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## KUWAIT MILITARY CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL SECURITY AND STABILISATION

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**JCSP 40**

***Exercise Solo Flight***

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Kuwait as compared to its immediate neighbor is very small geographically. It is 17,820 square kilometers. Since it's surrounded by the three biggest nations in the gulf which are not in good terms with each other, its geographical location makes it strategically vulnerable to its neighbors but surprisingly if we look at its recent history; it has been a fairly peaceful country.<sup>1</sup> Kuwait shares long borders with heavy weight countries like the Saudi Arabia, Iraq and a small part of Iran. Its location makes an easy target for its neighbors and it is well within its missile and artillery range of its neighbors. It is a very wealthy nation. The fact handicapped when it comes to transporting and exporting its oil to other countries because there is just one route through which it could export oil and that route goes through the borders of all the gulf nations.

Kuwait shares a kind of love hate relation with its neighbors Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. The best ties among the three are with Saudi Arabia. There has been history of these nations starting on the wrong foot but that is long forgotten and today Kuwait shares a peaceful relationship with Saudi Arabia. The only skirmish that had ever happened between the two nations was when Saudi Arabia almost invaded Kuwait during the reign of Ibn Saud but that was halted by Britain's invasion. Ever since both the nations share a peaceful relationship and they also have a neutral zone which is shared by both the nations along their borders.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maria O'Shea and Michael Spilling, "Cultures of the world, Kuwait", Marshall Cavendish, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, "The Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric War", (Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA: Washington DC, 2006)

The relationship with Iran is a bit sour because during the time when the Iran-Iraq war was at its peak, Kuwait sided with Iraq and that soured the relationship between Kuwait and Iran during those times Kuwait was being threatened by Iran. Ever since there have been many terrorist attacks by Iranian terrorist groups in Kuwait and also frequent invasions into the airspace of Kuwait by the Iranian air forces. The tensions heightened to such a level that Kuwaiti ships were flagged with American flags in order to avoid the attacks by the Iranian forces.<sup>3</sup> Then on the other side there was Iraq that invaded Kuwait right after it got independence from Britain and required the British forces to be there so that it does not get captured by Iraq. Around 1990s when Saddam Hussein was at the helm of affairs in Iraq, he invaded Kuwait and did not make it free until the UN intervened in 1991. After that Iraq started to recognize the sovereignty of Kuwait as an independent nation. Though disputes related to sharing of oil fields remained but overall the relations were quite amiable.<sup>4</sup> After being in the receiving end of all its neighbours and finally rising up to the occasion to protect its sovereignty and freedom, Kuwait started building its armed forces and started spending huge amount of money on it. Immediately after the Gulf War ended Kuwait made a proposal that it would engage in a plan spending 12 Billion USD over a period of 10 years in order to improve its military facilities. The main objective of the country was to withstand the attack from its neighbors for a sufficient amount of time till international came to its rescue. This country should think twice before it spends in military because it needs to plan for the time when its revenue from the oil declines and its own oil reserves run out of stock. Nevertheless the country has been trying to increase its spending in military expenses ever since the gulf war and currently spends around 10 billion a year for the

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, "The Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric War", (Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA: Washington DC, 2006)

<sup>4</sup> Ghanim Al-Najjar, "Challenges of security sector governance in Kuwait", (Geneva Center for the Democratic control of Armed Forces, Switzerland: Geneva, 2004)

advancement of its military.<sup>5</sup> Kuwait has three kinds of forces, one is the army which takes care of the external aggression and maintains stability, then there is the Police which ensures internal stability of the country and takes care of whatever happens within the border of the country and then there are the National Guards who acts as a supportive unit in the times of emergency.<sup>6</sup> Kuwait's armed forces have seen a dramatic change in the last few decades. There was a time when the country did not have more than 500 army personnel. The first division of armed forces that was established in 1938 and was called the Public Security and Border forces and that formed the basis for the establishment of the armed forces in the country. But the main shot in the arm that the army establishment got in the country was when the country got independence from Britain in the year 1961 and Iraq attacked the country. Only then the country realized that it needs to build a proper armed force in order to defend itself from its notorious neighbors. After that a treaty with Britain which ensured military assistance from for a period of time. After that it asked for support from the Arab countries but they refused to support because of the British presence in the country so ultimately Kuwait had to snap its ties from the British establishment and then it got the support from the Arab countries for developing its military establishment. Then slowly but steadily Kuwait bought advanced weapons and military hardware which improved its army and defence establishment.<sup>7</sup> After that over the years the Kuwaiti military establishment has undergone vast modernization process with the acquisition of Sam 8 rockets and F18 fighter jets.

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations Security Council, Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council, Items relating to the situation between Iraq and Kuwait, (New York: UN, 1990)

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Kostiner, "The GCC States and the Security Challenges of the Twenty-First Century", (The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Israel: Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University, 2010)

<sup>7</sup> David Pollock, "Kuwait: Keystone of U.S. Gulf Policy", (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus #76, USA, 2007)

Kuwait is a major player in maintaining peace that prevails and the peaceful state in the Middle East. Kuwait's strategic location helps the US to maintain regional stability in more than one way. Kuwait has been very instrumental in this process. In the year 2004 Kuwait helped in the construction of a permanent US base in its territory and handed it over to the US three years before it was scheduled to hand over. Apart from that it also offered large tracts of its territory to the coalition forces in 2003 for the operation OIF. According to the reports a number of troops that have been moved into these facilities in the last 5 years stand at a staggering 100000 which is not a small number by any means.<sup>8</sup> In the naval front also Kuwait contributed immensely for the maintenance of peace of the region by spending a lot in its maritime forces and forming coalitions with the US and other Arab countries. During Iraq war with the US, Kuwait was believed to provide US supplies of all the kinds including military and food and also ancillary supplies worth over USD 250 million and also other kind of support to the US. Then it has been constantly improving its infrastructure internally in order to facilitate the operations over there.<sup>9</sup> There is no doubt that Kuwait is an important ally when it comes to military support but it is also a great support when it comes to oil supplies across the world. The country being one of the most oil rich countries in the world contains almost 1/10th of the world's oil reserves and on a daily basis it produces more than 2.5 million barrels of oil. Most importantly it is a much better supplier than the Iraq both in terms of quality and safety of the supply. This makes it one of the world's foremost energy suppliers and even more valuable because of the neighbours which surrounds the country. This made Kuwait an important ally of US in its gulf policy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> W. Andrew Terrill, "Kuwaiti National Security and the US-Kuwaiti Strategic Relationship after Saddam", last accessed 2 May 2014, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/pub788.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Kuwait: Security, Reform, and U.S. Policy", (Congressional Research Service, January 2014)

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

Kuwait has been a trusted ally of the US through 3 gulf war's starting from the Iraq-Iran war, the Persian Gulf War and then finally the ultimate war of Iraq in the year 2003. The Kuwait has been supporting the US in spite of the threats that it gets to its own country and military, so it makes one of the most important allies of the US in the gulf region which it has used to stabilise the region. The seed of this relation and friendship was planted during the Iraq-Iran war because it was getting squeezed in between the on-going conflict between Iraq and Iran. During that war Iran threatened Kuwait not to support Iraq and consequently attacked many facilities where oil was produced including one of the most important oil facilities. Therefore the Kuwaiti ships had to flag themselves with the US flag in order to avoid Iranian attacks but still then certain skirmishes followed and some of the Kuwaiti ships were attacked.<sup>11</sup>

Initially Kuwait supported Iraq with the hope that the country would repay the debt by supporting in every possible way and that would boost the economy of the country and would also benefit the country in many other ways but the Kuwaiti were shocked when the same country that they had supported during the Iraq Iran war invaded their homeland and captured it. The reason that the Iraqis gave for doing so was that Kuwait was producing oil in large quantities, more than what was required and thus that dented the business propositions of Iraq and it slowed their recovery from the war. Moreover they ran into losses because Kuwait did not leave the scope for them to enough business. But the world knows that the invasion was to satiate and fulfilled the ambitions of Saddam Hussein to rule over the gulf and take control of the resources and dictate the terms politically and economically. The invasion was totally uncalled

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<sup>11</sup> Maria O'Shea and Michael Spilling, "Cultures of the world, Kuwait", Marshall Cavendish, 2010.

for. As a result of the invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqis, US intervened and launched a full scale attack on Iraq with other allies and drove away almost 500000 Iraqi soldiers out of the Kuwaiti land. This operation was called the Operation Desert Storm and it happened in the year 1991.<sup>12</sup> Thus finally Kuwait attained independence again and was free from the clutches of Iraq. And as a payback to the US and to maintain its ties with the country it offered around USD 16 Billion in order to cover the costs of the US that it had to bear in its Operation in Kuwait to drive away the Iraqi forces. This event strengthened the bond between Kuwait and the US and Kuwait started to trust the US in its military operations and subsequently both the countries entered into a defence agreement called the Defence Cooperation Agreement which was initially entered for a period of 10 years but since the bond has been strengthening between the two countries the agreement is still in effect and both the countries still cooperate with each other militarily. This agreement has been of tremendous help to the US because it gave the country access to various Kuwaiti facilities which includes the main headquarters of the US in the Kuwait in camp Arifjan, an air base in Ali-al-Salem, a proper base for training of the US soldiers which has a firing range in Camp Beuhring. Apart from this, the US also got access to the naval facilities of Kuwait in Camp Patriot. Kuwait has also benefitted a lot from this agreement. Among other things, it makes the arms deal with the US easier and better and more over the Kuwaiti troops are trained by the US army.<sup>13</sup>

As Kuwait proved to be a trusted and consistent ally to the US and was always ready to extend support to the operations of the US, the US returned the favour to Kuwait and ensured further

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<sup>12</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, "The Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric War", (Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA: Washington DC, 2006)

<sup>13</sup> Google books, "Kuwait Justice System and National Police Handbook", last accessed 2 May 2014, [http://books.google.co.in/books?id=I24YPmVO\\_UAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.co.in/books?id=I24YPmVO_UAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)



deepening of the bond by giving Kuwait the designation of the 'Major Non NATO ally'.<sup>14</sup> This designation worked wonders for the Kuwait as it would upgrade its status in the international arena and most importantly it would get access to the same defence and military equipment in a defence deal with the US as the allies of the US in the NATO got. This was a major shot in the arms for the Kuwaiti defence forces as it would advance their defence establishment by manifolds.

As the Kuwaitis had been betrayed by the Iraqis and more specifically Saddam Hussein, the Kuwaitis vehemently supported the actions of the US which led to the total ousting the dictator militarily from the country. It strategically supported the US in many ways as it welcomed and facilitated the stay of majority of troops that were brought in during the war that had started in 2003 between the Us and the Iraq and it also let in the troops of the other allies of the US to enter and use its soil for the successful execution of the operation. In order to facilitate the smooth operation of the troops and to protect them from attack, it totally cordoned off its northern border so that no movement can be done through those borders and they remained close for few days before the attack was planned to be executed. It supported the US forces in a full-fledged manner by offering and allowing access of the US military forces of its infrastructural facilities like few of its air bases, air ports and also sea ports. Apart from the help that it was providing to the militarily, the country also supported US by providing financial help in tremendous amount to cover the costs of food, fuel and other expenses. Report says that the financial support from Kuwait ran over USD 266 million to the US.<sup>15</sup> Kuwait was instrumental in bringing out stability in the country of Iraq after the ousting of the dictator, Saddam Hussein. It took various

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<sup>14</sup> Ghanim Al-Najjar, "Challenges of security sector governance in Kuwait", (Geneva Center for the Democratic control of Armed Forces, Switzerland: Geneva, 2004)

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Kuwait: Security, Reform, and U.S. Policy", (Congressional Research Service, January 2014)

humanitarian and other measures to bring about the situation to normalcy.<sup>16</sup> Various measures included building a facility like a water line into Iraq to sustain the people of Iraq, the establishment of a Humanitarian Operation center that financially helped the homeless and the war affected Iraqis to the tune of USD 550 million. Also, to boost the economy of the country it hosted a conference which dealt with the subject of stability in Iraq and major regional players like Iran were present and also the US was present. Moreover, one of the leading contracting offices of Kuwait called the General Trading Contracting Company opened its office in Iraq to generate employment for large number of unemployed masses of Iraq. According to various reports Kuwait contributed financially to the tune of USD 210 million to the US per year for the expenses that were borne by the US during the Iraq war and also it is believed that Kuwait provided USD 350 million to the US in the year 2013 in assistance for the same purpose. It also provided logistic support to the US forces during that time.<sup>17</sup> When the US announced that it would withdraw its forces from Iraq by 2011 Kuwait turned out to be of immense support because it served as the only exit route as the US forces made their withdrawal from the Iraqi soil. Initially the US has decided to leave out some of the troops in order to train the Iraqi military forces but that agreement could not be finalized and both the countries could not arrive at a conclusion and consensually agreeable decision on the exact number of troops that would be retained in Iraq. But before that the US planned that it would train the Kuwaiti forces so that they could in turn help the Iraqi forces if they faced any sort of difficulty.<sup>18</sup> There are some reports that there has been some disturbance in the Iraqi soil which posted the withdrawal of US forces

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<sup>16</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, "The Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric War", (Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA: Washington DC, 2006)

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Kuwait: Security, Reform, and U.S. Policy", (Congressional Research Service, January 2014)

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Kostiner, "The GCC States and the Security Challenges of the Twenty-First Century", (The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Israel: Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University, 2010)

from Iraq but the number of US troops in the Iraq is not going to increase. Currently US has around 13000 troops in the Kuwaiti soil to contain the disturbances in the Iraq and other gulf regions and going by the policies of the US, this number is not going to increase. Since Kuwait has been almost a full time ally and the major non NATO ally of US, the NATO said that it would open a center in Kuwait for regional stability in the region. Apart from that it was also announced that Kuwait would be a part of the 'Istanbul Cooperation Committee'.<sup>19</sup> These things apart Kuwait has been an important ally of the US in projects to improve the defence and military technology of the GCC. For that this country has been acquiring defence equipment such as missiles and has been trying to form a network of missiles among the GCC to assist the US in the gulf to maintain stability in that region. Also in one of the conferences of the GCC nations, they announced that they are planning to form a joint military command among themselves that would further help them contain the instable countries of the gulf region, maintain peace, stability and prosperity in the region.<sup>20</sup>

Thus Kuwait has been an important country that has helped in maintaining the stability in the gulf region and peaceful conditions over the years. Even though it was once one of the weakest nations militarily in the Middle East which used to be bullied by its neighbors, but today it stands at the top amongst all in spite of having such notorious neighbors. Moreover it has also helped to return the atmosphere of normalcy in Iraq by various measures and tried to maintain peaceful relations with all its neighbors. It was instrumental in the ousting of dictators like Saddam Hussein and still it tries to maintain peaceful condition in the region by improving ties with

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Kostiner, "The GCC States and the Security Challenges of the Twenty-First Century", (The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Israel: Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University, 2010)

<sup>20</sup> Google books, "Kuwait Justice System and National Police Handbook", last accessed 2 May 2014, [http://books.google.co.in/books?id=I24YPmVO\\_UAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.co.in/books?id=I24YPmVO_UAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Saudi Arabia and Iran even though both these countries have attacked the country earlier.

Therefore, it is the cornerstone of stability in the region.

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