary long-term foreign policy goal of exporting the Iranian Islamic revolution, remains essentially unchanged.³³ Many Western military analysts believe that Iran is trying to attain a capability to control the Gulf region or, at the very least, to deny the Gulf to hostile forces.³⁴ True Gulf security can emerge only when Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the six member states of the GCC can come to

³¹ Ibid, 4.

³² David E. Long and Christian Koch, *Gulf Security in the Twenty - First Century*, (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1994), 2.

³³ Ibid, 2.

³⁴ Ibid, 198.

mutual agreement. That is, genuine security in the Gulf region cannot be achieved as long as any one of the three key regional players is in a position to exercise a veto and is willing to do so. True security necessitates a degree of collaboration and consensus that has never been achieved and that may be beyond the capabilities of the Gulf States in the foreseeable future.³⁵

Kuwait and its relationship with other Arab countries

The Middle East is very complex. It contains at least two dozen countries, no single core conflict or one dominant power. Instead, there are four, or possibly five, sub-complexes (The Gulf, the Arab-Israeli, the Horn, north-west Africa, and possibly one centred on Libya). These sub-complexes all have independent, locally generated security dynamics, but they are all tied together into a super-complex because of the links created by Arab and Islamic politics. Nearly all of the states within the super-complex involve themselves in the security affairs of other members, and this process often produces bizarre patterns of alignment.³⁶ However, it is vital to solve or even bypass such problems and broaden the thinking of Arab countries so that they will participate in a collective defence system as a beginning for a collective security system to stand against any external threats or internal challenges for any member state.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait certainly provoked a realignment of Arab alliances. Some of these shifts startled Western observers, conditioned to interpreting regimes ‘pro-Western’ or ‘anti-Western’ based on their underlying ‘moderate’ and ‘radical’ orientations.³⁷ All too often the distinction between policies of regimes and the attitudes of their people has been lost sight of. Arab government policies tend to be tactical, flexible, and often oriented (at least in the medium term) to pragmatic alliances. Whilst longer-term considerations, such as geopolitical factors, depend on neighbours for critical resources and ideological orientation, there is nothing to prevent the leadership of a state from abruptly launching a 180 degree policy shift. Such a policy shift occurred following the elation of many Arabs at the humbling of the Kuwaitis by Iraq. This elation stemmed from a number of long-standing complaints, perhaps the oldest of

³⁵ Jerrold D. Green, *Gulf Security and Regional Threats*, (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1994), 24.

³⁶ Buzan, 126.

³⁷ J.E. Peterson, “The future of Gulf security after the Kuwait War”, *RUSI & Brassey’s Defence Yearbook 1992*, 131-143.

these complaints stemmed from the idealist belief that the Gulf States oil was in fact an Arab bounty; therefore it should have been shared equally amongst Arabs everywhere from the beginning. At the very least, poorer Arabs felt that the rich Gulf states could and should have done more to spread the wealth around.

After the liberation in February 1991, Kuwait readjusted the priorities of its foreign policy concerning national security issues. Apart from the US and the West in general, Egypt and Syria became the most enthusiastic promoters of regional security and both agreed with the GCC states on 6 March 1991, through the “Damascus Declaration” to station their troops in GCC states with the objective of defending these territories.

In reply to a question (soon after the Declaration was issued) on whether the region’s security would be confined to Egypt and Syria or whether other Arab states would be participating in the security forces, the Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister (current Prime Minister) Skaikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Sabah said the role of Syria and Egypt was fundamental but that “security was not confined to Syria and Egypt.”³⁸ This statement clearly indicated Kuwait’s reservations over these two Arab countries, and it is now well known that from the very outset, Kuwaitis preferred to rely on an Anglo-US presence. Thus, it was not surprising when on 8 May 1991, Egypt announced that it was withdrawing its troops from Kuwait.³⁹ It seems that the “new Arab order”, was to be selective, rather than conciliatory.⁴⁰ However, the (Damascus Declaration) alliance is not a convincing defence mechanism, partly because of Iranian hostility towards it, but also due to reservations on the part of all the Arab partners. In addition, Kuwait’s relationship with its GCC partners can be problematic. Although Kuwait supports Saudi Arabian policy in the region, there is an unresolved dispute with Saudi Arabia over control of islands offshore of the Neutral Zone and the detailed delineation and demarcation of the land boundary between the two states has never been completed.⁴¹

Population growth, the labour market and Kuwait’s security

³⁸ Pasha. 158

³⁹ Ibid., 158.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 138.

⁴¹ Ibid, 242.

There is general recognition that the old system of guaranteed employment and social benefits for all Kuwaiti nationals is coming to an end. The system can no longer be supported in fiscal terms and the implications for Kuwait's ability to control the modern state are dire - certainly given Kuwait's alarming population growth rate - at 4.1 per cent, one of the highest in the world - the demand on the state for employment will soon be unsustainable. Unemployment in Kuwait is officially put at a figure of 0.65 per cent of the workforce. Independent consultants argue, however, that servants on the payroll performing no function may take that figure as high as 40 per cent. Officially, the civil service no longer recruits but Kuwaitis argue that they are guaranteed a job for life by the state.⁴²

Kuwait faces equally serious problems in terms of migration and dependence on a foreign work force and over 50 per cent of the population today consists of non-Kuwaitis.⁴³ The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates that Kuwait now has a population of about 1.8 million and a labour force of around 566,000, of which up to 70% may be foreign.⁴⁴ Regardless of any uncertainties over numbers, several things are clear. Kuwait's foreign labour comes from countries that do not present a military threat to the state. Kuwait also has taken steps to prevent such workers from becoming a new class of semi-permanent residents and to reduce related state subsidies.⁴⁵ However, the foreign labour effect is contained in three dimensions; security, economic and social dimension.

The former Secretary General of the GCC in 1982 Mr. Abdullah Besharah, said "There is a danger in the migration of foreigners to Gulf states. In ten or twenty years, these communities will give birth to new generations who will have a say, with the Gulf Arabs, in their political decisions that will not help Gulf or Arab interests."⁴⁶ Sixteen years later his successor highlighted, that "foreign labour carries problems with dangerous dimensions in social by encouraging citizens to be idle, economic by draining national wealth and political by violence and strikes. It may well worsen in the future if it keeps increasing it will be quite difficult to

⁴² Sentinel, 234.

⁴³ Cordesman, 61.

⁴⁴ Harry Brown, "Population Issues in the Middle East and North Africa" Middle East Economic Digest, Feb 23, 1996, 11., and RUSI Journal, February, 1995, 32-43.

⁴⁵ Cordesman, 62.

⁴⁶ Ashraf Kishk, "Foreign Labour in Gulf States and its Effects," Gulf Report, December 1998, 18.

handle”⁴⁷. This, plans are being formulated to transform both the economy and society to curb these trends, that include providing better educational facilities and simulating a Kuwaiti employment move towards the private sector and away from dependence on the state, while encouraging all employers to “Kuwaitize” their work force.⁴⁸

Economics and the need for structural reform

The economy dominated the July 1999 parliamentary election campaign, noticeably surpassing national security, which was the major domestic concern of the 1992 elections. Kuwait’s stock exchange, one of the largest in Arab world, demonstrated its volatility amid the political uncertainties and opposition parliamentary candidates also accused the government of using the economy to buy influence in the election. Clearly, Kuwait’s economy did recover well from the devastating effects of the Iraqi invasion and its oil industry, the driver of the economy, has been expanding production and marketing activities. As a result, Kuwait’s budget for fiscal year beginning April 2003 was US\$11 billion, with revenues expected to total US\$17 billion, including US\$16 billion from oil revenues. In the long term, economic recovery depends on a period of political stability, effective military alliances and the full recovery of the oil industry. However, the state has to reduce its role in the economy and is encouraging the private sector to take up the strain. There have been attempts to privatise the economy, where the state has a particularly powerful presence in the financial sector.⁴⁹

Per capita oil and investment wealth are relative even in a nation with as many oil reserves as Kuwait; the state needs the kind of structural economic reform that will allow privatisation to create new jobs and industries to reduce its dependence on foreign labour.⁵⁰ It needs to offer real career opportunities to both its current citizens and its many foreign workers. Kuwait also needs to face the reality that population growth is likely to reduce per capita oil wealth even if oil prices remain at current or higher levels and production increases. At the same

⁴⁷ Ibid, 18.

⁴⁸ Sentinel, 233.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 235.

⁵⁰ CIA, World Factbook, 2003, ‘Kuwait’, World Bank, “A Population Perspective on Development” The Middle East and Africa, August, 2003, 24.

time, Kuwait's economic, social and political reforms must take account of strategic realities. No other country in the Gulf has a clearer need for a strong defence and close security ties to its Southern Gulf neighbours and the West.⁵¹

Kuwait's economic vulnerabilities are not unique, but the same geography that has blessed Kuwait with oil has cursed it with neighbours like Iran and Iraq. Kuwait's oil facilities and urban areas will remain vulnerable to air, missile, armoured and sea borne attack. Kuwait will always be dependent on imports for virtually all of its food. It has no arable land other than a small patch of irrigated land, and only 8% of its territory can be used for light grazing.⁵²

Kuwait's ports will remain within the range of Iranian and Iraqi anti-ship missiles, and it will have to draw its water from easily targetable desalination plants. Kuwait has only about 0.01 cubic kilometres of internal renewable water resources. This only amounts to about 10 cubic meters per person, one of the lowest levels of any nation in the world, consequently Kuwait at least 75% of its potable water must imported.⁵³

Kuwait has long been uniquely active in investing abroad through the Kuwait Investment Office (KIO). Before the Iraqi invasion the book value of the KIO's portfolio was estimated at US\$100 billion. The costs of the war and reconstruction have probably reduced this amount to less than US\$35 billion. Further losses or devaluating were revealed in 1993 when it emerged that KIO's Spanish arm had lost some US\$5,000 million through fraud and poor investments.⁵⁴

Kuwait's defence policy

Despite recent events in Iraq leading to the removal of the Ba'athist regime, the major security threat to Kuwait continues to be Iraq, Kuwaiti defence strategy is based on a 48 to 72

⁵¹ Cordesman, 54.

⁵² Ibid, 58.

⁵³ CIA, World Factbook, 154.

⁵⁴ Sentinel, 235.

hour holding operation before its defensive alliances come into play. However, even though Kuwait relies upon its security links with the West and also the GCC to safeguard its sovereignty, the Defence Minister has noted that the ultimate responsibility lies with Kuwait's security forces. The Kuwaiti Chief of Staff, General Fahad Al Amir reinforced this view, when he said that, "the final burden to protect Kuwait's security lies with the Kuwaitis."⁵⁵

Today, the Kuwaiti armed forces consist of 16,200 personnel, which is a significant decline from the pre-Iraqi invasion period when the military included 20,000 members. The Kuwaiti Navy consists of some 2000 men (including the Coast Guard) but has limited readiness, low prestige and competes for resources with the Coast Guard.⁵⁶ This rivalry must be eliminated if Kuwait is to concentrate its limited resources in a way that maximizes the effectiveness of Naval units. In short, Kuwait is likely to remain dependent on the US and British Navies for anything other than very low level contingencies. This situation will be compounded by the fact that both Iran and Iraq (in the future) can attack virtually any maritime targets in Kuwaiti waters with their long-range, land-based antiship missiles, and the fact that the Iranian Navy and Naval Branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards corps can attack quickly and with little warning. Thus, Kuwait has vulnerabilities at sea similar to those on its land borders. The Kuwaiti Air Force now consists of about 2,500 men, with 68 combat aircraft and 16 armed helicopters. Its two main bases north of Kuwait City suffered serious damage during the Gulf War, but are now fully operational again. Meanwhile, the Army numbers between 10,000 and 11,000 personnel divided into one mechanized brigade, three armoured brigades, one artillery brigade and a reserve brigade.

In addition to the armed forces, Kuwait also has police and a National Guard. The Kuwaiti Police is a national organization that has a complement of about 4,000, the majority being assigned to Kuwait City. It is a semi-military organization, armed with light weapons capable of dealing with violent disorder as well as performing normal police functions. The police are directly responsible to the Emir through the minister of the interior. The National Police is also deployed for public order enforcement and a special unit has been assigned to search for Iraqi arms caches in Kuwait. As well, police units are based in all major urban

⁵⁵ Pasha, 162.

⁵⁶ Military balance 2003-2004, Middle East and North Africa, 114.

centers.⁵⁷ The National Guard is composed of about 5,000 volunteers organized into four battalions. The Civil Defence force was formed before the 1990 invasion to cope with a threat from Iranian bombing. Today, it number, about 2,000 Kuwaiti citizens.⁵⁸

In terms of military doctrine, Kuwaiti strategy (as laid down, as noted above, by the Defence Review Group (DRG) in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War) has been to focus on withstanding an attack from a superior military force for a period of 48 to 72 hours until assistance from allied powers arrives. Under this doctrine, Kuwait aims to deploy a highly mobile defensive force comprising aircraft, tanks, artillery and support units and has established a 10 year development plan to equip and train its armed forces to fulfill this defensive role.⁵⁹

Despite Kuwait's recent heavy defence expenditure it is likely that the armed forces can at best provide only a force that could delay an external invasion for a maximum of 48 hours that is without the continued reliance on defence agreements with the US, UK and France, Kuwait cannot ensure its own national defence. An attempt has been made to improve defences along the border with Iraq from where the major threat is perceived to come, by constructing a booby trapped ditch along the frontier, supported by a concurrent attempt to improve intelligence on future Iraqi intentions.⁶⁰

Table I - Regional Military Forces.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Pasha, 260

⁵⁸ Ibid, 260.

⁵⁹ Sentinel, 260.

⁶⁰ Sentinel, 233.

⁶¹ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, "The Gulf States, Kuwait" available from http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/sentinel/GULFS_doc_view.jsp?Sent_Country=Kuwait&Prod_Name=GULFS&K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/gulfsu/kuwts010.htm@current#section1.

Country	Armed Forces Strength	Armored Vehicles	Combat Aircraft	Combat Vessels	Defence Expenditures (US\$ million)
Bahrain	11,260	336	78	7	371
Iran	393,000	2,760	344	29	7,500
Iraq	40,000 ⁽¹⁾	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kuwait	16,200	778	68	10	5,100
Oman	39,800	337	47	6	2,600
Qatar	11,800	292	17	7	1,300
Saudi Arabia	124,500	3,895	368	17	24,700
UAE	65,500	1,683	122	12	3,100
Yemen	66,700	1,289	86	5	542
Note 1 - The US plans to establish a 40,000-strong New Iraqi Army by 2004.					

Kuwait must continue to do every thing it can to strengthen its forces if it is to develop its collective security capabilities, maintain its sovereignty, reinforce its deterrence of external threats, and deal with any low-level threats and incursions. Kuwait cannot overcome the basic strategic reality that it is small, immensely wealthy country that is surrounded by unpredictable neighbours. Kuwait's total territory is only about 17,800 sq km, or roughly the size of New Jersey, but Kuwait has a 240 km of border with Iraq and 222 km with Saudi Arabia. These borders present major problems for Kuwait in preventing infiltration and raids.⁶²

Kuwait has set a goal of creating four active, fully manned brigades, but a number of experts believe this to be impossible. They believe that Kuwait can only create two fully manned and well-equipped armoured brigades with two additional brigades, which mix regular manning with a rapidly mobile reserve. They also assert that such a force would be large enough to help deter any sudden external insurgence and to delay external forces long enough for US air and land forces to build up sufficient forces to halt a major external attack.⁶³

⁶² Cordesman. 70

⁶³ Ibid, 97.

Kuwait has taken the deliberate strategic step of allying itself with all five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, in an attempt to ensure its sovereignty. This means that it will adopt the doctrines of these nations, modified for local conditions. It has sought to balance this somewhat conflicting policy by buying arms from all five, including China. Kuwaiti tactical doctrine appears to be moving away from the concept of defending the whole of the country during an invasion, to that of the defence of a number of key areas, whilst waiting for assistance from its allies.⁶⁴

Kuwait's security blueprint for the 21st century

Today, Kuwait faces many challenges - the challenges of self-defence, regional co-operation, relations with the US, the West and the challenge of internal reforms. The most important of these is its determination to modernise its defence capabilities, and to strengthen strategic relationships with other countries, especially relations with the GCC and Arab countries. In addition, Kuwait has to continue with political, social and economic reforms. Reforms that are essential if Kuwait is to reach the level of self-defence capability that it wants to achieve.

To begin with, Kuwait must continue its diplomatic efforts to find legal settlements for the problematic issues with Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia and encourage political attempts to achieve a sort of collective security system regionally within the GCC or in conjunction with the Arab League. Kuwait must also maintain its strong economic, political and military relations with super powers and support the Arab - Israeli peace process, and democracy in Iraq and Iran.

It is a fact that Kuwait will still require the assistance of the US and its Western allies to provide the main guarantee for its security against any major threats. However, this is not a final solution for a number of reasons. On the one hand, any offensive action from an external threat will be rapid, whereas the reaction from the US and its allies will likely be slow because of the distances involved. It is unwise therefore, to depend solely on the assistance of the US. On the other hand, these defence treaties may force Kuwait to adapt its dependency and purchase equipment from other countries, thus it is vital for Kuwait to have other options that could assist

⁶⁴ Sentinel, 260.

with external security. Three major steps must therefore be taken. Self-defence, collective security with GCC countries and co-operation with other Arab countries.

GCC countries have in many circumstances established a number of excellent objectives for common security, which have helped in deterring threats towards its members. However, they have failed to physically achieve what was promised in the GCC constitution. They certainly have the equipment to achieve much, but currently lack the determination to act. GCC countries, must strengthen the fighting capability of the Peninsula Shield forces and make them capable of standing against any major external threat by ensuring a high level of mobility, and the most modern equipment. These forces must also be able to co-operate with major allied forces, and be capable of conducting joint operations. Thus, GCC countries need to take the following steps in priority, if they are to be capable of defending one of their member states:

- All GCC border disputes must be resolved.
- The Peninsula Shield force must be truly multi – national and rapidly deployable (even if national contingents remain based in their countries of origin).
- Defence budget needs to be spent more wisely.
- A joint weapons and defence equipment procurement program must be established.
- A joint planning training doctrine and C4I system must be implemented.
- A joint air defence and air attack system must be implemented.
- A joint maritime operation system must be established.
- A joint combat and combat services support plan must be agreed to.

Co-operating and strengthening relationships with Arab countries is also a major activity that could assist in improving the security of Kuwait. In spite of the Charter of the Arab League, which confirms and supports the principle of non-intervention in the settlement of disputes between member states, the Charter is almost devoid of any direction related to the settlement of such disputes. However, the organisation usually takes the initiative and tries to mediate in the settlement of some disputes. Written direction or recommendations would be also useful. It is also vital to establish the Arab Court of Justice to help assist in some way to solve some of the problems between the member states.

For many reasons Arab countries should provide for their own security. For example, the US has an increasing number of truly global interests to consider so Arab countries cannot and should not rely upon the US to share the same security goals and to prioritise limited resources to their favour. Furthermore any Arab nation that remains allied to the US because of its own weakness is probably in an unsustainable position politically. In addition, Arab nations, in this new global environment, cannot risk becoming slaves to a 'virtual' US veto on their foreign policy.

The most important political requirement for Kuwait is to reinforce the national political feeling among the Kuwaiti people to foster public support for the self-defence of their country and the belief that no one will defend Kuwait except its own people. It is possible that Kuwait may face challenges to this national security , if all their community is determined to do is to defend themselves individually.

In fact no country can secure itself and achieve its strategic objectives without the support of its own people. To this end Kuwait must introduce more opportunities for the Kuwaiti people to participate in decision-making issues, reduce its dependency on foreign labour, create more opportunity for Kuwaitis to work in the private sector and privatise most of its governmental economy facilities. Kuwait reconstruction and industrial reforms should include efforts to:

- Protect human rights and assets to achieve the growth of democratic values.
- Encourage steps to control the spread of terrorism.
- Reduce the number of foreign labourers by levying additional costs on them or their employers, which will potentially limit their numbers.
- Reform social changes for Kuwaitis to accept the fact that the government is not responsible for providing jobs and to direct Kuwaitis to work in the private sector.
- Change the educational policy towards the occupational and manual jobs.
- Create more opportunities for foreign investment.
- Create other than oil based industries and commerce.
- Reduce government subsidies for consumer products.

Kuwait is determined to achieve a high self-defence capability by renewing its defence facilities and gaining new self-confidence. It will, however, still face major challenges that must be addressed. Firstly, Kuwait must renew its C4I in order to ensure a rapid reaction capability to counter any immediate threat. Secondly, it must improve the standard of leadership skills by ensuring that the professional national cadres are capable of dealing with conflicts across the spectrum. It is also important that the leadership is loyal to their military commanders, and well trained, flexible when dealing with fast moving situations and professional in working with and co-ordinating major forces. Thirdly, Kuwait must not let politics drive its weapons and defence equipment procurement program, in order to ensure that all equipment is compatible and can support defence rather than political needs.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to discuss the strategic challenges that will face Kuwait in the near future and to offer a blueprint as to how Kuwait should posture its foreign security policy for the 21st century. Arriving at a workable blueprint though is no easy matter, for the Kuwaiti government is faced with numerous domestic and foreign policy issues to overcome – issues that would likely overwhelm any country especially one such as Kuwait with its small population when compared to its much larger neighbours.

Since 1961, Kuwait's foreign relations have been dominated by its dealings with Iraq, the generally poor security situation in the Gulf region, and its desire to maintain the supply of oil for its major markets in the Far East and Europe – this latter concern often influenced by the actions of Iran who has in the past attacked Kuwaiti oil tankers. In response to these issues, the Kuwaiti government has focused on maintaining security by having a robust (for the region) military force, while ensuring the ruling family is fully supported. In addition, better relations have been fostered with both Arab and non-Arab countries and Kuwait has improved economic ties with all the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council. Relations with the US and the UK have also been close – a point often noted in the Arab press as being detrimental to security in the Gulf. However, as I have shown, relations with the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council are the best mean to insure that UN Security Council will respond appropriately to the threat to Kuwait National Security.

Certainly, it should be clear by now that Kuwait faces numerous security challenges. The Iraqi political situation remains unpredictable, the Iranian political situation remains unpredictable, the GCC states are far from committing themselves to a fully functioning Peninsula Shield force, and relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are cordial but not close. Thus, and given this situation, Kuwait has few choices in how it postures its foreign policy for the 21st century - but there are several key points it should examine as follows:

- All border demarcation problems within the GCC countries should be resolved as a priority and hopefully on an amicable basis.
- The development of a fully operational, combat capable Peninsula Shield force must then be a second priority for all the GCC countries.
- The government must encourage democratic values in Kuwait.
- The government must keep up steps to control the spread of terrorism.
- The government must develop the economy and ensure more Kuwaiti's enter the work force.

Finally, and most importantly, the Kuwaiti government must convince the Kuwaiti people that Kuwait itself is worth defending. It is fine to have defence treaties with many different nations but it is always unclear as to how long Washington and London will maintain a significant military presence in the region. The point is, that no one in the end can really be counted upon to defend Kuwait except its own people. This is true for every country in the world, but perhaps more so for the Kuwaiti government and people, who are surrounded by tremendous instability in the region – instability that will likely continue for decades to come.

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