

Kuwait's Foreign Policy (1961-1977)

Non-Alignment, Ideology and the Pursuit of Security

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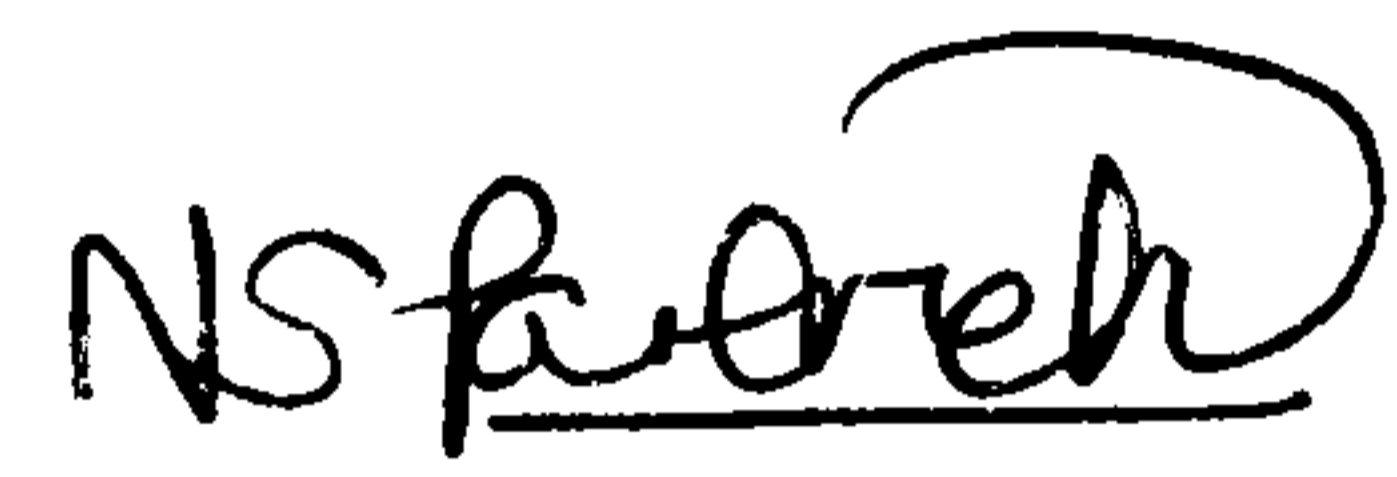
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Author's statement

I hereby declare that this thesis is wholly the original work of the author.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "NS Partrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large loop at the end.

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Abstract

Kuwait's leaders from 1961-77 maintained a foreign policy that reflected the country's territorial vulnerabilities. They sought to discretely cultivate an Anglo-American defence relationship without fatally compromising an ideological fealty to at least the slogans of Arabism. The thesis emphasises Kuwait's essential need to offset its international "hard" security component with, as far as practicable, a regional non-alignment posture and adherence to Arab policy norms. In the process neo-realist and constructivist theory are used to bring out the duality at the heart of the amirate's foreign policy.

Differences between key Al-Sabah over foreign policy were differences of emphasis, while domestic security concerns did not so much determine policy as emphasise Kuwait's regional challenges, against which the amirate chose to deploy ideology. Arabism inevitably had contradictions as a tool of Kuwait foreign policy, and was often more about the cash subventions that accompanied policy stances, than the value of the stances themselves. However deploying ideology was indicative of the ruling Al-Sabah's desire to strike the right tone for external and domestic consumption; a desire to accommodate or befriend key regional players without, it hoped, alienating others.

The inherent contradictions of Kuwait's foreign policy were born of the country's relative weakness, save its one precious asset, oil. In the 1980s Kuwait's strategically vital location and key resource would see the amirate forced to abandon its sometimes illusory regional non-alignment; after 1990 it maintained an overt US alliance. Events post-1977 therefore emphasised what had been the fragility of Kuwait's foreign policy since independence. The country's limited ability to act to prevent these crises only underscored what had been the limits of the amirate's policy options.

Preface

I would like to thank all of those who agreed to be interviewed in the course of this research, some of whom, sadly, are no longer alive. The input of senior diplomats and political figures from Kuwait, the United Kingdom and the USA proved especially useful in understanding the drivers and context for Kuwait's foreign policy making.

The interviews gave me insights into events conducted up to 45 years ago. Otherwise I would have been largely dependent on those UK and US government records that have been made publicly available. At the time of writing, the release of these records had not extended in any systematic fashion beyond the year 1975, in either country's case. Other secondary material in the form of histories and memoirs remain limited, in their utility and detail. Without being able to conduct interviews with some of those who participated in, or at least were first-hand observers of, the policy process in Kuwait, a much more limited impression of the subject would have been garnered.

I would also especially like to thank two people who were vital to my overall ability to conduct, and complete, the writing of this thesis: My supervisor, Professor Fred Halliday, for his intellectual and academic insights and for his practical and, necessarily, frank advice. I would also like to acknowledge the personal debt I owe to my wife, Valerie Grove, whose patience (and proof-reading) during the ordeal that is part-time doctoral research enabled me to get to this stage.

Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of the determinants, objectives and outcomes of Kuwait's foreign policy, from independence in June 1961 until December 1977. From the beginning of sovereign decision-making in the emirate, key trends and events in the shaping of foreign policy are explored in the period up until Shaikh Jabr Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah's accession, and as Egypt, traditionally a key policy influence upon Kuwait, began its pursuit of bilateral relations with Israel

Primary source material in the form of interviews conducted by the author with Kuwaiti and western officials from the period, and secondary source material largely consisting of embassy communications at the time, have enabled consideration of what the priorities of Kuwaiti decision-makers were during the 1961-77 period. The thesis is therefore able to examine the internal, regional and international context for the making of foreign policy, and to conclude that the essential consideration was the preservation of the emirate's external security. The primary responses that Kuwait adopted in the pursuit of this were, to a significant extent, contradictory: an attachment to an international defence alliance, first with the UK and then to seek to secure one with the US; and in regional terms to project an Arabist ideological fealty but on a non-aligned basis, a position important to maximising key Arab friendships and maintaining, as far as possible, positive relations with Iran. In exploring these two key themes, I utilised the essentially neo-realist approach to understanding Middle Eastern inter-state relations of Stephen Walt¹ and the constructivist analysis of Michael Barnett². Kuwait's foreign policy is explored in terms of the internal, regional and international inputs into decision-making, and the stances that were adopted as a response. This thesis takes Walt's emphasis on identifying the primary security threat, and examines a policy response that combined international defence guarantees with an ideological "construct". Essentially, this meant expressing loyalty to Arabist norms, including the goal of political unity and the pivotal cause of Palestine.

The year 1961 is an instructive point at which to begin a consideration of the bases of Kuwaiti foreign policy. Almost as soon as the emirate's leadership became formally responsible for external relations, Kuwait was thrown into an apparent security crisis involving its northern

¹ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (New York; Cornell University Press, 1990)

² See in particular Michael N. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York; Columbia University Press, 1998), and Michael N Barnett and Jack S Levy, "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments – The Case of Egypt 1962-73", *International Organisation* ILV (1991) p369-395.

neighbour Iraq. A territorial claim by General Qassim on the oil-rich emirate compounded an external threat perception established by prior Iraqi claims on the emirate in 1938 and 1958, the latter after Kuwait rejected Iraq's invitation to join its Hashemite Union with Jordan. While subsequent evidence shows that there was no direct military threat from Iraq in 1961, the event and its immediate aftermath shaped the guiding preoccupation and tools of Kuwait's foreign policy: the maintenance of external security against, principally, a perceived Iraqi threat. This was offset by what became the two main, albeit contradictory, props of Kuwaiti foreign policy: international, or extra-regional, defence relations, and policies designed to express Arab solidarity. The arrival of a UK military detachment in 1961, was followed three months later by an Arab League Security Force (ALSF). Despite Kuwait's desire to base its "hard" security on the UK, the emirate achieved some ideological legitimacy with the subsequent departure of the British troops. This in turn was quickly followed by support from the leading Arab countries, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, for the emirate's independence.

Walt's neo-realist interpretation of regional relations between 1955 and 1979 provides a useful basis on which to consider how the key threat perception behind the emirate's regional policies motivated its decision-making. Walt assessed that international alliances did not affect Middle East states' central focus on the regional "balance of threat". This, he said, was typically about proximate dangers, while the "threat" itself was not just defined, as realists would see it, in terms of military power, but on the past practice of neighbouring states: whether they had threatened a particular state before, and what claims or ambitions they articulated. If Walt's "balance of threats" analysis is applied, then Iraq can be seen as Kuwait's greatest, but not exclusive, external security concern, and the emirate's foreign policy would therefore be deemed to be largely orientated toward offsetting this threat. While the rationale behind threat assessments has applicability to Kuwait, the emirate did not conform to the assumptions of regional alliance policy that Walt's argument suggests. In fact this thesis shows that, in the period from 1961 to 1977, Kuwait was for the most part only loosely associated with regional alliances, and that its non-alignment was part and parcel of an ideational construct that formed a key part of its foreign policy toward the Arab world. The inadmissibility for Kuwait of allying with Iran cannot be explained by Walt's "balance of threat" concept, given the apparent logic of allying with Iran to balance against Iraq in the 1960s and, arguably, of "bandwagoning" with Iran in the immediate aftermath of the departure of the British from the Gulf in 1971.

Kuwait did not always avoid alliances, however, as we shall see in Chapter 3 with the forming of the ALSF which aligned Kuwait against Iraq. Interestingly, this provides the only reference Walt makes to Kuwait, albeit in passing, when, following the sending of British military forces in 1961 to deter an apparent Iraqi threat, Saudi Arabia and Jordan are described as “band-wagoning” with the more powerful state Egypt, against Iraq, by sending troops to the emirate as part of the ALSF. Conversely, two years later it can be argued that Kuwait’s direct pursuit of Iraqi recognition, without particular regard for the opinion of the UK, or for that of Egypt, its key Arab “ally” in the events of 1961, is bandwagoning, in so much as wider Arab mediation was disregarded and the determining issue was ultimately how much the emirate was prepared to pay Baghdad. However this, and the former pro-Kuwaiti Arab alliance, were exceptions that proved the rule of Kuwaiti foreign policy. The alliance had proven unwieldy and the key player, Egypt, knew that it was mistrusted by Kuwait. With its more pressing security concerns regarding Syria, Egypt proved to be a half-hearted participant in the ALSF. Regional non-alignment, in a Middle East characterised by shifting alliances, made sense for a comparatively weak power such as Kuwait. Iraq was to an extent bandwagoned by Kuwait in order to secure Soviet diplomatic recognition. In the event, the backdrop of Moscow’s eventual recognition of Kuwait, which opened the door to UN membership, made an unstable regime in Baghdad far more amenable to the emirate’s financial inducements.

Kuwait, in conformity to what Walt noted is the likely tendency of weaker states, preferred an extra-regional alliance with the UK that would have only limited impact on its domestic and foreign policy, especially in the form that the emirate insisted on after 1961. Kuwait also understood and valued the prop to security in the wider Gulf that the UK’s military presence in the southern Gulf provided, hence its private discomfort with the UK’s announcement in 1968 that it was pulling out in three years time. Kuwait’s regional non-alignment enabled it to exercise some autonomy from the constraints of a power structure that in the 1960s could be characterised as the “Arab cold war”³. However, Kuwait’s regional vulnerability meant that it could not escape the need to assert its Arabism – expressed through rhetorical and practical expressions of solidarity with key causes. This created the impression among conservative Arab states that Kuwait was effectively aligned with Egypt. Throughout much of the 1961-67 period, the emirate’s Arabism took on a decidedly Arab nationalist hue as the anti-colonialist language, and

³ Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War – Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-70* (London; Oxford University Press, 1971). The international alignments of leading Arab states Egypt and Saudi Arabia did not so much shape regional structure, but, as Kerr, Walt and others have shown, reflect it.

opposition to British interests expressed elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula, was adopted by Kuwait. Adopting such stances also overlapped with strategic realities as the emirate had every reason to maintain good relations with an Egypt that it hoped would continue to counter Iraq. Post-1967, Egypt could no longer project itself as the citadel of Arab nationalism, despite its brief revival as the leader of such sentiment in the aftermath of the 1973 war. However, encouraged by the fact that radical Arab nationalists had assumed power in Iraq and Libya, Kuwait's ideational construct would still retain radical tinges, even as a more conservative, Islamic, assertion of Arabism, spearheaded by Saudi Arabia, also began to be articulated by Kuwait.

Michael Barnett has assessed how the vagaries of Arabism drove the foreign policy and alliances of Arab states from the late 1950s onwards, through to 1991 (which, he suggests, is the point at which Arab state sovereignty was established as an inter-state norm⁴). Kuwait largely avoided alliances but was mindful of the need to ascribe to Arab policy norms, seeing its external security as bound up in the need for both regional acceptance and, paradoxically, extra-regional defence partner(s). Constructivism helps illuminate how ideational factors were part of Kuwait's search for regional legitimacy and therefore security in the Arab world. Both Walt and Barnett share a conception that ideology can serve as a tool of larger states' foreign policy, creating obligations for weaker states in particular. However their assumptions about the key factors determining foreign policy differ, in part because of the differing weight they attach to ideology, and specifically to Arabism. For Barnett ideational factors can shape the identity and interests of foreign policy-makers and not just the responses; for Walt ideology is more a device to legitimise the foreign policy ambitions of more powerful Arab states. Barnett sees ideology as about more than external power plays and argues that the policy norms of Arabism can constitute a threat to internal and external security. This thesis will argue that the ability of more powerful states to deploy the "Arab card" was primarily a regional threat to Kuwait, and that the most important function of the emirate's emphasis on its Arab identity was as a tool of external security policy. The symbols of Arabism functioned as a counter to the ideological cloak in which Iraq pursued its territorial claims on Kuwait, and to offset the image created by the emirate's attachment to an extra-regional security partnership.

⁴ Michael Barnett has argued that the outcome of the 1967 war began a decline in the potency of Arab nationalism, but that this was not fully realised until its previous co-existence with state sovereignty from the mid-1960s was undermined by the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990. Michael N. Barnett, "Identity and Alliances in the Middle East", Peter J Katzenstein (Ed.) The Culture of National Security – Norms and Identity in World Politics (Columbia; Columbia University Press, 1996). A residue of it survives however, as do some territorial disputes or tensions for example between Iraq and Kuwait, that, prior to 1990, were more likely to be dressed up in pan-Arabist rhetoric.

While I have given equal attention to the internal context, as well as that of the regional and international, for Kuwaiti decision-making during this period, this thesis will emphasise that foreign policy was not primarily driven by internal factors. At certain points, such as the political clampdown begun in 1966 (see Chapter 2), Kuwait develops greater room for manoeuvre in managing its international relations. There are also occasions when senior Al-Sabah consciously project contrasting foreign policy “images” toward the UK as part of their domestic competition with each other. However, their differing “values and images”⁵ did not determine the bases of foreign policy so much as affect its presentation. Kuwait displayed Arabist fealty primarily as a means to counter external pressure, in particular the efforts at de-legitimising Kuwait made by Iraq. In fact, enforcing internal constraint, not least at the expense of those Arab nationalists, domestic and foreign, supported, and to some extent funded, by Egypt, was made all the more possible by Kuwait’s maintenance of Arab nationalist norms in its foreign policy. Tellingly, a few years earlier, the leader of Kuwait’s Arab Nationalist Movement, Jassim Qitami, was appointed as foreign ministry under-secretary and given lead responsibility for negotiating what became a mutual recognition agreement with Iraq in 1963. This did not make these crucial negotiations beholden to the amirate’s pro-Egyptian Arab Nationalists, rather it emphasised the strength of Kuwait’s internal position that such a figure was trusted to manage the country’s primary foreign policy issue.

In assessing the internal political dimension for foreign policy decision-making, I was drawn to the field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), and specifically those who have applied it to the Middle East, emphasising how the domestic context shapes policy. Some illumination was provided for how a number of the factors typically seen as pre-eminent in the making of foreign policy in more institutionally-based polities had a relatively minor role in Kuwait. Adeen Dawisha’s work on foreign policy making in Middle East states and specifically in Egypt⁶ provides a useful typology of three levels of political authority key to decision-making. These are, in order of importance: the “principal decision-maker”, a “chief executive” who typically has charismatic authority; the ruling elite, those often few key individuals who influence the principal decision-maker; and the political elite, usually operative within relatively powerless parliaments

⁵ Part of the framework adopted by A.I. Dawisha is assessing the factors shaping Egypt’s foreign policy. Egypt in the Arab World - The Elements of Foreign Policy (London; Macmillan, 1976)

⁶ A.I. Dawisha, "The Middle East", Christopher Clapham (Ed.), Foreign Policy Making in Developing States: A Comparative Approach (Teakfield; Saxon House, 1975); and *Ibid.*

or political parties. For most of the period under consideration in this thesis, Kuwait lacked a single, pre-eminent, much less charismatic, decision-maker, as could, in contrast, be said of Shaikh Abdullah Salim Al-Sabah. However, in keeping with the patterns identified elsewhere in the region by Dawisha, key authority over foreign policy in Kuwait did not lay with the council of ministers (cabinet) or with the national assembly. Rather, in Kuwait, foreign policy was a matter of consensus among a handful of senior Al-Sabah members, the principle decision-makers, with whom a few other ruling family and technocratic non Al-Sabah officials were influential.

Informal decision-making

Egypt's President Nasser, notes Dawisha, created rival bodies to the cabinet in order to maximise his authority, even though the government was essentially like-minded; the Kuwaiti ruling family held the key posts in cabinet and determined the rest, but more important discussion on foreign policy, on the few occasions that it was held to be necessary, would take place in the Al-Sabah family council. In considering the making of foreign policy in Middle East states, Fred Halliday emphasises how key foreign policy decisions by, for example, Egypt's President Sadat, and by Iraqi leaders, were taken in a highly secretive manner by essentially one man⁷. This, says Dawisha, is the virtue of foreign policy decision-making in most Middle East states. Decisions affecting war, key alliances, and peace-making would have been far more complex, and far less decisive, he writes, in polities subject to more institutional constraints. The kind of bureaucratic bargaining identified in the government decision-making model of Graham Allison⁸, for example, is unrecognisable in Kuwait or the wider Arab world. However Kuwait for the most part also tended to avoid dramatic decision-making of the kind more typical of stronger regional actors. Although its ability to doggedly pursue the mutual recognition agreement with Iraq in 1963 (see Chapter 3) showed the utility of a decision-making system that revolved around only a few key players. In general though, Kuwaiti foreign policy operated on broad and largely uncontested consensual lines that were understood, regardless of the occasional discussion of a pressing external issue within the semi-formal context of the, only occasionally convened, Al-Sabah family council, or more routine exchanges in weekly cabinet meetings. Foreign minister Sabah

⁷ Fred Halliday, "The Middle East in International Relations" (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2005),

⁸ Graham Allison and Phillip Zelikow, Essence of Decision – Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York; Longman, 1999)

Al-Ahmed would give expression to the central assumptions of a policy initially directed by Amir Abdullah Salim, but which, for the greater part of the period in question, were managed by the lead political actor, Crown Prince Jabr Al-Ahmed, in close consultation with the interior and defence minister Saad Abdullah, and Amir Sabah Salim. Kuwaiti foreign policy would display presentational differences between Jabr Al-Ahmed and Amir Sabah Salim, but in essentials there was clear consensus. In this sense Kuwaiti foreign policy fitted with characteristics identified by some writers of the FPA school who essentially had western polities in mind. The “non-decisional mainsprings of foreign policy action” referred to by Michael Clarke⁹, for example, in identifying the lack of analysis and ongoing routine “outputs”, can be applied to Kuwait, along with many other very different and diffuse political systems. While mindful of the broad parameters of acceptable foreign policy in the eyes of domestic religious and political opinion¹⁰, Kuwait’s policy-makers, often unreflectedly, maintained a set of stances that were rarely re-examined. This was aided by a relative detachment from domestic factors that owed no small part to Kuwait’s ability to draw on a key domestic resource, oil, which, as well as facilitating regional acceptance, enabled the co-option of merchants who had previously been a key foreign policy input (see Chapter 2). Archie Lamb, who was British ambassador in the mid-1970s, identifies a policy-making “process” in Kuwait that could often be characterised as the unquestioning maintenance of key assumptions among a tiny coterie of leaders (see Chapter 5).

While Kuwaiti leaders may not have systematically reassessed their policy assumptions, they did try to project an identity in regional affairs that was more than a kind of Arabist political correctness. The Kuwaitis sought to give expression to Arab solidarity, not just by stances and finance, but also by seeking to mediate in Arab and wider regional disputes. While fully opening the “black box” of decision-making in a small and often informal process proved difficult in the writing of this thesis, the empirical material I obtained suggested that Kuwaiti policy makers’ identification of themselves and of the country was an important part of the ideational construct within which policy was presented. Kuwaiti efforts at mediation were often unsuccessful, or failed to even get off the ground as in the case of Iraq and Iran in the early 1970s. Thus Kuwait had limited “agency” and could not alter the structure of regional relations in which it felt

⁹ Michael Clarke, “The Foreign Policy System”, Michael Clarke and Brian White (Ed.), An Introduction to Foreign Policy Analysis: The Foreign Policy System (Ormskirk; GW&A Hesketh, 1981).

¹⁰ See for example Michael Smith, “Comparing Foreign Policies: Circumstances, Processes and Performances”, in Clarke and White (Ed.) Ibid., p.59-60; Dawisha, “Egypt in the Arab World”, op. cit. p89-91; and Halliday, op.cit., p.56-59.

vulnerable to security threats. However role theory¹¹ helps explain how mediation was bound up in a strong Kuwaiti foreign policy self-identification with a non-aligned Arabism and, to a lesser but increasing extent in the 1970s, wider Islamic links. Personal political preferences were also of relevance here. Amir Sabah Salim, who ruled from 1965-77, was the most enthused of the senior Al-Sabah leaders about Kuwaiti mediation. However, from the mid-1970s, the amirate's efforts in this regard were led with particular attention to south Yemen and Oman by foreign minister Sabah Al-Ahmed. Amir Sabah Salim, like his nephew Saad Abdullah, defence and interior minister (1962-78), was more sympathetic to the British connection, and, as prime minister (1963-65), Sabah Salim bemoaned Egyptian influence over foreign policy. This encouraged Sabah Salim's desire to try to mediate in inter-Arab disputes in order to give greater credibility to Kuwait's professed non-aligned credentials, despite the Nasserite connotation of the phrase (see Chapter 3).

The failures of Kuwaiti mediation during the period covered by this thesis, with the partial exception noted in Chapter 6 of its efforts to enable Iran to effectively abandon its claims to Bahrain, should not detract from the essential success of the amirate's foreign policy. In combining an international alliance with a projection of Arab fealty, Kuwait was able to improve its security, at least over the first part of this thesis, up until 1968. After Britain's withdrawal announcement that year, however, Kuwait was obliged to rely more firmly on ideological constructs, even as the influence of Arab nationalism weakened in the aftermath of Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war, a factor that was to gradually lessen the importance to Kuwaiti security of Cairo's political support. In this new environment, a professed non-alignment in the Gulf became unsustainable, and the beginning of armed conflict between Iraq and Iran in 1969 obliged Kuwait to support Iraq. Iraq had just begun incursions into Kuwait, helping to encourage the amirate's political support for Baghdad. At the same time Kuwait's reliance on Arabism as a tool of foreign policy would have made band-wagoning with Iran, which was stronger than Iraq militarily, unthinkable. Balance of threat analysis also suggests that balancing Iran by aiding the weaker power, Iraq, would have been strategically rational, although this was not what drove Kuwaiti policy. In practice the amirate's policy-makers in this period felt that the country was being coerced by Iraq and compelled, by dint of Arab expectations, to express solidarity. However the limits to any emergent alliance would soon be revealed in the events at Al-Samita (1973). The

¹¹ KJ Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy" in Stephen Walker (Ed.), Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis (Durham (NC); Duke University Press, 1987).

amirate's need to continue to engage Iran, as the pre-eminent Gulf military power, as well as Saudi Arabia, would prove beneficial in offsetting Iraqi pressure.

Kuwait did not abandon the desire for extra-regional defence support; it turned to the US and gradually achieved closer cooperation. However this relationship was not to develop the strategic importance or provide the balance in Kuwaiti foreign policy that the UK relationship earlier had. Kuwait's leading role in the embargo against oil sales to the US, UK and Holland in 1973-74 suggests that ideological assertions had become the primary focus of foreign policy, or at least confirmed the absence of other options. Kuwait's participation in economic action far more punitive than in 1967 would have been difficult to sustain if the amirate's defence relationship with the UK had still been in place, or if Kuwait's desire that Britain's role be superseded by the US had been fulfilled. However, unlike the ostensible objective of mediation, Kuwait was confirming it was "on-message"; it was not seeking agency, rather, as one official argues (see Chapter 6), it was intent on "sharing the pain".

By 1977 there was ongoing concern in Kuwait at Iraqi territorial incursions, while tensions arose with Saudi Arabia, which had become the amirate's key Arab state relationship as Egyptian influence collapsed in the wake of President Sadat's initiation of relations with Israel. The Arab solidarity on display during the 1973-4 oil embargo had proven practically non-existent toward Kuwait in the face of further Iraqi incursions. Despite this, Kuwait's security did not appear to be fundamentally at stake, a situation that its ability to project an Arabist foreign policy helped to ensure.

The Kuwaiti case from 1961 until 1977 is an interesting exploration of how a relatively weak, but oil-rich, country seeks to adopt foreign policies that can offset its security vulnerability. There are, however, clearly limits to the autonomy and influence of Kuwait's policies. Its manipulation of ideology and the presentation of itself as a funder and facilitator of Arab solidarity – in line with the amorphous shibboleth of Arab unity - emphasises that regional structure alone cannot explain Kuwaiti foreign policy. Yet at the same time the ideological construct of Kuwait's foreign policy took account of the weight of Egyptian influence in the region and the need to deflect ideological assertions by Iraq and other states that questioned the legitimacy of the amirate's existence. In examining the factors shaping Kuwaiti foreign policy, there is a need to utilise theories that combine structural understanding in terms of regional power dimensions, with how a relatively weak state may seek to project a politically acceptable identity and role as an

alternative to the expected pattern of alliances. Walt's argument that decision-makers make judgements based on the behaviour and past practice of neighbours, as opposed to the simple military power determinism of realist thinking, has suggested to Gregory Gause¹² a way of combining it with constructivist thinking in order to create an "aggregate of threats" (see Chapters 3 and 6). Walt accepts that ideology forms part of alliance considerations in the Middle East, suggesting that, at the height of pan-Arabism at least, ideology formed part of a threats-based analysis, preventing, or causing, the break up of alliances. For constructivists like Barnett, the making of foreign policy reflects identities among decision makers whose importance can be a response to external or internal efforts to delegitimise a regime. In weighing up the relative threats from Iraq and Iran, the "aggregate threat" plainly was greater from Iraq. Iraq's utilisation of pan-Arabist rhetoric was periodically used to bolster its denial of Kuwaiti legitimacy. Ideology therefore informed part of Kuwait's external threat perception, even before incursions in 1969 had strengthened the existent belief that Iraq was more of a specific threat to Kuwaiti sovereignty, despite Iran's greater military strength.

Kuwait was not a passive recipient of ideological pressure, but sought to make itself ideologically acceptable. For Syria or Iraq, their apparent ideological commitment to Arab *wahda* (union) served as a defence against the ability of Egypt to de-legitimise them internally¹³. In the Kuwaiti case ideology was similarly a pro-active tool, but the amirate was self-evidently not competing in the Arab hegemony stakes that characterise much of Walt's analysis. Kuwait's talk of unionist projects conformed to the conventions of the period, but it principally deployed Arabism to create regional acceptability, in turn providing greater autonomy from domestic structure. Constructivist literature emphasises how developing countries can be vulnerable to accusations that their internal politics or external policies are not conforming to acceptable standards¹⁴. For Kuwait, Arab nationalism was primarily a construct that it sought to deflect as an external ideological threat that could ultimately undermine the rationale for the amirate's separate existence. Foreign policy expectations of the kind identified by Barnett as being upheld by a common Arab identity¹⁵ were mediated by the more powerful Arab states, one of which was a direct military threat to Kuwait. Thus ideology could easily be deployed against the amirate's international defence relations if they were not offset ideologically. Domestic opinion could not of course be

¹² Gregory F Gause III, "Balancing What? Threat Perceptions and Alliance Choice in the Gulf", Security Studies, Winter 2003-04.

¹³ Kerr, op.cit.

¹⁴ For example Stephen R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment", World Politics Volume 43, Issue 2, p233-256.

¹⁵ Barnett, "Identity and Alliances", op.cit

disregarded in a polity whose periodic authoritarianism did not extinguish its essentially pluralistic traditions. However the country's narrow band of decision-makers did not feel under pressure from internal factors in their consideration of foreign policy. The realities of Kuwait's military vulnerability necessitated the utilisation of its economic strengths for both foreign policy and internal legitimacy, advantages not enjoyed by many developing states. Furthermore, Kuwait's external threats and active domestic political life required a tailoring of foreign policy in ideological terms that would not upset these relations. Kuwait was not a fractured and unstable entity seeking external support to maintain a remote ruling elite in power.

This study shows that analysis of foreign policy determinants in a Middle East prone to security challenges and ideological pressure, particularly in the period with which this thesis is concerned, needs to consider structural constraints on weaker states at the internal, regional and international level, and how countries can try to minimise them. International relations theory confined to alliance analysis cannot explain the role of ideology or national identity in the case of weaker states that recognise they have little prospect of leading opinion, but who seek to utilise constructs to legitimise their place in the region, or at least deflect pressure from those who would question it. On the other hand, theoretical analysis needs to be cognisant of the calculations made by decision-makers of their country's strategic position and whether a full embrace of "correct" stances, including the termination of international alliances that attract regional and domestic criticism, would leave their country at the mercy of shifting political fortunes and regional alignments. This thesis shows how the loss of a firm defence commitment from the UK left Kuwait more vulnerable to regional developments that ideology could not provide sufficient cover for, just as solidarity and financial generosity could not resolve its dispute with Iraq. However, by the end of 1977 at least, there was little that Kuwaiti foreign policy-makers could have done to have offset the threat to the country's security caused by regional developments in the years ahead. This clearly has implications when considering what policies Kuwait could have adopted to avoid the temporary termination of its existence as an independent country in the course of the Iraqi occupation in 1990.

Chapter One

Literature on Kuwait

In writing this thesis I was struck by the paucity of books and journal articles relevant to the inputs, outputs, or consequences of Kuwaiti foreign policy in the period under examination (1961-77). Much of the little that has been published exclusively on Kuwait, and that is of some relevance to a study of this topic, is available in English, however, whether it was originally written by Arab or non-Arab writers. The limitations on useful published material emphasises the value for this thesis of the personal interviews conducted with former Kuwaiti, UK and US officials, and of the extensive utilisation of British and US government archives. While partiality and political calculation needed to be carefully borne in mind when considering either retrospective reflections or edited embassy accounts of conversations with Kuwaitis, the fact that there is no Kuwaiti government archive covering this period¹, nor any formal decision-making process², makes such sources invaluable. The importance of external assessments in analysing Kuwaiti foreign policy is further borne out by the amirate's reliance on UK assessments of events in Iraq (see Chapter 7).

Of those books and journal articles that have been written either exclusively or largely about Kuwait, most are either historical narratives or present a largely compartmentalised vision of the northern Gulf state in terms of its founding history, oil wealth, the ruling Al-Sabah family, and foreign policy³. The treatment of foreign policy usually lacks any theoretical examination in terms of either internal or external structural constraints. Nor is there usually any suggestion that the distinct aspects of Kuwaiti society and politics could have a relationship to its foreign policy.

¹ Nor could there be, given the events of 1990-91, when the government's private records were largely destroyed.

² See the assessment of Kuwaiti decision-making by former British ambassador Sir Archie Lamb contained in Chapter 5.

³ For example, Peter Mansfield, Kuwait: Vanguard of the Gulf (London; Hutchinson Press, 1990).

Political economy

There is a considerable body of literature that applies an analysis based on political economy to state formation and legitimacy in the Arab world; and several writers have looked at Kuwait in particular. Among the latter there is a coalescence of views that the arrival of oil enabled the Kuwaiti state to largely escape the political constraints of dependence on internal political compacts, but replaced it with dependence on the vagaries of the international oil market. Thus, as rulers of an oil-based “rentier state”, the Al-Sabah enjoyed autonomy of internal decision-making, but at the price of a new kind of external dependency. Mary Ann Tétreault⁴ has described this process in terms of how Kuwait moved from dependence on the British with the granting of formal independence in 1961, to subjection to “the new patron”, oil. In this way a small state like Kuwait is economically dependent, despite owning a precious national resource that has provided considerable advantage over the kind of states more typically addressed by dependency theorists. Jacqueline Ismael⁵ has carefully dissected the political economy of Kuwait as a rentier state, assessing the way in which, with the advance of the oil sector after 1945, the ruler, Abdullah Salim Al-Sabah, became the disburser of a national largesse. This enabled the ruling family to combine the powers of capital ownership with almost exclusive control over the levers of state power to patronise and co-opt key constituencies and virtually the whole population of Kuwaiti nationals, especially following nationalisation in 1975, by which time nearly 80% of nationals were employed by the state⁶.

The impact of local and international economic structure on an essentially dependent state like Kuwait leaves little room, or indeed interest, on the part of Ismael or Tétreault, for an assessment what shapes a rentier state’s foreign policy. In essence foreign policy, according to this analysis, can only be a reflection of oil dependence. However, what this means in terms of ideological or strategic orientation for example, is far from adequately explored in analysis that adopts dependency theory, or the rentier state model, to look at Kuwait and countries like it.

⁴ Mary Ann Tétreault, Autonomy, necessity, and the small state: ruling Kuwait in the twentieth century, *International Organisation* 45, 4, Autumn 1991

⁵ Jacqueline Ismael, Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective (Syracuse; Syracuse University Press, 1982)

⁶ Abdel-Karim Al-Dekhayel, Kuwait – Oil State and Political Legitimation (Reading; Ithaca Press, 2000)

Kuwait did not in fact escape dependence on external allies, even if it had become formally independent. Indeed the oil wealth that enabled the ruling Al-Sabah to develop what Jill Crystal⁷ has described as a political compact with the merchant class - the latter's abstention from active politics in exchange for maintenance of their economic livelihood with property and contracts - served to increase the attractiveness of Kuwait's resources to external countries, principally Iraq. Regional security concerns are mentioned by Crystal as one of the "additional reasons" why this domestic compact survived, whilst Tétreault and Ismael give it little or no attention.

However these writers' class-based analyses provide good insights, especially in the case of Crystal⁸, into the internal consequences of ownership of an internationally marketable resource. This influenced the development of the state's institutions, in particular the ruling Al-Sabah family, and in the process internal stability was seemingly assured. However, Crystal believes that state formation in Kuwait is not inherently stable. She argues that if the state does not guarantee merchants continued high levels of economic reward, then local merchants do not always play by the rules of the informal political understanding⁹. Crystal sees evidence for this in the political agitation for restoration of the national assembly in the late 1980s and early 1990s, although she could equally have mentioned the subtler events surrounding the elite political fallout of 1969-71, which are detailed in Chapter 5 of this thesis. However Crystal's analysis usefully sets the context for an internal political sphere in Kuwait in which, for the period covered here at least, the ruling family made judgements about foreign policy very largely without regard for what the merchant elites thought.

National Assembly and merchants

This is not to suggest, as Crystal implies, that the merchants are necessarily a politically homogenous group, or indeed a non-political group for as long as their economic interests were being satisfied. In her assessment, Kuwait's national assembly was a largely cynical creation by a ruling family seeking to manage local political debate and offset regional opposition, rather than enabling genuinely democratic and civil structures to be established. However, for the greater part of the period covered herein, the national assembly, while manipulated, and at one point illegally

⁷ Jill Crystal, Oil and Politics in the Gulf – Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1990)

⁸ Jill Crystal, Kuwait – The Transformation of an Oil State (Boulder; Westview Press, 1992)

⁹ Crystal, op.cit.

suspended, saw lively debate that influenced the government's oil and finance considerations and therefore aspects, at least, of its foreign policy. Through the assembly, merchants and other sections of society have contributed to the political process, even if leading merchant families tended to remain detached from assembly politicking, and generally preferred to attend to their business interests rather than suffer the constitutionally-obligated financial compromises that are required to join the government. In something of a crisis in 1964/5, the Kuwaiti cabinet, which included wealthier merchants who had not forsworn their business interests, was rejected by an assembly majority of less wealthy merchants and Arab nationalists, egged on by a leading Al-Sabah (see Chapter 2).

The Kuwaiti parliament has thus tended to provide a more assertive political platform than rentier state and dependency theory would expect of an oil-rich hereditary amirate. For her part at least, Ismael concedes that the elected National Assembly was not a "rubber stamp for policies set forth by the ruling class"¹⁰. Following Kuwait's first elections in April 1963, twelve of the fifty elected MPs who supported the Kuwaiti branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement (KMAN) called for Kuwait to join the putative Arab Union of Egypt, Syria and Iraq. The mutual recognition agreement Kuwait signed with Iraq a few months later reflected the strength of regional and internal ideological pressure when it committed the two countries to seeking union in the future (see Chapter 3). Radical posturing in the assembly also meant that leading merchants have at times lacked enthusiasm to defend it, as seen between 1975-76 when the active part played by KMAN MPs in the parliament compromised perceived national interests and the assembly was suspended with relative ease (see Chapter 5).

An unpublished thesis authored by a Kuwaiti, Abdul-Latif Al-Rumaihi¹¹, lays out a template for examining the factors that determined the amirate's foreign policy, from its inception to 1983. After establishing the different spheres feeding into the deliberations of the Kuwaiti "decision-making unit", and exploring some of the theoretical literature relevant to the domestic, regional and international environment, Al-Rumaihi gives varying degrees of credence to a wide-ranging set of foreign policy inputs. Ultimately, however, he avoids making decisive judgements about where the balance of influence on policy lay, although the objective of external security is implicitly a key factor. Inevitably there is a difficulty for any writer in making definitive

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.86.

¹¹ Abdul-Latif Hassan Al-Rumaihi, "The Dynamics of Kuwaiti Foreign Policy"(Exeter; Exeter University, 1983).

judgements on what and who was determining policy in the absence of the equivalent of, for example, the records of cabinet conversations. Curiously he also explicitly avoids exploring whether Kuwait could have accepted military support from Iran, or the wider suitability of founding an alliance with Tehran. In fact the role of alliances in Kuwaiti foreign policy is not assessed, aside from general assumptions that the professed non-alignment held true in practice. Al-Rumaihi does, however, give considerable weight to the formal players - the amir, cabinet, national assembly and ministry of foreign affairs - that together make-up his notion of the “decision-making unit”. Thus, for example, the national assembly is held to be influential because some stances it adopted became government policy; the ministry of foreign affairs is simply “the engineer” of foreign policy, a notion at odds with evidence explored by this author that the minister himself was not a pivotal decision-maker and that his ministry was more the executor of some policy details within the understood policy framework. In general, a relatively open domestic political environment is believed to encourage the convictions of those sitting within the different components of the decision-making unit who remain firmly attached to a pro-Palestinian policy line whilst somehow seeking to find a “balance” between the dominant regional and superpower actors. Precisely how and where a foreign policy was determined that reflected traditional attachments, domestic dynamics, and the desire to offset external pressures is less clear, however.

Other writers on Kuwait, such as Peter Mansfield¹², and those writing more broadly on the Arab world, have emphasised the emirate’s civil sphere represented by professional associations, including the leading bodies of the middle class and merchants such as chambers of commerce, clubs (*nadwas*) and *diwaniyyas* (loosely translatable as “associations”), where political matters are often debated. The professional associations proliferated throughout the 1960s and 1970s and, like the *nadwas* and *diwaniyyas*, could be involved in political activity by holding debates, sometimes with foreign Arab contributors, and could be identified with defined viewpoints. *Nadwas* and more importantly *diwaniyyas* are important ways to let off steam, not least in the absence of legal, formal, political parties. The *diwaniyyas* remain aligned on family and factional grounds, and enable opposition MPs and leading shaikhs to rally, or to hear, opinion. Thus, in the Kuwaiti context, it can be argued that internal stability was not merely a matter of having sufficient oil largesse to buy off the merchants and other powerful interest groups. The country had a degree of civil life that underpinned the political order. The closing of the Assembly in 1976 and 1986 by an amir using *extra*-constitutional powers, saw the *diwaniyyas* assert the

¹² Ibid.

constitutional right of Kuwaitis to be represented by an elected assembly. This was a civil sphere that could not easily be disregarded, while the elected national assembly itself, despite periodic closure, has clearly proven its institutional resilience.

Kuwait does not suffer from many of the fundamental weaknesses of the state in the Arab world¹³, and, in the opinion of one writer, of the small Gulf Arab states in particular¹⁴. The cross-cutting allegiances that have weakened state formation in the post-colonial environment are less of a factor in Kuwait than, for example, in neighbouring Iraq or Lebanon. In some Arab countries, minorities or even majorities have been denied adequate political power and have thus helped to weaken state allegiance or even threatened its very existence. In fact it has been argued by some historians of Kuwait¹⁵ that for more than 250 years the country has enjoyed legitimacy as a distinct entity. This began with the voluntary commitment of the bani Al-Utub tribal alliance from Najd in central Arabia, who migrated to the northern Gulf port then known as Kut, where they consented to the rule of the Al-Sabah. This has become translated into political myth, not to mention propaganda in terms of the country's supposed claim to have established a rudimentary desert democracy. However, the attachment of, in effect, the state founders to forming a settled community within the then small port town, laid the groundwork for what would evolve into a separate country. Aside from the Al-Sabah, the leading families of Kuwait today are the merchant traders directly descended from the families of the bani Al-Utub who made the original political compact that brought Al-Sabah rule, and the beginnings of a separate and distinct entity that in 1961 became the state of Kuwait.

Crystal is right to argue that the contemporary state of Kuwait still lacks many of the embedded institutions that would make for greater internal security. However, whatever Kuwait's internal vulnerabilities, they do not fundamentally come from cross-border allegiances undermining the central rationale of the state. Kuwait does not suffer from the ethnic or religious vulnerabilities of other Arab states. Its one key minority was (and remains) the approximate one-quarter of the national population who are Shia Muslims¹⁶. In the period with which this thesis is concerned, the

¹³ Giacomo Luciani (ed.) *The Arab State* (London; Routledge, 1980)

¹⁴ Nazih Arubi, "Arab Bureaucracies", in Luciani (ed.) *op.cit.*

¹⁵ See for example, Ahmad Mustafa Abu-Hakima *The Modern History of Kuwait (1759-1965)* (London; Luzac and Co., 1983)

¹⁶ In the early 1960s the UK embassy gave a figure of 22% (see Chapter 2). Sourcing work written in the late 1970s, Joseph Kostiner gives a figure of 24%. Joseph Kostiner, "Shi'i Unrest in the Gulf", *Shi'ism, Resistance and Revolution*, Martin Kramer (Ed.) (Boulder; Westview Press, 1987). For her part, Crystal

Shia were seen warily by the Sunni Arab majority, especially after the departure of the British in 1971, given the proximity of Kuwait's large neighbour, majority Shia Iran. A visit from the Shah in November 1968, prompted many Kuwaiti Shia to line the streets, thereby causing some concern among the majority Sunni population. However, it was not until the Iranian Revolution in 1978/9 that the Shia were seen, largely erroneously, by the Kuwaiti authorities as a potential dissident minority. The Shia were represented within the national assembly, often enjoyed significant state patronage, and, as Mansfield points out, were among the most loyal of the elected representatives.

This thesis argues that the key foreign policy driver for Kuwait was its external threat perception, rather than internal pressures. In the period concerned, as well as subsequently, Kuwait's consciousness of the "balance of threat"¹⁷ from Iraq and the need to accommodate Egypt, coincided with the presence of large numbers of Palestinians, Iraqis, Egyptians and Syrians in the population. In the opinion of the Al-Sabah, according to Crystal and a number of British and American officials at the time, these foreign Arab populations were seen as particularly prone to Arab nationalist sentiment, and possibly agitation. While Kuwait did not suffer the weakness caused by cross-border fractures in the very identity and legitimacy of the state, its development of an independent machinery of government, and the huge financial surpluses that its economy generated, required the absorption of foreign labour. Comparatively poor Arab nationals would largely fill the gap.

The significant role of Palestinians in the public sector extended to a number of senior advisory and diplomatic posts. The extent to which Palestinians could influence foreign policy, by being positioned at such an elite level, is not explored in the literature but will be examined in this thesis. Walid Kazziha¹⁸ has explored the historic development of the Palestinian-dominated Nasserite, Arab Nationalist Movement (MAN) and its hybrids, touching on their relationship to Kuwait among other states in the region in the 1950s and 1960s. This included leading Kuwaiti oppositionist and MP, Dr Ahmed Khateeb. However, there is little evidence that the Palestinian political presence in Kuwait, going back to the founding of the pro-Egyptian Fatah around 1958

suggests the number of Shia range from 10-25% *Ibid*. In common with neighbouring countries, such data is not provided in Kuwait's official "Statistical Abstract"

¹⁷ Stephen M Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1987).

¹⁸ Walid W. Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World – Habash and his Comrades from Nationalism to Marxism* (London; Charles Knight, 1975)

under Yasser Arafat, then an exiled oil engineer, had any active relationship to Kuwait's political opposition inside parliament.

Kuwaiti academic, Abdel-Reda Assiri, who has written the only book to exclusively address Kuwait's foreign policy¹⁹, is also one of the few writers on Kuwait to give scope in their analysis to the role of the leading Al-Sabah in Kuwaiti decision-making and to their relations with the National Assembly. This is not, however, explored in much detail, nor very usefully in terms of considering differing foreign policy perspectives among the key actors (some of whom remained in leading positions until recently). Assiri talks of the "personalisation of foreign policy" under Sabah Al-Ahmed (foreign minister from 1965-2003 and amir since February 2006), while another Kuwaiti academic, Hussein Ali Al-Ebraheem, extended the analysis of the importance of key figures to talk of the "personalised state"²⁰. Undoubtedly, key decisions on foreign and domestic policy were being made by only a few Al-Sabah, but how, and with what degree of consultation on the part of the amir, crown prince, foreign minister and defence minister, is not clear from the literary sources. However, through interviews and embassy material, this thesis is able to establish differences of emphasis among the senior players, which for the period concerned suggests rather less weight being exercised on the part of Sabah Al-Ahmed, for example, than is suggested by Assiri. More importantly, this thesis argues that differences on foreign policy among the senior Al-Sabah were, and are, largely about style rather than substance, given the external and internal limitations on foreign policy options. However, the tendency for books that do include commentary on the Al-Sabah is to avoid trying to penetrate the inner-family policy process and to ignore potential policy differences, apparent in the domestic domain at least. This is partly because material is relatively hard to come by. However it is also because those writing on this subject – Kuwaitis or those close to the country - often have to be careful about commenting on what in Kuwait, and throughout the region, is a sensitive subject²¹.

This thesis argues that Kuwait was more mindful of external threats than internal constraints or imperatives, however these factors cannot be entirely separated. As Crystal shows, throughout the 1970s Kuwaiti public opinion emphasised a distinct Kuwaiti and Gulf state identity, but also

¹⁹ Abdel-Reda Assiri, Kuwait's Foreign Policy – City State in World Politics (San Francisco; Westview Press, 1990). The only, partial, exception would be the very limited number of memoirs published in Arabic by former Kuwaiti officials.

²⁰ Hassan Ali Al-Ebraheem, Kuwait and The Gulf (London; Croom Helm, 1984).

²¹ Two books are notable for mentioning individual Al-Sabah in relation to foreign policy but also for forswearing speculation on policy differences. Assiri op.cit. and Robert L Jarman, Sabah Al-Salim Al-Sabah, Amir of Kuwait 1965-77 – A Political Biography (London; London Centre of Arab Studies, 2002).

stressed the importance of the country as an Arab state, while its younger nationals gave the greatest priority to their own identification with Islam²². As shall be seen in Chapter 6, the ruling family would increasingly present its foreign policy in Islamic as well as Arab terms as the decade wore on, mindful of shifting trends throughout the region. Kuwait was undoubtedly a country with strong internal constituencies and identifiers, where allegiance to the ruling Al-Sabah could be subject to financial considerations and compromised by, seemingly contradictory, ideological alignments. However, Crystal's conception is that the state in Kuwait is a potentially fragile entity, albeit one that has accommodated differing class and other interests within its structures. The state in Kuwait and other Gulf Arab countries, she argues, does not conform to the stark dichotomy presented by Marxists who see the state as subject to an emergent bourgeoisie, or those who view the state as a (post-colonial) entity able to overcome class forces and build its own legitimising institutions. The state in Kuwait is, in Crystal's view, dangerously independent of institutional links with the more powerful class forces, whilst subject to new class interests where the old merchants are able to use the machinery of the state to serve their own patronage interests. This does not sound like such a fragile entity, however, especially given her view that it is the growth of the Kuwait state and of its patronage power that has given rise to these new class interests.

Interestingly, when specifically addressing foreign policy in just a single chapter of one of her two otherwise comprehensive books on Kuwait, Crystal emphasises that Kuwait is, in her view, an externally weak state conceiving of itself as militarily vulnerable, and that for this reason alone it has to pursue ameliorative and non-aligned policies. Crystal makes no theoretical link in her examination of foreign policy to her strong emphasis elsewhere on internal vulnerability and her conception, when looking at foreign policy, that regional insecurity motivated a desire to "balance" regional threats. Nor does she, or other writers who have looked at the identity and political orientation of Gulf Arab states, give particular attention to Kuwait's combination, for example, of the use of aid for regional influence, with strong stances on the Palestine question. In 1967 and 1973 this even saw symbolic Kuwaiti troop contributions to the Egyptian and Syrian war effort. Kuwait was also keen to publicly oppose US military engagement in the Gulf, at least until Kuwaiti oil exports began being threatened by Iran from 1986. Stances patently more Arab nationalist than that of its Gulf Arab allies suggest that foreign policy dynamics in Kuwait went

²² Crystal, *Transformation*, *op.cit.* in which she draws on the work of Kuwaiti researchers, Tawfiq Farah and Faisal Al-Salem, among others, to show how Kuwaiti middle school students in 1976 stressed Islam as their primary form of identification (p.66).

beyond the internal legitimacy perspective favoured by many western academics when looking at the amirate's policies in the 1960s and 1970s.

Hussein Ali Al-Ebraheem²³ emphasises that, as a small state, Kuwait was well advised to combine its oil wealth with the distribution of monies via such official state bodies as the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. The Fund was founded in 1961 in order to win friends in the Arab and, after the oil price hikes of 1973-4, throughout the wider Muslim and developing world. This, said Al-Ebraheem, could be combined with efforts to mediate where there were tensions in the Gulf, and the wider Middle East and Islamic world. This theme is also taken up by Assiri. However, Assiri's book, in common with all other books on, or related to, Kuwaiti foreign policy, lacks a theoretical context and presents a largely narrative account, albeit one that usefully emphasises the regional factors that prompted Kuwait, as a small and ostensibly powerless "city state", to accommodate more powerful Gulf countries where possible. Assiri, perhaps unsurprisingly, puts greater emphasis on the supposed achievements of Kuwaiti mediation than non-Kuwaiti observers. In reality such mediation was of limited impact, at the most Kuwait can be said to have played a part in encouraging Iranian acceptance of a UN consultation in Bahrain over the island's future status. However, his book does at least acknowledge the role of Kuwait's wealth in foreign policy terms.

However, there is very little material in Assiri's book, or among what is more generally available, that addresses Kuwait's foreign policy in terms of the importance of the amirate's ideological image, both internally and regionally. Nor is there any analysis of how the use of ideology had to accommodate the maintenance of good relations with all the key regional players, including non-Arab Iran. Kuwaiti non-alignment in the region, as Crystal rightly points out, was not entirely neutral and was not above using aid as a nuanced tool of foreign policy, including seeking to financially penalise or incentivise Iraq.

International relations

There is little in the available literature that seeks to explore Anglo-Kuwaiti or American-Kuwaiti relations with reference to threat perceptions, much less to any theoretical context. Crystal states the importance of the US-Kuwaiti relationship prior to Washington's agreement in 1987 to re-flag

²³ Al-Ebraheem, *op.cit.*

Kuwaiti oil tankers, but does not explore this in any depth. In contrast to the approach of Crystal, J.B. Kelly takes a largely jaundiced and highly personalised aim at what he views as the perfidious policies of the Gulf Arabs in general towards Britain in particular, but without remotely exploring what may have been motivating Kuwait's regionally non-aligned position for example²⁴.

The only book that specifically seeks to explore Kuwait's relations with both the UK and the US throughout this period is by Miriam Joyce²⁵. To its credit, and in the absence of any other literature of which I am aware on this specific subject, it gives a detailed historical account of relations from 1945 to 1968. However its coverage of the subsequent period, despite the book's title suggesting otherwise, is quite scant, partly reflecting the limitations of analysis very largely reliant on trawling through publicly available British and American government records. This, and a narrative-based political biography of Amir Sabah Salim²⁶, do not set Kuwait's relations with what were the key powers in the period, in any regional and/or theoretical context. Joyce's analysis also suffers from a lack of assessment of what the importance was of the internal context for Kuwait's or its neighbours' foreign policy²⁷. A number of historical memoirs provide a useful set of impressions of leading British officials in the region, pre-Kuwait's independence²⁸. However these largely provide background material only, rather than any insights into the making and shaping of Kuwaiti foreign policy.

Michael Palmer traces the history of the evolution of the US's security role in the Gulf²⁹. In the process he displays a good feel for the regional context created by the US's relative strategic detachment, which would oblige Kuwait to emphasise regional relations and Arabist policy stances. Two books provide an account of the Soviet Union and China's relations with Kuwait. One, by Stephen Page³⁰, is a wider dissection of Moscow's policy in the Arabian Peninsula, while

²⁴ J.B. Kelly, Arabia, The Gulf, and the West (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1980)

²⁵ Miriam Joyce, Kuwait 1945-1996 – An Anglo American Assessment (Frank Cass, London, 1998)

²⁶ Jarman, ibid.

²⁷ In a subsequent case study approach to analysing all the smaller Gulf Arab states' relations with Britain from 1960-69, Miriam Joyce gives an account is given of Bahrain's fears of (Shia majority) Iran without actually mentioning that Sunni-ruled Bahrain is majority Shia. Miriam Joyce, Ruling Sheikhs and Her Majesty's Government, 1960-69 (London; Frank Cass, 2003).

²⁸ For example Bernard Burrows, Footnotes in the Sand, and Ralph Hewins, A Golden Dream (London; WH Allen, 1963)

²⁹ Michael A. Palmer, Guardians of the Gulf, (New York; Free Press, 1992).

³⁰ Stephen Page, The USSR and Arabia – The Development of Soviet Policies and Attitudes Towards the Countries of the Arabian Peninsula (London; Central Asian Research Centre, 1971).

the other, by Hashim Behbehani³¹, provides a series of case studies of Peking's relations with very different Arab states. Page's account concentrates on the evolution of Soviet ideology toward Arabian Peninsula countries in response to calculations of potential receptiveness to the USSR's influence. The region is seen, rightly, by Moscow as largely unsympathetic, but periodically provides perceived opportunities for increasing influence. By definition this tells us little of the views held by Kuwait or her neighbours toward relations with the USSR. Behbehani's book on China similarly provides a useful account of the historical evolution of its relations with Kuwait, which are covered in the comprehensive manner that his case study approach affords. Unlike Page, he provides an assessment of the relationship from both sides, and in doing so illuminates the relatively limited expectations and objectives that Kuwait had in pursuing relations with Peking.

Kuwait's international relations, and in particular its relations with the UK, with whom it was aligned in a defence agreement from 1961-68, and the US, who Kuwait sought privately to involve in Kuwaiti and Gulf security from as early as 1965, are central to any analysis of the amirate's foreign policy priorities and motivations. However there is little in the literature that assesses Kuwait's international relations in this wider perspective. One very recent addition by Chookiat Panaspornprasit³² does examine the amirate's relations with the US and includes a chapter on the 1961-77 period. Panaspornprasit, however, views the motivation behind Kuwait's differences with the US over the latter's policy in the region in fairly narrow, domestic terms.

In conclusion, the available literature on Kuwait's political economy, and its relationship to internal societal forces and the governance of the country, was highly useful in providing context for the examination of the foreign policy-making process. However the relationship between these factors and, what this thesis will argue was, the primary foreign policy driver, that of external threat perceptions, is not adequately covered, whether in the work of those who adopt a class-orientated model of state development in Kuwait, or a more narrative-based approach encompassing internal developments or foreign relations. Hopefully this thesis will fill a gap in much writing about Kuwait specifically, as well as provide additional insights to those found in strategic overviews of regional alliances that lack adequate consideration of the ideational factors that help to shape foreign policy in the Middle East.

³¹ Hashim S.H. Behbehani, China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World (1955-75) – Three Case Studies (London; KPI, 1985)

³² Chookiat Panaspornprasit, US-Kuwaiti Relations – An Uneasy Relationship (Abingdon; Routledge, 2005)

Chapter 2

Internal dimensions 1961-67

Kuwait's foreign policy from 1961 to 1977 was driven primarily by external threat perceptions. However, the way in which Kuwait sought to maximise its security in the region has to be examined in light of the political and economic context inside Kuwait. Normative factors, such as Arab nationalist ideology, were as prevalent internally as externally, while Kuwait's focus on countering external threats would draw on the leadership's projection of the country's national identity and national role¹, bolstered by the judicious distribution abroad as well as home of its oil wealth. Domestic economic patronage provided political autonomy for the Al-Sabah to focus on external concerns, even as internal political life in Kuwait proved more assertive than rentier theorists looking at Kuwait have assumed (see Chapter 1). In this way, internal political forces, including those whose ideas ran counter to state sovereignty, were managed so that they did not threaten Kuwait from the inside, as Iraq and others appeared to from the outside.

In many instances Kuwait's use of Arab nationalist ideology, and its rulers' projected foreign policy identity, overlap with pragmatic calculations of where the emirate's best interests in the pursuit of its national security lie. This meant that absorption into the cold war-influenced regional alignments that characterised inter-state relations in the Middle East was largely avoided. However, periodically Kuwait's policy-makers could not avoid at least partial regional alignments, while they were far from oblivious to the dangers that hostile regional alliances could pose. For this reason, Kuwait valued the defence agreement with the UK that in 1961 replaced the 1899 Treaty of Protection, and sought to encourage the US to step into the vacuum that followed Britain's announcement in 1968 of its departure from the Gulf.

This chapter will consider internal political dimensions in Kuwait from 1961 until the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war. Kuwait's primary foreign policy consideration was how to deal with perceived external threats, and the alliance with the UK that it maintained, and the ideological constructs it utilised, were deployed with this primarily in mind. A constructivist approach would

¹ Stephen Walker (Ed.), *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis* (Durham (NC); Duke University Press, 1987).

view Kuwait's foreign policy as mainly a reflection of its identity². The amirate's decision-makers undoubtedly had a definite conception of the country, shared to a significant extent by the public, which they tried to project abroad. Arabism ran deep in the internal life of Kuwait, and informed the norms to which foreign policy had to be seen to subscribe. However this also helped its decision-makers to exercise domestic autonomy in the pursuit of a foreign policy that largely functioned as a defensive tool against external threats.

As this chapter will explore, the domestic drivers in Kuwait's foreign policy decision-making were largely a matter of consensus among senior Al-Sabah who were not bound or conditioned by internal governmental constraints or political vulnerabilities, and, in a pattern recognisable in foreign policy making in other Arab states, policy could be directed from on high with particular attention to the wider, regional environment³. Prior to the annulment of the Treaty of Protection, the ruling family, the Al-Sabah, exercised exclusive responsibility for Kuwait's domestic affairs. However, under the 1899 Treaty, Britain had effective control over Kuwait's foreign relations as the ruler of Kuwait could not enter into any additional treaty or commitment with a foreign power, nor concede to another country rights over land, without the approval of Britain⁴. The *quid pro quo* was that Kuwait's protection was guaranteed by Britain. By the late 1950s, the mutual desire on the part of both the British government and Amir Abdullah Salim Al-Sabah, who ruled Kuwait from 1950-65, for this treaty arrangement to be annulled and for Kuwait to be granted independence reflected regional and internal pressures (see also Chapters 3 and 4) that would subsequently shape the amirate's foreign policy-making. The Al-Sabah leadership had sought to manage these elements in order to maximise their decision-making autonomy and ensure that Kuwait retained a separate existence. The fact that in 1956 British and French troops, together with Israel, invaded Egypt, provoked outrage and unrest in Kuwait and throughout the region. The enormous propaganda victory that accrued to the Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser from the political failure of Britain and France, whose forces, along with those of Israel, were eventually obliged, under US pressure, to retreat, helped inspire the overthrowing of the British-

² Michael N. Barnett, "Identity and Alliances in the Middle East", Peter J Katzenstein (Ed.) The Culture of National Security – Norms and Identity in World Politics (Columbia; Columbia University Press, 1996).

³ A.I. Dawisha, "The Middle East", Christopher Clapham (Ed.), Foreign Policy Making in Developing States: A Comparative Approach (Teakfield; Saxon House, 1975); and A.I. Dawisha, Egypt in the Arab World - The Elements of Foreign Policy (London; Macmillan, 1976)

⁴ The treaty of 23rd January 1899 bound Shaikh Mubarak Al-Sabah Al-Sabah "... (and) his heirs and successors not to cede, sell, lease, mortgage or give for occupation or for any other purpose any portion of his territory to the Government or subjects of any other Power without the previous consent of her Majesty's Government for these purposes." Richard Schofield, Kuwait and Iraq: Historical Claims and Territorial Disputes (London; Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991), p.17

backed Hashemite monarchy in Iraq in 1958. This presented a sense of the inevitability and desirability of Kuwaiti independence on the part of London and of British officials on the ground in Kuwait, as well as in the view of Amir Abdullah Salim. However it also created dangers that the Amir and the British were acutely aware of; hereditary rule by the Al-Sabah, and, conceivably, the separate identity of Kuwait, could be ended as a consequence.

The Majlis Movement

Kuwait's merchant class contributed to civil and political life in the amirate to the extent that the country had an identity that, for its residents and neighbours alike, went beyond the leading family. Assertions of authority by leading non Al-Sabah merchants in the early part of the 20th century had found expression in the short-lived 1921 consultative council, the elected municipality in 1930, and the 1938-9 "Majlis Movement". However, bad management of the growing regional wave of Arab nationalism could have put Kuwait's separate identity in peril, especially as historically some of the leading Kuwaiti merchants had not strongly identified with the Al-Sabah and had proven sympathetic in some instances to Iraq and, after, 1952, Egypt.

The Treaty of Protection had been terminated by the "Exchange of Letters", which, however, maintained Britain's defence commitment to Kuwait⁵. As a result, the authority already being exercised by the hereditary ruler would be extended to foreign affairs (see Chapters 3 and 4). In Kuwait the leading non Al-Sabah families, the elite merchants who dominated business life, the Al-Ghanem, the Al-Sagr, and the Al-Khaled, among others, had a strong conception that Kuwait's political direction was something that they had, if not an equal right over with the ruling family, certainly a significant role in, whether they held formal public office or not. It could even be argued that the non-Al-Sabah merchant tribes had the upper hand in that the power of the leading family had depended on a consensual process⁶, with the implication that this consent could be taken away.

⁵ Paragraph "d" stated: "Nothing in these conclusions shall affect the readiness of Her Majesty's Government to assist the government of Kuwait if the latter required such assistance" Quoted in a Foreign Office telegram to British Embassy, Kuwait, 27th March, 1968 (FCO 8/102).

⁶ Ahmed Mustafa Abu-Hakima, The Modern History of Kuwait 1750-1965 (London; Luzac, 1983); and personal interview with Dr Abdul-Reda Assiri, professor of political science, Kuwait University, Kuwait City, January 2003.

Both the ruler, Shaikh Ahmed Al-Jabr (r.1921-50), and the British government became concerned that the *majlis* movement was being supported by Iraqi Arab nationalists and a Hashemite Iraqi regime that saw it as a vehicle to advance their claims to Kuwait (see Appendix 1). In the event, only a relatively small number of the leading Kuwaiti families represented in the *majlis*, or council, backed Iraqi annexation. However, the fact that some *majlis* members had privately called on Iraq's King Ghazi, who was asserting his country's claim, to annex Kuwait, while many had economic interests in their northern neighbour, and, especially as they came under pressure from the Kuwaiti authorities, travelled or were exiled there, caused fears that that a body, whose domestic policy focus was reaching uncomfortable heights, was overlapping with unwelcome foreign interests. Over Palestine this could severely embarrass Kuwait and its UK ally, while, in the context of Iraqi claims, it might, plausibly, threaten the survival of Kuwait altogether. The Majlis Movement proved highly influential among both merchants and their allies among the Al-Sabah in shaping expectations of the political direction the country should take following independence. Unprecedented throughout Arabia, the events of 1938-9, finally wrapped up when Shaikh Ahmed decided to disband the *majlis* by force, had seen a young Abdullah Salim, and those close to him within the Al-Sabah, lend legitimacy to the notion of inter-family partnership in the rule of the country. Furthermore, the events had shown how external Arab criticism of the Al-Sabah could overlap with domestic political commitment to wider Arab causes, and the making of Kuwaiti foreign policy in the future would be mindful of this.

When Kuwait received its independence in 1961, these factors did not necessarily mean that, as amir, Abdullah Salim would automatically introduce some form of elected assembly. However, he was encouraged to do so by the apparent threat to Kuwait that followed within days of its independence. Iraq's General Qassim re-ignited territorial claims that had been largely dormant since the Iraqi agitation at the time of the Majlis Movement. Amir Abdullah believed that broadening political participation in the emirate would be the best way to strengthen elite merchant and wider allegiance to Al-Sabah rule, and thus the coherence and security of Kuwait as a national entity; it also played to the strong merchant sympathy that his earlier position had elicited. However the amir's decision was taken mindful that elite, and less privileged, merchants overwhelmingly identified with Kuwait, which the dispersion of oil largesse had helped to secure, as it had a less overt political profile on the part of the merchants. The internal integrity of Kuwait had been shown when General Qassim made his territorial claim to Kuwait in June 1961, something that careful economic and political management by Amir Abdullah had helped

encourage⁷. Therefore, when the ruler decided to invite the British to operationalise their defence commitment (see Chapter 4), he was looking to a perceived external threat, and was not being internally pressured by any acute support for Iraq.

Partners in power?

During the crisis of June-July 1961 Kuwait successfully asserted and deepened a sense of identity beyond the rule of a single family. After the defence commitment of the British was symbolised by a major troop presence in the country, the leading merchants were the key constituency the Amir turned to in order to consolidate his internal authority. As amir, his formal title following independence, Abdullah Salim set up an advisory council consisting of Al-Sabah and merchant family representatives. The council laid down the rules for the constituent assembly founded in 1962 that largely consisted of merchant representatives. The constituent assembly agreed a constitution that included provision for an elected national assembly. Passed on 11th November 1962, it affirms that Kuwait is a hereditary emirate and that executive power is exercised by the Amir as well as the cabinet and ministers who are collectively responsible to him⁸. It also states that legislative power is exercised both by the amir and the national assembly. At the same time the political system in Kuwait is described as democratic and one where sovereignty lies with the people.

The question of who can articulate or represent the sovereignty of the people – the amir or the national assembly - is left undefined. To an extent it therefore embodies the ambiguous partnership that leading merchant families have with the Al-Sabah. The limitations on the authority of the merchants are reflected in a political system in which the Al-Sabah dominate the executive and manipulate the legislature, and, on two occasions, has unconstitutionally suspended it. However, the historic assertion of political authority by the merchants was written into the political fabric of the Kuwaiti body politic in 1962 with the forming of the constituent assembly, reflecting the sense that the merchant families have of an inherent right of partnership in the

⁷ This view was also expressed by Suleiman Majid Al-Shaheen, who served in the Kuwaiti foreign ministry from 1963 to 1999. Personal interview January 2003, Kuwait. Contrastingly, Jill Crystal judges the founding of the assembly as a device to offset pro-Iraqi and wider Arab nationalist sentiment at home, and external criticism of Kuwait in the region. Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf – Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁸ The text of the constitution can be found at www.kuwaitinformationcenter.org

political process⁹. Furthermore, they believe that there should be checks on Al-Sabah power, a view that saw strong merchant reaction against the dissolution of the assembly in 1986 and in favour of its restoration in 1991. However, influential merchants largely coalesced in the assembly's closure in 1976 (see Chapter 5).

Individuals from leading merchant families took positions within the first cabinet and within the machinery of the nascent state, often filling the post of ambassador to leading western and Arab countries, as well as to the UN and the Arab League, occasionally on a multiple basis. The leading merchants usually had a superior education and possessed more practical skills than many of the Al-Sabah. The first two cabinets and sessions of the National Assembly by no means excluded representation of merchants either. In fact, as a British ambassador to Kuwait later observed, it is hard to find a Kuwait national who is not in some way involved in trade¹⁰. The non-Al-Sabah represented in cabinet from 1961 fluctuated at around just under half of the 15 or 16 seat cabinet. From 1963, of the 50 elected members of the assembly (MPs), at least 21 either had major business interests of their own or came from families that did¹¹. However the only representative of the leading families in the parliament was the assembly president, or speaker, Abdul-Aziz Al-Sagr, who had headed the council of shaikhs and merchants set up to advise on the formation of the constituent assembly. As the president of the Kuwaiti Chamber of Commerce, his pivotal position in the assembly suggested that a watching brief would be attempted, not just over the legislature, but over the government itself. That said, many of the top merchants considered public service, whether as cabinet members, ambassadors, or MPs, as a distraction from the business of being merchants and not, as might perhaps have been expected, as the essential means to advance such interests. While positions such as minister of commerce held an attraction, for the most part during this period the leading merchants did not consider a role in government or within the national assembly as essential. Furthermore, the constitutional bar on maintaining business interests and serving in cabinet acted as a deterrent. This clause appeared to simultaneously embody democratic values while serving an Al-Sabah interest in constraining senior merchants from exercising a direct role in government. Many of the top families did not see the need to intervene or have a role in the political process unless their interests were directly at stake, especially as the chamber of commerce had significant influence

⁹ Personal interview with Faisal Al-Mutawaa, head of Al-Bayan Investments, and a leading figure in the contemporary "liberal" political grouping, National Democratic Forum, Kuwait City, January 2003.

¹⁰ Sir John Graham, UK ambassador to Kuwait, 1966-68. Personal interview, UK, August 2000.

¹¹ Author's calculation, based on profile of MPs contained in US embassy telegram to State Department, July 15th, 1965 (A-13).

on the domestic decisions of the government as the Al-Sabah struggled with the realities of state building.

Cabinet crisis

The 1964-5 cabinet crisis, in which relatively conservative, and less wealthy, merchant MPs mobilised against a proposed cabinet that contained a number of senior merchants keen to offset KMAN influence, had the result of deepening the leading merchants' detachment from formal political life. Al-Sagr resigned as speaker, and the vice-president of the assembly, Saud Abdul-Razzaq, the leading voice of the so-called "lesser merchants", took his place. It could be argued that this proves that the rentier economy had enabled oil to become the new "patron" in Kuwait¹², after Britain's former promotion of political and economic "clientcy". The ruler of an otherwise small and potentially internally vulnerable state could enjoy autonomy of political operation from those who were also benefiting from the wealth that it facilitated, whatever the political setbacks to certain leading merchants' ambitions. Kuwait's use of ideology, and its developing conception of a national role that pro-actively promoted regional non-alignment, was being developed for external legitimacy, not to appease internal opinion..

The KMAN deputies had positioned themselves during the crisis as something akin to "His Highness's loyal opposition", emphasising their need to have a government in place that they could then oppose. With further upheaval later in 1965 in the form of KMAN-inspired demonstrations on school campuses and against visiting Tunisian President Bourguiba¹³, the challenge of the assembly contributed to a desire on the part of the government to assert greater authority. The setback to the KMAN deputies within the assembly represented by the conservative-led parliamentary "revolt", and division among their own number, made it easier for the government to act more freely and a succession of measures were introduced to tighten up on the relative freedom of the press and of *nadwas* (or clubs) that in some instances were Arab nationalist meeting places, but more frequently provided opportunities for young men to talk sports.

¹² Mary Ann Tetreault, "Autonomy, necessity and the small state: ruling Kuwait in the twentieth century", *International Organisation* 45, 4: Autumn 1991.

¹³ The Tunisian president had stepped outside of the UAR-led Arab League consensus by advocating co-existence with Israel in return for a comprehensive political settlement.

The press and the wide variety of professional bodies as well as *nadwas* were central to the civil life of Kuwait and were part of what marked the emirate out from the rest of the Gulf. Frequently there would be an overlap between these organisations, with press titles serving as outlets for defined interests that were akin to pressure groups¹⁴. The independence of professional bodies and newspapers was partly compromised by financial support from the government and/or Al-Sabah family members, however, despite this, they genuinely represented part of the pluralism of Kuwaiti society. Unlike the clampdown that followed the 1967 war, the government on this occasion was not intent on targeting a wide range of newspapers and groups, and chose to direct its measures against KMAN only. In protest, eight of those KMAN MPs who still represented a coherent bloc, resigned from the assembly, having not actually opposed the measures when introduced in the parliament in the first place. The government's domestic restraint of KMAN did not have a major impact on official foreign policies that had encouraged some leading merchants to join the cabinet in opposition to perceived radicalism (see Appendix 4), although their desire for the government ease its flirtation with communist countries (see Chapters 3 and 4) was realised. Within the parliament, posturing with communist states was not just the preserve of KMAN, however, and for a while included some of the wealthier and more elite merchants themselves, whose support for Arab nationalism even saw them express superficially socialist sentiments.

Official Arabism

The Kuwaiti constitution set out in its preamble that the ruler has "faith in the role of this country in furthering Arab nationalism". Amir Abdullah Salim (r.1950-65) recognised that Arab nationalism of the kind espoused by Egypt's President Nasser was the sea in which the Arab countries had to swim. He was also, as evidenced by his dissenting position against majority Al-Sabah opinion in 1938-9, able to recognise that this trend needed incorporating within Kuwaiti domestic political life, and that these internal as well as regional factors needed reflecting in the country's foreign policy¹⁵. The "regional sea" was made all the more challenging because of the potency of these ideas within Kuwait. However, by the time of the country's independence, its

¹⁴ Unpublished thesis by Abdul-Latif Hassan Al-Rumaihi, "The Dynamics of Kuwaiti Foreign Policy"(Exeter, U.K.; Exeter University, 1983), p.371.

¹⁵ According to the then leading Arab nationalist MP, Dr Ahmed Khateeb, the Kuwaiti amir even offered to fund KMAN. Such was Abdullah Salim's willingness to incorporate this trend, given the significant regional weight and local sympathy for pan-Arabism, that at a meeting in Egypt in the early 1960s, President Nasser asked Khateeb rhetorically, "Who is this shaikh?" Khateeb, *op.cit.*

foreign policy construct was not seen as a reaction to a perceived external vulnerability cross-cutting with internal weakness. Foreign policy needed to embrace this ideational construct in order that, as a weak power, Kuwait could offset Iraq's deployment of Arab nationalist propaganda against the emirate, maintain broad support among militarily stronger Arab neighbours, and prevent any domestic disquiet. This meant treading a potentially difficult path of articulating pan-Arabist ideas and pursuing policies that broadly reflected them, without being internally undermined by concepts that sat awkwardly with hereditary rule, especially by a ruling family that in part relied for its external security on a British defence guarantee.

Michael Barnett writes, "...Arab leaders often needed Arab nationalism to provide a basis for their actions, yet its logical conclusion threatened to undermine their basis of power"¹⁶. In the period with which this thesis is concerned, there were undoubted constraints on the ability of Arab states to emphasise state sovereignty as a foreign policy construct, rather than Arab nationalism. However the Kuwaiti case is less that of the leadership riding the tiger of Arab nationalism as an internal threat, than skilfully utilising what Barnett rightly identifies as a key construct in Arab states' foreign policy identification in order to legitimise its place in what he calls the "Arab state system". Arab nationalism's popularity among Kuwaiti nationals went far beyond the minority support that KMAN accrued. Respect for Arab nationalism's leading embodiment, President Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, was especially strong during this period, not least because of a perceived indebtedness for his role in "defending" Kuwait during the perceived Iraqi threat in 1961¹⁷. Arab nationalist impulses ran through a wide range of the political trends represented in the national assembly and the Kuwaiti press, whose stances, often authored by foreign Arab nationals and in particular by Palestinians, was paid attention to by the Kuwaiti leadership¹⁸. However the Kuwaiti leadership's determination of policy was not being led by popular opinion; and, partly out of acknowledgement of the sensitivity of foreign relations, the government would prove keen, through a combination of manipulation and legal and extra legal measures, to keep assembly and press opinion within manageable boundaries.

Arab nationalism could however have de-legitimised the Kuwaiti ruling family if its precepts had been directly contradicted by the emirate's foreign policy, just as closeness to Britain had

¹⁶ Michael N. Barnett, "Sovereignty, Nationalism and the Regional Order in the Arab State System", Thomas J Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (Ed.), State Sovereignty as a Social Construct, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Al-Rumaihi, op.cit., p.350.

¹⁸ Al-Rumaihi argues that the Kuwaiti press would encourage a tougher, perceptibly Arab nationalist, policy stance. Ibid. p. 368.

undermined the Iraqi monarchy in the second half of the 1950s. Kuwait was not under significant internal threat, nor was its use of Arab nationalist rhetoric and policy advocacy primarily a response to such fears. However pan-Arabism represented a potent regional force that, if mishandled, could bring governments down due to internal pressure, as was seen in Iraq and Syria throughout the 1960s.

The Kuwaiti constitution does not clearly provide for the functioning of political parties. As a result political trends had to be careful to organise on a fairly informal basis as “associations”, a status under which they could legally register but which still rendered their legality ambiguous. This intentionally made it hard for KMAN, whose beliefs, theoretically at least, were incompatible with Al-Sabah rule, to mobilise support outside of the assembly, or to present more coherent demands for extensive assembly representation in the cabinet. It made it easier for the authorities to clamp down and manipulate the electoral prospects of political trends whose organisational status was questionable. On the other hand, to this day there is still strong opposition among many senior merchants as well as the Al-Sabah to, as they see it, importing the party politics of neighbouring countries, regardless of the almost total lack of support among Kuwaitis, then, or now, for the Ba’ath parties of Iraq or Syria. Despite the relative clampdown, political debate would continue to be active as many professional bodies, clubs and press titles remained active, frequently providing outlets for sentiment in tune with the pervasive Arabism of the time. Mindful of the popularity within the region and no less within Kuwait of Arab moves toward political unity, Amir Abdullah would be careful to embrace the broad principle whilst keeping some distance from the practical realities of projects that, if they included Kuwait, could have neutralised its distinct identity.

KMAN presented a parliamentary motion on April 8th, 1963 in support of the newly announced United Arab Republic (UAR) of Egypt, Syria and Iraq, and urging that Kuwait should declare its willingness to join a federation of all four countries as soon as possible. This was within weeks of the Assembly opening, and less than two years after the apparent threat from Iraq, albeit under a different regime, had led to the UK military intervention. The 12-man KMAN bloc in the 50 member national assembly were persuaded to drop their motion, but not before Amir Abdullah Salim had issued a statement affirming that the widest possible unification of the Arab world was indeed Kuwait’s aspiration, if this was the express wish of the Kuwait people. However he was careful to add that this would not be possible until five years, the minimum period required for any changes to the constitution, had expired. Just as during the events of 1956, Abdullah Salim

was not prepared to do anything that would enable Egypt to gain undue influence over Kuwait, or encourage antagonism with Cairo either. The Kuwaiti ruler's Arab nationalism was always a matter of practical statecraft. Couching his response with reference to the will of the Kuwaiti people was precisely in tune with what, in addition to support for Arab nationalism, had been written into the constitution, thereby also associating Kuwait with the norms of state sovereignty and creating practical distance from the realities, if not the rhetoric, of pan-Arab union projects.

Political opposition

In Kuwait, the majority of the population in this period were non-Kuwaiti Arabs, who lacked the vote, and were, for the most part, kept separate from political life with the connivance of KMAN, who, for example, voted in the Assembly in support of preserving the legal right to trade union membership as an exclusively Kuwaiti national prerogative. (This did not prevent KMAN from organising clandestinely among foreign workers, however). By definition there was hardly any such thing as a Kuwaiti working class, with manual work largely the preserve of immigrant, mostly, Arab workers, of whom Palestinians, Iraqis and Egyptians were by far the most populous¹⁹. Among Kuwait nationals there were less well-off members of the middle class, and it was in the neighbourhoods where they predominated, such as the Kaifan constituency near Kuwait city, where the KMAN attracted most support. The evolution of the political ideology of the KMAN into something akin to that of the Arab Socialist Union that Nasser had established in Egypt in 1966, brought use of socialist as well as Arab nationalist rhetoric; this had a genuinely widespread, but not majority, appeal in Kuwait. In particular KMAN were supported by some of the less wealthy among the private sector merchant elite, and some of the emerging "new class" of public sector bureaucrats whose rapid expansion as a source of oil wealth distribution would soon see them become the majority of the workforce of Kuwaiti nationals, and whose vested interest in more social spending KMAN, as well as conservative MPs, would articulate. However there were non-KMAN trends among the business and public sector elites, with two small political groupings providing a focus of both moderate Arab nationalism and of more

¹⁹ In 1965, Kuwaiti non-nationals represented 76.7% of the workforce and 52.9% of the total population of the emirate, while non-Kuwaiti Arabs were 76% (187,923) of the total foreign population (247,280). Onn Winckler, *Demographic Developments and Population Policies in Kuwait* (Tel Aviv; Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1988). In 1964, of the non-Kuwaiti Arabs, 65,000 were estimated by the US to be Palestinian in origin. US Embassy to State Department, February 13th 1964 (A167).

conservative opinion that would be dubbed “Kuwait first”. These tendencies included only a small number of MPs, but were connected with a leading member of the Al-Sabah, Jabr Al-Ali, the minister for guidance and Islamic affairs (1965-68), and drew significant merchant support. With the passing of Amir Abdullah at the end of 1965, the new crown prince and prime minister, Jabr Al-Ahmed, would come to espouse “Kuwait First” policies too.

The only example of a genuine appeal by KMAN to those who could be considered outside of a mainstream that had vested interests in preserving the status quo, were the Kuwaiti bedouin oil workers organised in the KMAN-controlled union²⁰. Overwhelmingly, however, the bedouin were settling in urban areas and increasingly in the 1960s and 1970s were being given nationality, and therefore enfranchised, as a way of countering support for the KMAN. They did not embrace Arab nationalist ideas but focused instead on the particular interests of their tribe. Bedouin MPs to this day ally with conservative forces in the Assembly, and, as the 1964/5 cabinet crisis had shown, these could mobilise against senior merchant families without the support of the Arab nationalists.

KMAN heads foreign ministry

In 1962 KMAN leader Jassim Qitami became the first director-general of the newly-founded ministry of foreign affairs. It is not clear if the initiative for this came from Sabah Salim, the then foreign minister (1962-3), or from Amir Abdullah Salim (1950-65) himself. By political instinct, Abdullah Salim would not have opposed the decision, while Sabah Salim, despite being more conservative in instinct than a number of senior Al-Sabah colleagues, and strongly supportive of the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship, was happy to reappoint his former deputy at Kuwait’s police department. Sabah Salim was a believer in drawing KMAN MPs into the cabinet (see Appendix 6 and also Chapter 6). Furthermore, Qitami’s political connections in the Arab world, reflecting his pan-Arabist beliefs, were extensive, something that drew appreciation from British officials too. The fact that the leader of what was considered by both British and US officials in Kuwait at the time to be a potentially de-stabilising pro-Egyptian political force, was entrusted with negotiating with Iraq the terms of its recognition of Kuwait in October 1963, suggested that senior KMAN officials were not only not considered a threat, at least not under Amir Abdullah Salim, but that these Arab nationalist politicians were seen, by their high profile role, as potentially providing

²⁰ Dispatch from US Embassy to State Department, 7th June 1965 (A320).

Kuwait with greater acceptance in the Arab world precisely because of their political allegiances. Some two years after Kuwait's independence and Iraq's apparent threat to invade, Baghdad's recognition of the emirate held the key to Kuwait's acceptance in the Arab world following the ending of the Soviet veto on UN membership in May 1963. Thus, in Kuwaiti eyes, the country was developing international and regional legitimacy, and, as a result, a potential security equal to that provided by the British defence guarantee. This was therefore no small responsibility to give the KMAN leader.

The Al-Sabah and Arab nationalism

Until his failing health began to be more marked from 1964, Amir Abdullah Salim, had taken care to court Arab nationalist support at home, as well as abroad. This had been the case with Sabah Salim too, but was particularly pronounced on the part of the aspirant heir apparent, finance minister Jabr Al-Ahmed, and his half-brother, foreign minister Sabah Al-Ahmed (1963-2003). The Al-Ahmed brothers were sons of Ahmed Jabr (r.1921-50), who, while concerned about political impressions, had, as ruler, shown little patience with Arab nationalist merchants. Britain, however, was concerned that Amir Abdullah Salim, who had been mistrusted by the British over the Majlis Movement, might nominate Jabr Al-Ahmed, who was perceived as pro-Egyptian in orientation, as crown prince instead of Sabah Salim. However the latter was named heir in October 1962 and was shortly confirmed as prime minister by the amir, who preferred to constrain the younger Jabr Al-Ahmed's ambition for the time being, despite the break this represented with the pattern of alternation as ruler between the dominant Al-Jabr and Al-Salim sides of the ruling family. As the half-brother of the ruling amir, Abdullah Salim, and son of the former amir Salim Sabah (r.1917-21), Sabah Salim had sought to utilise his "pro-British" credentials in meetings in London, believing that would aid his chances of acceding. It was evident that in the domestic jockeying for position among the most senior Al-Sabah under Amir Abdullah Salim, that Jabr Al-Ahmed was willing to play the Arab nationalist card more than Sabah Salim, or than the other up and coming contenders for senior positions: Jabr's second cousins from the Al-Salim line: Saad Abdullah (interior minister 1962-77; defence 1965-77) and Jabr Al-Ali (minister of information and Islamic guidance 1965-69). The latter two Al-Salim first cousins were no less concerned to compete with the Al-Ahmed brothers, but preferred to play to more conservative sympathies and, in the case of Shaikh Saad, to assert his responsibility over security matters as the amir's health waned.

As ruler, Abdullah Salim had ensured a careful balancing in senior positions of both the Al-Jabr and Al-Salim lines of the family²¹ as he had been determined to avoid the damaging approach of his second cousin, the former ruler, Ahmed Jabr, to intra-Sabah politics. This approach was to be continued, following the death of Amir Abdullah in November 1965, under the more collegiate style of leadership exercised by Sabah Salim, whose marriage to one of Jabr Al-Ahmed's sisters, and the fact that his own sister was Shaikh Jabr's mother, was symptomatic of the ruling family's desire to minimise intra-Sabah tension. Furthermore it was understood that, once Sabah Salim acceded as ruler, Jabr would become crown prince. As amir, Sabah Salim was keen, as he had been as crown prince, to distance himself from everyday domestic politics. Under his tutelage, governmental authority was more disbursed and responsibilities became more clearly defined. This, and his forceful personality, enabled Jabr Al-Ahmed to exercise much greater authority as crown prince and prime minister than Sabah Salim had, and to much more effectively carry out the role of head of government that is formally ascribed to the premier in the constitution. This did not mean, however, that Sabah Salim was disconnected from foreign policy, nor that he wished to be.

Sabah Salim was to confide in a British diplomat shortly after Kuwait was admitted to the UN in 1963 that the "old system was working fine", whereby Kuwait (under the terms of the treaty of protection with Britain) was independent except for foreign policy, but that now its foreign policy "was determined somewhere else"²². This strong implication that Egyptian influence over Kuwait's foreign policy was less preferable than British direction, speaks to an Arab nationalist motivation in foreign policy that sat less easily with the older, more conservative, Sabah Salim who, while privately not enamoured with Nasser, was well aware of the constraints on Kuwait's foreign policy options. As amir, Sabah Salim would continue to prove sympathetic to the British relationship, unlike Jabr Al-Ahmed. However, in practice, and given the regional realities that Abdullah Salim too had striven to accommodate, there was little substantive difference in foreign policy between Sabah Salim and Jabr Al-Ahmed.

²¹ By tradition the descendants of the first two sons of Shaikh Mubarrak ("the Great") Al-Sabah (r.1896-1915), Jabr and Salim, have provided the rulers and most senior figures among the Al-Sabah leadership. However the constitution only prescribes that the amir should be a descendent of one of the (five) sons of Shaikh Mubarrak.

²² G. Noel Jackson to UK Ministry of Defence, 14th December 1965 (DEFE11/616).

In the last 18 months or so of his rule, Abdullah Salim had been increasingly less and less in command of the day to day direction of the country, and was spending most of his time out of the country convalescing. A “stand-to” of Kuwaiti forces in September 1964 against an Iraqi mobilisation close to the border had been initiated without the approval of the amir and without any discussion with the British, an event unthinkable a year or two earlier. The decision was the initiative of the amir’s son, interior minister (1962-65) Saad Abdullah Salim. Saad had also backed the beginning of a domestic clampdown initiated by his first cousin, Jabr Al-Ali, minister of culture and Islamic guidance, which in particular had intended to target the Arab nationalist, Istiqlal Club. The pair, fellow members of the Al-Salim branch of the Al-Sabah, took a more cautious, indeed repressive, approach to the management of relations with KMAN, than that of their uncle, the increasingly absent amir.

Coup speculation

During this time the UK and the US embassies were becoming increasingly preoccupied with what they considered was the possibility of an Egyptian or Iraqi-authored coup in Kuwait. The Iraqis were the largest non-Kuwaiti national group in the armed forces, where their presence was most pronounced among relatively low-ranking officers, but were easily outnumbered by Kuwaitis (see Chapter 5). There were in fact few plausible Kuwaiti partners for a coup plot. Some private criticism of the ruling family was likely among non-Al-Sabah senior officers. However there was little likelihood of a concerted plan to overthrow the ruling family, which would have mobilised the traditionally loyal and generally apolitical bedouin troops in response. Notably, there were hardly any Baathist Kuwaiti nationals, in the military or generally, and the tiny number that could be found were much more likely to be pro-Syrian rather than pro-Iraqi. Prospective coup plotters would have been more likely to have been sympathetic with Egypt. This fact, and the latter’s improved relationship with Iraq, which sparked such speculation in the UK and US embassies, meant that Egypt would have needed to have allowed Iraq to “assist”; given that it would be the latter’s troops who would intervene in defence of any “Nasserite uprising”. This is unlikely to have been an outcome favoured by any Arab state, save possibly the Iraqis themselves. It is notable that *Sawt Al-Arab* (Voice of the Arabs), the Cairo radio station dreaded among the leaders of Kuwait’s Gulf amirate neighbours as well as by the ruling family in Saudi Arabia, would not usually directly target Kuwait with its onslaughts against “feudal reactionary regimes”, commonly portrayed as “in league with Britain”. Kuwait’s foreign policy

was partly constructed in order to avoid being the target of such accusations, as was the orientation of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (see Chapter 4). In addition, the presence of a large number of Egyptian nationals throughout the education sector, and, to a lesser extent, other government services, helped to mitigate Cairo's vitriol²³.

Kuwait First

While Kuwait's political relations with communist bloc countries had been partly adjusted, there was little discernible inter-relation between domestic constraint on KMAN, and the pan-Arab presentation of Kuwaiti foreign policy, even if its rhetorical expression showed signs of easing. Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali had earlier asked US officials "not to be offended if we call you bad names" as this is merely our way of "fending off our real enemies, as Nasser is doing²⁴." For his part, the new crown prince and prime minister, Jabr Al-Ahmed, began to focus on what he defined as Kuwaiti interests at home and abroad. Impatient with domestic radicalism and what was perceived among many senior Al-Sabah to be a lack of Arab understanding for Kuwait's desire to avoid regional alignment (see Chapter 3), Jabr Al-Ahmed would deploy a markedly different policy style from what he displayed under Amir Abdullah Salim. A more divided Arab world, evidenced in the civil war in Yemen, over Palestine, and to an extent over the Arab nationalist struggle in Bahrain (see Chapter 3), made Kuwait feel less obliged to continually emphasise pan-Arab concerns in foreign policy and more able to constrain KMAN domestically. A domestic initiative announced when the crown prince, as was traditional, read the Amiri speech in 1966, had reflected the growing "Kuwait First" trend that encompassed both the Al-Sabah and a broad swathe of merchant opinion, long frustrated with perceived foreign policy "excesses", including a number of MPs. As a result some 200 non-Kuwaiti Arabs were expelled from the country; mostly Egyptian and Palestinian Nasserites, but they also included the tiny handful of Palestinian pro-Syrian Ba'ath party members, while, more significantly, the KMAN house journal, *Al-Talia* was closed for a year.

The outcome of the January 1967 National Assembly elections were a shock to British and American observers as well as to KMAN. The latter's representation had been expected to increase, and yet was drastically curtailed. Widespread electoral ballot rigging was alleged by

²³ Al-Shaheen (interview) *Ibid.*

²⁴ State Department to US Embassy, Kuwait, January 13th, 1965 (A165)

western embassies and KMAN officials alike. Key Kuwaiti public figures had failed to secure seats, while those that had, decided to boycott the assembly. “Kuwait First” appeared to have been taken to extremes and there was a definite sense among foreign officials who had previously urged a more cautious approach by the Al-Sabah in response to the domestic Arab nationalist mood, that they had gone too far. However, in the externally focussed mood that followed the June 1967 war, Kuwait was able to minimise any short term major political fallout at least, by emphasising its foreign policy commitments, not least on Palestine.

Oil and political credibility

The government’s revenues from the UK and US-owned Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) were the cause of an ongoing dispute that reflected Kuwait’s prioritising of regional and domestic opinion, especially as this could be manipulated to serve its financial interests. A deal on the “supplemental agreement” (see Appendix 5) became complicated by positioning by the Kuwaiti senior leadership in terms of Assembly and public opinion, which was united in wanting to improve the financial arrangements to Kuwait’s advantage. (The assembly had to approve any deal between the government and KOC). After more than two years of delay, this eventually exasperated those Al-Sabah, including Jabr Al-Ahmed, who, although having played domestic politics with the issue on the advice of a number of Arab nationalist-inclined senior finance and oil ministry officials, ultimately wanted an agreement. A further compromise on the terms of the supplemental agreement was secured, and was finally approved by what was a more accommodating national assembly following the 1967 elections.

The importance of this issue was more than just Arab nationalist symbolism; government revenues and the funding of Kuwait’s expanding public services were inextricably bound up in these negotiations too. As a result all sections of Kuwaiti opinion had a vested interest in improving the terms for the Kuwaiti exchequer. However, for more than 12 months the Al-Sabah had lacked the willingness to resolve the matter. Oil was key to the ruling family’s ability to exercise relative autonomy from merchant interests and domestic political pressure. However this did not prevent the ruling family from having to handle such pressures carefully and from

wanting to play the oil issue in ideological terms for external and domestic consumption. Kuwait thus defied expectations of “dependent” or “rentier” states²⁵.

Palestinian presence

A primary identifier of what Kuwait liked to present as its Arab nationalist foreign policy was the commitment to the Palestinian cause. Although a differing emphasis in foreign policy was detectable over 1965-66, this in no way lessened the government’s strong identification with Palestine. By end-1966 it was estimated that the Palestinian population (of largely Jordanian citizenship) in Kuwait could be as many as 70,000²⁶. Representing approximately 12% of the overall population, 28% of foreign nationals, and equivalent to 25% of the total number of Kuwaiti nationals, the Palestinians were by far the largest group among the foreign population in the country, of whom Arab nationals represented around 76% of the overall total²⁷. However, despite the US belief that KMAN had ambitions to take over the political leadership of this exiled group, the Palestinians themselves were not actors in the Kuwaiti political system. In addition to the presence of Palestinians who were leading members of the region-wide, Arab Nationalist Movement, the emergence of what would later become the predominant Palestinian nationalist group, Fatah, begun in Kuwait around 1958. Despite this sympathetic environment, the requirement on all Palestinians was that they keep out of local politics. This was rigorously enforced by the Kuwaiti authorities and understood by Palestinians, and all foreign Arabs, to be a red line that they could not cross. Although Palestinians, like other Arab nationals, were widely employed in the private sector, they were most pronounced in the public sector where, in 1965, they held nearly 50% of all posts²⁸. Like the Egyptians, the Palestinians were extensively employed as teachers, as well as within the health sector and other public services. There were also a small number of “naturalised” Palestinians, who held Kuwaiti nationality; some of whom occupied important posts in ministries and as ambassadors (see Appendix 5).

²⁵ Jacqueline Ismael acknowledges the assertiveness of an elected national assembly that, in her view, had been “expected to be a rubber stamp”. Jacqueline S. Ismael, Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective, (Syracuse; Syracuse University Press, 1982).

²⁶ US Embassy to State Department, 21st March 1967 (A274). Kuwaiti census figures do not break down non-nationals according to their nationality or Kuwaitis according to ethnicity or religion.

²⁷ Calculation based on the April 1965 census and on US estimates of size of national populations. “Form at a Glance”, March 1966 (DEFE 11/616).

²⁸ Jill Crystal, Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State (Colorado; Westview Press, 1992), p.130.

Successive Kuwaiti policy statements would open with an exposition of commitments to the Arab nation, chief of which was Palestine, often cast, like other Arab struggles, in anti-imperialist rhetoric²⁹. Although some of the government's rhetoric had been adjusted since the embrace of "Kuwait First", this did not lead to any shifts in policy on Palestine or any other regional issue. Not every political decision made by the Kuwait leadership was cynical, however. The Kuwaitis, no less than the Saudi leadership that had long pressed the UK and US governments on the question, were genuinely angry at what they considered to be the injustice of the Palestinian situation. In the period of regional tension that led to the outbreak of the 1967 war, senior Al-Sabah would convey this directly to US and UK officials. On one occasion the US ability to equate the Israeli attack on the Jordanian West Bank village of Samu in November 1966 with the Palestinian attacks that preceded it, was seen as "unfathomable" by senior Al-Sabah family members³⁰. The US struggled to appreciate that such feelings could be genuine. One American embassy official, however, admitted to being able to "sense an underlying strain of conviction going beyond political expediency" on the question of Palestine³¹.

Kuwaiti financial support was funnelled to the PLO, military training continued uninterrupted, and statements made on the issue by foreign minister Sabah Al-Ahmed were to continually cause discomfort among US embassy officials and oil company representatives. The head of Gulf Oil, which owned half of KOC, said he hoped that the US administration could help the situation by persuading more caution on the part of senior Al-Sabah in their comments. This brought the rhetorical response from a US undersecretary that he was being asked:

"What could the US do with a small country which is well-off, has lots of money (*sic*), and with which the US does not have much leverage. He did not profess to have an answer at this time for Gulf (Oil)³²."

²⁹ However statements always emphasised that Kuwaiti identity had to be preserved in such a context. The October 1964 Amiri Speech opened by saying that Kuwait's foreign policy is "based on the consolidation of brotherly ties and solidarity between Kuwait and her sister Arab countries and cooperation in supporting the Arab League, its foundations and charter and *supporting any tendency emanating from the will of the people for further solidarity between the Arab countries.*" (author's emphasis). The Arab League's achievements were then emphasised in terms of the decision in that year's first summit to found the Palestine Liberation Organisation. (FCO 371/174584 106540,).

³⁰ Howard Cottam, US Ambassador to Kuwait, Telegram to State Department, 6th November, 1966 (A-147).

³¹ Dispatch A-274 from US Embassy to State Department 21st March 1967.

³² Note of conversation between "Mr Whiteford", Chief Executive, and "Mr Davis", Vice President, of Gulf Oil, with "Mr Mann", Under Secretary for Near East and South Asia Affairs, US State Department, sent to US Embassy, Kuwait, 23rd March 1965.

Egyptians raise concerns

Egyptian workers living in Kuwait numbered 7,500 as of 1964³³, representing 9% of the total Kuwaiti workforce, and 13.5% of the majority foreign workforce³⁴. Egyptians were usually blue-collar workers, and as a result were mainly employed in manual positions in the private sector; however more than 1,000 had public sector jobs. Aside from the small number operating in an advisory capacity on constitutional and legal matters, Egyptian professionals were principally involved in teaching and the health sector. The presence of a significant number of Egyptians, whether in the private or public sector tended to be of greater concern to the US embassy in Kuwait, as well as to an extent the British, than the far larger Palestinian presence. Less attention was paid by western embassies to Iraqis working in Kuwait. Surprisingly, however, the Kuwaiti government, at least up until the late 1960s, shared this comparatively relaxed view, evidenced by the presence of Iraqis in the Kuwaiti armed forces. In 1965 Iraqis were the second largest Arab national group in the Kuwaiti population, and constituted 8.4% of the total³⁵.

A key reason for the greater concern about Egyptians than other Arab groups was that, in the early years of Kuwait's independence, Egypt had a very significant diplomatic presence. Furthermore, their large embassy was staffed by a disproportionately large number of military intelligence officers compared to western embassies. Egypt would make it a condition of an Egyptian national's application to work in Kuwait that they would have to report regularly to the embassy, while Egyptian staff were well known in Kuwait for attending *nadwas*, especially those of KMAN politicians, where the political discussion was usually more extensive than at those clubs identified with other political trends. Through these meetings as well as more discrete means, Egyptian intelligence officers were known to be in regular contact with the leading KMAN MPs, Jassim Qitami and Dr Ahmed Khateeb. The US and UK embassies' concern was not about the Egyptian officials working in the government. While the latter attracted some resentment from Kuwaiti officials, Sabah and commoner alike³⁶, who suspected the Egyptian

³³ UK embassy to Foreign Office, undated but assume late 1964 (FO 371/174584 – 106540). Egyptians as a whole represented 5.3% of the total Kuwaiti population, 28% of Arab nationals, and nearly 10% of foreign nationals. DEFE 11/616. op.cit.

³⁴ According to the Kuwait census of April 1965, the non-national workforce was 69.4% of the total, standing at 55,586 out of 80,288. Winckler, op.cit.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ An indication of this suspicion of the Egyptians was that common term of abuse used privately by Al-Sabah ministers to refer to KMAN MPs, was “dog of an Egyptian spy.”

embassy, and ensured that Egyptian civil servants all had minders³⁷, they were not viewed as potential fifth columnists by the UK and the US. Rather, American and British security concerns, which from 1965 were increasingly shared with the Kuwaiti authorities, were about the willingness of the Egyptian embassy to encourage foreign Arabs as well as Kuwaitis to demonstrate, in particular over the issue of Palestine. There was concern that, in certain circumstances, the Egyptians might be able to manipulate the Palestinians in order to stir up political pressure on the Kuwaiti government.³⁸

The Egyptians financed a newspaper that attracted a small circulation, while the more established title, the weekly *Al-Talia*, which was run solely by KMAN, presented pro-Egyptian views, and continues to this day to give a more Arab nationalist take on domestic and international affairs. However, these “pro-Egyptian” titles were indicative only of a slice of Kuwaiti opinion and would not have had the potential to galvanise mass opinion³⁹. Just as the Kuwaiti government service and administration was badly in need of foreign Arabs to staff it, so was the written and broadcast media. However, overtly pro-Egyptian views were kept out of the broadcast networks and newspaper titles, even if initially, following independence, a considerable amount of Egyptian newsreel was used.

The Kuwaitis, like the British and the Americans, were periodically concerned about the large number of foreign Arabs, especially given the political complexion of the countries they came from. Western officials, however, viewed them as a latent security concern. Egyptian and Palestinian teachers may have helped strengthen an atmosphere unsympathetic to the policies of the British in the region, however this was not the main factor driving the adoption of Arab nationalist rhetoric or of foreign policy stances that were understandably characterised as “pro-Egyptian”. Some other Arab governments, especially Saudi Arabia, would see Kuwaiti foreign and domestic policy as simply an outlet for Cairo opinion, albeit acknowledged as one likely to respond to whether other leading Arab states, such as Iraq and Syria, had good relations with Egypt. However the Kuwaiti leadership itself was cautious in its views of the benefits of following too close to Cairo, and had proven itself quite prepared to act against both Egyptian and

³⁷ FO 371/174584 – 106540 op. cit.

³⁸ This scenario was painted by Dayton Mak (charge d’Affaires ad interim, Kuwait, 1961-64) in a personal interview, Washington DC, August 2000.

³⁹ *Al-Talia* was the weekly KMAN house organ. However its sales suggested less support for KMAN MPs than was the case. An estimated 3,000 copies were sold per week. FO 371/174584 – 106540. op.cit.

other foreign Arabs accused of espionage or illegal political activity as well as against pro-Egyptian Kuwaiti politicians.

The Shia and regional dynamics

Among the Kuwaiti national population, about 22% were estimated to be Shia Muslims, of whom the majority were of Arab extraction⁴⁰. The Kuwaiti Shia were plainly outside of the favoured circles of the Sunni Arab elite families who had founded the country and who effectively represented its “aristocracy”. However, within the Kuwaiti Shia there was a considerable merchant population tied, through business, to the interests of more senior Kuwaiti circles. Some, most notably, Abdul-Aziz Hussein, Kuwait’s first ambassador to Egypt and the UN, were represented in government where, like Talat Ghusein, the Kuwaiti ambassador to the US who was of Palestinian extraction, their expertise was held in high regard among senior decision makers in the emirate. Abdel-Aziz Hussein was a Shia Arab of Iranian extraction, whose Arab nationalist credentials made him an astute appointment to serve in Cairo. Significant numbers of Kuwaiti nationals who were Shia also had Persian antecedents. However the Kuwaiti authorities did not view the Shia, Arab or Persian, as a potentially challenging national minority, even though neighbouring countries and communities would sometimes suggest they had great influence over Kuwaiti Shia. The Shah suggested as much to the British (see Chapter 3); while, during a visit to Najaf and Karbala in Iraq in 1966, Amir Sabah Salim was smothered with affection by Iraqi Shia clerics, seemingly in order to encourage support for them from his Shia audience at home.

The Kuwaiti leadership thought it prudent to take steps in the 1967 election to ensure the Shia were better represented in the national assembly. Generally seen as socially conservative, and historically inimical to Arab nationalism, the Shia were to gradually develop into a useful tool of the government for managing the assembly. A somewhat different issue were the around 6% of the overall population defined as Iranian in 1965⁴¹, the third largest group of foreign nationals in the emirate. Kuwait would later express concerns about the increasing number of illegal Iranian

⁴⁰ A breakdown of religious fealty was not officially provided. However in 1961 the UK embassy estimated that Kuwaiti Shia represented 22% of the total population of Kuwaiti nationals.

⁴¹ According to the 1957 census there were 19,919 Iranians in Kuwait, representing almost 10% of the national population. (US embassy to State department, August 4th, 1962, FCO 371: 156897). The US embassy later reported that in the 1965 census, Iranians represented only 5.6% of the total population, i.e. 26,210. “Form at a Glance”, *Ibid.*

nationals working in the country, a factor brought home when the Shah visited in 1968 (see Chapter 6). However, the Iranian population was not seen as a particularly pronounced security issue as, unlike the Arab foreign workers, they were not viewed as a potential source of political trouble.

In 1966 US and UK embassy representatives would inform their home capitals that the political mood in Kuwait was becoming less stridently Arab nationalist, and yet “Kuwait First” was not especially being felt in the country’s foreign policy. Palestine remained Kuwait’s main Arabist foreign policy expression, which, while mutual non-interference was maintained between the authorities and the Palestinian factions within Kuwait, which mainly took the form of financial support as well as strong assertions of Palestinian rights in line with the official Arab League position. By deploying financial assistance to the Arab world in general through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, and the operation of discrete “soft” loans direct to government exchequers, the Kuwait leadership was able to go beyond rhetorical expressions of solidarity. Thus Kuwait gave its own particular expression to the Nasserite notion of non-alignment, “positive neutrality”. This was the phrase used by Sabah Salim to characterise what Kuwait’s foreign policy would be when he addressed the UN upon Kuwait’s awarding of membership in 1963.

The 1967 war and the role of ideology

Kuwait’s official commitment to the cause of Palestine would be unwavering, even if domestic enthusiasm would fluctuate in its intensity. One event that required careful management of this emblem of Kuwait’s Arab nationalist attachments, was the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Angry but essentially unthreatening demonstrations took place in the amirate⁴², with the British and the Americans proving to be the focus for Kuwaiti as well as foreign Arab agitation. Kuwait radio reflected anger within Kuwait and the wider Arab world by repeating, to the infuriation of British officials, the popularly believed “big lie” that the UK had helped the military success of Israeli forces from its bases in Cyprus. Amid pressure within the region and across Kuwait society - whether within the ruling family, leading merchants or KMAN MPs - for a strong stance against

⁴² Sir John Graham, Head of Chancellery, British Embassy, Kuwait. Personal interview, November 2000, London.

the US and the UK, the Kuwaiti leadership did not go so far as to break off diplomatic relations but did commit the country to an Arab-wide oil embargo. This was a classic Kuwaiti compromise. The fact that Kuwait had the previous year begun a clampdown on foreign and local Arab nationalists, and in January 1967 on KMAN and even liberal representation in parliament, did not reduce the government's need to accommodate regional and internal anger over the war.

In practice, although creating diplomatic difficulties, the embargo had only minimal economic impact as third party oil trading between the two countries was not only unaffected but was positively encouraged by the Amir, while at the same time Saudi Arabia's oil exports to the UK were not significantly set back. The Arab oil embargo was relatively short-lived and piecemeal compared to the 1973-74 boycott and price hikes, whose impact would be felt internationally. The 1967 embargo's targeting of the US and the UK exclusively for what was perceived to be their strong support for Israel evidenced its symbolic nature. However impractical the 1967 embargo would therefore prove to be, it did reflect regional and domestic pressures for Kuwait and fellow oil-rich Arab states to assert a foreign policy that would seek to politically exploit western dependence on oil. The strength of the Arab nationalist imperative regionally that had driven Kuwait's emphasis on the Palestine question in its foreign policy in order to bolster its position and its legitimacy in the Arab world, was, in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war, to become more significant as an internal dynamic too. Domestic support for Palestine had always been a factor of course – the strength of KMAN, and the sensibilities of the merchant class on the Palestine question was well established. Furthermore, the willingness of senior Al-Sabah to give greater emphasis to the question, at various points from independence until the 1967 war, reflected the regional and national mood, their own convictions, and their political judgement about the best way to manage the issue in Kuwait's and their own interest. After the war, Crown Prince Jabr Al-Ahmed would adopt a particularly strident tone, in keeping with the wider Arab mood.

Ultimately the foreign policy position that emerged during and after the war was one where the necessity for Kuwait to satisfy external and internal pressures, and make a largely symbolic stance, was satisfied. The fact that the embargo was robbed of its meaning in practice pleased Amir Sabah Salim, who made it clear to British officials that he had to satisfy this pressure with what was judged to be a "face saving device" that in no way affected the essentials of the Anglo-Kuwait relationship. Amir Sabah was also keen to stress that the personal and property interests of the British had been entirely safeguarded throughout what had been a tense, but essentially

secure, period during the war and its aftermath, in distinction to Saudi Arabia where a refinery had been attacked⁴³. The Kuwaiti security services had been able to minimise the tensions, allowing a demonstration to march to the US and UK embassies. While the US and UK cultural centres were temporarily closed by the Kuwaiti authorities, there was never any serious threat to internal stability from either Kuwaitis or foreign Arabs. This suggests that the need to make a stand on Palestine at this time was an elite-driven reaction to regional realities and the views of an essentially peaceable Kuwaiti national population, rather than to the presence of the PLO or of foreign Arab workers.

It is notable that Amir Abdullah Salim had been happy for senior Al-Sabah to make anti-British comments during the Suez war of 1956; although demonstrations were constrained by security forces. However, in 1967 there was not a conviction among any of the senior family members that Britain or the US was in cahoots with Israel, and thus the anger, on this occasion, did not emanate from them. Furthermore, the domestic political clampdown prior to the 1967 war did not lessen the need to allow Kuwaitis to let off steam about the war. Nor is there any evidence that the clampdown affected the tempo of demonstrations or that the government would have been the focus of any significant anger. Traditionally, Kuwait nationals were the only ones allowed to stage political demonstrations, and as a result they were rarely conducted by non-Kuwaitis, including Palestinians. Despite the recent constraints upon them, and their tough rhetoric in response, Kuwait's Arab nationalists were more tied into the political and elite life of the emirate than in other Arab countries (see Chapters 3 and 5), and their caution at this point partly reflected this.

British embassy staff remarked that attitudes to them were different to the antagonism that could be found in poorer parts of the region where Arabs perceived themselves as having been under colonial rule. Kuwaitis recognised the enormous sway that the British had had prior to 1961 and the influence they exercised afterwards. However the distinction between a voluntary agreement to British protection in 1899 and enforced military occupation and colonial-style rule was felt strongly by Kuwaitis. This again emphasises that internal pressure to adopt a strongly Arab nationalist position, at least at the popular level, was less important in Kuwait than the leadership's judgement of the correct approach to the regional mood.

⁴³ Ambassador GG Arthur correspondence with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 8th June 1967, FO 8/679, 0 51.

As the decision not to back the British-authored UN Security Council Resolution 242 revealed, Kuwait's foreign policy needed to emphasise an Arab nationalism in tune with its majority expression in the region, and therefore Egypt, which backed the resolution, was by no means the only influencer of Kuwait's stance. Kuwait's public stance on a foreign policy issue as controversial in the Arab world as, effectively, the terms of an Arab peace with Israel would rarely produce controversy. A collective decision-making process largely confined to the amir, the crown prince, the defence and interior minister, and to a lesser extent, foreign minister, was ultimately responsible for foreign (and domestic) policy, with, typically, Shaikh Jabr Al-Ahmed making the running if any concrete discussions were called for. On such a highly sensitive issue of foreign policy as this, the instinct of Kuwaiti leaders would be to avoid a high profile and to work with an obtainable consensus in the Arab world. Jabr Al-Ahmed and Sabah Al-Ahmed would be particularly keen to say the right things in public in Arab nationalist terms, but the practical consequences of doing so would be carefully measured.

Foreign policy was not a major point of contention between the senior Al-Sabah. Foreign policy choices, after all, were limited to points of emphasis. Differing emphases would in fact become more acute after 1967, as, in the wake of Britain's departure from the region, Amir Sabah Salim sought to encourage co-operative and relatively integrated relations between Kuwait and the emergent independent southern Gulf Arab states. This was more of a personal initiative, however, which in many respects would prove ill considered and to an extent even counter-productive. However, it also fitted with a pattern of "positive neutrality" intended to use financial resources to give expression to the rhetoric of pan-Arab fealty.

Kuwait's internal dynamics since independence, and in the country's evolution of a consensual, participatory politics, had placed a high emphasis on Arab identification and promotion of Arab causes, of which Palestine was central. However, ideology was primarily a product of a conception of the Kuwaiti leadership that finding security in regional as well as international terms meant providing practical and political support in order to build allies, co-operation, and mutual support. To a lesser, but still important degree, this was extended to the wider Islamic and international community. The presence of significant numbers of foreign Arabs, including Palestinians, at both elite and mass level, was a re-enforcer of this inclination, but not its driver.

During the 1961-67 period, and subsequently, foreign policy determination was principally confined to a handful of Al-Sabah, who functioned as "principle decision-makers" and whose

authority over foreign policy was largely free of institutional constraints⁴⁴, despite Kuwait's lively political life and highly opinionated parliament. The latter proved susceptible to Al-Sabah manipulation and, while traditionally valued as an expression of inclusive decision-making on domestic questions, was not the focus of elite merchant activity, who, for the most part, prioritised their business interests. Ideological sympathies, among senior Al-Sabah and merchants, helped inform the parameters of Kuwait's Arabist identity and the notion of the amirate's "role"⁴⁵ in the region. However Kuwaiti decision-makers enjoyed autonomy over foreign policy, assisted by the patronage powers that oil wealth provided, and, despite adjustments in some marginal respects, remained faithful to the essential elements of the amirate's external relations.

⁴⁴ Dawisha, *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ KJ Holsti "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy" in Stephen Walker (Ed.), Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis (Durham (NC); Duke University Press, 1987).

Chapter 3

Regional dimensions 1961-67

Kuwait's foreign policy in this period was, according to one former senior Kuwaiti diplomat, "Arabised".¹ Following the emirate's independence in June 1961, Amir Abdullah Salim and his foreign ministers would emphasise that Kuwait's interests were rooted in those of the Arab world, and that it supported diplomatic solutions vis-à-vis Iraq, based on an Arab framework and, more broadly, in terms of UN legitimacy.

Due to his early political grounding, Abdullah Salim (r.1950-65) was sympathetic to pan-Arabism, which was influential among the merchants whose political ambitions he had upheld. This trend had been given a populist impulse within the wider region following Gamal Abdul Nasser's defeating of Anglo-French "imperialist" ambitions during the 1956 war. Abdullah Salim was perceived by local Nasserites in the Arab Nationalist Movement as sympathising with their political sentiments². Although more willing to defer to British counsel, and more wary of Arab nationalist sentiment, Amir Sabah Salim (r.1965-77) was equally mindful of the importance of this trend. However, both Kuwaiti amirs also understood that "Arab nationalism", despite being written into the Kuwaiti constitution, remained a highly subjective notion whose theoretical denial of state interests could enable it to be manipulated for domestic interests by the leading Arab nationalist regimes³. The obligation on Kuwait to back concrete proposals for unions of Arab states would ease as such enthusiasms softened in the region in light of practical experience, and the era of summitry gave more credence to state norms. Arab nationalism, given the concurrent notions during this period of anti-imperialism and republicanism, was an uneasy

¹ Personal interview, Abdullah Bishara, retired senior foreign ministry official, Kuwait, January 2003.

² Personal interview, Abdullah Neebari, leading KMAN figure in the 1970s, Kuwait, January 2003. Abdul-Reda Assiri, Kuwaiti academic, described Abdullah Salim as "an Arab nationalist". Personal interview, January 2003, Kuwait.

³ The predominant articulation of "Arab nationalism" in the Arab world in the 1950s and 1960s was that of Gamal Abdul Nasser's Egypt. Arab nationalism was formally subscribed to by the Kuwaiti Arab Nationalist Movement (KMAN), which, like the wider MAN organisation, was supportive of Nasser. In Bassam Tibi's analysis, Arab nationalism in the period from Nasser's takeover in Egypt in 1952 up to the 1967 war, underwent a phase of "pan-Arab populism" where the advocacy of a political union of all Arab peoples, whether made by Nasserites or their Baathist rivals, was rooted in the projection of traditional cultural commonalities onto the "modern model of a nation-state." Bassam Tibi, Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry (London; Macmillan, 1981)

construct for Kuwait. The emirate's preferred adherence to generalised postures of solidarity was in line with its constitution, which expressed "faith in the role of this country in furthering Arab nationalism." While Arab nationalism could serve as a pillar of a small Arab state's foreign policy, it could not be its source.

The public face of Kuwaiti foreign policy - its rhetoric, its ideational cast, and its attempt to translate this into a regional and even extra-regional role in mediating disputes - was the politics of accommodation of stronger Arab states⁴, in particular Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria. In other words, while packaged as having a sincere ideological motivation, it was more a presentational sheen on the politics of national survival. Rhetorical attachments to the Arab nation were commonplace in Kuwait and its neighbouring Arab countries right up until the 1990 Iraqi occupation of the emirate and the subsequent 1991 Gulf war. Following this, Kuwaiti leaders, and Arab leaders generally, spoke more about their country's national interest. However, Kuwait, in common with many small states, lacked independent military capability to even delay the advance of its larger neighbours⁵. Its leaders, mindful of internal opinion and the rhetorical conventions in which many Arab states, whether small monarchies or powerful republics, would present their foreign policies, would also communicate policy in Arab nationalist terms. After all, comparatively powerful Arab states were deploying Arab nationalist ideology throughout this period. Egypt used it to justify its domineering leadership of the United Arab Republic (UAR) it founded with Syria in 1958, Syria to underscore its decision to withdraw from the same union in 1961, and Egypt to explain its soft-peddling over a proposed tripartite union with Syria and Iraq in 1963⁶. As in these cases, Kuwait too had an external, as well as an internal, rationale in justifying its foreign policies in this way.

Positively neutral

Kuwait needed to accommodate more powerful Arab countries. This would be reflected in its use of its oil largesse to provide "soft" finance to two countries, Iraq and Egypt, that, among its regional neighbours, had the greatest potential to both undermine and uphold its security. Kuwait did not though conform to the quietistic approach that writers on small states typically expect of

⁴ Off the record conversations in London with a senior member of the Al-Sabah, June 2004; and in Kuwait with a former KMAN MP, January 2003.

⁵ One of the definitions of a small state applied in Colin Clarke and Tony Payne (Ed), Politics, Security and Development in Small States (London; Allen & Unwin, 1987).

⁶ Malcolm H. Kerr, The Arab Cold War – Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-70 (New York; Oxford University Press, 1971)

such countries' foreign policy⁷. Upon Kuwait's accession to the UN in 1963, Shaikh Sabah Salim, the then prime minister of Kuwait, announced that the emirate would practice "positive neutrality" in its foreign policy. To Kuwait's detractors, and in particular among the southern Gulf shaikhdoms, this Nasserite phrase was seen as confirmation that the country geared its foreign policy toward what Cairo found appropriate. This was after all an in-vogue expression of the Non-Aligned Movement championed by Gamal Abdul Nasser's Egypt. However, in Kuwait's case, this phrase reflected a foreign policy that, while pursuing neutrality in terms of largely avoiding alliances in the region, saw its acceptance within a predatory environment as often best served by activism. Thus its use of financial support for powerful neighbours had a much broader and more formal application than just accommodation of Iraq or Egypt. Through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, launched in December 1961, as well as more discrete payments, the emirate was able to build on the practical and diplomatic support being expressed for its independence by other Arab states. This "dinar diplomacy" was designed to provide the emirate with legitimacy in the Arab world and was begun with the active input of other Arab countries' financial advisers. By 1973 the greatest beneficiary of its predominantly soft loan support was Egypt. However the fact that the next largest recipients were Sudan and Tunisia⁸ reflects the economic rationale behind specific award decisions, although both Khartoum and Tunis had maintained good relations with Kuwait since 1961, even, in the latter case, in the face of domestic Kuwaiti criticism of President Bourguiba (see Chapter 2). Buoyed by the perceptible neutrality in the Arab world that the wide distribution of its financial largesse suggested, Kuwait, especially under Amir Sabah Salim, would also offer its services as a mediator in inter-Arab disputes. This, Kuwait believed, provided a further opportunity to legitimise its existence and, it hoped, in the process to lessen regional tensions that heightened its sense of vulnerability.

In international terms, Kuwait's defence agreement with the UK meant that Kuwait was not neutral. This both hindered and helped Kuwait in its attempts to get international and regional diplomatic recognition and acceptance. Kuwait's determination to play down the public and

⁷ Most of the conventional portrayals of small states' characteristics do not sit easily with Kuwait. See Clarke & Payne (Ed), *op.cit.* Economic wealth, much less a willingness to utilise it as a foreign policy tool, nor the ideological packaging of foreign policy, much less an assertive utilisation of it, to deflect physical vulnerability appears to be outside of a number of small states theorists' purview. David Vital has assessed the ability of comparatively wealthy small states to enhance their military security in hostile regions. However the deployment of wealth and ideology is of little relevance to his case studies. David Vital, The Survival of Small States: Studies in Small Power/Great Power Conflict (London; Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁸ Abdul-Reda Assiri, Kuwait's Foreign Policy - City-State in World Politics (Colorado; Westview Press, 1990) p.26.

outward expressions of a historic relationship with Britain that had directly facilitated its emergence as a more independent entity in 1899 (see Chapter 2), was mirrored by the amirate's active search for accommodation within a region where distrust of Britain was widespread. Contradictory friendships were simultaneously maintained, most obviously in the case of Egypt, to which Kuwait, officially then subject to British control in the conduct of its foreign policy, had sent a large financial subvention in the middle of the 1956 "Suez" war⁹, and had continued to provide official and private financial support for its military effort afterwards. In the 1961 "Exchange of Letters", the UK government had granted Kuwait its independence and agreed to respond positively should a request for assistance be made (see Chapter 4). This did not lead to any British troop departure, for none had been present other than occasional small contingents of military trainers and advisors. However, within a day of Kuwait's independence it appeared that a testing of Kuwait's new-found status was being conducted by Iraq, whose leader General Qassim claimed that the amirate belonged within his country. This provided an opportunity for Britain to assert its declining post-Suez authority in the Middle East, against a background of poor Anglo-Saudi relations and the UK's suspicion of Egyptian influence in Kuwait and more widely. However Britain's response was somewhat disproportionate to what appeared to be almost exclusively rhetorical Iraqi threats against Kuwait, especially given that only three months previously, Iraq's military ability to occupy Kuwait had been disregarded by UK defence and intelligence analysts¹⁰.

Both Britain and the Kuwaiti amir, Abdullah Salim, were concerned to ensure that the underscoring of the British defence commitment could be handled in such a way as to not prejudice Kuwait's acceptance within the Arab fold and to encourage the prospect of the amirate's survival in the future. The difficulty was in marrying a request from the Kuwaiti amir for UK military intervention with an emergent Arab political initiative that was precisely intended to head off what, for most Arab countries, was a highly unwelcome scenario. The Kuwaiti request for assistance led to the quick mobilisation of a UK military taskforce. For some observers, its haste suggested that the purpose was more to head off a putative "Arab solution" than any imagined Iraqi military threat¹¹. The Kuwaiti amir had had little direct contact with either the Arab League or representatives of the two key Arab countries, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In the

⁹ A sum of £2 million pounds was reportedly sent to aid the Egyptian military effort. Mustafa M. Alani, Operation Vantage – British Military Intervention in Kuwait in 1961, (Surbiton; LAAM, 1990).

¹⁰ Richard A Mobley, "Gauging the Iraqi Threat to Kuwait in the 1960s", www.cia.gov/csi/studies/fallwinter2001/article03.html 2001; and Alani, *op.cit.*

¹¹ Alani, *op.cit.*

period of heightened vulnerability prior to Kuwait's membership of the UN two years later, Egypt and Saudi Arabia were concerned to ensure that any Iraqi coercion of Kuwait could be prevented by Arab means, thereby minimising the role of the British. Variations on this so-called "Arab solution", while having failed to prevent the rapid British military mobilisation, sought at minimum to end the Anglo-Kuwaiti "Exchange of Letters" in return for Iraq's acceptance of Kuwait's membership, as an independent state, of the Arab League and of the UN.

Arab League puts troops on the ground

The amir's priority, shared with the British, was to ensure that the 7,000 British army, naval and air force personnel, and the 3,000 support staff, of the taskforce be removed as quickly as possible. Kuwait did not want this to happen at the expense of the British defence commitment, but was keen to ensure that, as soon as possible, an Arab League Security Force (ALSF) would enter Kuwait to replace the British units. While, in comparative terms, militarily insignificant, the 2,600 members of the ALSF, whose arrival three months later included the most prominent Arab states¹², symbolised both Kuwait's acceptance by all of its Arab neighbours and Iraq's political isolation. The contribution of Egyptian troops, however, was modest compared to the Saudi Arabian and Jordanian contingents¹³; the Sudanese made up a small, additional contingent. The fact that Egypt could not be relied on by Kuwait as an ally that could balance Iraq was emphasised by the departure of its troops in November 1961, as Syria's breakaway from the United Arab Republic (UAR) loomed. On the other hand, without Egypt's political support, no Arab League initiative on Kuwait, or anything else, could get off the ground. Kuwait was grateful to have secured UAR participation, but, like Britain, was also pleased that establishing a fairly broadly-based Arab force meant that neither Egypt nor Saudi Arabia would effectively establish Kuwait as their sole protectorate; having a single and powerful Arab state present for any duration would not have been welcomed by the Kuwaiti leadership either. From a Kuwaiti perspective, the agreement on the Egyptian-sanctioned Arab League force was a necessary, if unusually overt, regional alliance for it to adopt. Applying Walt's "balance of threat" concept¹⁴, Kuwait's greatest danger, Iraq, needed balancing by alignment with other key Arab states. As Walt's analysis suggests of weaker states, Kuwait was seeking to balance an immediately

¹² Syrian troops were not a part of the ALSF. However Syria was, in effect, politically represented as Egyptian troops took part, albeit relatively briefly, as UAR forces.

¹³ British Embassy Amman to Foreign Office, 16th November 1961 (FO371/156901)

¹⁴ Stephen M. Walt, The Origin of Alliances (New York; Cornell University Press, 1990)

proximate threat with an alliance with a powerful neighbour at a greater territorial remove. Ultimately, Walt observed, this makes alliances with powers external to the region the most attractive for weaker Middle Eastern states. However local alignments were a necessary response to local threats and would not necessarily reflect the preference of international allies.

In diplomatic terms Egypt was the Arab country that Kuwait primarily looked to for support of its aspiration for full international recognition and acceptance in the Arab world as a sovereign state. However Egypt, like Iraq earlier, was not a country with which Kuwait wished to pursue an overt alliance. An invitation from President Nasser to Kuwait to join the UAR upon its formation in February 1958 had not been favoured by Amir Abdullah Salim who, emerging from Britain's formal foreign policy veto three years later, would continue to value the alliance with Britain as the backdrop against which meaningful regional non-alignment could be played out. The invitation to Kuwait from the Hashemite monarchies of Iraq and Jordan to join the ill-fated federal union they had founded in response to the UAR had therefore also been rebuffed (see Appendix 3)¹⁵.

Seeking Arab legitimacy

In the months ahead the British would express concern about Iraqi troop mobilisations, while periodic rhetorical attacks would continue to make the Kuwaitis uneasy. In December 1961 tensions were raised again as a UK naval mobilisation occurred in the northern Gulf to offset an apparent Iraqi threat to Kuwait despite the presence of ALSF troops. During this period Iraq's General Qassim was to declare that, "The road to Jerusalem lies through Kuwait." Deploying Arab nationalist sentiment to link Iraq's own territorial ambitions with popular regional hostility to Britain, which was widely seen as Kuwait's protector and the author of all attacks on Arab unity, including the loss of Palestine, was a skilful assault on the amirate's Arab legitimacy. Kuwait would seek to garner regional acceptance however, with ideological correctness, widespread financial generosity, and, lacking confidence in the reliability or capability of particular Arab states as military allies, a regionally neutral foreign policy. With the commitment shown by the "radical" Arab states in the early period of the ALSF having weakened

¹⁵ Abdullah Salim told the British Political Resident (based in Bahrain) in March 1958 that Kuwait had no intention of committing the amirate to either bloc. Jarman, *op.cit.* p.57. Mindful of the UAR, the UK had initially tried to persuade the Ruler to join the proposed federal union (see Appendix 3).

considerably, throughout 1962 Kuwait would pro-actively engage with different would-be regional intermediaries in the search for a formula for Iraqi recognition. With departure of the remaining contingents of the ALSF over January- February 1963, this search became more imperative. Uncomfortable, however, with the terms being proffered, Kuwait took the opportunity of the short-lived Ba'ath-led takeover in Iraq from February, to pursue direct talks, regardless of British reservations about the manner in which this was being conducted. Kuwait was in a sense "band-wagoning" with its greatest perceived threat. Walt has suggested that this more unusual practice can occur in the case of weak states who feel especially vulnerable to neighbouring countries. Kuwait did not possess significant military power in terms of men or material, and, even in 1962 when the ALSF had still been present, remained fearful of its immediate neighbour, Iraq. In seeking to accommodate Iraq, Kuwait was not sidelining its regional friends, but its direct engagement with Baghdad reflected the fact that the symbolic support of the Arab states was insufficient to persuade Iraq to at least formally accept Kuwait's existence. Securing Iraqi recognition also held out the prospect of prompting Kuwait's admittance to the UN, assuming that the USSR lifted its veto. (In the end, however, Soviet recognition of Kuwait came before Iraq's, thereby contributing to the shift in Baghdad's policy toward Kuwait (see Chapter 4)).

Iraq's diplomatic boycott of the Arab League, and of the states that had most actively supported Kuwait's independence, would emphasise that it had to come to terms with Iraq. At the same time, Egypt's half-hearted and short-lived commitment to the ALSF, and Syria's development of an economic pact with Iraq following the collapse of its union with Egypt in the UAR, confirmed to Kuwait that it could not rely on the Arab alliance that was so publicly on display in 1961 as the basis for its security, and that it had little choice but to deal directly with Iraq and meet its financial demands in order to secure recognition¹⁶.

Saudi Arabia, the leading troop contributor to the ALSF, remained firmly on-side. However, Saudi Arabia's willingness to counter Iraq partly reflected its emerging leadership role among the Gulf Arabs, exemplified in a proven willingness to contest British authority in the area¹⁷, and the kingdom's fears of the consequences for its own security should Kuwait be absorbed by Iraq. In

¹⁶ The Egyptians' early departure when the UAR collapsed and the Syrians' consequent decision to align with the Iraqis was noted by the US charge d'affaires Dayton Mak at the time as being key examples for Kuwait of the vulnerability of Kuwait's position. Robert Jarman, Sabah Salim, Amir of Kuwait 1965-77, A Political Biography (London; London Centre for Arab Studies, 2002), p.84.

¹⁷ During the crisis over the Buraimi Oasis, in 1955 Saudi policemen had been evicted by Omani tribal levies loyal to Britain in a bid for the control of territory also claimed by Oman and Abu Dhabi.

historical terms Saudi Arabia's assertion of its territorial interests in the Gulf had been exercised, with British connivance, primarily at Kuwait's expense; a factor that made the amirate view its Gulf neighbour warily and only emphasised the undesirability of relying exclusively on regional or international alliances. Saudi Arabia was concerned about what it saw as the danger of Kuwait being over-enthusiastic about securing Iraqi recognition at the expense of the amirate's long term independence, which Saudi Arabia feared would make itself more vulnerable to Iraqi attempts to destabilise it¹⁸. The third key element of Kuwait's security considerations within the Gulf, was the strongest regional military power, the non-Arab Iranian monarchy. The Shah had been quick to recognise Kuwaiti independence in 1961, a factor that would encourage Kuwait to cultivate good relations with Tehran, something which became especially important given the latter's concerns about Kuwait's external and internal policies. Iran continued to be concerned about what it regarded as unwelcome foreign Arab penetration on the western shore of the Gulf, and for this reason tried to encourage the UK to support a UN-backed international, as opposed to Arab, force. The Shah also liked to refer to Kuwaiti Shia as in some sense belonging to Iran, a view that was dismissed by the British as "stirring"¹⁹.

Triangle of interests

Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia represented a triangle of power in the Gulf, a tripod of the key players, all of whom bordered Kuwait. It was imperative that the amirate did what it could to encourage Iran and Saudi Arabia to believe that their own interests were bound up in Kuwait's survival. This was complicated by Kuwait's close relationship with Egypt, which Saudi Arabia and Iran would continue to view with suspicion, sharing as they did the belief that Kuwaiti foreign policy was largely shaped in Cairo. Egypt was not a direct actor in the affairs of the Gulf. However it had a foothold in the Arabian Peninsula via the conflict in Yemen from 1962, was the pre-eminent Arab military power, and exercised considerable influence throughout the Arab world because of widespread popular support for President Nasser. Thus Kuwait's relationship with Egypt, caricatured privately by Shaikh Sabah Salim shortly after he became prime minister as having replaced the UK as the source of foreign policy, could undermine the amirate's attempts to project a regionally non-aligned stance in the eyes of its Gulf neighbours, who all distrusted Egypt. At the same time, while Egypt had not proven wholly reliable as a

¹⁸ Steward Crawford, British Resident in the Gulf, to FO, 7th February 1963 (FO 371/ 103193).

¹⁹ UK embassy, Tehran, to FO, August 1st, 1961, (FO 156897)

counterweight to Iraq, and was conceivably too removed physically to entirely constrain Baghdad in the future, Kuwait would continue to ensure that, through the emirate's financial support and its foreign policy stances, that it did not attract the opposition of Cairo. Ideologically, after all, Egypt was the primary source of legitimisation in the Arab world and its popular credibility made it a key consideration in Kuwait's regional policy²⁰.

However, in pursuing a bi-lateral solution with Iraq, Kuwait acted with little regard for what neighbouring states or the wider Arab world thought. Kuwait was making a potentially risky attempt to negotiate terms with Iraq, but was doing so at a time of greater internal weakness in its northern neighbour following the change of regime. While it is unlikely that Kuwait factored this into its, from a British perspective, hasty decision to seek to engage with the new Iraqi regime, it emphasises that this was not a case of band-wagoning along the cut and dried lines suggested by Walt. Furthermore, despite the formal commitment to an eventual "federal union", this was not seen by the Kuwaiti leadership as anything other than a short term means to an end.

At the same time Kuwait's negotiations with Iraq were not pursued at the expense of close relations with Egypt, despite the poison that would soon infect relations between Cairo and Baghdad after an initial attempt at forging a political union (see below). Like the financial inducement of some 30 million Kuwaiti dinars that finally, almost literally, bought Iraqi recognition of Kuwait in October 1963²¹, Kuwait-Egyptian relations also continued to have a strong financial element. As such Kuwait was far from conforming to the behaviour of another weak Arab state that at various times sought to balance or bandwagon with Iraq, Jordan²². The Hashemite Kingdom constantly flitted from alliance to alliance in the region, seeing itself as especially vulnerable from Iraq and Egypt in fairly equal measure. While Iraq and Egypt were pre-eminent in Kuwaiti considerations too, Kuwait saw Iraq as its primary security concern, but preferred to use a financial resource not possessed by Jordan to try to avoid overt alliances, and to build support among opposing countries in the region.

Writing in 1964, the British ambassador to Kuwait, George Jackson, characterised the emirate's foreign policy in the Arab world as seeking, "To maintain neutrality among them..." but added

²⁰ In 1966 Abdul Aziz Musa'eed, editor of the conservative daily *Al-Rai Al-Amm*, and subsequently an MP, described Egypt as Kuwait's key source of information regarding the "outside world."

²¹ This figure, at Iraq's request, was proposed as an interest-free loan from the government and thus had to be approved at a special session of the national assembly. Jarman, *op.cit.* p.161.

²² Walt, *op.cit.*

that this, “taxes the Amir (Abdullah Salim) considerably, although he has shown exemplary patience and wisdom in pursuing this as a policy, while actively using Kuwait’s money to help all Arabs²³.”

In the period leading up to Iraqi acceptance of Kuwait along the territorial boundaries that had already been mutually agreed in 1936 (see Chapter 6), Iraq had sought to extract more than a financial price for its political about-turn. The nullification of the “Exchange of Letters” appeared to be the minimum Baghdad would accept, however, with federal-arrangements being floated by would-be Arab interlocutors. Despite the fact that some initial encouragement for its efforts probably came from Iraq, Syria’s attempts in January 1962 to mediate came unstuck with the publicity they accrued. This only added to Iraqi suspicion of Syria’s motives. Although, what to Iraq, had been an unwelcome Egyptian-Syrian partnership in the form of the UAR had ended, Iraq continued to view Syria as conspiring against it. The fact that an Arab initiative was being pursued at all was obviously of interest to Kuwait. However, in their inability to place Kuwait’s independence at the front of a series of steps intended to resolve the dispute, the Syrians’ proposals were an elaborate way of maximising an interest for a number of Arab powers in Kuwait, which, if they had progressed, would have soon negated its very existence other than as a collective source of oil largesse for the more powerful Arab states²⁴.

Direct talks with Iraq

Kuwait would not entertain discussion of the terms of any political union ahead of Iraqi recognition of the amirate’s independence, despite the objective of union being formally endorsed by the Kuwaiti parliament (see Chapter 2). However, to the chagrin of the UK, Kuwait was prepared to discuss with Iraq a phased termination of the “Exchange of Letters” over a three year period, with the whole process seemingly cancelled should the amirate be dissatisfied²⁵. Ultimately, however, talks conducted on this basis did not get anywhere. Kuwait wished to accommodate Iraq; Shaikh Sabah Al-Ahmed (foreign minister 1963-2003) went to Baghdad and sent representatives on repeated initiatives where the literal price of progress was a central factor. However Kuwait was not prepared to place its future in Iraq’s exclusive hands. British reports

²³ G. Jackson to British Foreign Secretary RA Butler, January 2nd, 1964 (FO 371/ 168728)

²⁴ For a detailed list of the proposed terms, see FO 371/162898, Book 1083, sourcing BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, January 2nd, 1962

²⁵ John Richmond to “AW”, FO, April 7th 1963 (FO 371/168738 113253)

emphasised that Shaikh Jabr Al-Ahmed, finance minister (1962-65), would have been happy to have rescinded the “Exchange of Letters” with the British, a stance that contrasted with prime minister Shaikh Sabah Salim (1963-65). After the eventual agreement with Iraq, which referred to terminating the Exchange of Letters at a “suitable time”, Sabah Salim had commented privately that this could be used to procrastinate indefinitely²⁶. Either way, there seemed little support among the ruling Al-Sabah, including Amir Abdullah Salim, who was the ultimate policy arbiter, for the idea of effectively swapping UK security guarantees for Iraqi recognition. The impression created by UK embassy correspondence is that the Amir may have been open to a deal that ensured Iraqi recognition of Kuwaiti independence with Arab-wide security guarantees in place of the Exchange of Letters²⁷. It seems unlikely however that the temporary alliance that had brought the short-lived Arab League Security Force into being in 1961 would have inspired the Amir to feel that this was anything other than a formal aspiration that was a long way from materialisation.

The excitement generated among Kuwaitis and more widely in the Arab world over the Egyptian-Syrian-Iraqi union in April 1963, following a Syrian Ba’athi coup after the earlier Iraqi one, did not affect the Amir’s thinking, for all the strong domestic Arab nationalist impulse in Kuwait (see Chapter 2). The tripartite union was an extremely temporary convenience for a much stronger Egypt, whose domestic and foreign policy was cast in terms that obliged it to at least be seen to pursue unionist projects, but was enormously wary of what, for the time being, were two Baathist regimes. Syria and Iraq had found some benefit in keeping Nasser on-side in the face of internal vulnerabilities to pro-Nasserite sympathies in the military and more widely, and as a bulwark against each other as they sought to maintain domestic authority²⁸. Within three months the putative union collapsed among mutual recrimination and manifold coups in Damascus. In the aftermath Egypt was especially keen to deploy ideological language to attack its former “brothers”, reflective of Nasser’s fierce rivalry with the Ba’ath which had always been unlikely bedfellows. Kuwait had no real interest in Arab “unity” projects that genuinely threatened to end state sovereignty between member countries and thus could eventually threaten the amirate’s ability to exercise its independence. For this reason the Kuwaiti amir, Abdullah Salim, had confided to the British that he had been nervous about talk of Baath unity projects that had then extended to the proposed federation with Egypt in 1963. Kuwaiti leaders were also privately

²⁶ Jarman, *op.cit.* p. 160.

²⁷ UK embassy, Kuwait to FO, 14th March 1963 (FO 371/BK 103193/8)

²⁸ Kerr, *op.cit.*

anxious about renewed discussions in 1966 of an Egyptian-Iraqi union following their improved relations.

Had the union proposed in 1963 been robust and given rise to a meaningful federal government, then the Amir may well have concluded that there was little choice but to throw Kuwait's future in with it. Kuwait's absorption into a meaningful Arab national entity could only then have been avoided by relying exclusively on British protection and thus undermining the rationale of its independence from the UK in the first place. Kuwait's emergent regional policy of appealing to Arab unity, while seeking accommodation with leading Arab states who had a vested interest in ensuring that one or the other did not absorb Kuwait too firmly into their orbit, would have been rendered largely meaningless. As it was, Kuwait would not be presented with a serious prospect of an Arab alliance that could remotely guarantee its security.

Kuwaiti public statements about Arab unity, however, were different. One was issued jointly in September 1963 when Syria, at this point enjoying closer relations with its fellow Ba'ath regime in Iraq, initiated formal relations with Kuwait. The emirate not only sought to build support by giving expression to "Arabism", but, as Kuwaiti was also seeking an agreement with Iraq, it appeared to come close to taking its Arab nationalist stance to its logical conclusion and renouncing its agreement with the British. The joint Syrian-Kuwaiti declaration stated, "The two sides expressed their conviction that Arab power alone should undertake the mission of defending the Arabism of any Arab country, that circumstances have overtaken every existing agreement, so that the Arab bond is the only legitimate bond for the defence of Arabism anywhere²⁹. Syria was moving closer to the Iraqi orbit, while its Arabist and unionist aspiration continued to be strongly asserted, not least as, like the UAR, it was a frontline state with Israel. Syria was a country whose radical Arab politics, periodically shared with Iraq, that Kuwait, although not feeling directly threatened by Damascus, had to be careful to accommodate as far as possible.

The Arabism expressed in their joint agreement was in line with the form of words that were to eventually underpin the agreement Kuwait signed with Iraq in October 1963, in which the Amir was obliged to re-affirm his commitment to the Kuwaiti National Assembly that the Exchange of Letters would be rescinded at the "suitable time" (see Chapter 2) and that "comprehensive Arab unity" would be sought³⁰. The mutually expressed fealty to Arab brotherhood was in many

²⁹ British embassy, Kuwait, to FO, October 7th, 1963 (FO371/168740 BK 103193/45)

³⁰ Ibid.

respects more important for popular consumption in Iraq than in Kuwait, given that the Iraqi demand for the cancellation of the amirate's agreement with the British had not been realised. Pro-Nasserite Arab nationalists in the Kuwaiti parliament complained that the financial cost of the agreement was a compromise of the country's non-aligned foreign policy stance. They need not have worried, however, as Kuwait's band-wagoning with Iraq ended as soon as its objective, diplomatic recognition, had been achieved. Ambitions that had underwritten previous efforts at brokering an Iraqi-Kuwaiti agreement, for example a proposal for bringing piped water from the Shatt Al-Arab waterway to Kuwait, did not materialise; apparent territorial threats would still be made, and the promised demarcation of the border would be continually stalled by Iraq. In March 1964, for example, oil drilling conducted under Kuwaiti auspices close to the Iraqi border had to be abandoned as a contingent of Iraqi troops arrived, claiming that the work was being conducted inside Iraqi territory³¹. In October 1966 Iraqi troops even placed their national flags on the Kuwaiti island of Warba, located at the strategically vital northern Gulf headwater, just south of the Iraqi port of Um Qasr³². In April 1967, Iraqi troops crossed the land border with Kuwait, removing a passport processing tent, while the next morning three Iraqi sorties were flown over the border area. Even though this incident had followed the announced reining back of the practical extent of the British defence commitment (see Chapters 6 and 7), the Kuwaitis were not that perturbed by the Iraqi action³³.

Amir Abdullah Salim understood that Kuwait's foreign policy within the region rested on its active neutrality, reflected in its non-aligned, but assertively pro-Arab, political stance. He also understood that this was made possible by Kuwait's relationship with its British ally. For example, what might have appeared a natural political affiliation with the monarchical regimes of Saudi Arabia and Jordan did not attract the amirate. The invitation to join the anti-Nasserite "Kings' Club" alliance that lasted from 1962-64 was politely declined. Membership in the "Kings' Alliance" with Hashemite Jordan and Iraq had similarly been declined in 1958. The Amir was keen to keep detached from Saudi Arabia's determination under King Faisal to build alliances in the Arab world against Nasser's Egypt. The Amir declared to the British Ambassador

³¹ The incident to some extent foreshadowed the allegations made by Iraq prior to its invasion of Kuwait in 1990. On February 22nd, 1964, Kuwait agreed to discuss with Iraq the possibility that Iraq's Rumeila oil field extended into Kuwait. However this did not prevent the Iraqi troop incursion occurring on March 2nd, prior to which Kuwaiti-approved drilling had been conducted, seemingly without Iraqi objection. UK embassy correspondence with FO, February to March 1964 (FO371/174017)

³² US embassy to State Department, 31st October 1966 (A-125).

³³ Miriam Joyce, Ruling Sheikhs and Her Majesty's Government, 1960-69 (London; Frank Cass, 2003), p.88.

that he was not going to encourage King Faisal to “believe he could take sides with him against President Nasser.” The British Ambassador recorded that Amir Abdullah Salim “was careful to tell me several times how much importance he attached to British support and the confidence that its existence in the background gave him in following his Arab policies³⁴.”

Non-alignment challenged

When the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) was founded in Sana' in September 1962 with the direct intervention of Egypt, thereby replacing the Imamate, Kuwait was faced with its first key diplomatic challenge in the Arab world. Kuwait's subsequent decision to recognise the YAR was seen by Kuwait's conservative Arab neighbours, not least Saudi Arabia, which had sent troops to assist the royalist forces, as a reflection of the emirate's closeness to Cairo in foreign policy. Saudi forces had not only played a key role in asserting Arab support for Kuwaiti independence, but were still present when Kuwait made its decision to recognise the YAR. Notably, Saudi troops did not then remain much longer. However Kuwait had deliberated for nearly five months over a decision to recognise the YAR that also put it out of favour with Britain, which was assisting Saudi Arabia's attempts to offset what in Yemen was rapidly became a challenge to its own territorial security. The beginnings of Kuwait's innovative Yemen policy, which would later lead to the more controversial recognition of the Marxist south Yemeni regime in Aden, was a way of asserting an “Arab nationalist” foreign policy that was perceptibly anti-colonial. Thus it was at one with the image Kuwait liked to project elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula, even when Egypt was not a player there (see Chapter 6). The recognition of the YAR also reflected internal opinion, not least that of Kuwaiti Arab nationalists and wider popular sentiment, which had exercised considerable pressure on the leadership³⁵. However Kuwait's decision, although risky in terms of Saudi opinion, was also at one with the emirate's inclusive, Arabist, orientation in foreign policy. Kuwait was wary of being seen as siding with one of emergent camps in the Arab world, which the Yemeni civil conflict was to quickly provide the basis for. However the YAR was not only supported by Egypt, but it enjoyed wider Arab support as a consequence. Kuwait was not by any means an enthusiast for the republican leadership of Abdullah Sallal, and financial

³⁴ Ambassador John Richmond to R. Walmsley, FO, 27th August 1962 (FO 371/162899).

³⁵ Abdul-Reda Assiri, Kuwait University. Personal interview, Kuwait, January 2003.

support was initially relatively meagre. However it would not have been in character for Kuwait to try to set its face against a regime already given recognition by the UN, an important factor given Kuwait's anxious desire to be afforded the same status, and, for that matter, the YAR had been recognised by the US. The emirate's foreign policy approach to the Arab world was generally to avoid and, where possible, to seek to overcome confrontation. Thus, as Yemen increasingly became a stage for Egyptian-Saudi confrontation, Kuwait would be asked by the Yemenis to be, and would seek to act as, a mediator between the two key Arab states, a stance that the emirate found more comfortable, however limited its mediation abilities would prove to be.

Summitry and non-alignment

For the Kuwaitis the era of Arab summitry was an ideal vehicle for building links across rancorous inter-Arab divides. The first Arab League summit, held in Cairo in January 1964, enabled Kuwait to take its seat as a bona fide member of the Arab club and as a UN-recognised state. While Egypt was clearly in the dominant position as host and leading political force, Saudi Arabia and Jordan also shared Kuwait's view that summitry was a suitable means to overcome tensions and they welcomed the chance to sit as distinct, and seemingly respected, national entities alongside Egypt in a common Arab forum. They hoped this would ease Egypt's support of hostile forces, whether within Jordan, or the republicans who had seized power in Yemen from an Imamate still being supported by Saudi Arabia.

However, the principal agreement of the Arab League summit was on a unified military command in response to rising tension with Israel. This was less directly relevant to Kuwait, although the fact that it took the heat out of the Egyptian-Syrian feud, and seemed to minimise the danger that Syrian action could drag the states neighbouring Israel into war, was welcome as a sign that inter-Arab conciliation was possible. The summit also agreed the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), which had been prefigured by the forming of the pro-Nasser Palestinian faction, Fatah, which had been founded in Kuwait (see Chapter 2). Kuwait's "neutrality" in Arab politics did not prevent it from taking a strong stance in defence of the Palestinian cause, even at the expense of Jordanian concerns. Palestine was at a safe territorial distance and, through statements and financial support, became a relatively low cost signifier of the emirate's Arab nationalist credentials. At the same time, the co-operation among the leading

Arab players, which was designed to minimise the danger of disunity as tensions rose with Israel, fitted with Kuwait's desire to accommodate key players rather than siding with one bloc within the Arab camp. Kuwait had not been comfortable with the logic of Arab unity projects. The era of Arab summitry, with its contrasting emphasis on Arab inter-state cooperation, was a welcome development. While Kuwait would endorse the broad principle of "wahda" (unity), clearly defined projects for Arab federal union could weaken the rationale for the emirate's existence as an independent state. In August 1964, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Kuwait signed a treaty binding them to establish an Arab Common Market on January 1st 1965, and to work, over a nine year period, toward the removal of all trade restrictions between them. However Kuwait's parliament never even ratified a treaty that each member state would argue over, as political symbolism came up against jealously guarded national sovereignty. Kuwait was also uncomfortable when splits placed the key Arab countries, on whose support it relied, in entrenched opposition to each other. Within a couple of years such developments would also present Kuwait with an opportunity to parade its would-be "positive neutrality" on an Arab stage in the cause of mediation.

The fact that Iraq and Syria were no longer apparent Ba'athi allies, following a change of regime in Baghdad in November 1963 that also saw Syrian relations improve with Egypt, would not have caused Kuwait undue discomfort. After all, earlier signs that the Iraqi and Syrian militaries had been drawing closer would not have been welcome in Kuwait. However these two countries' internal weakness, and the fact that Egypt was unwilling or unable to promote a powerful bloc of the three states, helped to minimise the threat that Kuwait felt. A few months later, however, Iraq's internal weakness under Colonel Abdul Rahman Al-Arif, who was anti-Ba'ath and sympathetic to Nasser, suggested to a senior Kuwait official that Iraq may have been seeking, and possibly securing, Egyptian help in maintaining internal stability³⁶. This in itself worried the Kuwaiti government. However it is unlikely to have suggested that Iraq might be emboldened to threaten Kuwait at this point, were it not for a set of reports that Iraqi troops were moving in a southerly direction. If there were any Egyptian troops in Iraq at all, their numbers are likely to have been small. However the fact that these two elements were apparently occurring in conjunction led to excited speculation by the Iranian government who were in communication over the matter with Kuwait³⁷.

³⁶ M. Errock to FO, reporting on a conversation with Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali, 22nd September 1964

³⁷ UK embassy, Tehran, to FO, 3rd September 1964 (FO371/174584)

Iran was given to periodically informing Kuwait and the UK of what it alleged were threatening Iraqi, or, on this occasion, Egyptian, troop movements. Iran's relations with these radical Arab powers were poor, and during this period Tehran's relations with Cairo reached a particular low. This in turn created difficulty for Kuwait-Iranian relations, given the suspicions caused by the emirate's relations with Egypt and with Arab nationalists in the Gulf (see also Chapter 6). In fact such was the strain in Iranian-Egyptian relations that in 1964 they had been broken off. As a result, a Kuwaiti foreign ministry official, Abdel-Rahman Ateegi, travelled to Iran to meet with the Shah in order to minimise the damaging impact on Kuwaiti-Iranian relations and to organise a visit the following year by the then prime minister, Sabah Salim, to Tehran³⁸.

Kuwait "stands to"

There were reports that Saudi Arabia, also worried about the apparent "developments" in Iraq, had moved forces to the north of the kingdom, and that this had ended the Iraqi troop mobilisation. In response to news of the Iraqi manoeuvres, Shaikh Saad Abdullah (interior minister, 1962-65) took the decision, while the rest of the senior leadership were on summer vacation, to instruct Kuwait troops to "stand to" (see also Chapter 2). Neither the military exercise, nor the apparent threat against which it was seeking to prepare, was reported to the British embassy. The subsequent explanation that the Kuwaitis did not wish to worry the UK suggested that Saad intended to signal to the British that the emirate could carry out a national security exercise without undue panic. It also implied that Kuwait did not feel particularly threatened. At the same time, Saudi Arabia's movement of troops northwards would have confirmed to Kuwait that at least one key Arab state was still interested in upholding the security of the emirate. Whatever the truth of the reports that Egyptian troops were in Iraq, this was not the making of an axis between the two states, nor was it seen as such in Kuwait. Egypt's apparent internal radicalisation, with the creation in 1965 of the Arab Socialist Union, appeared to be the latest incarnation of its quest for internal control and regional hegemony, with Kuwait providing as much financial support as the Soviet Union. None of this suggested, however, that Egypt's essential pragmatism in regional relations, which had clearly benefited Kuwait, was being altered.

³⁸ As under-secretary at the foreign ministry from 1963-67, Abdel-Rahman Ateegi had visited Iran in 1964 to facilitate the intended visit of the then Kuwaiti prime minister Sabah Salim the following year. In stressing to the Kuwaiti amir and crown prince the need for his visit, "I told them our relationship is boiling with our neighbours....I have to go and cool that." Personal interview, Kuwait, February 2005.

The collaborative spirit that had been launched with the birth of Arab summitry continued through to a second summit in 1965, bringing unlikely regimes together in an attempted spirit of compromise. By the same token, efforts were made by the external protagonists in the Yemen civil war, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to negotiate a solution, even in the face of resistance by the local leadership³⁹. The Jiddah conference in August reflected exigencies on both King Faisal and President Nasser's part, with the former fearing that ongoing Egyptian military intervention in neighbouring Yemen could see increasing pressure on the Saudi kingdom, and Nasser wanting to save face and extract himself from a burdensome campaign. However, neither side could force an agreement on their local allies. Shortly afterwards it appeared that Faisal had decided to establish a would-be ideological alliance of conservative "Islamic" states in an attempt to protect his flank against the "secular" Arabism spearheaded by Nasser's Egypt. The fact that Britain had announced their departure from Aden two years later, is likely to have made both Nasser and Faisal feel less inclined to pursue negotiated solutions over Yemen.

Islamic alliance

The Islamic "Pact" was launched as an association of overwhelmingly conservative governments from the Muslim world. Quirkily, together with the monarchies that signed up, were the secular Turkish and Tunisian regimes. Their membership helped to cement the impression of an alliance reflecting cold war divisions, and there is little doubt that, as Nasser's Egypt drew closer to, and more dependent on, the Soviet Union, so Faisal's Saudi Arabia was drawing closer to the strategic embrace of the US. However, mindful of a regional environment in which the Yemen war had emphasised the vulnerability of Saudi Arabia, regardless of its international alliances, King Faisal's primary objective is likely to have been to represent an alternative to the Egyptian-led, Arab-only summitry. Formally speaking, the so-called Islamic Pact was open to any Muslim country, as Faisal made clear. However, his high profile visits, including to the Shah's Iran, which was on poor terms with Egypt, and the eager signing up to the initiative by Jordan's King Hussein, meant that Saudi Arabia was not, as claimed, simply broadening the principle of the Arab League summit. While Kuwait was a conservative society in which expressions of Islamic fealty were the norm, there were few internal pressures to encourage foreign policy prioritisation of such an alliance; Islamism would not constitute a significant internal force until the late 1970s (see Conclusion). Kuwait did not join this alliance of mostly conservative Islamic monarchies and

³⁹ Kerr, *op.cit.*

shaikhdoms; in fact Faisal did not visit Kuwait, nor attempt to solicit its involvement. One interpretation could be an assessment on the Saudi king's part that Kuwait was not important enough a political player. By contrast, though, the Saudi king made seemingly inexplicable trips to two small African states, Guinea and Mali. However these "revolutionary" friends of Nasser⁴⁰ were poor, and perhaps Faisal saw room for Islamic, in addition to "socialist", patronage in west Africa. However, Kuwait was plainly not in need of patronage and Amir Abdullah Salim had already made clear his disdain for joining alliances that divided the region, a position that was maintained under the more collegiate leadership of Amir Sabah Salim (r.1965-77) and Crown Prince Jabr Al-Ahmed, following the death of Amir Abdullah in November 1965. While this was not strictly true, in as much as Kuwait had been happy to see an Arab alliance against Iraq in 1961, it would not have been expected that Kuwait would ever encourage an alliance against Egypt, the primary Arab power, whose support had ensured Arab recognition for the amirate's right to independence.

However Kuwait appeared to see less harm in Faisal's Islamic Pact than in Nasser's threat to prevent Saudi Arabia attending the next Arab Summit in reprisal, or to boycott it if Saudi Arabia was present. In an assertion of Kuwait's view on the correct conduct of inter-Arab relations, the supposedly more Arab nationalist crown prince, Jabr Al-Ahmed, launched a much trailed foreign policy speech in June 1966. He told the national assembly that there should be no exclusions⁴¹, and rejected talk that had emanated from Cairo of a "limited Arab summit" i.e. one that excluded Saudi Arabia. The crown prince also complained of hostile radio broadcasts targeted at Kuwait – an unusual development in Cairo's treatment of the amirate. The UK believed that this was the start of "a foreign policy for Kuwaitis by Kuwaitis", as opposed to what they had considered hitherto to be Kuwait's Egyptian orientation. Additional suggestions of a new tone, UK officials argued, could be found in the crown prince's apparent private comment to President Nasser that, "Kuwait must be seen as a force in her own right and not regarded merely as a source of funds."⁴² There was nothing in Kuwait's public statements to suggest any overt rancour with Egypt, however, and Jabr's speech, for which Amir Sabah Salim apologised to British officials, railed against "foreign bases in the peninsula."⁴³ This most obviously implied Britain, but could also have had Egypt in mind.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p.110.

⁴¹ UK embassy to FO, June 1966 (FO 371/113253. BK1022/36).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

Egyptian influence undoubtedly remained significant in Kuwaiti foreign policy; the decision by the amir to make an official visit to Iraq in 1966 was encouraged by Cairo, which enjoyed much improved relations with Baghdad prior to the re-establishment of a Ba'ath regime in 1968. A "unified political command" had even been formed between Egypt and Iraq in 1965, although it represented only a symbol of improved relations. The Egyptian-Iraqi relationship had both resulted in Egyptian encouragement to the Kuwaiti amir to visit Baghdad, but also made such diplomacy all the more important from Kuwait's perspective, given earlier concerns that these two countries' improved relationship might increase the emirate's vulnerability. Kuwait's ongoing financial support of Baghdad was for the most part sufficient to offset tensions during this period, although some territorial incursions did occur.

By this point Kuwait was asserting what it considered its right to respect for the neutral, but influential, role that it considered its financial status could give it as a would-be mediator, uncompromised by financial or political interest. The difficulty was that Saudi Arabia, in common with the small southern Gulf states among which Kuwait sought a leadership role, viewed Kuwait as too close to Egypt. The crown prince's speech was an attempt to belie the impression of Kuwait being pro-Egyptian, but it would take more than this.

Kuwait was adamant that it wished to be what the new amir, Sabah Salim, referred to as a "dove of peace" in the region, although, in a reflection of the emirate's limitations, he pressed upon the US ambassador to facilitate such initiatives⁴⁴. In April 1966 Kuwait had secured the agreement of Saudi Arabia's King Faisal to come to the emirate for direct dialogue with President Nasser of Egypt. However, to Kuwait's disappointment, Nasser refused to attend. This may have been less a snub to Kuwait than a disinclination to rerun the process that had failed at Jiddah a year earlier. Rashid Pharaoun, senior counsellor to Faisal, commented that Saudi Arabia welcomed Kuwait's efforts, and he had urged the US to encourage them to continue⁴⁵. This was described by an American diplomat in Jiddah as "the only presently viable means to get Saudi-Egyptian dialogue resumed⁴⁶." The then US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Herman Eilts, however, argues that Kuwait was not seen in the kingdom as having a realistic chance of mediating successfully in the dispute. The Saudis, he said, preferred a quiet, backroom approach⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ US Ambassador Howard Cottam, 25th May 1966 (A282).

⁴⁵ American consulate, Dhahran, to US embassy, Kuwait, June 1966 (A282).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ambassador Herman Eilts. Personal interview, MA, USA, September 2000.

However Kuwait continued to push itself forward as a potential mediator in this and other disputes in the Arabian Peninsula, and beyond, whether at the public or the private level. Concerned about the upheaval in Oman, where supporters of the Imamate, with wider Arab backing, continued to contest the Sultan's authority, Amir Sabah Salim hosted a representative of the Imamate for exploratory talks. However this attempt at diplomatic intervention failed to get anywhere. Kuwait's identification with opposition to the Sultan, in common at one point with both Saudi Arabia and Egypt, would only have undermined its efforts in the eyes of Muscat. Kuwait had considerable difficulty in striking a confidently neutral position on Yemen too. This was emphasised by the incident at Najran in March 1967 when an Egyptian attack on a Saudi town close to the Yemeni border threatened to develop into a direct conflict with Saudi forces. The Kuwaitis felt unable to condemn the incident, which for Saudi Arabia confirmed its inability to be an effective, but neutral, mediator. Failing to grasp what their claim to being "positively neutral" should mean in practice. Kuwait officials argued that maintaining the trust of either side required it not to take sides⁴⁸.

Relations with Saudi Arabia had clearly cooled, as evidenced by Kuwait's distance from the self-styled Islamic Pact. Efforts to negotiate over the Neutral Zone and agree the delineation of the administrative boundary of the oil-rich land and water mass between them, were arguably more important. This appeared to have been successfully concluded in mid-1965 in an agreement that would be officially ratified a year later. However demarcation of the land boundary, which was not to finally occur until 1974 (see Chapter 6), got caught up in attempts by Kuwait in 1966 to agree the median line maritime boundary with Iran. Kuwait came to believe that its attempted agreement with Iran was being undermined by Saudi Arabia's understanding with Iran over their own maritime boundary. This in turn had implications for applying Kuwait's agreement with Saudi Arabia over the maritime boundaries of the Neutral Zone further north. Kuwait had hoped that Saudi Arabia would support it in its negotiations with Iran, but their own, undisclosed, maritime boundary understandings were believed by Kuwait to be encouraging collusion against Kuwait's interests in the northern headwaters of the Gulf. In Kuwaiti eyes, Iran's determination to exclude the Kuwaiti island of Failaka from the delineation of the median line between them would threaten the integrity of the emirate's maritime border with Iraq, given that the three countries' maritime borders converged at the head of the northern Gulf (see Map, p.241). After all, these talks were happening at a time when some Iraqi troops had landed on the tiny Kuwaiti island of Warba in the northern Gulf headwaters. Declining relations with Saudi Arabia over the

⁴⁸ UK ambassador G. Noel Jackson (FO 8/618)

maritime boundaries had even seen the Kuwaiti foreign minister, Sabah Al-Ahmed, unceremoniously evicted from the waters of the Saudi side of the Neutral Zone where he had been fishing⁴⁹.

Southern Gulf leadership

The Amir's attempt to promote Kuwaiti influence in the southern Gulf Arab amirates that at this time were under British direct rule, suffered from the same suspicion among both the local rulers and the British regarding Kuwait's perceived closeness to Egypt, and from the fact that Saudi Arabia was the primary actor to whom the southern shaikhs would look. Kuwait was aware that there were already British plans to form an association of the Trucial States (which later became the United Arab Emirates) and, with an eye to their eventual independence, wanted to gain influence and in the process more security. "We tried to make ourselves stronger by joining the Gulf area," argues a former Kuwaiti foreign ministry official⁵⁰. However Kuwait's ideas, which were first presented by Amir Sabah Salim on his southern Gulf tour of 1966, were seen, at best, as misplaced and arrogant interference in their affairs by the local rulers, and, at worst, a front for Egyptian interests (see also Chapter 6).

Kuwait's ability to present itself as a neutral mediator between Saudi Arabia and Egypt further suffered from its attempts to put itself forward as an alternative local leadership in the kingdom's "backyard". Saudi Arabia's dislike of the initiative appeared to make Qatar's opposition inevitable. In fact Kuwait thought Qatar was too close to Saudi Arabia to even consider supporting its proposals⁵¹. Bahrain, which would also increasingly look to Saudi Arabia for support, resented Kuwait's domestic political environment for allowing what it considered free rein for some of Bahrain's Arab nationalist opposition. The Bahraini opposition, implicated in attacks on British forces stationed in Manama, was also understood by the ruling Al-Khalifa to be funded from within the Kuwaiti leadership⁵².

⁴⁹ US Embassy Kuwait to State Department, 31st October 1966 (A-125)

⁵⁰ Suleiman Majid Al-Shaheen, an official in the ministry of foreign affairs from 1963-99. Personal interview, Kuwait, January 2003

⁵¹ G. Noel Jackson to the FO 6th April, 1967 (FO 371 B 3/14).

⁵² Dennis Healey, Time of My Life (London; Penguin, 1990), p280.

Some of the Kuwaiti proposals presented in Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi and Dubai were, on the face of it, entirely practical – help with police training and developing their education systems, for example. Where the proffered support did not encroach on Britain’s interests, and could be provided by Kuwaiti nationals who had been trained by them, this had been encouraged by the UK from an early stage. Kuwait set up two specific funds to provide financial and practical assistance, as the amirate saw it, for the development of the Trucial States⁵³. However there was resistance to the operation of both of them; for example Kuwait’s willingness to supply Egyptian teachers was seen suspiciously. Kuwait fell in line with the Egyptian position that it would not recognise the British-formed Trucial States Council, which had been set up to run education and other key services in the southern amirates. As a result, when bolder ideas such as running passport offices and help with intelligence work were floated by Kuwait in April 1967, these were complete non-starters. The UK was unfairly made the scapegoat by Kuwait and the Trucial States for “misunderstandings” between them over the amirate’s proposals. Britain seems to have genuinely believed that Kuwait’s proposed taking over of some of the UK’s responsibilities was due to the influence of Nasser⁵⁴. Such an idea could have been spread by British representatives among the local rulers to stiffen their resistance; certainly Kuwaiti officialdom believed that UK officials were encouraging opposition to the amirate’s aspirations⁵⁵. Other ideas, such as those suggested to the British by Crown Prince Jabr Al-Ahmed for a currency union between Kuwait and the Trucial states based on the Kuwaiti dinar, were non-starters on technical as well as diplomatic grounds⁵⁶. Similarly, Kuwaiti ideas for assisting in the formation of banks and insurance companies were perceived as largely financially motivated⁵⁷.

Kuwaiti leaders, whether supposedly of a pro-British or a more Arab nationalist inclination, seemed to believe that the amirate’s effective leadership of a southern Gulf bloc was a way of strengthening their own position in the region. They were prepared to support these nascent independent states as the latter sought, as Kuwait itself had done only a few years earlier, to secure Arab League and UN recognition, and Kuwait believed that additional independent Gulf Arab countries with a similar outlook would strengthen its regional position. Saudi Arabia

⁵³ Al-Shaheen, *op.cit.*

⁵⁴ From the vantage point of Bahrain, where Britain’s Political Resident was based, Kuwait’s policies were often seen more suspiciously. Letter to George Brown, Foreign Secretary, 13th May 1967. (Dispatch No. 12 1310/59/67).

⁵⁵ Al-Shaheen, *op.cit.* The former Kuwaiti foreign ministry official believes that Britain was the source of southern Gulf resistance to co-operating with Kuwait.

⁵⁶ G. Jackson to the FO, 6th April 1967 (FO371 B 3/14).

⁵⁷ G.G. Arthur to M. Weir, 12th October 1967 (FO 371 B3/12).

however had not been consulted over something that directly affected its interests. This suggested that Kuwait hoped, however naively, that shepherding an independent Gulf amirates federation could help Kuwait offset Riyadh's weight in the Gulf. Kuwait had maintained a long-standing friendship with Saudi Arabia, and had aligned with Jiddah in the face of the Iraqi threat in 1961. Yet Kuwait had historic and contemporary sensitivities to the power of Saudi Arabia which, in competition with Egypt, appeared to be encouraging the polarisation of the region. Kuwait saw little likelihood that its own position would benefit from inter-Arab division, especially one that had more than an undercurrent of cold war alliances that, given its own relationship with the UK, it wished to play down. Kuwait was seeking to actively assert its neutrality by promoting conflict resolution and by seeking its own sources of influence in the southern Gulf. The decision of the UK a year later to withdraw from the Gulf would underline the value to Kuwait of working more closely with its Gulf Arab neighbours, especially as there were mutual concerns about the ability of Iraq and Iran, and to a lesser extent Saudi Arabia, to exploit the vacuum.

Kuwait appealed to the British to persuade the southern Gulf rulers to support their ideas. However they attempted to convince the UK on the basis that they had a mutual interest in constraining Egyptian influence in the area. It seems unlikely that Kuwaiti leaders really believed that this would be the outcome, and the strength of this pitch appeared to be undermined by claims that they had Nasser's assent to the southern Gulf being an area of Kuwaiti influence, which seemed little more than bravado⁵⁸. Egypt, like Saudi Arabia, would have been decidedly cool toward Kuwaiti efforts to obtain British support for its objectives in the southern Gulf. In fact Kuwait also suggested that this had resulted in less friendly relations with Egypt, which were already showing signs of tension in 1966.

Kuwaiti efforts at regional mediation and at outreach in the southern Gulf were often misconceived on Kuwait's part and misconstrued on the part of neighbouring countries. Kuwait was unable to convince interlocutors that it was able to act from entirely neutral motives, and yet there is little evidence that it was seeking to advance any country's influence than its own. Despite its financial independence, Kuwait was not seen by the targets of its diplomatic initiatives as having sufficient autonomy to be credible, either as a mediator or a leader in the southern Gulf. Being respected for being more than a "source of funds" proved difficult for Kuwait, and yet it was vital if the country was to build legitimacy among the leading regional actors upon whose

⁵⁸ G Jackson, *op.cit*

long term support Kuwait would need to rely, especially when the UK signalled the end of its formal commitment in 1968.

The perception of Egyptian hands at work when Kuwait sought to “positively” promote a non-aligned role for itself in the region needs to be considered in light of the lengths to which the country went to maintain its neutrality within the Arab world, or, if this was not possible, to adopt a populist position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. This was firmly in evidence in the aftermath of the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, when, after upholding a common Arab front in the form of an economic embargo of the US and the UK, Kuwait continued to express its strong support of the Palestinian cause, in opposition to an Egyptian-backed UN Security Council attempt at a diplomatic resolution with Israel.

Aligned with Palestine

Kuwait had been a (minor) party to the formation of the United Arab Command (UAC) set up by the Arab League in 1964 and had interpreted this to mean that it should make a military contribution to Egypt as required⁵⁹. It had also strongly supported the Arab League’s formation of the PLO, which in effect had seen Kuwait adopt an aligned position - at least against that advocated by Jordan, which opposed the decision on sovereignty grounds. Kuwait’s identification with the Palestinian cause would create tensions with the US and the UK, for example over the Israeli incursion into Samu in the Jordanian-controlled West Bank in 1966. At the same time the officially monitored, and partly Al-Sabah controlled, Kuwaiti media ardently backed PLO guerrilla operations in Israeli territory, although the Kuwaiti leadership was judged by the US to be more restrained⁶⁰. Thus, following the 1967 war, Kuwait inevitably supported what was, initially at least, a common Arab League position of opposition to any accommodation with Israel.

The UAC had been what Nasser thought could be a mechanism to tie Syria into a united, and thus more manageable and constrained, Arab front against Israel. After this had failed to prevent the war, the public stance among all the leading Arab states appeared as one. This did not mean that

⁵⁹ Two squadrons (24) of supersonic aircraft (undefined) were assumed by the US embassy to have been made available to the Egyptians as required and would be manned by Kuwaiti pilots under the United Arab Command commitment, 18th May 1966, US embassy, Kuwait to State Department. (K-Def 12/5).

⁶⁰ US embassy, Kuwait, 6th November 1966 (A147).

there was not some tentative exploration through third parties of what the outlines of a deal might look like. However the popular mood on the streets of the “frontline” states and beyond was more militantly opposed to Israel as a consequence of the war, after which Arab land, including what remained of formerly British Mandate Palestine, stood occupied, and no Arab leader could afford to ignore it.

As a result Kuwait firmly sided with the regional Arab mood and joined the declaration of a boycott of oil sales specifically to the US and the UK (see also Chapter 4). In this respect Kuwait was firmly aligned, but with a common Arab states’ position, in symbolic opposition to the US and the UK who were popularly believed (a view shared among ordinary Kuwaitis) to have aided Israel’s military success. Kuwait’s amir, Sabah Salim, felt embarrassed about the measure, which, for all the more nationalist spin put on the Kuwaiti embargo by Shaikh Jabr Al-Ahmed, was a case of the emirate having to “do the right thing” when more radical neighbours, not least Iraq, were going to forgo their oil revenues⁶¹.

However Kuwait’s siding with the rejectionist mood outlived what proved to be a short-term and only partially implemented economic measure. Kuwait emphasised that it was not a front for Egyptian (or for that matter British) interests when it rejected UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 242, the fruit of diplomatic efforts in which the British had played a leading part (see Chapter 4). Kuwait thereby showed that its Arabism could involve stances more radical than that of Egypt, and that an Arab nationalist identification in its foreign policy was not just a matter of accommodating the Egyptian line; it could even mean effectively opposing Egypt’s position. This reflected a sense of where the wider centre of political gravity now was in the Arab world. (In the aftermath of President Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem in 1977 and the subsequent Camp David agreement with Israel, it would move away from Cairo entirely). On the specific issue of UNSCR242, Iraq was predominantly in the rejectionist camp, along with Syria, which was a direct party to the conflict. Iraq had dispatched troops to the battlefield via Jordan, as they had done in 1948; Kuwait had sent a small number of soldiers to Syria and Egypt, where they saw action in the Sinai⁶².

⁶¹ GG Arthur to Foreign Office, 9th June 1967 (FO 54/52). However by year’s end it appeared that Iraq’s drop in revenues related more to its dispute with the UK-owned Iraqi Petroleum Company. Frank Brenchley, Britain and the Middle East – An Economic History 1945-87 (London; Lester Crook, 1989), p.183.

⁶² Miriam Joyce, Ruling Sheikhs and Her Majesty’s Government, 1960-69, (London; Frank Cass, 2003), p.190.

Kuwait's refusal to support the post-war search at the UN Security Council for a diplomatic solution was mindful of opinion regionally as well as that of its domestic public. As a country not in a position to strike more than symbolic stances on this issue, it could maintain a radical posture in the expectation of widespread domestic support and mindful that radical Arab states, not least Iraq, opposed UNSCR242, while conservative Saudi Arabia would not publicly back the resolution either. Kuwait was not pleased to be taking a different stance than Egypt, which had signed up to it, along with Jordan and Israel. However while the emirate publicly opposed the resolution, its leaders privately conceded that they wished the diplomatic efforts well, but explaining that it could not be heard publicly to express this point of view.

Relative neutrality

Kuwait's foreign policy toward its Arab neighbours in the period from independence in 1961 through to the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war was overwhelmingly premised on a non-aligned posture toward the leading players. Where possible Kuwait attempted to protect itself from the damage that polarisation might cause its own position by offering mediation and by reaching out to nascent independent states in the southern Gulf. At the point of its independence Kuwait had little choice but to offset an overt alignment with the UK with an alliance with Arab allies, who in turn, like neighbouring Iran, saw little benefit in allowing Iraq to coerce its southern, oil-rich, neighbour. Kuwait's pursuit of good relations with Egypt and, to a lesser but still important degree, Saudi Arabia helped deny Iraq the opportunity to subsume it. However, when Egypt and Saudi Arabia were in dispute, Kuwait had to assert its autonomy, even at the risk of weakening its relations with them. Kuwait could not pursue an alliance with one of them at the expense of the other in order to secure its position in the region, nor was either country a reliable ally, as Kuwait witnessed with the early departure of Egyptian troops from the emirate. Kuwait's need to offset Iraq also necessitated good relations with Iran, a relationship, like that with Saudi Arabia, which could be seriously buffeted by Egypt's troubled relations with both Tehran and Jiddah. Kuwait's brief period of effective band-wagoning with Iraq was a means to secure diplomatic recognition. Kuwait was genuinely opposed to steps that appeared to promote division in the Arab world, whether on the part of Egypt or Saudi Arabia. In essence Kuwait was in nobody's camp. Its military alignment with the British, once their forces had departed in favour of the Arab League in 1961, was to continue to be managed on a discrete basis, providing a reassurance but not a long term guarantee of Kuwait's survival. Against this background Kuwait

could project an Arab nationalist foreign policy and seek to curry favour with financial aid and correct political stances. It was an awkward balance and one that was not to last as external props faded and regional pressures grew.

Chapter 4

International dimensions 1961-67

The overthrow of the pro-British Hashemite regime in neighbouring Iraq in 1958 was in turn related to the upsurge of anti-“colonial” fervour in the region after Egypt’s effective defeat of Anglo-French forces in the 1956 “Suez” war. Together with the move toward Egyptian-Syrian federal unity following the founding of the United Arab Republic (UAR), Britain’s decision to give Kuwait independence by terminating the 1899 Treaty of Protection on the 19th of June 1961, was seen by UK officials serving in Iraq and Kuwait as “almost inevitable”¹. In 1957 a British government review of foreign policy in the Gulf had emphasised the need for “maximum flexibility” in ensuring that the bottom line of maintaining its responsibility for the defence of Gulf Arab allies be maintained, for which “temporising” moves such as, in the Kuwaiti case, judicial and some symbolic foreign policy responsibility, were seen as commensurate with UK interests. The durability of this approach to maintaining British interests in the Gulf was very much recognised as subject to change, of which an overthrow of the Iraqi or Saudi regime would make an obvious, dramatic impact². The eventual decision to enable Kuwait to exercise independence under British defence protection was very much a mutually desired arrangement, with the Kuwaiti ruler, Shaikh Abdullah Salim, adroitly sensitive, as he had been in the past, to internal as well as regional opinion (see also Chapter 3). The ruler had been keen to secure a formal defence treaty with Britain to accompany Kuwait’s independence in 1961, but was persuaded by the British Political Agent that this risked obstruction in the House of Commons, at which point the ruler settled for a more informal “Exchange of Letters”. Following the agreement Abdullah Salim received statements of support for his country’s independence from the pivotal Arab players Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as well as from Jordan and Iran³.

¹ Sir Stephen Egerton, who served in the Political Agency Kuwait, 1958-61. Personal interview, London, October 2000.

² Bernard Burrows, Footnotes in the Sand: The Gulf in Transition 1953-58 (Salisbury; Michael Russell Publishing, 1990), p.128-144.

³ Frank Brenchley, Britain and the Middle East – An Economic History 1945-87, (London; Lester Crook; 1989); and Mustafa M. Alani, Operation Vantage – British Military Intervention in Kuwait in 1961, (Surbiton; LAAM, 1990), p.120.

The Iraqi leader General Abdul-Karim Qassim responded to the agreement between Kuwait and the United Kingdom with an outright denial a week later of the legitimacy of the emirate's independence and an assertion that Kuwait belonged to Iraq. When the Iraqi ruler had initially responded to the ending of the treaty and its mutual description by Britain and Kuwait as incompatible with Kuwait's "independent and sovereign status", it was to make a terse statement congratulating Kuwait's ruler Shaikh Abdullah Salim al-Sabah on ending the British commitment but made no mention of the country's independence. As a result, according to Britain's political resident in the Gulf, William Luce, the Amir's first response was to consult with him on what to do. A senior Foreign Office official⁴ subsequently noted that when, a week later, the Iraqi leader pressed his formal claim to the emirate, and denied the right of the Amir – in the Iraqi leader's words, a mere "*qarsai*" (chief) of the "*qaimaqqam*" (sub-region) of the "Villayet of Basra" - to terminate agreements with a foreign power, Amir Abdullah Salim then took a further five days before, on June 30th, utilising his right to call on military assistance from the British under the terms of the Exchange of Letters agreed with the British government in place of the former Treaty of Protection (see Chapter 3).

The Kuwaiti amir desired that an Arab political solution could be presented as resolving the crisis and ending what, on the day of his formal request to the British, had seen the seemingly choreographed arrival of part of the British military taskforce. However in the few days after General Qassim's apparent threat, Amir Abdullah Salim was not inclined to wait for progress by the Egyptian-dominated Arab League, who, three days after the Qassim statement, had begun efforts to find a political solution. The time taken to bring British army and naval personnel and assets to Kuwait's shoreline in the northern Gulf would suggest that a decision had been reached, by the British at least, two or more days earlier. In fact, it could be argued that Amir Abdullah Salim's invoking of the Exchange of Letters was done in unnecessary haste. After all, on the 29th June, only a day before the treaty was invoked, the Amir met with Abdul Khaliq Hassounch, a Moroccan diplomat and secretary-general of the Arab League, and wished him well on his mission to Baghdad and other Arab capitals. However, it is unlikely that the Kuwaiti leader would have invested much confidence in the ability of the Arab League to deliver an agreement that would secure the full backing of the Iraqi government and thus end the apparent crisis. At the same time the Kuwaiti Amir's ability to determine the extent of any Iraqi military threat would have been almost entirely reliant on British officials and on their intelligence reports, with which he was being supplied. However, as soon as General Qassim had made his claims on Kuwait, the

⁴ At the time Frank Brenchley was serving in the Arabian Department of the UK Foreign Office. Op cit.

amir was anxious that Britain provide an assurance of its willingness to act under the Anglo-Kuwaiti treaty. In fact the British premier Harold MacMillan and UK officials were concerned that such an assurance should not be made public, lest it provoke the Iraqi leader⁵. Amir Abdullah Salim was impatient with such sensitivities and expressed considerable concern at the need to mollify Kuwaiti public concerns by ensuring that a commitment and some evidence of follow through would occur quickly. The ruler urged that a warship scheduled to arrive in the Gulf over a week later should berth in a Kuwaiti port far more promptly⁶.

Once the amir, a couple of days later, took the decision to request British military assistance, Kuwait was quite prepared to exaggerate the seemingly already slanted British account of Iraq's military movements and their likely purpose⁷. A judgement had plainly been made by Abdullah Salim that, whatever the real extent of the Iraqi military threat on the ground, Kuwait was in little position to question the British assessment about what was best for the amirate's external security. Kuwaiti officials were able to make a more informed judgement in retrospect⁸.

The ruler had maintained a close relationship with the British and they had shared a mutual understanding about the timing of the amirate's independence. Against such a co-operative background, Britain's ability to encourage the amir to invite the UK forces, that, according to press reports from the UAR and Lebanon were already arriving in the Gulf, to intervene would have been considerable. However, for the amir, the verbal atmosphere created by Qassim and the counsel of British officials, who throughout the region were being told by London to emphasise a residual Iraqi military capability to cross the border as well as vaguer reports of manoeuvres southwards, was sufficient a reason to offset the apparent danger and effectively set the seal on an operation by UK military forces that, by the time of the Kuwaiti ruler's request, were waiting to disembark.

⁵ RS Crawford, FCO to UK embassy Kuwait, 28th June 1961 (FO 371/156846)

⁶ Ambassador John Richmond, Kuwait to A.R. Walmsley, Eastern Dept., FCO (FO371/156847)

⁷ According to the examples translated by BBC Monitoring, Alani *op.cit.* From this point onwards, Kuwait's account was in line with the alarmist versions emanating from the UAR media that in turn would have encouraged Kuwait to see an unexpected common UK-UAR interest in British military intervention.

⁸ Abdul-Rahman Al-Ateegi served as under-secretary in the Kuwaiti ministry of foreign affairs from 1963-67, Mr Al-Ateegi commented on the extent of the Iraqi military threat to Kuwait in June to July 1961.

"...[I]ts (Iraq's) troops were fighting in the north and south of the country. The threat was verbal....it was nonsense because he (Qassim) couldn't do anything..." Personal interview, Kuwait, January 2005.

With the benefit of hindsight at least, it would seem that the British government wanted to make a show of military strength to reinforce the deterrent impact of its new agreement with Kuwait⁹. Furthermore, any consideration the Amir might have given to prioritising the Arab League's attempted mediation would have been undermined by the poor state of relations between the key Arab players. With Cairo's approval, the Arab League offered its diplomatic services to the two parties in dispute. However, relations between Iraq and the United Arab Republic (of Egypt and Syria¹⁰) were at a low ebb. It would not have escaped the attention of the Kuwaiti amir and his senior officials that the UAR media, along with other state-controlled Arab news outlets in the region, were talking up an Iraqi threat to Kuwait¹¹, and engaging in vitriolic condemnation of General Qassim.

Saudi Arabia continued to view Nasser's Egypt and its leadership of the UAR with suspicion, but was even more hostile to the republican regime that had taken power in Baghdad in 1958. Saudi Arabia had been desirous, despite its poor relations with Britain, for the US and Britain to apply their apparent commitment to regional intervention¹², and take action to overthrow the Iraqi regime¹³. Indeed, such was the kingdom's desire that it should itself make a clear, practical statement of support for Kuwait independence and its opposition to the Iraqi leader General Qassim, that when the British Military Mission began the first phase of its arrival in Kuwait on July 1st, some 100 Saudi soldiers were already there. Their presence as a "token force" had been discussed by the amir with British officials. Abdullah Salim's willingness to accept the Saudis'

⁹ In his statements to the House of Commons, British prime minister Harold MacMillan emphasised the apparent strength of the Iraqi threat. In his memoirs, while the Iraqi threat is still taken seriously, MacMillan writes of Qassem's "...irresolution being removed by our strong reaction to his threats", and of the British cabinet "being convinced that our honour as well as our interest was involved." Harold MacMillan, *Pointing the Way, 1959-61*, (London; MacMillan, 1972).

¹⁰ The United Arab Republic (UAR) was founded in February 1958. Egypt's political stock in the Arab Near East (as well as the Gulf) had risen immensely, while its Arab nationalism had not only been seen to weaken the interests of Britain and France in the region but had made Nasser's rhetorical appeals to political unity appealing to an unstable Syrian regime keen to offset pressure from neighbouring Iraq. In the latter respect the primary objective of both the Egyptian and Syrian leadership, that of countering an Iraq closely allied with the mistrusted British, was met by political union. See also Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War - Gamal Abdul Nasser and His Rivals 1958-70*, (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹¹ Alani, *op.cit.*

¹² The "Baghdad Pact" had been founded in the Iraqi capital in 1955 as an alliance of the US and the UK with pro-western states that also included Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. It was intended as an expression of collective "anti-communist" commitment and mutual willingness to intervene to defend the incumbent regimes. The US willingness to intervene was reflected in the Eisenhower Doctrine after 1957. After 1958 the Baghdad Pact became known as CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation).

¹³ This enthusiasm was also shared with CENTO members, Iran and Turkey. Michael A. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf - A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833-1992*, (New York; Free Press, 1992), p.80.

symbolic presence alongside a far more substantive British troop contingent emphasises Kuwait's desire to be seen to securing Arab backing for its independent status.

The basis of foreign policy

The decision of the Kuwaiti Amir to effectively by-pass the Arab League initiative is liable to have reflected his judgement that a tangible expression of Britain's commitment to defend the newly independent amirate's sovereignty was preferable to placing his faith in an uncertain Arab League political initiative. Abdullah Salim knew that Hassouneh's mission was unlikely to secure an about-turn by General Qassim of what, a week earlier, had been a blanket assertion of Iraq's claims to Kuwait and an outright denial of its right of sovereignty.

We now know that Iraq's military forces were not actually positioned to challenge Kuwait militarily and had significant security challenges to confront, especially in the Kurdish north¹⁴. Furthermore, it is clear that the arrival of the British taskforce killed off the Arab League's attempted political initiative. However this is less relevant to understanding the drivers of Kuwaiti foreign policy in this period than Kuwait's decision to overtly emphasise a British military guarantee that, although it became more discrete as the decade wore on, would minimise physical threats to the amirate's security as Kuwait strove for political acceptance and legitimacy in the eyes of its Gulf and wider Middle East neighbours (including from Iraq). Kuwait was evolving a foreign policy that, up until the departure of the British from the southern Gulf in 1971, would successfully combine a military alliance with the dominant armed power in the region, and the partially contradictory pursuit of a political strategy designed to enhance Kuwait's security. As such, Kuwait's Middle East policy was rooted in the legitimacy afforded by international diplomatic recognition and the maximisation of support - or at least begrudging acceptance - from key, if often disputatious, neighbours. Kuwaiti foreign policy in this period was in line with Stephen Walt's assumption that alliances are preferred with countries sufficiently geographically removed that they are not an imminent threat¹⁵. Within the Gulf and wider Middle East, Kuwait largely adopted a non-alignment strategy designed to build as wide a base of support as possible, reflecting the unreliability of local alliances and Kuwait's need, as an independent country, to

¹⁴ Richard A. Mobley, "Gauging the Iraqi threat to Kuwait in the 1960s", a CIA document authored by a US naval intelligence officer, unclassified and made available on the CIA website in May 2003; interviews with both former British and Kuwaiti officials.

¹⁵ Stephen M. Walt, The Origin of Alliances (New York; Cornell University Press, 1990)

“swim in the sea”, as British officials would put it, without any overt British assistance. Kuwait’s ruler saw the country’s primary security concerns as external. However Kuwaiti leaders’ mindfulness of the influence among Kuwaiti and regional opinion of the UAR leader, Gamal Abdul Nasser, gave further impetus to their desire to ensure that the political basis of their foreign policy was “pro-Arab” (see Chapter 3). The British government had, following Kuwaiti independence, clarified that the UK could be called upon by the Kuwaiti ruler to intervene over internal as well as external threats to its security. However it was understood by both senior Kuwait and UK officials alike that, in the event of a military coup, which was seen as likely only with external encouragement, the British would not be practically or politically able to react in time, resulting in a *fait accompli*.

The amir was acutely conscious of the sensitivities involved in calling on the country that had had sole responsibility for defence and foreign policy to militarily intervene in the emirate within two weeks of its independence. Throughout the previous sixty years of Kuwait’s protected status such a step had never before been considered necessary by either Britain or the emirate. Any physical expression of military links in the past had been limited to the occasional arrival of a small number of officers on detachment from the British military naval bases in Bahrain and Aden, and discrete provision of training assistance for the emergent Kuwaiti military and security forces from the 1950s onwards. While there had never been a serious threat to internal security throughout the 1950s, during the 1956 war, and in part as a reflection of wider Arab events in 1958, there had been Arab nationalist demonstrations and some strike activity that had fiercely criticised the British and even on occasion the operation of Al-Sabah rule. As a result the Kuwait leadership, while clearly able to keep a tight rein on political protest, understood that any significant British military presence would have been counterproductive. Abdullah Salim was particularly attuned to the local and regional strength of nationalist feeling that had to be accommodated (see Chapter 3). In 1961 he also understood that the prompt replacement of the British force with an Arab one would be essential to Kuwaiti security in terms of Arab legitimacy, and specifically Arab League recognition¹⁶. No sooner had the British military arrived than the Amir was continuing discussions with the Arab League about the introduction of a security force (see Chapter 4) and discussing with the British the need for their prompt departure. Abdullah Salim was as keen as the Arab League’s dominant power, Egypt, that the British

¹⁶ Abdullah Bishara served in the Kuwaiti foreign ministry from 1963-80. He described the Kuwaiti agreement with the Arab League as “symbolic” only, and Arab League membership, and thus the entry of its security force, as being conditional on “the departure of the British.” Personal interview, February, 2003, Kuwait.

departure would be rapid. The Exchange of Letters, which facilitated the emirate's independence, had been attacked in Egypt's state-managed press, for all the UAR's official support for Kuwaiti sovereignty. Both the UAR and Saudi Arabia were, on the one hand, keen to see Qassim checked, but were also uncomfortable about a former colonial power, Britain, being the one to do it. They therefore shared an interest in encouraging Kuwait to enable the Arab League to take over from the British military presence in the emirate as soon as possible. Egypt had done nothing to prevent the movement of the British naval component of the taskforce from sailing to Kuwait via the Suez Canal, having been powerless to prevent the emir from making his decision in close consultation with the emirate's British ally. The UAR's tabling of a UN resolution, supported by the Soviet Union, which condemned the arrival of the British forces emphasised Egypt's need to be seen to be opposing the UK's action, and a probable fear that British might be establishing a long term presence in Kuwait. However it did no harm to Egypt's interests to see Iraqi aspirations constrained by the British, especially when it was relatively cost free in political terms. Egypt had not been keen to put itself in a lead role in any Arab security initiative in Kuwait. They knew that neither the Emir or the British government would welcome their troops in Kuwait in significant numbers¹⁷, nor, despite the Cairo press's objections to Kuwait's ongoing military dependence on Britain, was the UAR seeking to tie a collective Arab force to any Kuwaiti renunciation of the Exchange of Letters. With the British taskforce present in the emirate and in the northern Gulf, Kuwait, the UAR and the other Arab states that had lined up against Iraq were keen that the British departure should begin promptly. However they were also keen that the departure should occur without leaving a security vacuum in its wake and that it should not be completed without the proposed Arab League Security Force (ALSF) having been properly assembled.

The British however were concerned that the Kuwaiti ruler might be coming under pressure to rescind the Exchange of Letters as part of his negotiation with the Arab League over arrangements for the stationing of the ALSF. The talks were something that London was keen for its diplomats around the world to make clear in public it had no direct influence over¹⁸. At the same time, private British assessments confirmed that the British Government had little to gain in

¹⁷ Egypt's ambassador to Kuwait commented to the counsellor at the British embassy in August 1961 that his government would not be sending a large component of the proposed Arab League Security Force, contrary to reports emanating from the Arab League that it would be sending some 5,000, nearly as many as the combined number of British forces. Ambassador Zayyat commented that Cairo knew that both "Her Majesty's Government and the (Kuwaiti) Ruler" were "as anxious to prevent Egyptian predominance in Kuwait as to forestall Iraqi occupation." Telegram to Kuwait, 28th August, 1961 (FO 371/156897).

¹⁸ Confidential Foreign Office "Guidance Telegram", dated 12th August 1961, sent from Commonwealth Relations Office to British embassies in Commonwealth countries (FO 371/156897).

trying to prevent the talks' success, and furthermore that the entry of the ALSF – which could be finessed as an “Arab solution” - could serve to reduce USSR and Iraqi hostility to the British role and that, once the British troops had departed, might aid the entry of Kuwait into the UN, which it eventually did. Britain, an official wrote, could not have prevented the success of these talks, “even if we wished to”. Britain’s priority was to ensure that the UK-Kuwaiti defence agreement was safe and, seemingly, to ensure that there was no danger of the issue of what arrangements would replace the recently deployed British military force becoming a matter for the United Nations to determine. Both Britain and Kuwait wanted to secure entry of the amirate to the UN as soon as possible and shared the objective that the ensuing UN debate on the issue would provide international legitimacy for the process whereby the ALSF would replace the British taskforce. However British officials were also concerned that the price of securing UN support for Kuwait’s independence, and, effectively, the action that Britain had taken in the name of this objective, might be that the UN would decide the nature of security arrangements for a newly admitted country and might seek to establish some form of UN or international security force that could limit both the UK’s ongoing military role and the imprimatur of political credibility provided by the useful symbolism of the involvement of Arab states (see Chapter 3). However the Soviet Union’s rejection on July 6th of a British drafted UN resolution in support of Kuwait’s sovereignty and territorial integrity seemed to end this prospect¹⁹, although British officials would continue to express concern about the role of its taskforce and of the incoming ALSF being decided in the UN Security Council²⁰. As a result the focus became what, for both Britain and Kuwait, was the mutually desired entry of the ALSF, and ensuring that this should be obtained on the best possible basis by not undermining Britain’s ability to provide military support to Kuwait in the future and providing what was widely perceived by British officials as the “political deterrent” of an Arab League force that had broad representation.

While Kuwaiti and UK officials were equally keen that the UAR’s role should not be predominant, there was little London could do to influence the make-up of the force, other than seek to persuade Jordan to take a significant role in it. Saudi Arabia, who had not renewed relations with the UK since the Buraimi crisis (see Chapter 3), could not be influenced by Britain to send troops to Kuwait, nor could former French-held territories from which the contribution of armed forces, such as Lebanon or Morocco, was being discussed by their governments with Arab

¹⁹ Foreign Office statement for use by UK representatives worldwide to explain current policy in Kuwait (Telegram number 331, date estimated as mid-August 1961 (FO 371/156899).

²⁰ For example, Sir Percy Dean, British Ambassador to the UN, as reported in FO communication with British embassy, Kuwait, August 4th 1961 (FO 371/156897).

League representatives. The US State Department was keen that Saudi Arabia, with whom Washington at this point had developed good, but not yet close, relations, should play a dominant role in the force and that, at the same time, the UAR's role be minimised²¹. However, the US's impact on developments in the Gulf was to remain relatively insignificant throughout this period.

For the most part the US preferred to defer to Britain, which it viewed as a reliable power in the Gulf region. This was especially the case when the US's burgeoning Vietnam commitment had, by 1965, become an all-consuming foreign and defence policy issue, at least outside of events in Europe. The result was the sidelining of the direct US military interventionism that had been seen only three years earlier in 1958 in Lebanon and with the US-assisted UK-led operation in Jordan. These had typified the more forceful approach embodied in the Eisenhower Doctrine, which in turn had replaced the more indirect approach typified by the CIA-assisted overthrow of the nationalist regime in Iran in 1953. However, the US was now resuming a relatively detached stance, at least in the Middle East. This did not prevent the cautious development of defence relations however. From President Eisenhower onwards, US relations with Saudi Arabia were gradually extended, and under President Kennedy the US began what was to become a regular off-shore deployment in the Gulf.

For its part Britain understood that not only was it largely powerless to influence the make-up of the ALSF, but that the amir was not in a position to shape the composition of a force that was effectively being negotiated on his behalf by the Arab League²². On July 20th Kuwait was admitted to the Arab League by a decision of its council made in Iraq's absence. Both Britain and the amir understood that the price of entry was that the Kuwait leader would "undertake to request the withdrawal of British forces as soon as possible"²³. Despite British concerns that such an agreement could irrevocably weaken its position in Kuwait - to the advantage of the UAR in the more alarmist analysis of some British officials outside of the emirate - maintaining the Exchange of Letters was, in the words of a senior Kuwait official, a "cardinal principle" for the

²¹ Sir Harold Caccia, British ambassador to the US, commented that, "(the US) State (department) is coming round to sympathise with the British action (in Kuwait)," Telegram to UK consulate, Kuwait, July 25th, 1961 (FO 370/156896).

²² Oral statement by the UK Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Alec Douglas-Home, to the British Cabinet, July 27th, 1961. (FO371/156896, Bk1195/17). The details of the handover from the British to the ALSF would be negotiated between the Arab League Mission to Kuwait and representative of the British Middle East Command based in Aden.

²³ Ibid.

amir²⁴. It was also understood on both sides that the entry of the ALSF should in no way undermine this agreement. Furthermore, Britain was keen that nothing should happen to prevent the pre-positioning of British military equipment, including Chieftan tanks, for potential use should a threat arise in the future. Kuwait was not minded to challenge a residual UK defence foothold that, with little outside knowledge, remained in place until 1971. In fact, rather surprisingly, it appeared at one point as if British armoured vehicles and weapons might be temporarily utilised by the incoming Arab force. In a goal shared across the board by Kuwaiti leaders, it was also agreed that a UK training mission be established to build up Kuwait's armed forces, with the objective that they be able to delay Iraqi troops for 36 hours²⁵. In other words Kuwait's accession to the Arab League would be a vital step in it securing political legitimacy in the Arab world, despite the relatively limited armed strength and, in Kuwaiti eyes, limited willingness of the ALSF to fight²⁶. Kuwait's accession the desire of both Kuwait and its military ally, Britain, and thus an unspoken (and temporary) alignment of interests between London, Kuwait and the UK's seeming opponents in the Arab world, namely the UAR and, to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia. In this way the transfer of military authority to the ALSF, which arrived in the emirate in September, was enabled.

Neither Arab League membership, nor even the ALSF, was seen by the Kuwaiti amir or the emirate's officials as a military deterrent against Iraq²⁷. For that, the amir told a UK official, he put his faith in "God and the British"²⁸. While there is often an element of both Kuwait and British officials telling each other what they think the other would like to hear, and of British officials doing the same when reporting to London, much of the comment by senior Kuwaitis was borne out by the emirate's unwillingness to do anything that would undermine the British relationship. Acknowledging the equipment shortcomings of the incoming Arab force, the Kuwaiti ruler would tell the British Political Agent that he regarded the agreement with the Arab League over the ALSF as "satisfactory, especially with our (British) support still behind him." The agreement over the stationing of the ALSF was understood by Kuwait as an acknowledgement by all the key Arab players, except at this stage Iraq, of the emirate's legitimacy.

²⁴ According to the Amir's Assistant State Secretary, in conversation with a British embassy official, July 1961.

²⁵ UK Commonwealth Relations Office "guidance telegram", *op.cit.*

²⁶ *Al-Rai Al-Amm*, a relatively conservative Kuwaiti paper, owned by Shaikh Jabr Al-Ahmed, stated that it preferred British troops to Arab League ones as they would not hesitate, if necessary, to shed Arab blood.

²⁷ Alan Rothnie, Political Agent, Kuwait, 14th August, 1961 (FO 371/156897 103571; Bk 1196/34)

²⁸ British embassy to FO, October 1961 (FO 371/156897).

Other security constructs

From the moment Kuwait was granted independence by Britain, its foreign policy combined maintenance of defence relations with London, with the search for legitimacy in the region, especially in the Arab world. The latter would primarily be sought through rhetorical and financial support for Arab “*wahda*” (unity) in the sense of solidarity and cooperation. However political unity projects of the kind referred to in the Arab League council’s resolution, which admitted Kuwait and committed it and the other Arab League members to an eventual (and non-defined) “federation” would receive only the most general support. Kuwait sought legitimacy through the mere fact of membership of regional and international “regimes”²⁹. Membership of the Arab League provided a formal underscoring of Kuwait’s state sovereignty, and as such was valued by both Kuwait and Britain³⁰. It was also seen by Kuwait, like the era of Arab summitry, as providing a potential vehicle for resolving inter-Arab disputes, as opposed to the divisive formation of blocs. More importantly, however, for Kuwait, membership of the Arab League was understood as a key step to the highly desired membership of the UN. The latter was to continue to be a thread in Kuwaiti foreign policy as the ultimate form of institutional recognition and legitimisation, and therefore, once membership was achieved two years later, Kuwait would seek security by pursuing good relations with the UN, both as a formal entity and, more particularly, in terms of establishing positive relations with all five of the permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council (UNSC), even at the cost of upsetting two of them - its key international allies in this period, the UK and the US. This did not represent Kuwait’s prioritisation of regional and international regimes as the basis of its foreign policy *per se*. Rather, Kuwait’s foreign policy was to prioritise the search for security, and thus the building of broad friendships, not just in the Middle East but internationally. For this reason, by 1964 the Chinese Communist regime was being actively courted by Kuwait, some nine years before the US established diplomatic relations with Peking and thereby facilitated the People’s Republic of China’s eventual replacement of Taiwan on the P5.

²⁹ Keohane and Nye emphasise regime membership as affecting states’ behaviour. See Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr, “Power and Interdependence Revisited”, International Organisation, Volume 41; Issue 4: 1987, p.725-753.

³⁰ Oral statement, Douglas-Home, op. cit.

Britain promotes Arab acceptance of Kuwait

Kuwait's desire to gain acceptance in the Arab world also included signing up to the Arab League's "Pact for Joint Defence and Economic Co-operation" in August 1961. This was a step that some British officials viewed as unfortunate, but about which the Political Agency staff acknowledged privately that they could do little to prevent. Dubbed the "Arab Collective Security Pact", this eight member body, including Kuwait, was seen by British officials as having a useful symbolic value for Kuwait but no military significance. Britain's political resident in the Gulf was advised by London that, "[I]t is doubtful whether the signatories would call the pact into operation against Iraq," adding that "... (it) has never been taken very seriously, has no teeth, and.... was generally assumed at its genesis to be directed against Israel."³¹ The Kuwaiti ruler was happy to announce the accession of Kuwait to the pact and to make clear that this would mean that British troops would have to depart his country. Furthermore it would not have displeased either the Kuwaiti amir or other senior Al-Sabah that, in response, the Arab League Secretary-General, Abdul-Khaliq Hassouna, emphasised what he claimed was the Arab national fealty behind Kuwait's accession to a pact whose practical expression of collective security was presented in terms as concrete as that of NATO or the then Warsaw Pact.³² Thus the construct of Kuwaiti foreign policy – the ambiguous and partially contradictory notion of "Arabism" – was neatly affirmed in a collective Arab security arrangement that, in military terms, was to prove fairly short-lived and limited in scope. Kuwaiti state sovereignty, however, was being asserted through an expression of Arab solidarity and in policies presented as in tune with the pan-Arab desire for unity among Arab states .

The British political resident in the Gulf was advised by the Foreign Office only to discuss the Arab League defence pact if, as was likely, the ruler should seek his advice. Britain was to

³¹ Telegram from FO to British Political Resident (Bahrain) (FO371/156897 103571). Undated (estimate: mid-August, 1961). The telegram reproduces the relevant clause of the pact (article 2), which states that the "contracting parties" "shall consider any act of armed aggression made against any one or more of them or against their forces, to be directed against them all and therefore... they bind themselves to hasten to the aid of the state or states against which such aggression is committed."

³² Abdel-Khaliq Hassouna, secretary-general of the Arab League, was responding to the Amir of Kuwait's announcement. In a telegram dated 12th August 1961 he asserted that all the other seven members of the pact were bound to come to the defence of Kuwait in the event of an attack on it, which he said would constitute an attack on all the pact's members. He added that it pleases him to announce in the State of Kuwait, "[T]o the sons of the whole Arab nation," that the ruler of Kuwait has requested the evacuation of the British troops and for preparation for the coming of "Arab forces as guests of Kuwait. In this way," Mr Hassouna said, "[W]e give the best example of Arab solidarity and of our insistence on the promotion ofArabism and of rights." His reply to the Kuwait ruler's announcement is contained in documents sent to the Foreign Office from the British consul-general in Kuwait, dated 13th August 1961 (FO 371/156898).

continue to be a source of considerable influence over Kuwaiti foreign policy, although the Kuwaiti ruler was also acutely aware that that advice may not be dispassionate. To this extent the UK, seeing an advantage in Kuwait seeking and securing membership in the “Arab club”, did not want to prejudice this by raising the ruler’s suspicions about the Arab League pact by appearing over keen on Kuwait’s accession to it³³. Britain’s military advice and ongoing assistance was particularly valued by Shaikh Abdullah Salim, and as such the UK both expected to be, and was keen to take advantage of being, in a position to counsel him that the pact was vague on what steps would be taken to face down any aggression against the emirate. However Kuwait was keen to ensure that the importance it attached to Britain’s commitment to provide military assistance - despite what it had accepted as a necessarily overt expression of this in the first three months of independence - should be handled as discretely as possible. Kuwait’s leaders were mindful of the need, for both regional and domestic consumption, to project a pro-Arab identity in the emirate’s foreign policy and, as a result, to appear to be as free as possible from reliance on the British (see Chapter 2). Indicative of this was Abdullah Salim’s statement to the British Political Resident, at a time when the British taskforce was still present in Kuwait, that “in due course he would thank Her Majesty’s Government for their great assistance.... and to make clear that this in no way would affect our Exchange of Letters of June 19th...” However, the ruler made clear that this would only be done in the form of a letter to the British Political Resident that “should remain confidential between us.”³⁴

British-Kuwaiti relations benefit from Arab division

Throughout July and August, discussion ensued over the make up of the Arab League Security Force (ALSF), with British observers acerbically noting that the Arab country over which they retained significant influence (aside from Kuwait itself), Jordan, was continuing to prevaricate over its participation, with Kuwait’s financial inducements being a key factor that finally ensured its involvement³⁵. A memorandum was drawn up by the Arab League’s Military Secretariat in late July that assumed a lightly armed and relatively small force of 12 infantry companies plus technical and administrative units, and suggested that the total number would not exceed 2,000³⁶,

³³ Telegram to Political Resident, op.cit.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ UK embassy Amman to FO, 12th August, 1961 (FO371/156899)

³⁶ Translation of document signed by General Ali Amer, military assistant to the secretary-general of the Arab League, July 24th, 1961,(FO371/156898 103571 Bk 1195/56).

markedly down on the British force whose total number, on and off-shore, was 5,000. Jordan headed the list of only six prospective participating Arab countries. In the event its involvement proved to be smaller than that of Saudi Arabia, which was the largest contributor to the ALSF when it entered Kuwait nearly two months later. In early August Jordan's foreign minister informed the British embassy in Amman of his "personal" ideas for providing a longer term solution to the defence of Kuwait. The revival of an earlier proposal of a federation of Jordan with Kuwait, which on this occasion was envisaged as bringing in Iraq at a later stage, was seemingly intended to overcome the exclusion of Iraq, and may even have been advocated at Baghdad's initiative. British officials observed that Jordan, which was stalling over the ALSF in order to maximise its financial reward, was hardly likely to attract the Kuwait ruler to a project promising the even more dubious appeal this time of absorption into a federation with republican Iraq. Furthermore, the different calculations of the four main Arab members of the proposed ALSF, namely the UAR, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Jordan, whose attitude and possible ambitions could impact on Kuwait, would only have emphasised to Kuwait the importance of seeking to avoid alignments within the region whilst maintaining the un-stated alliance with the UK.

Kuwait and Jordan viewed each other as little more than a front for the interests of their perceived adversaries, Iraq and the UAR respectively. It was viewed as sufficiently important for Kuwait to have Jordan on board for it to pay handsomely for the privilege, despite an assumption by the British that Amman had the green light from Baghdad to do it. However Kuwait was under no illusion that the ALSF was anything other than an alliance of convenience, one that, in Britain's assessment, Kuwait would not regard as a good basis for its security over the longer term. Neither could Kuwait rely on sufficient UAR-Iraqi animosity, or, for that matter, Egyptian-Syrian unity to provide a deterrent against Kuwait being attacked on the basis that the UAR might invade Iraq from Syria if Baghdad was to threaten the emirate in the future. Yemen, along with an earlier prospective member of the ALSF, Lebanon, proved wary of a military involvement in Kuwait, and in the end a four country Arab League force consisting of Saudi Arabia, UAR, Jordan and Sudan succeeded the British taskforce (see Chapter 3).

The ALSF was to remain in Kuwait until late January 1963, but without the UAR's comparatively small force, which had departed as early as October 1961 due to internal security priorities. A reawakening of British concern about an apparent Iraqi territorial threat was to occur two months later. In December 1961 a UK naval mobilisation took place in the northern Gulf and Kuwait made official complaints to Iraq about troop "concentrations", for which once again there

was no evidence³⁷, and Baghdad's ongoing propaganda assaults on, and claims against, the emirate. The rhetorical onslaught against Kuwait was to continue from Baghdad, before a change of regime in February 1963 provided an opportunity for direct Kuwaiti engagement after various Arab intermediaries had failed to break the impasse over the previous year. In the intervening period, Shaikh Jabr Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, who, like his half-brother, the then finance minister Jabr Al-Ahmed, tended to couch his statements in Arab nationalist rhetoric, reacted to Iraq's ongoing statements against Kuwait by asserting that, "My country finds no alternative but to take all measures which will preserve her safety and rights³⁸." It was noted by British ambassador, Sir John Richmond, that the shaikh had made no specific reference to the recent presence of British troops, or to the role of Britain generally in preserving Kuwait's "safety and rights". However the meaning of Jabr's comments were clear, and the orientation of Kuwait foreign policy was not to change, even in light of the expedient accommodation of Iraqi financial demands in order to secure diplomatic recognition from Baghdad in October 1963.

USSR lifts veto on UN membership

At the same time as the make up and remit of the ALSF was being finalised in September 1961, a number of Arab states established diplomatic relations with Kuwait, despite the threat, acted on in some instances, that Iraq would break relations with them. Iraq's opposition to Kuwaiti admittance meant that Baghdad was effectively excluded from the Arab League for much of 1962. Aside from the momentum generated by Kuwaiti overtures and financial offers after the short-lived change of regime in February 1963, the new Iraqi government was keen to break out of its isolation. Kuwait's success in securing diplomatic recognition from the USSR just one month after the Iraqi coup had damaged Baghdad's relations with Moscow, in turn removed the remaining barrier to the emirate's entry to the UN, which occurred in May. In previously denying Kuwait recognition, the Soviet Union had been influenced by Iraq's stance as Moscow sought to increase influence over a republican regime that enjoyed the support of the pro-Soviet, Iraqi Communist Party. However, after establishing formal state to state relations with, first the UK and then the US, Kuwait had, aided by the agreement over the entry of ALSF troops, established diplomatic relations with all the major Arab countries (except Iraq) as well as its key Gulf

³⁷ The amir was unaware of any Iraqi mobilisation and, according to the UK embassy in Kuwait, the source of the story appeared to have been Kuwaiti officers. December 23rd, 1961 (FO371/156854)

³⁸ Public statement. Quoted in UK embassy telegram to FO, 18th March 1962 (FO 371: 162898)

neighbour, Iran. Kuwait's first formal exchange of ambassadors in the Arab world was with the UAR, a country with whom the Soviets were establishing increasingly strong relations. By 1963, Kuwait's success in opening relations with P5 members France and China (represented by Taiwan), some additional European countries, and a number of states throughout Asia began to make the USSR look at the prospect of relations with Kuwait more favourably. The People's Republic of China (PRC) had formally recognised Kuwait as soon as its independence in 1961, however tentative diplomatic and trade relations did not begin until finance minister Shaikh Jabr Al-Ahmed visited Peking in 1964. Furthermore, Kuwait's entry to the UN, over which the Soviets held a veto, was by this point less bound up in cold war politics. At the time of Kuwait's independence in 1961 tensions between the two blocs were high and recognition of newly independent states was a matter of intense bargaining. By May 1963, when the Soviets lifted the veto on Kuwaiti admittance to the UN, relations between the US and the USSR had partly improved, making Kuwait, a country pursuing relations with a number of the USSR's Arab friends in the region, less sensitive. The Soviets were entirely pragmatic in their calculations, they saw benefits in that the Kuwaitis were willing to pursue external relations not favoured by their western allies and allowed "progressive" opinion represented, as they saw it, by Arab nationalists, to engage openly in domestic politics. However Moscow was under no illusion about the limitations of the commonly professed Arab nationalism in affecting the basic interests of the ruling Al-Sabah and believed that Arab solidarity was of limited substance in driving policy among disparate Arab governments. In 1964 Kuwait reacted angrily when these sentiments were expressed, in a very personal way, toward the amir by Soviet leader Nikolai Khrushchev at a meeting of Egyptian trade unionists; however their relations were unharmed by the event³⁹.

Following the shift in policy toward Kuwait by the USSR in 1963, the UK government believed that Iraq had little choice but to accept diplomatic relations with the emirate. Ongoing internal security challenges and the relative internal weakness of the Baathi-led government compounded this likelihood. Throughout the period of negotiations between Kuwait and Iraq, the UK had tried, directly and indirectly, to counsel the foreign minister and, from October 1962, heir apparent, Shaikh Sabah Salim, against an overly enthusiastic approach that, in the view of British officials in Kuwait, could increase the pressure on Kuwait to terminate the Exchange of Letters as part of

³⁹ "There is some little ruler sitting there, an Arab of course, a Muslim. He is given bribes (by the imperialists). He lives the life of the rich, but he is trading in the wealth of his people. He never had any conscience and he will never have any. Will you come to terms with him on unification? It is easier to eat three puds of salt than to reach an agreement with him, although you are both Arabs and Muslims." Stephen Page, The USSR and Arabia – The Development of Soviet Policies and Attitudes Towards the Countries of the Arabian Peninsula, (London; Central Asian Research Centre, 1971).

any agreement with Iraq. However there was never any likelihood that Sabah Salim would be a party to weakening the defence connection with Britain, nor that the amir, Abdullah Salim, would support one of his senior ministers should they try to.

Leadership and the UK relationship

Abdullah Salim would, unlike his successor Sabah Salim, take a leading, but not domineering, role in decision-making. He was keen to be seen to be exercising clear authority, but was always interested in hearing other opinion, including the ongoing counsel of the UK. The latter would range from advice on diplomatic propriety affecting Kuwait's opening of relations with other countries, to defence and security policy. Abdullah Salim would tend to dominate decision-making but was equally prepared to absent himself at times of internal family dispute, and, more generally, to enable significant autonomy to be exercised by senior and knowledgeable Al-Sabah politicians, in particular the finance minister Jabr Al-Ahmed; the latter's half brother, the foreign minister Sabah Al-Ahmed; the amir's son, interior and defence minister Saad Abdullah; as well as a handful of senior non Al-Sabah government officials (see Chapter 3). Amir Abdullah Salim, as he became known once a council of ministers (cabinet) was formed following the constituent assembly elections in 1962, also adopted the title of president of the council (effectively prime minister). This practice of the amir holding the top governmental job was to change under the new constitution in January 1963, with the result that the crown prince, Sabah Salim, became prime minister. However, following his accession in 1950, before health problems plagued him from 1964 until his death in November 1965, Abdullah Salim exercised continued executive authority, including, following independence, over foreign policy. However, while British concerns regarding the future of the Exchange of Letters as Kuwait negotiated with Iraq proved misplaced (see Chapter 3), Abdullah Salim's decision to appoint Sabah Salim, a younger brother, as his heir was a pleasant surprise to British officials in Kuwait and the wider Gulf, who had expected Jabr Al-Ahmed to accede on the basis of ability, the tradition of alternation between the Al-Salim and Al-Jabr branches of the family (see also Chapter 3), and strong indications that he had been favoured by the amir himself.⁴⁰

Abdullah Salim's decision to favour Sabah Salim rather than Jabr Al-Ahmed may also have been related to the contrasting views held of each by the British. This in no way suggests, however,

⁴⁰ Personal interview with Sir Bernard Burrows, London, 2000; and op.cit. p.55.

that the Political Agent, for example, would have tried to directly influence Amir Abdullah's decision. Britain knew how sensitive Abdullah Salim was to avoiding creating an impression, domestically or within the region, that he was anything other than an independent ruler. However, Shaikh Abdullah wanted to ensure that Kuwait's handling of its independence would not, in any way, undermine the British defence guarantee. While Abdullah may not have believed that, as Amir, Jabr Al-Ahmed would have sought to abrogate the formal understanding with Britain, he knew that the British perception of Jabr as sympathetic with Arab nationalism might affect relations between the two countries⁴¹. Crucially, in this respect, Amir Abdullah would not have wanted Britain to question its defence commitment. Shaikh Jabr's disdainful attitude toward the presence of British troops in Kuwait during 1961 had been widely noted by UK officials, as had his brusquely stated desire that, after the immediate crisis was over, they be removed with haste.

Appointing Sabah Salim heir was likely to have occurred with the expectation and, at the least, an implicit understanding on the part of Amir Abdullah Salim, and the rest of the senior Al-Sabah - Sabah Salim and Jabr included - that as Amir, Sabah Salim would share power with Jabr. If Sabah Salim was to become heir apparent, then Jabr would effectively be the heir in waiting⁴². Sabah Salim's leadership style, and the fact that the traditional alternation between the Al-Salim and Al-Jabr branches of the Al-Sabah family had been broken⁴³, would have encouraged an unspoken understanding to share power.

Oil and Arab nationalism

It was Jabr Al-Ahmed's likely importance in the decision making process, and the assumption that his instincts would be to play hardball with the British government, a factor displayed in oil negotiations from 1964, that would continue to worry the UK, despite their relative relief at Sabah Salim's appointment as crown prince. The protracted negotiations over the "supplemental agreement"⁴⁴ with the British and US companies, BP and Gulf Oil respectively, who between them owned the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), had begun in 1964. However final terms were not

⁴¹ In the judgement of the British embassy in 1958, Jabr Al-Ahmed could play a lead role in anticipated widespread Al-Sabah opposition to a mooted union with Hashemite Iraq and Jordan. PREM 11/2403 *op.cit.*

⁴² As suggested to the author by the former Political Agency official (1949) and UK ambassador to Kuwait (1972-75), Sir John Wilton. Personal interview, 2000.

⁴³ Sir John Moberly, deputy-head, Political Agency, Kuwait (1954-56). Personal interview, 2000.

⁴⁴ This would reduce the amount of the posted oil price that foreign companies could claim back as "royalty expensing" to set against income tax.

agreed by Kuwait until 1967. The Kuwaiti amir, whose predecessor Shaikh Ahmed Jabr had granted the original oil concession, and the oil and finance minister, Jabr Al-Ahmed, were keen that the best possible terms should be secured. This was a matter of simple common sense, given that the long standing division of revenues from KOC's production and sale of Kuwait oil limited the government's income to half of the revenues accrued by KOC, and that the Kuwaiti government had no influence over this⁴⁵. Kuwait's driving of what British officials considered a hard bargain was largely directed by Jabr Al-Ahmed. However, despite British officials' attempts to win them over, they understood that this posture was wholly supported by prime minister Sabah Salim and by the amir. The latter had, after all put an end to what has subsequently been understood as politically unacceptable privileges for the "seven sisters", top British firms who gained major contracts in the 1950s from the British Political Agency that had ruled Kuwait⁴⁶. Iran obtained better terms from its British partner than had initially been agreed with KOC in 1964, and as a result further protracted talks occurred over 1966, with Jabr Al-Ahmed continuing, as the then prime minister, to take a direct interest in efforts to agree better terms under the proposed supplemental agreement. It did him no harm to take up a plausibly tough posture against Britain in a national assembly where the Kuwaiti branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement was well represented (see Chapter 2), and from which Jabr Al-Ahmed was seeking approval of his nomination by the amir as heir. Thus oil policy was in part a foreign policy issue in which the illusive construct of "Arabism" was not so much a driver as a component, not least in the packaging of the Kuwaiti policy stance. Kuwait finally consented to the supplemental agreement when Jabr Al-Ahmed decided to urge a national assembly with a much smaller Arab nationalist-inclined presence to pass it, following elections in 1967 alleged by US and UK diplomats to have been rigged⁴⁷. British and American officials speculated that in 1966 a hard bargain was being struck by Kuwait out of a desire to accommodate Iraq. The Iraqi government was simultaneously negotiating with the Iraqi Petroleum Company, which was also owned by BP. Given the overlapping personal and political factors at work in Kuwait's stance toward KOC, it seems likely that talks would have been as protracted, regardless of what was happening in Iraq. Striking the right stance for neighbours and for internal consumption would continue to be a Kuwait preoccupation even if it meant publicly disrespecting the UK and the US. However, after such

⁴⁵ The emirate had hosted the formation of OPEC (Organisation of Oil Producing Economies) in 1960, but, what would eventually be known as a cartel, did little to influence the market until the oil price hikes and production agreements that began in the 1970s (see Chapter 7).

⁴⁶ Moberly, *op.cit.*

⁴⁷ "Kuwait in 1968", US embassy to State Department, 28th October, 1968 (A352); and former British official who referred to ballots being returned from the virtually deserted island of Failaka. Personal interview, London, 2000.

protracted negotiations, Kuwait wanted a deal over a revenue source that it needed to ensure was maximised and that therefore the western oil companies would not be discouraged by these wrangles from increasing output levels.

Kuwait's defence relationship with the UK was seemingly threatened in the heat of sharp exchanges in late 1965 when Jabr Al-Ahmed indicated to the UK ambassador that Kuwait's high level of sterling holdings in the UK might be withdrawn if the British government did not lean on the oil companies⁴⁸. Such statements played well in Kuwait and beyond, but caused some alarm in British circles, although this was more a concern about the Arab nationalist tone and what this might auger for their ongoing relations, not least the Exchange of Letters, rather, than any belief that Kuwait would actually withdraw from these investments. However it also signalled that a more confident Kuwait perceived that its relationship with Britain was no longer as dependent as it appeared to be in 1961. Discussions at this time were being held between British officials and Kuwait's deputy chief of staff General Mubarrak Abdullah Al-Sabah, and the interior and defence minister Shaikh Saad Abdullah, about reducing the UK's defence commitment to air cover only due to the intended abandonment of Aden⁴⁹. As a result the Kuwaiti crown prince and prime minister Jabr Al-Ahmed is likely to have had less inhibition about issuing threats about investments in Sterling. Jabr Al-Ahmed's message also reflected a keen awareness that devaluation was increasingly being talked about in the UK, an event that would, by definition, reduce the value of Kuwait's sterling holdings, and thus his statement about withdrawal from Sterling can be seen as an indication that he believed Kuwait needed to receive a higher proportion of the oil revenues that Britain was accruing in the amirate. Jabr Al-Ahmed knew that pulling out of Sterling would have been likely to end the UK's formal defence commitment. Britain feared that Kuwait could come increasingly under the control of the crown prince who, in the early period of Amir Sabah Salim's rule, London considered was relatively unconstrained in asserting his will over decision-making, and thus might in certain circumstances be prepared to provoke a cancellation of the defence agreement. It is telling that at the beginning of 1964 the incoming UK ambassador Noel Jackson judged that "oil probably means that the UK is more important to Kuwait than Kuwait is to us"⁵⁰. The "probably" would have reflected the importance

48 Sir John Graham, Head of Chancery in the British Embassy, felt aggrieved at the time at such "below the belt" tactics as Jabr Al-Ahmed threatening to withdraw Kuwaiti investments from Sterling if the "Government of Kuwait's demand for a revised Supplemental Agreement was not met". G. Noel Jackson, 14th December 1965 (DEFE 11/616).

49 British Political Resident, W.H. Luce, 16th October 1965 (FO 371/179842).

50 Ambassador G Noel Jackson, "1963 Annual Review", January 2nd, 1964 to FO, London (FO 371/168728/106540)

to the UK economy of Kuwait's oil and its sterling investments, and the residual assumption the UK held that its strategic interest still lay in being the dominant military power in the oil-rich Gulf area. By 1966 the same ambassador was acknowledging that Kuwait's investments in Sterling were more important to the UK than to Kuwait.

The UK government appeared sufficiently confident however in the Kuwaiti leadership's desire to retain, however begrudgingly in some cases, the defence commitment that the British was told that he should be prepared to say that the UK would reconsider the defence agreement if Kuwait continued to take what was considered a tough stance over the terms demanded under the supplemental agreement⁵¹. Although Britain had begun to constrain that defence commitment in practical terms, it had not yet begun to question the utility of maintaining the Exchange of Letters with Kuwait, assuming that the agreement could be continued without undue political cost to Britain in the region. This was an arrangement that continued to be strongly endorsed by the US.

US eyes Kuwait through cold war prism

For Washington more than London, the British commitment to Kuwait was an important part of a cold war conception of strategic interests in the Middle East, and as a result the subtleties of Kuwait's non-aligned position were not immediately obvious to incoming diplomats⁵². This could even extend to the assessments being made by more experienced hands in Washington who viewed the very well-staffed Soviet embassy in Kuwait as a security risk. Diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia, Poland and Bulgaria followed the arrival of the first Soviet ambassador in August 1963. When Kuwait made diplomatic overtures toward East Germany and allowed a media conference of representatives from communist countries resulting in the first West German ambassador to the emirate delaying his arrival, US officials reacted with alarm. The attacks on West Germany in the more Arab nationalist parts of the Kuwaiti press, at a time when Bonn's close relations with Israel were proving more controversial as tensions increased between the

⁵¹ The British Foreign Office specifically advised the Embassy in Kuwait to threaten to terminate the Exchange of Letters in the event of "any unilateral action by Kuwait in breach of the KOC's concession." It was additionally suggested that the British Embassy should inform the Amir and any other reliable and influential figures that Her Majesty's Government are still studying their defence commitments and to warn them that unilateral action by Kuwait in breach of KOC's concession might well affect Her Majesty's decision on whether they can afford to continue to keep forces available for the defence of Kuwait in an emergency. Telegram to G.Noel Jackson, 30th December 1965 (FO 371/181589).

⁵² See for example, US Ambassador Howard Cottam to State Department, 5th January 1964 (A121)).

Jewish state and its neighbours, encouraged Kuwait to threaten to break relations with West Germany. This, the US noted, occurred before the UAR had indicated that it was prepared to take such a step. Furthermore, the signing by Kuwait of technical and economic agreements with the USSR in 1964 was seen as a further worrying sign that the amirate was taking its formal commitment to non-alignment, and thus extending relations across the board, too seriously. The UK too was not above speculating that the large pool of south Asian workers based in the amirate could be recruited by the new Soviet embassy for espionage work⁵³. That same year diplomatic relations were established with the People's Republic of China, whose poor relations with the Soviet bloc were of little consolation to US officials. Although the PRC would not establish an embassy as long as Taiwan were present in the amirate, Kuwait was to slowly develop economic relations with the mainland Chinese while the amir was to tell the UK that it supported PRC admittance to the UN. Such a stance was in tune with Kuwait's inclusive approach through which it hoped, in the assessment of a UK official, to "win friends and influence people". The broad base of Kuwait's diplomatic outreach eventually saw communist North Korea beat the south to representing Korea in the amirate. Nevertheless, the principle of building as broad a base of friendship as possible was understood by UK and US officials. However they, and Kuwait's Arab neighbours, assessed Kuwait's communist relations simply in terms of who the UAR had established relations with. This was undoubtedly a factor in Kuwait's application of the principle of "positive neutrality". It also overlapped with Kuwait's need to project Arabism, which Egypt had the greatest legitimacy in embodying regionally, which communist states' more critical stance toward Israel was in line with. Unsurprisingly, Kuwait's approach to non-alignment attracted opposition from Saudi Arabia, with whom Egyptian relations were worsening as their involvement in Yemen deepened. As a result Kuwait's foreign relations were often seen solely through the prism of cold war blocs in the Arab world, and the government's and parliament's Arab nationalist foreign policy rhetoric. What was becoming an established Kuwaiti foreign policy trend - of trying to ensure its international as well as its regional relations avoided alignments by reaching out to those states who could deny it recognition and legitimacy as well as to those more predisposed to support it - was not properly understood at the time. However the US did later speculate that this policy may have indicated the domestic ambitions of the increasingly influential Jabr Al-Ahmed, a factor that did not minimise Washington's alarm but did at least suggest an understanding of the essential pragmatism at work.

⁵³ Miriam Joyce, Ruling Sheikhs and Her Majesty's Government 1960-1969, (London; Frank Cass, 2003).

While more alarmist visions of a Nasserite “fifth column” in Kuwait that pervaded early US embassy reports could be played down in the State Department, there was a concern that the presence of large numbers of Palestinians, Iraqis and Egyptians could add to potential internal volatility and thus be exploited by the USSR. However US officials who served in Kuwait in the 1960s and 1970s have since argued that cold war perspectives on Kuwait and other Arab countries at this time were greatly overdone. “There was,” one subsequently argued, “a weakness in American foreign policy...to exaggerate the threat...to interpret indigenous problems in terms of the cold war⁵⁴.” In part this could have reflected a desire to report back to the home capital what it was perceived Washington wanted to hear. More experienced Kuwait “hands” in the US government argued that the Kuwaiti “ruling group” is more than aware of “communist machinations as a result of the 1958 coup in Iraq” (in which the Iraqi Communist Party played a significant role)⁵⁵. However the US generally held a cold war perspective on what it regarded as the inherent risks in how Kuwait managed its international relations. This in turn encouraged Kuwait to try to exploit Washington’s increasing interest in the emirate. From 1964 the US planned to expand its intelligence operation there, mindful of the large Soviet embassy presence, and, despite Washington’s confidence in British monitoring, reflecting its desire to have access to key information. Kuwait was already being given an increased flow of intelligence on the wider cold war context, something that at the time of the international crisis over Berlin in 1963, for example, it was very pleased to be privy to. This puts apparent US concerns that year about Kuwait’s expanding roster of relations with Eastern Bloc countries in perspective. By 1965 senior Kuwaitis were telling the US embassy that they hoped that Washington, in addition to London, could provide the emirate with assurances that the US would intervene in the event of a threat to Kuwait’s security.

As early as 1961, when the UK granted Kuwait independence, Kuwait was, according to British embassy reports, considering approaching the US as an alternative defence guarantor, apparently in order that the “embarrassment” of the Exchange of Letters with the British could be terminated⁵⁶. While perhaps surprising, this was essentially only a policy option, considered at a

⁵⁴ Personal interview with Talcott Seelye, former US consul to Kuwait (1957-60), August 2000 Washington DC, USA. Such a view was endorsed by William Stoltzfus, former US vice-Consul (1954-56), and ambassador (1972-75), August 2000, Maryland, USA.

⁵⁵ Talcott Seelye, Arabian Gulf, State Department, 1961-64. Correspondence with US embassy, Kuwait, 1962.

⁵⁶ Dispatch written in 1963 from the British ambassador G Noel Jackson to the British Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas Home. Robert Jarman, Sabah Salim, Amir of Kuwait 1965-77, A Political Biography, (London; London Centre for Arab Studies, 2002), p.158.

time of growing regional pressure on Kuwait that its agreement with the UK be ended (see Chapter 3). It also confirms what remains to this day, that the essential importance to Kuwait of ensuring that, whatever happens, it has a defence guarantee from a country outside the region with whom it has friendly relations and on whom it can absolutely rely. In 1965 Kuwait approached the US over defence assurances, which leading Al-Sabah, Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali, said the amirate desired on a secret basis in addition to training and equipment, and, he indicated, not at the expense of the UK's extant public commitment. By this point the amirate's regional and international situation had changed. Kuwait now had diplomatic relations with all its key Gulf neighbours, including Iraq, as well as with the USSR and all the other members of the P5. Ironically, this more confident external position encouraged an adjustment in its domestic security and, to a lesser extent, its foreign policies to give what all senior Al-Sabah regarded as a necessary emphasis on "Kuwait first". This was first definitively expressed in 1966 when the traditional annual Amiri speech, which hitherto had been written very much under Amir Abdullah Salim's direction and delivered by his heir, was, following this precedent, given by Jabr Al-Ahmed in close consultation with the new amir, Sabah Salim (see Chapter 3). However the need for a policy shift was being expressed a year earlier among senior Kuwaitis and was reflected in comments by Jabr Al-Ali that Kuwait had gone too far in extending relations with communist countries. Essentially the same point was made differently by the under-secretary for foreign affairs, Abdul-Rahman Ategi, who at the time of Kuwait's attendance at the Non-Aligned Movement conference in Cairo in 1965, was stressing to the US that Kuwait had "veered away from communists" and was now "comfortably neutral" in its foreign policy⁵⁷ (see Chapter 3). This move by Kuwait toward becoming "more neutral" was acknowledged by the US, despite its concerns. It was considered by the US to have found expression in a "two Chinas" policy that precluded allowing Peking to open an embassy in Kuwait on its terms⁵⁸. In essence US perceptions did not waiver that, at bottom, Kuwait was "pro-western"⁵⁹, an assessment that included expectations of what it believed Kuwait's foreign policy should be, given Kuwait's trading and investment connection with the west and its therefore inherent support for the operation of "western" free market interests. The US assessed, correctly, that Kuwait's projection of its foreign policy did not square with what were effectively the pro-western bases of its

⁵⁷ The description of Abdul-Rahman Ategi's analysis is contained in US ambassador Howard Cottam's "Mid-Year Review", June 1965.

⁵⁸ In its early years of independence Kuwait did not want to develop a relationship with communist China, however much encouraged by the UAR and its local supporters, at the expense of relations with Taiwan, then a P5 member. Mid-year review, *Ibid.* By 1971 this was to change (see Chapter 7).

⁵⁹ US embassy "1965 Annual Report", January 1966 (A19).

security and economic interests⁶⁰, and that this contradiction in view was found among influential merchants as well as the ruling family⁶¹. As early as 1965 the US was assessing that this unspoken pro-western orientation of Kuwait's security was essentially about the amirate being under a "US umbrella". While the UK remained the pre-eminent actor in Kuwait defence, there was at this time an increasing US relationship with Kuwait and a deepening role in Saudi Arabia and in the wider Gulf.

Seeking US guarantees

Comments made privately to the US ambassador by senior Kuwaitis, implying an adjustment in the country's foreign relations, were to some extent Kuwaiti "spin" designed to curry favour. However, they also reflected the priority of Kuwait's foreign policy. This was exemplified by the approach of Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali in particular, in his efforts to ensure that the amirate enjoyed firm, if discrete, defence assurances. In seeking an invitation for the Amir to make an official visit to Washington, Jabr Al-Ali, for all his private ambitions, was undoubtedly acting with the authority of the amir and the crown prince. Kuwait wanted a public and joint communiqué that would declare common economic objectives, as had been previously suggested by the more Arab nationalist-inclined Jabr Al-Ahmed and foreign minister Sabah Al-Ahmed; and a private understanding committing the US to the defence of Kuwait⁶². Jabr Al-Ali suggested that what Kuwait had in mind was in addition to the commitment of the British, contradicting an earlier UK embassy report that in these circumstances Kuwait might have been prepared to give up the British guarantee for the sake of Iraqi recognition. However, despite what was the US's expanding interest in Kuwait by this point, Washington continued to express its confidence, both privately and publicly, in the UK's prior role in this respect and saw no reason for Kuwait being "under the defence umbrella of the US." Washington did not in any way want to compete with what it saw as Kuwait's primary defence relationship with Britain.

⁶⁰ "...[T]op officialdom realise that we protect them and their oil, even though more for themselves than for Kuwait. Our defence umbrella permits Kuwaiti non-alignment and brinkmanship for trade or political benefit elsewhere." (From US Embassy, 1963 Annual Report, February 24th 1964 (A121)).

⁶¹ A senior Kuwait oil negotiator and merchant, Faisal Mazidi, commented a year later on his realisation that the flirtation that he and others had had with communist states had gone too far. "[M]any merchants were similarly spouting socialism and (at the same time) making commissions on free enterprise deals and from the financial institutions." US embassy to State Department, May 6th, 1965 (A273)

⁶² Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali Al-Sabah asked that the US "guarantee her independence, secretly and without strings." US State Department to the US embassy, Kuwait, January 13th, 1965 (A165).

US confidence in the British commitment can, with the benefit of hindsight at least, be seen as misplaced. However, in 1965 there was little reason for the US, and therefore for the Kuwaitis, to have any doubts about London's attachment to the Exchange of Letters. Furthermore the amirate's position in the Arab world had for the most part been well handled and suggested a confidence that enabled it to crack down on foreign Arab nationalists and even the press outlets of their Kuwaiti allies (see Chapter 2). Although Kuwait's foreign policy put it at odds with Saudi Arabia over Yemen and, more importantly Bahrain, the amirate struck a suitably Arab nationalist image by recognising the republican regime in Sana in 1963 and by doing little to prevent Bahraini opponents of the Al-Khalifa ruling family from freely organising in Kuwait, backed by strong parliamentary and press support (see Chapter 3). Kuwaiti leaders also mouthed generalities about supporting an end to foreign domination in the southern Gulf⁶³. During Kuwait's pre-independence period it had enjoyed what, for domestic and external consumption, was the useful position of being able to support financially, as well as rhetorically, the Imamate rebellion against the British-backed Sultanate of Oman, a position in accord at the time with both Saudi Arabia and Egypt. From 1963, however, Kuwait found itself in agreement with Britain and Saudi Arabia who were backing the Sultan against the Dhofari rebellion within Oman. The rebellion was linked to UAR-backed rebels based in the British-founded South Arabia Federation (SAF), established in 1959. The contradictions in this position, given that Kuwait also gave verbal support to rebels fighting British troops in the south-west Arabian protectorate of Aden, that within a few years would be joined to the SAF in independent south Yemen, was of less importance than the value for Kuwait of siding with "anti-colonial" causes. It was fairly low cost stance too. Bahrain was the only foreign policy issue within the Arab world over which Kuwait had risked the wrath both of an important Arab neighbour, Saudi Arabia, and of Britain. However the limits to Saudi Arabia's anger were reflected in progress in negotiating the Neutral Zone agreement with Saudi Arabia (see Chapter 3).

For its part, Britain was sensitive to Kuwait's unwillingness to constrain those linked to violence in Bahrain. After all, it was the location of the closest British military facility to Kuwait, which in 1961 had been an important part of Britain's ability to intervene in Kuwait. However tensions on this score had done little to fundamentally undermine relations with the UK, and by the time of the internal clampdown that followed the adoption of a "Kuwait first" policy, the relatively low-

⁶³ The Amiri speech in 1963 expressed support for "(Arab) countries' struggle for independence and stability, and included reference to the southern Gulf and southern Yemen, and cooperating with the countries of the "Arab Gulf". 30th October, 1963 (FO 371/168728.)

ranking Bahraini and other foreign opposition activists based in Kuwait were removed, thereby improving Kuwait's poor relations with its southern neighbour.

Kuwait's developing confidence in this period found expression in its willingness to attempt mediation in the Arab world and beyond. In the case of Yemen this reflected a confidence on the part of the republican government in the relative neutrality of Kuwait, which had had relations with the Zaidi Imamate and then within six months recognised the new regime. However Kuwait's articulation of Arab nationalist causes associated with the UAR, and the amirate's trumpeting of its "positive neutrality" in foreign affairs⁶⁴, was seen by Egypt's opponents as compromising Kuwait's credentials as a mediator. Despite this, Kuwait, under an amir trying to assert his personal standing as much as Kuwait's, was keen that Britain should give its efforts recognition and, where feasible, assistance. In practice Kuwait was not remotely successful as a mediator until a few years later when, over Iranian claims to Bahrain, it stepped outside of the frame of inter-Arab disputes where suspicions of its motives tended to run high. While British officials had reservations about Kuwait's suitability for conflict resolution, they did conceive that this relative newcomer to independent status could play a useful role in prompting cooperation among the southern Gulf amirates of Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States. The Kuwaitis themselves had previously made broad statements about wanting to promote cooperation in the "Arab Gulf" in the context of independence in its southern portion⁶⁵, and in 1965 the British tried to persuade the Bahrainis to open up unofficial "diplomatic" relations with independent Kuwait. It did not get anywhere as Bahrain continued to have strong political and personal resentments at Kuwait, and, in the UK's assessment, Manama lacked the personnel to make such an idea worthwhile. However both the UK and Kuwait were clearly already thinking about what the future of the southern Gulf amirates was going to be, and believed that this early step could be a way of relieving pressure on Bahrain from UAR interests in particular⁶⁶. Aside from the implication that the UK had no wish that Bahrain be joined with Qatar and the Trucial States in some form of federation, this early initiative is interesting as it showed common interest between Kuwait and the UK in the amirate playing a potentially influential role in the southern Gulf, a policy seemingly endorsed by Egypt. The fact that a year later Kuwait set up an office to fund education provided overwhelmingly by Egyptian teachers (and which was seen locally as a front for Egyptian interests), did not prevent continued Kuwaiti emphasis on support for the "Amirates

⁶⁴ Upon Kuwait's accession to the UN, foreign minister Sabah Salim identified this as the hallmark of Kuwait foreign policy.

⁶⁵ Amiri speech, *op.cit*

⁶⁶ Joyce, *op.cit.* p.86, citing British embassy correspondence with the Political Resident, Bahrain.

of the Gulf” as well as the “Arab south”, even as it gave more stress to Kuwaiti money meeting domestic needs first⁶⁷. Kuwaiti ambitions in the Gulf continued to be thwarted, however, with the blame for lack of progress directed by Kuwaiti officials at the UK, who it believed were influencing the southern amirates against Kuwait because of the latter’s sponsorship of Egyptian teachers and other assistance that could indirectly aid the influence of Nasser’s regime⁶⁸ (see also Chapter 3).

Suspicion of British motives in the Middle East was hardly confined to Kuwait. However in a country whose decision makers continued to feel that they were operating in a predatory regional environment, even if less overtly so than in 1961, constant attention to what British officials likened to a British military prop underpinning Kuwait’s necessarily unguided pursuit of a “pro-Arab” political identity, was needed. The UK’s February 1966 White Paper, following the completion of a two year long defence review⁶⁹, included the announcement of a withdrawal from the British protectorate of Aden that was due to be completed by 1968. A few months later, Kuwaiti leaders were told of the practical consequences of this decision for Britain’s defence commitment. Although the British ambassador was keen to stress to prime minister Harold Wilson that the decision to withdraw from Aden “aroused no concern” in Kuwait⁷⁰, Kuwait’s leaders were keen to assess the implications of the decision for a UK defence commitment that, like it or loathe it, would remain an essential part of the emirate’s foreign policy.

For all the apparent confidence expressed by the Amir in May 1966, on being told of the limitations on Britain’s ability to deploy a ground force in the future⁷¹, that Kuwait could rely on Arab ground troops, the UK judged that the residual air defence commitment was key to Sabah Salim and most of the senior leadership. The amir accepted the British position that its forces would not be able to be brought from East Asia or the UK without up to a month’s notice, and that, as a consequence, the defence commitment had effectively been reduced to air power only. He pronounced himself satisfied that the maintenance of the commitment, and the UK’s simultaneous “reinforcement” of its presence in Bahrain and Sharjah, represented a necessary

⁶⁷ Amiri speech, US embassy, June 27th 1966 (A340)

⁶⁸ Suleiman Majid Al-Shahin, foreign ministry 1963-99, continues to maintain this view.

⁶⁹ This was the beginning of the commitment to stringent cuts in the defence estimates. Crossman, *op.cit.*

⁷⁰ Comment on reaction in 1966 is contained in “Annual Report 1967” from British Ambassador GG Arthur to Prime Minister Harold Wilson, 6th January, 1968 (FCO 8/609 113253).

⁷¹ UK Secretary of State for Defence, Dennis Healey, writing in September 1966, referred to the cabinet having approved a revised commitment as being “...limited to the provision of air support, unless the ruler gives us adequate time to move in land forces from the UK or the Far East to Kuwait.” (DEFE 13/564).

“reconfiguration”⁷². Amir Sabah Salim emphasised what, for Kuwaiti leaders across the spectrum of supposedly “pro” and “anti” British opinion, was the undoubted perception that the risk of external attack on Kuwait had been reduced. There is no evidence however that this figured very highly in British defence calculations, nor in the subsequent ending of the commitment entirely. At the same time the new arrangement presented the risk in the eyes of British officials, including the foreign secretary, that, in the event of a future military threat, Kuwait would seek an exclusively “Arab solution” of the kind that in 1961 had only occurred post-facto. The regional and internal political expectations created by Kuwait’s “Arab foreign policy”, and what now would patently be practical constraints on the UK’s military capabilities, made this a likely scenario. Initially Jabr Al-Ahmed’s reaction to the formal announcement was to consider the effective reduction of the British defence commitment as insufficient. However, over the next few months he began to adopt a different position, in line with an amir who, despite British concerns that he was largely a figurehead, took a strong interest in issues that were fundamental to Kuwait’s national interest. When Britain announced to Amir Sabah Salim that its defence commitment to Kuwait would, with the abandonment of Aden, primarily rest on the use of air power from Bahrain, Jabr expressed reservations that this would convey an image of dependency, and suggested the British base in Muscat instead, given its location further away from Kuwait, at the southern end of the Gulf. His objections were in one sense understandable – a weakening of “colonial power” caused by the British withdrawal from the Red Sea port of Aden was something that would have appealed to the crown prince. However his initial concern was at the perceptible consolidation of Britain’s position close to Kuwait. However, by the end of the year Jabr Al-Ahmed was echoing the arguments of the amir concerning the acceptability of the new defence proposal. Whatever his political instincts in terms of regional and local reaction, the crown prince continued to see some utility in some form of British presence in the Gulf and in a willingness to intervene in Kuwait in extremis. His half-brother, foreign minister Sabah Al-Ahmed, had told a British newspaper upon a visit to London two years earlier that Kuwait did not need the UK’s defence commitment, and that therefore there was no residual reason for Britain to retain Aden. While such statements played to an Arab nationalist gallery in the region and domestically, they

⁷² Troop numbers were to be extended in Bahrain, where Britain operated a naval base. A meeting in August 1966 between the amir, his nephew the interior and defence minister Saad Abdullah, and the British ambassador, saw the two Kuwaitis express gratitude that the commitment in the Gulf was being re-enforced and Britain would still be in a position to defend Kuwait at a time when the Aden base was already in the process of being dismantled (with the result that, by 1967, the British had left the south-west Arabian protectorate and the resultant People’s Republic of Yemen was founded, consisting of Aden and the former emirates of the South Arabia Federation. 10th August 1966 (FO 371/185402 – 113253)..

did not constitute official Kuwaiti policy⁷³. Having an international security prop remained a matter of Al-Sabah consensus: an issue that would remain a key element of foreign policy⁷⁴, albeit given a self-reliant gloss by arguing that British air power would combine with Kuwait's developing air force. British officials were reporting that Kuwaiti defence capabilities were growing, but continued to stress that this needed augmenting with additional defence supplies from the UK and further British military training support. Doubts would continue to be cast on Kuwait defence capabilities throughout the 1960s, however, with UK defence officials arguing that the long-desired standard of being an effective "trip wire" in order to sufficiently delay invading forces to enable outside assistance to arrive in time, was far from being realised. The fact that a new British ambassador felt the need to talk of Kuwait's "growing ability to defend herself" was probably a case of telling his foreign secretary what it was perceived he wanted to hear. After all, the UK appeared to be increasingly in the mode of heightening local capabilities with British sales and assistance, and was beginning to regard itself as the last line of defence should a local deterrence capability, and Kuwait's acceptance in the region and internationally, fail to prevent a military threat from arising.

By 1967 Kuwait's regional and international relations had grown strongly. Relations between Arab neighbours had proven divisive, and therefore uncomfortable for Kuwait, however this had also provided an opportunity for the amirate to try its hand at mediation. While such efforts were not successful, they showed a more confident country gaining greater acceptance in the region. At the same time, despite being periodically difficult, Kuwait's relationship with the UK was operating on a stable basis where ongoing defence guarantees had little impact on the amirate's ability to develop an "Arab policy". However, with the devastating loss of Arab territory in the June 1967 war, the relationship with Britain, and for the first time with the US, was to be buffeted by both regional and internal pressure to take action against countries popularly believed to have aided the Israeli war effort (see chapters 2 and 3). With some other Arab countries breaking diplomatic relations with both the UK and the US, Kuwait acted quickly; the amirate and Libya were the first Arab countries to announce a boycott of oil sales. The crown prince declared, in suitably strident language, that Kuwait "would be the last country to resume oil sales to the UK

⁷³ Abdul-Latif Hassan Al-Rumaihi, "The Dynamics of Kuwaiti Foreign Policy" (Exeter; Exeter University, 1983), p.143.

⁷⁴ "All rulers of Kuwait wanted to rule away from the influence (of external forces)...but they had been obliged to lead (under the) protection of mighty elements here," commented Suleiman Majed Al-Shaheen, referring to the role of the British, and then later the US, in the security of Kuwait and the Gulf. Al-Shaheen *op.cit.*

and the US”⁷⁵. In practice the fall in the value of Kuwaiti oil sales that circuitously continued to reach the UK in 1967 was relatively modest⁷⁶, while the domestic clamour for a boycott of imports from Britain was not matched by significant action. British officials entirely understood that Kuwait had no choice but to at least be seen to be foregoing oil revenues from sales to the US and the UK when Iraq had played an active part in the war and appeared to be making economic sacrifices in the aftermath⁷⁷. The Kuwaiti amir was keen to stress the limited economic effectiveness of the embargo, something that would have been known to his senior Al-Sabah colleagues. Similarly, the amir was eager to point out how successfully the prospect for violence against western interests of a kind seen in neighbouring countries had been contained in Kuwait.

In practice the closure of the Suez Canal in the months after the war and its impact on oil and other supplies was of greater concern to the UK government than a formal declaration of an embargo. Kuwait had made clear to Britain during the war that its priorities were external defence and internal security. As such, British-supplied Chieftain tanks facing Iraq were held back from the allocation to the UAR in the build up to the war⁷⁸, and measures to prevent an influx of Palestinians were quickly taken in the aftermath⁷⁹.

Sabah Salim considered himself to have played a skilful hand in managing the crisis, an assessment from which British officials did not demur. There was never any prospect that Kuwait would follow Syria and Iraq, both parties to the conflict, and Sudan in cutting diplomatic ties with the UK; or Egypt, also a party to the war, and Algeria and Yemen in cutting their ties to the US; nor was there any serious suggestion that Kuwait should do so. That said, the UK ambassador asserted that the war “had done permanent damage to Britain’s position in Kuwait⁸⁰,” a judgement that was to make him and other British diplomats especially bitter because much of the damage related to the “big lie” of British and American collusion in the war (see Chapter 3). Although of relatively limited impact and duration, the oil embargo renewed British concern about the possibility of significant “political withdrawals” from Sterling⁸¹ at the behest of the

⁷⁵ CCR Battiscombe to FO, 16th June 1967 (FO 8/614).

⁷⁶ Brenchley, *op.cit.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Sir John Graham, former head of chancery, UK embassy Kuwait (1966-68). Personal interview, 2000.

⁷⁹ Joyce, *op.cit.*

⁸⁰ GG Arthur to UK Foreign Secretary George Brown, 20th August 1967 (FCO8/614)

⁸¹ It was generally reported in British official correspondence that in practice there had been no such withdrawals. However the decision of the post-war Arab League conference in Khartoum to provide financial support for the frontline Arab states, led to £25m being withdrawn from the amirate’s Sterling holdings.

crown prince, and caused worry that, should this occur, it would strengthen the hand of those in the British government who wanted to reduce the defence commitment to the amirate.

Britain takes “pro-Arab” line

Britain had taken a lead role in securing the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 242 in November 1967. It had contained what for Arab governments was a welcome condemnation of Israel’s territorial seizure⁸². It also saw enormous relief among the Kuwaiti leadership as it led to the resumption of British diplomatic relations with Egypt⁸³. The creation of some relative goodwill toward the UK in the Arab world helped to ease what had become a potentially dangerous disconnect between the two contrasting, but key, elements of Kuwait’s foreign policy: a British military guarantee and an Arab political identification. The British ambassador reported that at the height of the post-war tension in the region, Kuwait’s leaders took solace from the fact that the amirate could rely on the defence guarantee⁸⁴. As ever, there was plainly a difference between public posture and private understanding. The UN resolution, after all, had been formally opposed by Kuwait for only addressing the Palestinian issue as a refugee problem. The UN resolution, however, helped smooth the gap between the ongoing UK defence relationship and the “Nasserite” language in which the Kuwaitis continued to cast much of their foreign policy.

Devaluation fails to weaken UK relationship

In the same month as the UK was improving relations with Kuwait and the wider Arab world, it announced, what in Kuwait as well as Britain, had been the long expected devaluation of Sterling. Gorowny Roberts, minister of state at the foreign office, was deputed to visit the region in order to smooth any potential ruffled feathers and in the process confirm the UK’s commitment to the

⁸² Its key, and most controversial and disputed, clauses however called for the “Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;” the “...respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and the right to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries;” and “achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem.” (UN Security Council documents website: <http://www.un.org/documents/scres.htm>)

⁸³ “[No] government could have welcomed the resumption of diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and United Arab Republic (UAR) with greater relief than the Government of Kuwait,” wrote GG Arthur, UK ambassador to Kuwait, in his Annual Report sent to prime minister Harold Wilson in January 1968. Or, put another way, “Kuwait hates it when friends fight.” Brenchley, *op.cit.*

⁸⁴ Joyce, *op.cit.*

defence of the Gulf. In fact an increasing flow of parliamentary visitors had been arriving in Kuwait with a view to easing the tensions caused by the war and to build on the goodwill generated by Britain's diplomatic efforts at the UN. The expectation in Kuwait of Sterling's devaluation meant that, according to the British ambassador, it was received "with hardly a ripple". Despite a fall in oil sales revenues following the (limited) oil embargo, the cost of the devaluation had been estimated at a manageable £75 million, less than the annual commitments Kuwait would make to the Arab states neighbouring Israel in light of its obligations made on it and other oil-rich Arab states at the September 1967 Khartoum conference. It was noted, however, that Kuwait had, as a result, "lost her confidence in Sterling". There are no indications that Kuwait was given any prior private warning of the British government's decision, but neither would this have been expected, and Kuwaiti leaders such as Jabr Al-Ahmed, never normally one to avoid expressing irritation with British policy, did not raise the matter with Roberts when he arrived. In fact the British embassy noted some relief among the Kuwait leadership that the devaluation had not been of the order that had been expected. The devaluation obliged Britain's chancellor of the exchequer, James Callaghan, to resign, given his strong personal sense of responsibility, after more than three years of commitment not to devalue. Lord Callaghan recently stated that the fact that he had had to go back on an express commitment given to Kuwait was part and parcel of his decision to resign⁸⁵. The UK decision though was not to impact on Kuwait's policy toward its military guarantor at this point, nor to see it gamble, as the British ambassador feared it might in the aftermath of the war, on an exclusively "Arab" foreign policy. Both the crown prince and the amir understood that maintaining Britain's support, even if the practical military expression of it had been reduced and might come under further pressure, was important enough for the emirate to both continue its financial interest in the UK and the UK's involvement in the Kuwaiti oil sector. After all, the economic benefits to Kuwait of this longstanding cooperation were also well understood.

In the second half of 1967, however, Kuwait decided to assert the "Arab" component of its foreign policy with more vigour. Upon meeting with the crown prince and asserting the British commitment to stay in the Gulf that only two months later would be reneged upon, Gorowny Roberts was urged by Jabr Al-Ahmed that Britain should give its firm and unequivocal support for a "League of Gulf Arab States" that would include Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar along with the

⁸⁵ Lord Callaghan of Cardiff. Written interview with the author, November 2000. Lord Callaghan had made a personal commitment not to devalue earlier in 1967 to the Amir's son Shaikh Salim Sabah, who was the ambassador to the UK at the time.

Trucial States. Kuwait was preparing a renewed and more assertive commitment to the federation idea that it had begun exploring 18 months before, after earlier suggestions for lower level co-operation had floundered (see also Chapter 3). To Britain it was clear that the amirate's "ultimate aim" was a League of States under Kuwait's leadership. This was seen as insurance "against the time, which they expect - with resignation, if not with enthusiasm - when Her Majesty's Government relinquishes their special position in the Lower Gulf."⁸⁶

New foreign policy phase

Trying to influence the pattern of events in the Gulf would shortly become a more pressing priority for Kuwait. However, when what had become the expected departure of the British was announced sooner than expected, the amirate was not in a particularly vulnerable position regionally or internationally and could thus weather what was, largely, unwelcome news. Aside from the challenge to UK and US relations caused by the Arab-Israeli war, 1967 had also seen incidents confirming that Iraq remained a territorial threat to the amirate - reports of Iraqi civilians crossing the northern border were followed by three days of Iraqi air force overflights of the border area in April. On the other hand, the negative impact of the June war on Egypt's projection of military and political weight in the region had led to a rapprochement between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, two countries that, partly due to the war's impact on UK policy toward the conflict, had improved relations with Britain. This had helped to ensure that Kuwait's foreign relations - which were essentially structured in opposition to Iraq, albeit without seeking an alliance against it - were in greater equilibrium.

It was clear from Kuwait's developing foreign policy that the institutional recognition of its state sovereignty and legitimacy afforded by membership of, and an active interest in, the UN was an important prop; one for which Kuwait had even been prepared to deal directly with Iraq in order to secure its grudging recognition. Kuwait would follow closely the UN debates, beyond even those affecting the Arab world, the region with whom its policy was principally concerned. However Kuwait did not invest confidence in the UN being able to provide guarantees for its security, and certainly did not feel that even if such a commitment could be forthcoming that it would be worth compromising the UK's commitment for. Britain had considered promoting a "system of guarantees" from the UN for the state sovereignty of Kuwait and Iraq, as well as their

⁸⁶ GG Arthur, *op.cit.*

Gulf neighbours, partly as a reaction to fears generated by Baath party rule in both Iraq and Syria in 1963. However this idea was quickly dropped when Britain realised that the amir's resentment of the UK's previous support for uniting Kuwait with Hashemite Iraq and Jordan would only be rekindled at a time when unity projects were increasing pressure on Kuwait to end its defence agreement with the UK.

At the same time as Kuwait maintained its friendship with the UK, its recognition of the political difficulties this created for the image it was trying to project within the Arab world encouraged it to play down the "outward appearances of it"⁸⁷, and to complement its friendships with all the UN Security Council's permanent five members by reaching out to communist states in Europe and to Communist China and North Korea. However, aside from the Soviet Union, Kuwait's relations with communist states were essentially postures, designed to appeal to Nasserite opinion locally and in the region, and were reined in when they proved inconvenient. Of far greater substance was Kuwait's desire to secure a US defence assurance to bolster that provided by what for the great majority of this period, internally and within the region, was the politically more embarrassing guarantee provided by the UK. When, in early 1968, the British declared that they would be pulling out of the Gulf, the US assessed that "recent events had demonstrated that the UK could no longer provide military or monetary security and that pan-Arabism was no guarantee of Kuwaiti security, its wealth or its sovereignty."⁸⁸ Although the Kuwait-British relationship would still retain important defence and economic components in the years ahead, from 1968 onwards Kuwait would seek to persuade Washington to replace London as the security prop for the emirate's continued and, partially contradictory, Arab foreign policy construct.

⁸⁷ Policy Assessment, February 1968, US State Department (A124).

⁸⁸ Policy Assessment, US State Department, Washington D.C., USA; February 1968 (A150).

Chapter 5

Internal dimensions 1967-77

Kuwait's internal political life during this period was largely characterised by the efforts of the country's key decision-makers to increase control. A key aspect of this was the incorporation of tribal interests, which have become a central feature of internal political management ever since. The efforts of senior Al-Sabah to assert authority over the domestic political process would see an intensification of authoritarian policies at the same time as the traditional compact with merchants weakened, compounded by a reduction in the ruling family's economic patronage in the aftermath of the 1967 war. Kuwait's Arab nationalists had been the direct target of the domestic clampdown, but merchant disquiet would lead to an easing of constraints, for all the discomfort that the Al-Sabah felt within the region at the political posturing of the country's radicals.

The fluctuations in the Al-Sabah's control over parliamentary life would, however, have only a negligible impact on foreign policy. Domestic politics were periodically viewed by the Al-Sabah as a regional embarrassment, and from time to time would encourage fears of vulnerability to external upheaval. However internal events did not shape foreign policy. Rather, the internal Al-Sabah debate over domestic political management, and the arena of parliamentary life, became part of an increasing competition for authority within the ruling family. When parliament was finally closed down in 1976, this was primarily a way of reinforcing Kuwait's balance of regional relations, and thus of maintaining the autonomy of Al-Sabah decision-making from domestic constraints.

The national assembly that had been elected in January 1967 saw the traditional basis of Kuwait's internal political compact begin to unravel. While the gerrymandered election had not prevented some senior liberal merchants such as former speaker Abdel Aziz Al-Saqr from successfully mobilising their supporters and securing seats, the extent to which the overall outcome was a parliament with a marked increase of tribal representatives due to the incorporation of some hitherto stateless *bedouin*¹, alienated relatively liberal members of the merchant elite. In part this

¹ "Bedouin" or "bedu" are, by tradition, the non-settled, rural, population. While their nomadness was more a matter of lineage than of reality, the *bedouin* often continued to lack Kuwaiti nationality. During the

was a form of social snobbery, which the senior Al-Sabah also give expression to when the malleable parliament they had engineered proved uncooperative. Increased *bedu* representation had followed the expansion of nationality to some hitherto “stateless” residents. This, and the redrawing of constituencies to boost their electoral prospects, and the widespread belief in Kuwait that ballot rigging had occurred, was also a reflection of how much the senior merchants, the former partners in power, in Kuwait were being politically sidelined. Abdul Aziz Al-Saqr was to resign his seat shortly after the 1967 election, citing the specific issue of ballot rigging.

The pattern of domestic alignment between the ruling Al-Sabah, an expanding *bedouin* client base, and those, often less senior, merchants who were less political and more easily influenced, continued in the post-1967 war period. If anything the war had further encouraged Crown Prince Jabr Al-Ahmed and interior and defence minister Saad Abdullah, who were largely driving internal policy, to extend the authoritarian approach to domestic political management that had characterised the “Kuwait First” policy articulated in 1966 (see Chapter 3). From the perspective of those leading this approach, the aftermath of the war was not a time to allow too much rein to those voices, whether relatively progressive or more radically Arab nationalist, who might conceivably utilise an angry domestic and regional mood to advance largely parochial goals². From Amir Sabah Salim down, pride had been taken in how stable the domestic environment was in Kuwait. This was hardly a country on a knife edge, as was to prove the case in Jordan for example, which had a majority Palestinian population compared to the under 12% they represented in Kuwait prior to the post-war influx³. Nor did Kuwait see the angry demonstrations witnessed in a number of Arab capitals, let alone the direct attack on western interests seen in other parts of the Gulf (see Chapter 3). However an existing conception among the dominant players within the ruling family that adopting radical Arab stances on foreign policy did not require accommodation with mildly reformist merchants or even domestic Arab nationalists, was further enhanced, despite the fact that a number of other Arab regimes were at this point seeking

1960s, the term “bidoon”, literally “without”, was not so commonly used to refer to stateless Arabs resident in Kuwait as it is now.

² KMAN leader Dr Ahmad Khatib recalls that Amir Sabah Salim’s instincts were towards accommodation, but his initiatives in this respect were effectively vetoed by the crown prince and defence and interior minister. On one such occasion, he says, they monitored the amir’s meetings with Khateeb and prevented press coverage of a political understanding between them. Personal interview, Kuwait, 2003.

³ The total percentage represented by Jordanians, who were largely Palestinians with Jordanian nationality, and a smaller number of Palestinians without Jordanian nationality, was 11.6%, according to the April 1965 census. (Sourced from “Kuwait – Form at a Glance”, March 1966 (DEFE 11/616)).

to balance their internal and external political relations⁴. The evident failure of self-styled radical Arab states in the 1967 war and the subsequent introspection, despite their outward expression of defiance, made Kuwait's ruling family able to more forcefully apply constraints on political life in the name of "Kuwait First", believing this would increase their domestic political authority.

The exclusion of many senior merchants from decision-making on domestic policy was not confined to the formal political process but, to the surprise of western governments, extended to the usually more significant circle of informal consultation. *Diwaniyyas* ("associations") would continue to be held both by Al-Sabah and by senior merchant figures alike (see Chapter 3). However, after the local political fallout from the January 1967 election, there was less discrete consultation where business, both political and economic, could be conducted between senior government and merchant figures, although there were other ways in which merchant interests could be accommodated. The process of state patronage through business contracts, or the ongoing process of selling valuable real estate at favourable terms, was a helpful glue, especially for the many merchants who were only inclined to be political if their business interests were threatened⁵. However, in the wake of *samud* ("steadfastness") payments to the "confrontation states" agreed at the September 1967 Arab League summit in Khartoum (see Chapter 4), and the fall in the value of Kuwait's Sterling holdings as a result of the UK government's devaluation (see Chapter 4), by 1969 merchants were holding the government responsible for the domestic economic slowdown. This provided part of the economic backdrop to what had become a significant rise in domestic political tension inside Kuwait.

Bomb attack sparks further clampdown

The spark for the discontent among the wealthier and more politicised merchants was the widespread perception among Kuwaitis and foreign observers that the unprecedented bomb blasts in January 1969 at the ministry of interior, the national assembly, and Saad Abdullah's residential

⁴ In a sense Kuwait was inverting Steven David's concept of "omnibalancing" between external ideological pressures and their internal impact, by prioritising the regional environment through its Arabist foreign policy construct, thereby enabling it freer rein at home. Steven R. David "Explaining Third World Alignment", *World Politics*, Vol. 43 Issue 2, p.233-256.

⁵ The pattern of recycling landed interests enabled the Al-Sabah to become patrons after the merchants had initially enriched the ruling family through favourable trading. Abdul-Reda Assiri, Kuwait University. Personal interview, January 2003, Kuwait.

garages were instigated by the ministry⁶. There had been only minor injuries as a result, but some four months were spent questioning students and young activists who in some instances were from elite families. Shocking by Kuwaiti standards, beatings and even torture were allegedly used to produce confessions. One of the detained, Hussein Al-Yuha, was widely known as one of the most radical within the Kuwaiti branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement (KMAN), and there was a commonplace belief that the whole exercise had been planned by Saad Abdullah in order to frame Al-Yuha and other KMAN activists⁷, not least as labour union militancy, in which the faction was instrumental, rose. In the wake of the bomb attacks, some 3,500 foreign nationals were deported in January and February; 250 members of KMAN were arrested; and its mouthpiece, the weekly newspaper *Al-Talia*, was once again suspended from publication. Deportations of foreign leftists and non-Kuwaiti Arab nationalists continued, and, relative to the small total population size, reached an incredibly high figure over 1969-70 of approximately 10,000 per year⁸.

Kuwait's organised Arab nationalists were not seen by the government as needing to be appeased by the adoption of staunchly pro-Arab foreign policy stances. In time, however, the government would recognise that repression could strengthen KMAN, which had already been reduced as a potential internal challenge, given its differences with the far more radical MAN, and divisions within the Kuwaiti "branch" organisation too (see Appendix 6). Kicked out of MAN, the "rightist" KMAN was encouraged to deepen its more or less exclusive "regional" (i.e. Kuwaiti) focus. In Aden leftist Arab nationalists had taken power and founded the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in January 1968, following the departure of the British two months earlier. In July, the Baathists staged two coups in Iraq, the second ensuring they retained power. However, mindful of the recognition deal agreed with the Ba'ath government in 1963, the new regime was initially seen with some optimism by Kuwait, despite its far more radical ideological orientation than its immediate predecessor. In 1969 an essentially pro-Nasserite coup had been successfully conducted in Libya, led by Colonel Qaddafi. Despite North Africa's geographical remove, the Kuwaiti leadership were more concerned about events in Tripoli than in Aden and, it

⁶ The US embassy for one was in little doubt that this was the case. (Telegram, August 14th, 1969, (A146)). Interestingly, the US embassy also gave some credibility to the idea popular in Kuwait at the time that the British had a hand in at least advising on the operation, given the presence of a CID officer within the interior ministry (Ibid.).

⁷ Many Kuwaitis believed that the bomb itself had been planted by the ministry of interior, according to the US embassy, "Country Appraisal", June 24th, 1969 (A124).

⁸ According to interior and defence minister, Shaikh Saad Abdullah, in a May 1971 national assembly debate on the government's internal security measures.

seemed, Baghdad. In Libya, after all, a perceptibly pro-western monarch had been overthrown. Throughout the Arabian Peninsula, the Kuwaiti leadership had long expressed support and even funded Arab nationalist challenges to traditional, often shaikhly, pro-British rule. Ironically, closer to home, foreign policy needed to be constructed with an Arab nationalist and therefore effectively anti-British symbolism in mind, but inside Kuwait organised Arab nationalists could be reined in as long as this was not counter-productive. In reality the “success” of such forces in south Yemen was not welcomed, but, diplomatically, they were firmly embraced (see Chapter 6). Regional upheaval that in many instances had a direct relationship to the aftermath of the 1967 war, would at the same time encourage the Kuwaiti leadership to favour internal political constraint.

KMAN continued to endorse the non-revolutionary socialism of the Nasserite variety, whilst also asserting its right to “regional” autonomy. The Kuwaiti authorities, however, continued to view KMAN as potentially damaging to internal stability and to the emirate’s foreign relations; southern Gulf Arab governments for example expressed disquiet at KMAN’s encouragement of agitation against the British presence. This perception only grew in the post-war period, and despite, or perhaps because of, evidence that MAN had little regional weight and were divided locally, the government sought to constrain KMAN further. The government’s contempt for KMAN was compounded by the fact that the recent assassination of former Iraqi vice-president Hardan Al-Tikriti in Kuwait, by, it was assumed, Iraqi agents, had not been mentioned in the debate by any of the Arab nationalist MPs, despite being a very clear breach of internal security⁹.

To the anger of KMAN, among those escaping the post-1967 domestic political clampdown were non-Kuwaiti Islamists and conservatives, such as figures from *Hizbut Tahrir* and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). The Kuwaiti government wanted to foster domestic conservative Islamist opinion as a bulwark against the “secular” nationalists, and as such prefigured the approach to the “political salafi” and Muslim Brotherhood organisations in the emirate after the 1990 occupation.

⁹ Saad Abdullah told the US ambassador that “he was inclined to suspect that there was some sort of association between the (Kuwaiti) Arab Nationalist Movement and certain Iraqis” May 26th, 1971 (A51).

Merchants repoliticised

The government's authoritarian posture had had the affect of repoliticising some of the wealthier merchant families, who had hitherto been relatively quiet. The Al-Jana'at clan were especially aggrieved at the actions the government was taking to constrain political life¹⁰. The government had upset the delicate internal balance by which senior families had traditionally been accommodated either on the inside of the political process or, more typically, through informal decision making channels in which they were carefully consulted.

Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali, the minister for guidance and Islamic affairs, commented in 1968 that the country was "still a *bedu* society," which he said, "thrives on, and can only be controlled by, machinations," identifying Saudi Arabia as a parallel with how politics should, in his view, be managed in Kuwait¹¹. In fact Kuwait's relations with Saudi Arabia were to be upset by the extent to which Jabr Al-Ali's patronage politics saw him grant citizenship to a number of members of his wife's tribe, the Ajman. The Ajman were central to Saudi Arabia's tribal polity¹² and Riyadh viewed its members as Saudi in origin¹³. Jabr Al-Ali, a nephew of the amir and a fellow member of the Al-Salim line, directly cultivated and armed Kuwaiti bedouin leaders and sought to draw them into the political process¹⁴ as a counterweight to urbanised, relatively liberal senior families that were opposing the government's authoritarianism. However he was uncomfortable with how far the government had gone in clamping down on dissent and had long offered to "relieve" the crown prince of the "burden" of the premiership and thus of managing parliament and wider political relations.

Kuwait's management of oil patronage had been an example of "tribalised government"¹⁵ in the sense of co-option of key kinship interests having been facilitated by the disbursal of property and government contracts. Since the 1940s this process had helped to create urbanised elites from

¹⁰ US embassy to State Department, June 24th, 1969 (A124).

¹¹ US embassy report of Ambassador's meeting with Jabr Al-Ali, November 25th, 1968 (A380).

¹² Madawi Al-Rashid, "Tribal Confederations and Emirates in Central Arabia", Tribes and Power – Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East, Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawood (Ed) (London; Saqi, 2003).

¹³ Jill Crystal, Oil and Politics in the Gulf – Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Fuad I. Khuri, Tribe and State in Bahrain – The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State, (London; University of Chicago Press, 1980), p239.

among the senior families and had therefore aided the process of “detrribalisation” as kinship groups thought less in tribal terms and more in terms of their common business interests. However from the late 1960s the beginning of the political and economic incorporation of the bedouin gave their leaders enhanced economic authority at the same time as lessening their tribal autonomy. This was in a sense a further extension of the long-standing co-optive tribalism seen in Kuwait and other Gulf amirates¹⁶, a form of political management that had steadily deepened state authority by patronising kinship interests without emphasising tribal identity. However the *bedu* were now being incorporated in order that they could be politically manipulated by senior Al-Sabah against the wealthy urban elite families, a politically partisan exercise that therefore contrasted with what had been the steady accretion of state authority over tribal organisation. These “politicised” bedouin tribal interests would gradually coalesce with the incipient religious conservatism that the government was promoting, and provide a deepening of support, albeit eventually willing to be critical, for the Al-Sabah against liberal and Arab nationalist groupings.

The senior merchant families, such as that traditional bastion of political influence, the Al-Sagr, could continue to be politically side-stepped by the ruling Al-Sabah as long as oil revenues were effectively and generously disbursed. By late 1969, a number of senior liberal merchants, including Abdel Aziz Al-Sagr, held an open public meeting, provocatively declaring themselves the “real parliament”, at which they held the government responsible for the economic slowdown being experienced in Kuwait¹⁷. This economic complaint would coincide with senior merchant disquiet at the Al-Sabah’s style of domestic political management and at the new tribal interests it was favouring. While this renewed merchant political activism fits with rentier-based assessments of Kuwaiti politics¹⁸, the elite merchants continued to support domestic and foreign policies that disadvantaged their economic interests¹⁹.

In response to criticism of its economic management, the government would continue to stress its leading role in the country’s development²⁰. However Kuwait’s increasingly authoritarian polity increased sympathy for KMAN among relatively liberal merchants whose political persuasions,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ US embassy to State Department, December 24th, 1969 (A-207).

¹⁸ Crystal *op.cit.* and Mary Ann Tétreault “Autonomy, Necessity, and the Small State: Ruling Kuwait in the Twentieth Century”, *International Organisation* 45, 4 (1991).

¹⁹ Abdel Aziz Al-Sagr held the Ford agency contract in Kuwait. However he supported the government’s boycott of foreign companies that had business involvements in Israel, and never criticised the government’s inclusion of Ford in its boycott list.

²⁰ On one occasion, in almost the same breath, fealty with Mecca was expressed alongside a proud boast about the number of post boxes there were in the emirate.

while broadly sympathetic to Arab nationalism, were usually more sceptical about the socialism that KMAN espoused, even if some had sounded sympathetic a few years earlier. The political fallout was far from uniform however, or in some instances was beginning to emerge in the government's favour. One emergent countervailing trend to the reformist and radical groupings were the Social Reform Society (SRS), which some less elite merchants supported. As the government moved to control organised political trends, it increased its funding of this conservative Muslim group. This, in significant measure, was an outlet for the relatively small but active number of Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwaan Muslimeen*) members in Kuwait who included among their number sympathisers from Egypt. The discrete presence of *Ikhwaan Muslimeen* among the large community of Egyptian teachers in Kuwait was occurring at the same time as neighbouring Saudi Arabia was providing a relative free rein in its education sector for Nasser's enemies. By 1970 the SRS was challenging the newly-founded Kuwait University, which was proposing to introduce co-education. Other trends succeeded in offsetting pressure. Senior members of the Al-Sagr clan intervened directly with KMAN and succeeded, given the respect afforded the public stance of this leading liberal merchant family, in persuading them not to stage protest demonstrations for fear of clashes.

Palestine as badge of pro-Arab policy

Despite domestic upheaval, Kuwait continued to maintain the bases of its foreign policy. While the outcome of the 1967 war had, on the face of it, made the shaikhly regimes in the Gulf less sensitive to ideological attack, it did not alter the Al-Sabah's established approach to regional relations. Funding by the Kuwait government and by senior individual Al-Sabah for what from 1969 had become the dominant PLO faction, Fatah, was not simply a matter of cynical politics although it did no harm to the regime's image at home and in the region. After all, ardent support for the Palestinian cause was already a long standing foreign policy construct and in large measure an article of (political) faith that embraced senior Al-Sabah and well placed members of the foreign ministry in particular²¹. The historical antecedents of this policy were evident in the beliefs of many of the merchants who led the movement for political reform in Kuwait in the 1930s and the fact that the founding and political succour of Fatah had taken place in the emirate

²¹ According to Dr Abdul-Reda Assiri, the personal predilections of the foreign minister and senior foreign ministry advisors were of significance in Kuwait's overtly pro-Palestinian policy. Personal interview, Kuwait, January 2003.

(see Chapter 3)²². Western officials in Kuwait were less charitable in their assessments, however, and the US embassy, for example, saw such events as “Commando Week” in 1969 as a particular pet project of the minister responsible, Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali. He was continually seeking ways to enhance his domestic and Arab political stock, and thus would have been attracted to this relatively painless use of what in Kuwait (and throughout the region) was a political virility symbol. In general the US saw the large levels of financial aid to Fatah that flowed from Kuwaiti government officials and private businessmen in the post-1967 period as a contribution to the country’s “image building”, believing it of undoubted utility in the domestic (as well as regional) political arena. “Progressives,” wrote a US embassy analysis, “are therefore obliged to admit that Kuwait’s capitalist heart beats for at least one doctrinally acceptable cause²³.” There is no doubt that well-placed officials and well-connected individuals understood that such donations fitted with the projection that the government wanted to make of its formal commitment to Palestine, and that in making such financial contributions they certainly would not be acting against government “policy”. However, given that an emergent radical Palestinian nationalism was beginning to grab regional and world attention in its armed expression by *fedayeen* (guerrillas), such support had significant connotations for Kuwait’s wider relations, and was not quite the easy gesture that US assessments suggested. In addition, the autonomy of key Kuwaiti decision-makers and other lower ranking officials and businessmen in making these financial commitments, indicates how “policy” on this and more complex issues, was a matter of individual preference based on an almost intuitive understanding of what the parameters were. This was less collective cabinet responsibility as traditionally understood in Britain, than individual choices within a consensual framework. Palestine was a badge of the Kuwaiti elite, of the Al-Sabah and non Al-Sabah’s fealty to the Arab nation; it served presentational purposes, sometimes quite calculatedly, for example when ministers joined Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali in publicly lauding the *fedayeen* and school children were taught, often by Palestinian teachers, of the guerrillas’ heroism.

Events in Palestine, and the influx of Palestinians as well as educated Arabs from Syria, Iraq and Egypt especially from the 1930s onwards, and Kuwaiti merchants’ education in the major Arab capitals in the 1940s and 1950s, had had a direct impact on the original politicisation of the

²² See for example Rosemary Zahlan, “The Gulf States and the Palestine Problem, 1936-48”, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Volume 3 Number 1 (1981). Others, such as KMAN leader Ahmed Khateeb, view the emirate’s early solidarity as more instrumental (see Appendices).

²³ US embassy Kuwait to State department (May 27th 1969 (A111)). The analysis includes the even more acerbic reference to the “guilty consciences” of “private Kuwaitis and government officials with crocks of gold, and no desire to confront IDF snipers, assuage their consciences with bank drafts.”

merchant elites and on Shaikh Abdullah Salim and other less conservative Al-Sabah²⁴. Some of these views continued to be widely held among leading Al-Sabah and in wider government circles, among whom were several naturalised Palestinians. The attachment to Palestine, although far from unique in the Arab world, helped inform a notion that senior Al-Sabah often had of the country's "role" in the region. Kuwait's "national role conception"²⁵, and the ideational factors behind its foreign policy²⁶, revealed an overlap between collective self-conception and policy outputs. However, the primary factor behind Kuwait's leadership sometimes assertively projecting the "role" of upholder of Arab nationalist causes that were seemingly at odds with the country's shaikhly traditions and defence relations with the UK (and, increasingly from the early 1970s, the US), was to offset Kuwait's perceived vulnerability within the region. This explains the difference between the obligation on all Arab governments to at least be seen to be saying the right things over Palestine, and an essentially conservative Kuwaiti regime that, in both rhetorical and practical terms, went "beyond the call of duty". Its leaders were mindful of the country's traditions and of the popular sympathies of the political and economic elites, but ultimately maintained a consensus within a tight circle of Al-Sabah decision makers that projecting an identification with Palestine, and even with Arab "anti-colonial" struggles in Arabia, could minimise hostility from radical Arab states. Ironically, Kuwait projected an Arabist foreign policy that often saw it effectively side with nationalists in neighbouring states in their struggle against British-backed hereditary ruling families (see Chapter 3). The strength or weakness of its own Arab nationalists had little bearing on this. Rather, the fact that KMAN were able to agitate through the assembly and organise Kuwaiti nationals in trade unions gave the Al-Sabah greater confidence in expressing solidarity with similar movements abroad. The extent to which they did so was more a judgement about external Arab pressures, however.

The attachment of the Kuwaiti government to the Palestinian cause was seen by US officials in the emirate at the time as symptomatic of the strength of Palestinian representation within Kuwait, both as a numerically sizeable group with a major, white collar public sector role, and as an organised political presence whose substance became more significant in regional and international terms post-1967. Less deterministic positions have been taken by some US officials

²⁴ I am grateful to both Dr Abdul-Reda Assiri of Kuwait University and Dr Ahmed Khateeb (former KMAN leader) for their insights into this historical process, which, while potentially self-serving in the latter case, provided an interesting insight into Kuwaiti national self-perceptions among elites outside of the ruling family. See also Zahlan, *op.cit.*

²⁵ K.J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy" in Stephen Walker (Ed.), *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis* (Durham (NC); Duke University Press, 1987).

²⁶ Barnett, *op.cit.*

subsequently²⁷. However, after the 1967 war the large dispersion of Palestinian refugees into neighbouring states and further a field, including a greatly increased number, in addition to the already large community, in Kuwait²⁸, and the regional tension caused by heightened Palestinian *fedayeen* activity in Jordan and Lebanon from 1969-71, prompted widespread speculation among Arab states as to what their domestic Palestinian populations would do. However the Kuwaiti leadership had a clearly understood *modus vivendi* with Fatah, who, as the dominant PLO faction, provided the focus for the more political among Palestinians resident in the emirate. The obligations on Fatah, including total non-interference in Kuwaiti politics, had been carefully respected by the leading Palestinian faction since its founding in Kuwait. The Kuwaiti government had allowed the Palestinian organisation to maintain its office, albeit clandestinely. This was despite the fact that the PLO had been established in 1964 as an Egyptian-led initiative at the Arab League to make it the representative of the Palestinians²⁹. British officials would later reflect on the Kuwaitis having “for many years purchased immunity from Palestinian outrages by a cautious provision of money and a safe haven”³⁰. However, the Kuwaitis’ refusal to “rein in the fedayeen” in the emirate did not mean that the presence compelled them to support the struggle in Palestine. The US tried to encourage the Kuwaitis to act against the presence of Palestinian factions at a time when their fighters were coming under control in Lebanon due to an Egyptian diplomatic initiative, and then in Jordan due to violent repression. A Kuwaiti decision to kick out Fatah and other factions, and to overtly support western-sponsored peace initiatives backed by Egypt, Jordan and eventually Syria (see Chapters 6 and 7) could have invited far more trouble than that constituted by the arrival of hijackers in 1972 and the terror incident in 1974 (see below). However Kuwait’s stance on Palestine was not dictated by the organised Palestinian presence, nor was its financial support for the struggle against Israel comparable to the use of cash to facilitate Iraq’s recognition of Kuwait as an independent state.

²⁷ According to William Brewer (former US consul in Kuwait (1955-57), who later became head of the Arabian Peninsula desk at the State Department (1966-70)), the Kuwaitis “did not need to appease the Palestinians” living in the emirate. Personal interview, Mass., USA, 2000.

²⁸ In 1975 there were 204,178 Palestinians in Kuwait, representing 20% of the total population, or 39% of the foreign population. Their number had risen by nearly three-fold since 1965, when they constituted 31% of the foreign population. Alvin Cottrell (General Editor), The Persian Gulf States – A General Survey (Baltimore; John Hopkins University, 1980).

²⁹ The maintenance of the Fatah office, despite the fact that Kuwait felt obliged to honour the Arab League decision to found the PLO and thus not have two organisations representing the Palestinians (up until the *fedayeen* takeover of the PLO from 1968), was attested to by a senior Kuwait-based Fatah leader, Khaled Al-Hassan. Alan Hart, Arafat – A Political Biography (Bloomington and Indianapolis; Indiana University Press, 1989.) p.168.

³⁰ Ambassador John Wilton, Annual dispatch 1973, written January 1974 (FCO 8/2188)

On the other hand, the extent of Fatah's organisation of Palestinians in Kuwait did begin to give Kuwaitis, as well as some Palestinians, a sense that the emirate had devolved part of its security responsibility vis-à-vis this community to the local Fatah leadership³¹. Kuwait also periodically feared that the Palestinian presence would, in the context of ongoing lack of resolution of their territorial conflict with Israel, translate into political demands within the Kuwaiti body politic³². There is no doubt that the Kuwaiti leadership continued to recognise the power of fellow feeling in Kuwait amidst a strong Arab nationalist sentiment internally and regionally for Palestine. This could, on occasions, reach dramatic proportions. However it was carefully and assiduously managed by the Kuwaiti leadership³³.

Whatever the perceived desires of Palestinian residents, the *fedayeen* within or without its borders, or Kuwait's MAN branch and wider Arab nationalist sentiment and groupings within the country, the Kuwaiti government did not shape its Palestine or wider regional policies primarily with internal constituencies in mind. On Palestine, as on many other issues, there was not a coherent collectively determined policy, although there was a basic understanding that it was politic to back the PLO, notwithstanding the definite red lines that limited what the Palestinian residents or the Fatah office in Kuwait could do. Senior Fatah officials in the emirate, such as Khaled Al-Hassan, held an especially privileged position within the emirate. According to his own rather partial, but instructive, assessment, he was effectively running the government prior to independence³⁴, and was being provided with a car and accommodation as a very part-time ministry of electricity official³⁵. However, with the exception of what was a very well behaved day of protest over the Jordanian clampdown in September 1970 (which was prevented from reaching the Jordanian and US embassies), the Palestinian community was not mobilised by the local Fatah office. Indicative of the Kuwaiti domestic management of the Palestine issue, and in a

³¹ Laurie A. Brand, Palestinians in the Arab World – Institution Building and the Search for State (New York; Columbia University Press, 1988) p.123,

³² "First Impressions", Ambassador Archie Lamb, April 1974 (FCO8/2192)

³³ A Palestinian solidarity event was organised in Kuwait by the government-funded, and regulated, National Union of Kuwaiti Students. Taking place at the time of the "Black September" crushing of Palestinian *fedayeen* by Jordanian forces in September 1970, it featured injured guerrillas who were publicly paraded to a very vocal and supportive audience. I am grateful to Professor Fred Halliday for his recollection of this event.

³⁴ Khaled Al-Hassan, one of the founders of Fatah, ran the Kuwait municipality prior to its election in 1962, and has described his role, given the municipality's primary role at that point for the emirate's public services, as akin to running Kuwait (Hart, op.cit.).

³⁵ From the late 1960s Khaled Al-Hassan, who was then employed by the ministry of electricity, was increasingly wrestling with other Fatah officials in Kuwait for control of the local office. However, according to US correspondence, this was conducted without impact upon, or reference to, the Kuwaiti government.

step that was unusual in the region³⁶, payments to the PLO were deducted by the Kuwaiti authorities from the salaries of Palestinians working in the public sector (see Chapter 3). Despite the domestic and regional disquiet caused by the events of “Black September” in Jordan, the Palestinians’ strike action in Kuwait was less than comprehensive, and was easily circumvented when Fatah activists sought to follow it up with a strike extending to all Kuwaitis. Given Kuwait’s almost paternalistic approach to Fatah since its inception, and between whom there was a clear interest in mutual accommodation, this is hardly surprising.

Individual Al-Sabah would seek to exploit the presence of a large number of Palestinians for intra-Kuwaiti political advantage, the most notable example being Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali. However the place of Palestine in the Kuwaiti body politic did not extend beyond carefully managed and understood boundaries³⁷. The Kuwaiti military’s largely symbolic contribution to the Al-Yarmouk brigade from before the 1967 war was exemplified by the state funerals given to Kuwaiti “martyrs” killed in the Suez Canal zone during the “war of attrition. However this would not be allowed to impinge on the amirate’s defence and security policy. The Kuwaiti military regulations required that any member of its armed forces who had any connection with the *fedayeen* be court-martialled, while the chief of staff, Shaikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Jabr Al-Sabah, asserted that no Kuwaiti was fighting with the *fedayeen*, although there was at least one, rather senior, exception to this³⁸. In practice Kuwaiti arms were reaching Palestinian fighters in Jordan, presumably via Iraq. While probably not directly sanctioned by the Kuwaiti chief of staff, these acts of solidarity were likely to have been undertaken with the knowledge of the Kuwaiti army command³⁹. This emphasises how Kuwait made gestures on Palestine, at the risk of alienating Jordan, but would not allow any action in support of Palestinian armed organisations that could threaten its own national security. This was not unlike the constraints that Syria, for example, put on Fatah and the PFLP’s MAN forerunner before and, rather more

³⁶ This move, which was unique among the Gulf Arab monarchies and shaikhdoms, was not formally introduced in Kuwait until 1968, when, following the 1967 war, the Kuwaiti leadership was anxious to be seen regionally and internally as assisting the Palestinian struggle, albeit from a safe remove. Interestingly, however, steps toward this had been discussed by senior Kuwaitis as early as 1964.

³⁷ This understanding, evident in the British and US embassy records, has subsequently been confirmed in the author’s interviews with senior Kuwaitis.

³⁸ Fahad Ahmed Al-Sabah (a younger half-brother of Crown Prince Jabr al-Ahmed) fought with Fatah in Al-Salt in Jordan, where he had been injured in an Israeli attack in 1968; and, according to Dr Rosemary Said-Zahlan, was arrested in Lebanon for fighting with the *fedayeen*; and then went on to raise funds in Kuwait for Fatah. US embassy, April 28th, 1969, “The Kuwaiti military and the fedayeen” (A083); and information supplied personally by Dr Said-Zahlan.

³⁹ Reports of arms from Kuwait reaching the Palestinians in Jordan were contained in US embassy briefings for the State Department during this period.

comprehensively, after the 1967 war. However Kuwait had no “frontline” to defend, nor was it interested in taking up an overt position on what was becoming an increasingly contentious issue in the Arab world of the *fedayeen*’s freedom of activity in states neighbouring Israel.

No internal military threats

The Kuwaiti armed forces did not include any Palestinian nationals, in part because of a perceived risk. However, among the non-commissioned and junior officer ranks there were some foreign Arabs, chiefly Iraqis, as well as Egyptians and Syrians. However, in the context of territorial pressure from Iraq and the increased activity of its intelligence services in the amirate, the rate of increase in the number of Iraqis working in various capacities in the amirate had slowed markedly by 1975⁴⁰. Iraqi guest workers in the amirate were widely resented as a number of them tried, albeit with very little success, to recruit local Kuwaitis to join the Ba’ath party⁴¹. The ordinary ranks of the Kuwaiti armed forces were mainly dominated by Kuwaiti *bedu*, as were approximately half of the officer posts, while most senior ranks were occupied by non-*bedu* Kuwaiti nationals. The bedouin, despite their unequal political and economic position in Kuwait, were very loyal to the Al-Sabah⁴² and were more capable soldiers than other Kuwaitis⁴³. However the desire to exclude foreign Arabs and other non-Kuwaitis from the armed forces meant that throughout the 1970s there was still a shortage of commissioned and non-commissioned officers⁴⁴. The most likely threat of a coup, or at least disaffection, was from younger, commissioned officers, frustrated - as were other younger, reformist, western-educated, members of the Kuwaiti elite - with the relative paralysis in domestic politics. However the prospect of serious disaffection taking hold was slim. One factor was the dominant position of *bedu* throughout the ranks⁴⁵. More fundamentally, the lack of permeation of radical Arab nationalist ideology among Kuwaitis; the ongoing government patronage of merchants, despite their earlier economic frustrations; and the financial and political incorporation of the bedouin, made coup plots unlikely. Attempts at external stimulation in the post-1967 environment were even less

⁴⁰ In 1975 Iraqis in Kuwait numbered 45,070, some 4.5% of the total population. Cottrell, *op.cit.* In 1965 there were 39,316, or 8.4%.

⁴¹ Suleiman Majid Al-Shaheen, former foreign ministry official. Personal interview, Kuwait, January 2003.

⁴² In the period prior to the Iraqi invasion of 1990, the sensitivity about Kuwait-resident bedouin believed to have originated from Iraq was not markedly greater than toward those who dwelt in the south of Kuwait.

⁴³ UK embassy to FO, November 4th, 1974 (FCO8/2189).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

plausible. Internal upheavals in Iraq after the coups in 1968 that eventually ensured the return of the Ba'ath to power, the continuing intra-party power struggles in Syria, and Egypt's established desire to maintain Kuwait as a stable and independent entity made this scenario unlikely. The revolutionary upheavals of neighbouring Arab states held little appeal in Kuwait, even among its more radical Arab nationalists. However the constraints caused by upheaval inside Kuwait's radical neighbours made the Kuwaiti leadership concerned about prospective local sympathisers, in particular foreign nationals, whatever their apparent ideological differences with the "home" country.

When communicating about Kuwait, the US government was disproportionately preoccupied with assessing how the presence of Arab nationals from "radical" Arab states could contribute to instability in the emirate to the potential advantage of the USSR. However, the US embassy's assessment overwhelmingly continued to be that the large non-Kuwaiti Arab population had little interest in being in Kuwait other than to make money and that they would not be prepared to put this at risk. Nevertheless, the US simultaneously believed that the very presence of Palestinians was directly moulding Kuwait's policy on Palestine. Saudi Arabia prognosticated that the nearly 50% of the population who were foreign Arabs would be the first to join some popular uprising against the Al-Sabah. However the US did not judge that the Palestinians or other foreign Arabs were likely to play a part in any scenario of internal upheaval in this period⁴⁶.

Domestic radicalism

The Kuwaiti authorities' greatest concern was external security threats. However the events of Black September in Jordan did give the government pause to reflect on its ability to deal with an internal challenge beyond past conceptions of external invasion or a related coup. This in turn encouraged it to seek the US's advice on internal security matters. Senior Al-Sabah were clearly suspicious enough of KMAN to want to ensure that its political strength was contained. However the government was to eventually decide that it was better to use more subtle means. The crown prince and prime minister, Jabr Al-Ahmed, and his close ally, the defence and interior minister, Saad Abdullah, concluded that too authoritarian a polity risked upsetting those whose tacit

⁴⁶ According to the US embassy, a rather confused assessment of foreign Arab nationals' motivation was provided in 1969 by Omar Saqqaf, the Saudi foreign minister, who, while arguing that they were primarily in Kuwait for financial reasons, believed they would be prepared to put that at risk and to support an "uprising". US embassy, Jiddah to State Department, 4th January 1969 (POL23/KUW XR DEF 1)

political consent, whether formally expressed within the assembly or not, was an important prop to Al-Sabah rule. Talk of electoral reform came to nothing, however, and leading merchant reformers were not persuaded to answer the crown prince's call of "public duty".

Despite this, the 1971 election saw 15 MPs returned who were either KMAN members, or sympathetic to them, a marked increase on the six KMAN MPs who were elected in 1967. The 1971 election also led to greater *bedu* representation in the assembly. The maintenance of a comparatively large number of constituencies, 25, in an electorate whose number remained small but had been selectively expanded by Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali's recruitment of additional bedouin voters, increased the latter's representation to the point where, despite the lack of election gerrymandering, the result had effectively been engineered to raise the overall number of "pro-government" representatives. The *bedu* MPs elected in January 1971, while clearly orientated (as those identifiable as "tribal" largely are to this day in Kuwait) toward maintaining their own patronage networks, proved loyal. However their loyalty was not so much to the government as to their specific Al-Sabah patron, Jabr Al-Ali. He tried to use the ongoing dispute in parliament and with KOC over the oil "participation agreement" to increase his bargaining position with Jabr Al-Ahmed. At one point it even looked like government could fall over the desire of a senior Al-Sabah to secure a top position within it.

Oil policy

The oil participation agreement, which initially proposed a 20% stake for Kuwait in line with an OPEC negotiated "norm"⁴⁷, turned into a two year wrangle between the government and KOC. Encouraged by demands for a far greater stake articulated by Jabr Al-Ali's supporters in parliament and KMAN, and *Al-Siyassa*⁴⁸, the government secured a 60% Kuwaiti "participation" agreement with the international oil companies (IOCs) in July 1973. Senior officials had for several years assumed that full public ownership of Kuwaiti oil assets, in common with other Arab oil producers, would eventually follow, and indeed Kuwait had been one of the first to make an agreement, in principle at least, over participation. However Crown Prince Jabr Al-Ahmed was prepared for the pace and extent to be altered according, principally, to the regional mood and

⁴⁷ In 1972, the Geneva Agreement established that OPEC member countries would seek 20% ownership of production, refining and distribution of their national oil industries.

⁴⁸ *Al-Siyassah* was founded in 1968 by Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali with the undoubted purpose of advancing his claims to a top position by adopting a critical, mildly Arab nationalist, perspective on government policy.

powerful neighbours' own agreements with the IOCs. Notably, in 1972 the Kuwaiti parliament passed a unanimous resolution praising Iraq for its nationalisation of the Iraqi National Oil Company, in overtly Arab nationalist language. The pace of Kuwait's increasing participation in KOC would bear Iraq, and the closer parallel of Saudi Arabia's negotiations, in mind. Al-Ateegi was keen to accommodate the strengthening regional and domestic mood and, like his parliamentary opponents in parliament, saw oil as a totem of his Arab nationalist credentials. However, Al-Ateegi was also keen to ensure that increasing public ownership was secured by agreement with the IOCs⁴⁹, and to serve both the interests of the Kuwaiti government and of the country's oil sector. In 1973 the national assembly was effectively setting the ever widening parameters of the Kuwaiti government's oil ownership ambitions. Following the rise in Arab nationalist sentiment caused by the war, the assembly debated a bill backed by essentially conservative MPs for immediate nationalisation. For the Kuwaiti government the oil issue was an increasingly urgent test at home and in the wider Arab world; one that, by taking bigger slices of KOC-produced oil into public ownership and constraining oil supplies internationally, enabled calculations of economic interest and political posturing to increasingly overlap.

Consensus understood but unspoken

Despite the view expressed by one senior Al-Sabah that there was a collective policy on oil participation, in Kuwait neither this or any other policy was a matter of cabinet discussion, let alone "bureaucratic" decision making of the traditional, collective cabinet, kind then operating in Britain. Within the Kuwaiti government, policies were not discussed within a formal cabinet setting, and rarely, in any detail, between even the senior players of this period: the crown prince, the defence and interior minister, and the foreign minister⁵⁰.

This is likened by the British ambassador of the period as encouraging not so much bureaucratic interests as business ones in an environment where formal decision making structures are almost complete lacking. "...the Administration-cum-Establishment operate largely as individuals, making their policy and carrying it out to meet their personal inclinations. The cabinet discusses routine affairs of the day almost to the exclusion of long-term policy considerations; no structure

⁴⁹ Al-Ateegi. Personal interview, February 2005, Kuwait City.

⁵⁰ "First impressions of Kuwait", AR Lamb, British Ambassador to Kuwait, 1st August 1974, to James Callaghan, Foreign Secretary, (FCO 8/2192).

of Cabinet Committees or Planning and Assessment Staff supports ministers in their collective task; every Minister or senior (and junior) official is actively engaged in business as well as in government; and the disinterested man is, it appears, nowhere to be found.....”.

Policies were merely “understood”; enormous autonomy as to how they were implemented, and adjusted, lay in the hands of the appropriate minister. On oil and finance, two issues of direct relevance to Kuwait’s primary relations outside of the Arab world, the UK and the US, this meant Al-Ateegi. One other influential key player outside of the family was the former ambassador to the UN and the Arab League, and during the 1970s the minister for cabinet affairs, Abdul Aziz Hussein. His formal role was liaising between the government and the national assembly. This made his counsel to the crown prince in particular invaluable. In foreign policy, Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, half brother of the crown prince, did not have that much autonomy and was, in this period at least, still prone to consulting widely with Jabr Al-Ahmed⁵¹.

Amiri abdication speculation

The position of the amir, Sabah Salim, had become largely ceremonial by the beginning of the 1970s. In part this was how he preferred it, and furthermore this fitted with the evolving constitutional structure established under Amir Abdullah Salim, who had created the position of prime minister following Kuwait’s independence four years earlier and had envisaged it as the focal point for day to day government. Despite having a more active foreign policy interest, both as prime minister, and then in his first few years as amir, when he sought to embody Kuwait’s regional aspirations, bolster its relations with the US, and raise his own profile in the process, for most of his period as amir, Sabah Salim settled into a role akin to that of a constitutional head of state in western monarchies⁵². Throughout the 1970s, recurrent health problems, which had raised questions more than a decade earlier about Sabah Salim’s eventual accession, reinforced his inclination to be largely detached from the day to day business of government. This even included

⁵¹ One Kuwaiti observer has given weight to Sabah Al-Ahmed in the shaping of foreign policy in this period. For example, Dr Abdul-Reda Assiri, professor of political science, Kuwait University, personal interview, and *Kuwaiti Foreign Policy*, *op.cit.* However serving US and British officials from this period tend to view Sabah Al-Ahmed as outside the loop when it came to key decision-making. For example, Sir Archie Lamb and Frank Maerstrone. Personal interviews, 2000.

⁵² This view of the constitutional role of the Kuwaiti head of state having evolved in way that lent comparison to the “dignified” role of the monarch in the UK was endorsed by a UK ambassador to Kuwait during Sabah Salim’s rule. Personal interview, September 2000.

foreign policy, especially once the die had been cast and his fondness for the British relationship failed to have any impact on the decision made by the UK government in 1968 to withdraw from the Gulf and to terminate its defence commitment to Kuwait (see Chapter 7). With his accession having come at the expense of the claims of the younger Jabr Al-Ahmed, then Sabah Salim was further inclined to allow the sharper, and more capable, former finance minister to take up a role akin to a chief executive. To some close observers of Al-Sabah politics, Sabah Salim's tendency to prefer office to power was a reflection of the compromise that had earlier seen him made heir apparent. A former British ambassador to Kuwait observes that as, under the pattern of intra-family alternance, the position of amir would after Abdullah Salim normally have gone to a senior member of the Al-Jabr, this would have made Sabah Salim "both temperamentally and constitutionally.... reluctant to try to overrule or downgrade Jabr Al-Ahmed"⁵³.

However, even though the Kuwaiti amir may often have been little more than the occupant of high office, his ongoing ability to conduct that role, in common with other Gulf Arab leaders then and today, made him central to the hierarchy of power beneath him and, ultimately, to the next accession. This consideration became crucial in the last few months of 1972 when it appeared increasingly likely that the amir would resign on health grounds. *Al-Rai Al-Amm*, the daily newspaper owned by the crown prince but, significantly, edited by Abdul Aziz Musa'eed, a close ally of Jabr Al-Ali, effectively called on Sabah Salim to stand down⁵⁴. Upon the amir's return from successful health treatment in the US, however, a very large crowd gathered to greet him, and speculation as to his abdication soon died away. While the domestic political stalemate related to Jabr Al-Ali's parliamentary games may have encouraged the amir to consider resignation, Sabah Salim's willingness to continue was as likely to have been the result of pressure from the crown prince and the amir's nephew Saad Abdullah, whose interests were unlikely to be favoured in any shake-up of the emergent accession order. By the time Jabr Al-Ali eventually returned to the cabinet after the elections in January 1975, it was in a capacity that both satisfied his pride and ensured that the crown prince was firmly in control. Jabr Al-Ali re-entered government replete with the formal title of deputy prime minister. The tight circle of foreign policy decision-making, however, remained intact.

⁵³ The pattern of alternance between the Al-Jabr and Al-Salim lines (descendents of the first two sons of Mubarak "the great") had effectively become the "constitutional position". *Ibid.* This is despite not being formally written down, and to this day being a matter of some dispute among those branches of the ruling family descended from the revered "founding" leader's other sons.

⁵⁴ Telegram to State Dept., October 27th, 1972 (A145).

After the 1975 elections, the national assembly continued to contain a large number of *bedu* MPs. Despite the fact that Arab nationalists and Jabr Al-Ali's allies had created uncertainty in domestic political life, the election had been the most open, so far, in Kuwait's history. The election had featured the largest number of candidates seen since assembly elections were first held 12 years earlier, and more than half of those who took their seats in the assembly were new to parliament⁵⁵. The KMAN group and other elected Arab nationalists took advantage of the influx of some MPs less prone to government persuasion, and as a result were able to create a highly effective alliance on a range of issues. The most significant was the opposition's effort to oblige the government to negotiate the prompt move to 100% public ownership of KOC, which was effectively already a government commitment. Thus, when in 1975 the government announced that it was to take measures to transfer the newly formed joint management company, which had only just begun operating, into 100% public ownership, this was a speeding up of a process that had seen Kuwait left behind by its neighbours.

Parliament crosses foreign policy red lines

By Kuwaiti standards the assembly was becoming quite boisterous in two areas that crossed "red lines" as far as the ruling family was concerned. One was criticism of neighbouring countries and the other was criticism of members of the ruling family. The opposition, and in particular KMAN MPs such as Dr Ahmed Khateeb and Abdullah Nibari, were more emboldened to speak out on a range of issues sensitive for the Al-Sabah, and opposed a proposed increase in government powers over press and publications. In 1976 the assembly passed a resolution condemning Syrian military intervention in the Lebanese civil war and proposing that the government cut off all aid to Syria. The Lebanese conflict helped develop a concern in Kuwait, the seeds of which had been planted by the attempted *fedayeen* takeover in Jordan, that the emirate was potentially vulnerable to instability given its large Palestinian population, and what, by this stage, was the Kuwaiti national population's clear minority status vis-à-vis foreign nationals. Sections of the Kuwaiti press were giving expression to these concerns when the Lebanese civil war began in 1975. However, as the conflict ensued, a number of Kuwaiti press titles were, to the government's consternation, also becoming battlegrounds for differing Arab perspectives on the war and Syria's presence in Lebanon. The Kuwaiti press was largely staffed by ex-patriot Arabs, often Palestinians, but was owned and controlled by Kuwaiti nationals. It normally functioned as an

⁵⁵ Jill Crystal, Oil and Politics in the Gulf (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.92.

outlet for the former's political concerns, which traditionally were broadly congruent with the government's foreign policy stance. Over the conflict in Lebanon, however, the Arab world was polarising.

In 1976 the Kuwaiti government closed down the network of Palestinian schools that had sprung up in the wake of the PLO's expansion of activities in Kuwait after 1967, and reintegrated Palestinian pupils into Kuwaiti state schools⁵⁶. Despite events in Jordan a few years earlier, the Kuwaiti government had not altered its attitude toward the domestic Palestinian community, nor to the infrastructure of services and institutions for Palestinians whose offices were providing the leadership for Palestinians throughout the Gulf⁵⁷. Nor had the Kuwaiti government sought to restrain the Palestinian community following the one, and only, Palestinian-related terror incident to be initiated on its soil. In February 1974, PFLP guerrillas; an obscure group, Sons of Palestine; and Palestinians operating in the name of the Japanese Red Army had occupied the Japanese embassy in Kuwait, and the authorities subsequently allowed a hijacked Japanese plane that had been commandeered in Singapore to land in the amirate⁵⁸. In the event Kuwaiti forces stormed the embassy and a deal was forged by Saad Abdullah whereby the hijacked plane could depart with the Palestinian fighters on board and head for Aden. In 1972 hijackers, connected in one instance to Fatah, had been forced on to the Kuwaiti authorities after having flown from European destinations, presumably in the belief that they would be treated more sympathetically in the amirate⁵⁹. As a result of these incidents, the Kuwaiti government became more sensitive to the possible overlap of what was assumed to be externally orchestrated terror, with its domestic Palestinian community. However, little action was taken against Palestinian interests in Kuwait until the Lebanese conflict began. Although careful to distinguish between Fatah and the PFLP, the Kuwaiti government wondered if its *modus vivendi* with Fatah would always be reliable, and also if the leading PLO faction would continue to constrain other Palestinian factions present in the amirate. Of course hijackings of aircraft were numerous throughout the Middle East during this period. In 1977 a series of incidents involved Kuwait along with a number of other Arab states when Palestinian, or pro-Palestinian, guerrillas sought to land in the amirate, or on doing so would attempt to extract money, and even, on one particularly audacious occasion, upon landing

⁵⁶ Laurie Brandt, Palestinians in the Arab World (Columbia; Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 122-125.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ John Wilton to Foreign Office, July 1974 (FCO 8/2190).

⁵⁹ In an incident in December 1972, *fedayeen*, who had occupied the Saudi embassy in Paris, landed by plane in Kuwait; and earlier that year, the Palestinian instigators of an attack at Rome airport arrived in Kuwait.

managed to acquire high-powered Kuwaiti and Palestinian hostages⁶⁰. However Kuwait would often prove resistant to attempts by hijacked aircraft to land, and would manage to foil or end a plot without concessions being made to hijackers whose motivations were often venal as much as political⁶¹.

If the national assembly's reaction to the Lebanese conflict had been unwelcome to the Kuwaiti, as well as Syrian, government, then the fact that the parliament was to attack senior Al-Sabah members was wholly unacceptable to the ruling family. Three newspapers had been closed, apparently for printing allegations concerning the role of members of the Al-Sabah in land and property speculation, and the assembly asked "awkward questions"⁶² about the conduct of the ruling family. This was seen by senior Al-Sabah as crossing a line which could have implications for the authority of the ruling family in general. The assembly was perfectly free to attack the Al-Sabah's policies, but denigrating individual members was seen quite differently.

Assembly suspended

The fact that the parliament had stirred up regional sensitivities, prompted domestic existential fears, and was prepared to target not just the Al-Sabah, but, in the absence of any significant merchant representation, to challenge vested economic interests too, meant that it had few friends among the elite and, at best, indifference among many ordinary Kuwaitis. Arab nationalist MPs had mobilised on many fronts, including attacking the planning process, the lack of effective stock market regulation, the operation of price controls and, most sensitive of all to those outside as well as within government circles, corruption. The decision to suspend the assembly was taken during the summer recess when many Kuwaitis, including many MPs, are out of the country. Upon his return to the country in August, an increasingly unhealthy amir was persuaded by Jabr Al-Ahmed, who had never been convinced of the elected assembly's merits, to announce the suspension of two clauses of the constitution. This enabled the indefinite suspension of the

⁶⁰ In one incident in July 1977, the Kuwaiti chief of security and two senior PLO officials based in Kuwait were exchanged for the release of some of the original hostages, but all were eventually released on arrival in Syria. "Arab hijackers disown leader and surrender", July 11th, 1977, Robert Fisk, The Times.

⁶¹ "Commandos seize hijacker in wheelchair", June 7th, 1977, Robert Fisk, The Times.

⁶² François Dickman, Personal interview, August 2000. Dickman headed the Arabian Desk at the US State Department, 1972-76; and was ambassador to Kuwait, 1981-85.

parliament and of the commitment to press freedom⁶³. The announcement did not meet any significant public opposition then, or in the subsequent months⁶⁴. However, in a reflection of the importance of the plethora of professional bodies in the domestic political life of the amirate, the government moved quickly to remove the existing boards of the major organisations and banned some completely, lest they express criticism of the assembly closure.⁶⁵

The assembly was not to reconvene until early 1981, when, following the Iranian revolution of 1978/79, Shia radicalism, both as an internal and regional force, having compounded their caution initially, led Kuwaiti leaders to seek to be more domestically inclusive but, once again, on a carefully calculated basis. The 1975 assembly election had already put down markers for the inclusion of Kuwaiti Shia by returning ten Shia MPs. While below the proportion of Shia in the national population, this was a significant advance on previous representation and reflected their utility to the government. By tending to be socially conservative (as seen in their willingness to ally with the SRS), Shia MPs were seen as a bulwark against more “secular”, Arab nationalist representatives. A number of the Shia MPs were so-called “ajam Kuwaitis”, nationals of Persian extraction. When tensions rose with Iran after Britain’s announced departure from the Gulf, then Kuwaiti leaders would worry about the size of their own Shia population as they had for some years about the large number of illegal Iranian workers in the amirate (see Chapter 6). Prior to the Iranian revolution, however, the Kuwaiti government, while concerned about scenarios in which Shia leaders might be swayed by Tehran, did not believe they were fundamentally disloyal, even if the Shia community in general were less favoured by state policy than the Sunni Arab majority.

The particular focus of the Al-Sabah’s manipulation of the composition of the assembly during the period prior to the closure, had continued to be the bedouin, and, in an acknowledgement of their conservatism, Islam received a greater rhetorical focus in the set piece statements of the amir and the crown prince from the late 1960s, when it was mentioned in the same breath as the ritual commitment to Arabism (see Chapter 6). The leadership was also picking up on an emergent regional shift, encouraged by Saudi Arabia, of playing an Islamic card in foreign policy, and suggestions by the Saudis that Kuwait was no longer applying Islamic (Shariah) law. This, was in the context, however, of changing social mores and what the Saudis saw as the Al-Sabah’s “irresponsibility” in allowing radicals in the assembly to grandstand on sensitive issues. Islamic

⁶³ Kelly, *op.cit.*

⁶⁴ Sir Archie (AJ) Lamb, British ambassador to Kuwait 1974-77. Personal interview, 2000.

⁶⁵ Abdul-Latif Hassan Al-Rumaihi, “The Dynamics of Kuwaiti Foreign Policy”(Exeter; Exeter University, 1983). p.371.

references served a domestic and regional purpose, with the Al-Bayan speech notably seeing the crown prince “confirming” that Islamic law is “the source of all legislation”⁶⁶, a position that did not reflect the more ambiguous constitutional position⁶⁷, nor assuage Sunni Islamists who, principally through the vehicle of the SRS, would in the 1980s demand that the constitution be changed to reflect this assertion.

Internal political autonomy

Over the period following the 1967 war until the accession of Jabr Al-Ahmed as amir at the beginning of 1978, Kuwait’s internal politics had gone through three distinct phases. The first was largely authoritarian and one in which the traditional Kuwaiti style of broad inclusiveness that could embrace both senior merchants of an often, but not exclusively, liberal inclination, and radical Arab nationalists, was mostly abandoned. In the second phase there was a return to inclusiveness, albeit measured; and in the third a resumption of authoritarian politics, but not to the exclusion of the more senior of the traditional merchant allies of the Al-Sabah.

Although political tensions inhibited decision making at the top, especially when the challenge from Jabr Al-Ali was at its height, there was little threat to stability within the emirate, whether from domestic opposition forces or from foreign Arab nationals. The fact that the senior Al-Sabah developed concerns about the potential for disruption from the large number of resident Palestinians, especially when a terrorist incident occurred, did not significantly impact on relations with this community or with Fatah, the principal PLO faction. Kuwaiti foreign policy on Arab national questions, or more discretely in relation to its security partnerships with the UK and then the US, were governed primarily by external calculations (see Chapter 7). The presentational need for “acceptable” stances on Palestine, and to a lesser extent in relation to “anti-British” movements in the southern Gulf, did not appreciably change as security fears increased. Nor were they in any sense reinforced as some kind of compensation for internal political forces. After all, Arab nationalists as well as conservatives were frustrated in their political demands, and were ultimately denied a formal platform altogether when the assembly was suspended.

⁶⁶ Bayan speech, US embassy to State Department, June 1st 1970, (Pol 1 Kwt).

⁶⁷ Article 2 (State Religion) “The religion of the state is Islam and the Islamic Sharia shall be a main source of legislation.”

Internal dynamics in Kuwait in the period from 1967 until 1977 saw a growing sensitivity on the part of Kuwait's leadership to domestic developments, not least out of fear that the country could become prone to regional upheaval. One response of the amirate's "principle decision-makers"⁶⁸ was to seek to broaden their domestic support by developing what has since become an established practice, that of patronising tribal interests. At the same time, Kuwait's radical political voices were periodically constrained, moves that initially upset merchant opinion. However, by 1976, the wholesale curtailing of public political life could be conducted with little opposition from key, non-Al-Sabah, families. Like the ruling family, they were mindful of regional concerns and, given the breadth of interests being targeted by KMAN, also believed that domestic dissent should have its limits. Kuwait's decision-makers were, in effect, solidifying their political autonomy and maintaining a plausible non-aligned Arabism in foreign policy by constraining political opposition at home. Domestic policies had partly changed as a result of a changed regional climate, while Egypt's changed status in the Arab world undoubtedly made Kuwait both feel more able to close down the assembly and more mindful of Saudi objections to its existence. In the 1975-76 period at least, the national assembly patently did not conform to the notion of a political elite as portrayed by Dawisha⁶⁹ in his typology of foreign policy decision making in Middle East states; the most outspoken MPs plainly were not cut from the social or ideological cloth of the principle decision makers in the way he, for example, suggested of the Egyptian parliament. Kuwaiti decision-making throughout the 1967-77 period would, however, remain the preserve of the few. Domestic political management was partly intended to underwrite the existing basis of foreign policy, and thus the latter did not shift to accommodate the changing weight of internal pressures, despite for example an increased concern about the Palestinian presence. Kuwaiti foreign policy decision making could be affected by members of the non Al-Sabah, and in one policy area of foreign as well as domestic policy relevance, the nationalisation of the oil sector, parliament plainly influenced that policy's evolution. For the most part, however, foreign policy was the sole preserve of a small coterie of decision makers who adhered to established foreign policy lines, even as the policy packaging would be altered to reflect a changing regional mood.

⁶⁸ A.I. Dawisha, "The Middle East", Christopher Clapham (Ed.), Foreign Policy Making in Developing States: A Comparative Approach (Teakfield; Saxon House, 1975); and A.I. Dawisha, Egypt in the Arab World - The Elements of Foreign Policy (London; Macmillan, 1976)

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 6

Regional dimensions 1967-77

In the aftermath of the 1967 war, the Arab oil producers' embargo against those countries perceived as having aided Israel was soon terminated. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the leading Arab oil producers, faced little regional resistance in ending a policy to which they were plainly far from wedded. The embargo had by no means been thoroughly observed. However the shared need of Arab states, despite their very different polities, for a strong statement of opposition to compromise with Israel meant that a kind of *quid pro quo* applied at the post-war Arab League summit in Khartoum held in September 1967. The conference ended with a declaration containing the famous "three no's"; namely, "no" to negotiating with Israel, "no" to conceding territory to Israel, and "no" to recognising Israel. However, in a much less quoted part of the same passage, support for the diplomatic process, then gathering at the UN, was clearly affirmed¹. Albeit in a contradictory fashion, the closing statement emphasised the on-going importance of Arab nationalist rhetoric to very different Arab states with very different foreign policy requirements.

Kuwait continued its blanket assertion of the right of Palestinians to national self-determination and publicly opposed the emerging diplomatic process based on UNSCR242, which required recognition of Israel and its right to security (see Chapter 4). This stance remained a key prop of Kuwait's foreign policy identity throughout this period. It was also possible though to find Kuwaiti official statements that reflected the shifting mood within the Arab world, and specifically reflecting the assertion by the PLO, given its increasing prominence, of the primary role of Palestinian nationalism in the Arab struggle to establish a state in Palestine². In private Kuwait would berate the US for not doing more to secure progress with efforts to advance a peace process involving a resolution of the Palestinian question and, by implication, a settlement with Israel.

¹ Alan R. Taylor, The Arab Balance of Power (New York; Syracuse University Press, 1982)

² The Amiri speech of 1971 contained reference to the rights of the Palestinians "to liberate their homeland", as opposed to the more traditional tendency to talk of the collective struggle of the Arab nation.

The outcome of the 1967 war caused a shift in the way Arab national ideas were expressed within the region. The soul-searching after the loss of all of historic Palestine led to a fundamental questioning in the Arab world of the relatively secular pan-Arab nationalism, with the Egyptian variant embodied as much by the personality, as the limited ideology, of Gamal Abdul Nasser³, which was now in eclipse within the region⁴. This did not prevent another, seemingly more radical, variant of radical Arab nationalist ideology⁵ being asserted when, in Iraq, which had contributed troops to the fighting, the Baath party capitalised on the sense of failure and in 1968 retook power. At the same time an essentially Nasserite coup led by Colonel Qaddafi was successfully staged in Libya in 1969. However, the gradual decline in the ideological authority of Egypt, despite remaining the leading military power in the Arab world, would eventually see a marked easing in the sharpness of the ideological cleavage of the “Arab Cold War”⁶, whereby Cairo had previously sought to corral Arab countries into the so-called progressive as opposed to conservative camp. In its stead a rise of ideas expressing solidarity between very different Arab regimes occurred, and, gradually, a suffusion of this more generalised Arabism with an assertion of Islamic identity. The fallout from the 1967 war did not see blame within the Arab states of the Gulf attach to their leaders, nor a pronounced rise in domestic radicalism, even though this had been feared by the Kuwaiti leadership (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, the increased leverage that Arab oil producers’ wealth gave them - the Khartoum conference had also mandated Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Libya to make annual *samud* (“steadfastness”) payments to the Arab states bordering Israel - meant that a more conservative, and therefore less polarising, take on Arab nationalism was now more in vogue. This followed the populist, radical Arab nationalism that had been dominant in the region following the military coup in Egypt in 1952⁷. In the Kuwaiti case at least, this did not mean that its foreign policy on Palestine, or in support of what it

³ Arguably “Nasserism” was no more populist and simplistic in its expression of pan-Arabism than its Baathist rival. However the founders of the Ba’athist movement, at least, sought to draw on an intellectual tradition in Arab nationalism, whilst incorporating this with aspects of socialism. See for example Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry* (London; MacMillan, 1981).

⁴ Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament - Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1981); Tibi prefers to describe this as the decline of an ideology associated with Nasser, rather than of “pan-Arabism” *per se*.

⁵ Tibi, *op.cit.*

⁶ The title of Malcolm Kerr’s assessment of the ideological disputes among the Arab states. Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War – Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-70* (New York; Oxford University Press, 1971)

⁷ Ajami, *op.cit.* (p.80-81) “The style and expressions of the pan-Arabists gave way to a subdued language that was more in line with the sensibilities of the conservative states, more deferential to the heritage, less threatening to the prerogatives of wealth and power. The political discourse of the established leaders now emphasised inter-Arab solidarity rather than ideological splits and assigned a more central place to Islam than had been the case in the previous era.”

continued to portray as anti-colonial struggles elsewhere in the region, was displayed in language that was any less Arab nationalist. Kuwait's identification with causes long emblematic of the so-called "progressive" line was undimmed, even as it, in common with its arguably more conservative Gulf Arab neighbours, was, for the most part, less vilified in the Arab region. Ideology would continue to compound Kuwait's sense of security threat, however, as the Ba'ath take-over in Iraq - initially a source of optimism in the Kuwaiti government as they had negotiated recognition with the last Baath-led government in 1963 - was, in common with Ba'athist Syria, to project a radically Arab nationalist stance that maintained aspects of Egypt's formerly polarising approach to the region, but at much closer a distance.

For one seasoned western official, the "central dilemma of Kuwaiti foreign policy" was the contradiction of being an oil-rich Gulf shaikhdom having to profess Arab nationalist causes as a kind of insurance policy against Arab nationalist regimes.

"For a score of reasons of domestic political prudence, emotional commitments over Palestine, a desire to stand well with everybody, and a realistic assessment of the inability of the conservative regimes of the Arab world to help her in time of trouble, Kuwait has seen the best hope of political survival, at home and abroad, to lie in the espousal of the 'progressive' line, whether this emanates from Algiers, Tripoli, Cairo, Damascus or Baghdad."⁸

However, in the early post-war period Kuwait was cleaving to a progressive line that often had more in common with Baghdad and Damascus than with Cairo, while Algiers and Tripoli (after the 1969 coup) were smaller and more removed players in Arab politics and as such were not to impact that directly on Kuwaiti foreign policy (see Chapter 6).

An Islamic foreign policy?

Following the political lead shown by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait reacted to the Arab political vacuum following the 1967 war with an assertion of her Islamic identity. However, given Kuwait's perceived vulnerability within the Arab world, a structure that Bassam Tibi has likened to a "regional sub-system"⁹, the emirate would continue to encourage caution and, as far as possible, accommodation with differing political trends. Kuwait's non-aligned espousal of Arab national,

⁸ Ambassador John Wilton, "Annual Review 1972", January 1973 (FCO 8/1987).

⁹ Tibi, *op.cit.*, p.23.

and what were increasingly Islamic, norms was to an extent a way of trying to opt out of the confines of the regional structure, whether an Arab one or a Gulf-wide one, by avoiding an ideological niche that was exclusively radical or conservative. Nor, by dint of Kuwait's past success in balancing a defence partnership with the UK, with radical foreign policy stances reflecting its regional and internal political tradition, would it suit it to try to adopt one single approach. Therefore, alongside the continued identification with mostly, but not exclusively, radical Arab causes, Kuwait's foreign policy would increasingly throughout this period also emphasise the country's Islamic identity. Kuwait had already begun to promote an Islamist political competitor to the Kuwaiti Arab Nationalist Movement (KMAN) within the domestic political sphere (see Chapter 5). However Kuwait's commitment to "Islamic fraternity", alongside "Arab unity" and non-alignment with the cold war blocs as the defining elements of its foreign policy¹⁰, was to develop after Saudi Arabia formed the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). In 1969, a series of meetings of representatives from the world's Muslim countries was launched by King Faisal, and a permanent secretariat was set up in the Saudi city of Jiddah. The founding of the OIC provided a platform for Saudi Arabia to offer a wider basis of leadership than the Arab nationalism that it distrusted, at a time when King Faisal's Arab rival, Gamal Abdul Nasser, was in political decline. Kuwait responded qualitatively differently to the OIC than it had to King Faisal's previous proposal for an "Islamic Summit" in 1965 (see Chapter 3). In the new environment, however, the Saudi move appeared far less suggestive of divisive blocs within the Arab and wider Muslim world. All Arab states attended the first meeting, alongside other Muslim countries, and the October 1970 "Amiri speech" observed that the first meeting of the OIC was the only "positive note" in a series of incidents in the region in the previous 12 months which, it was recalled, had caused unwelcome division or discomfort¹¹.

Intrinsically, Kuwaiti foreign policy, as a reflection of its national interest, would see little benefit in division among the Arab states or between the Arabs and Kuwait's powerful neighbour, Iran. Therefore Kuwait would continue to seek to mediate between countries in the region, or even beyond, in the case of India and Pakistan¹². Divisions within the Arab world specifically were not judged as beneficial to its own security position. Arab unity projects, such as those formally

¹⁰ This was stated in the crown prince's "Bayan speech" in June 1970. US embassy to State Department, June 1970 (Pol 1 Kuw).

¹¹ Amiri speech, US embassy to State Department October 26th, 1970 (A132).

¹² Kuwait tried to build on its efforts in brokering an agreement over Yemen by attempting to end the war that broke out in 1971 between India and Pakistan over the civil uprising in East Pakistan (Bangladesh). While historic connections with the Indian sub-continent were strong, Kuwait lacked the knowledge and leverage to be an effective player in resolving a conflict that had regional and international ramifications.

agreed in 1970 between Egypt, Syria, Libya and Sudan, and a different version a year later excluding Sudan, were officially welcomed. After all, Kuwait had professed a commitment to political unity as a means to secure Iraqi recognition and to accommodate wider regional as well as domestic Arab nationalist opinion (see Chapter 3). Rarely heralding meaningful political co-operation, the rhetorical commitment of Arab states to such plans was generally seen positively by Kuwait as being symptomatic of improved inter-Arab state relations, even if any likelihood of substantive political unity involving Iraq would make it nervous. Arab divisions had provided the backdrop to the apparent threat from Iraq in 1961, and Kuwait believed that its best prospect for advancing a foreign policy, whose primary focus was always “sovereign independence”¹³, lay in ensuring that the most likely Arab threat, that from Iraq, was constrained when Baghdad was enjoying reasonable relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Kuwait’s need to walk a careful line between the Arab world’s “progressives” and “traditionalists” was made all the more difficult when these key countries “were at loggerheads” and the emirate was therefore obliged to choose one camp or the other¹⁴. In the post-1967 environment this was less problematic, although, as Malcolm Kerr observed¹⁵, the more radical countries were successful in preventing diplomatic progress involving Egypt or the “moderate” Arab states, by which he meant Saudi Arabia (and, by extension, Kuwait). Thus the Kuwaitis increasingly talked up Islamic solidarity and publicly opposed UNSCR242. Egypt, however, had supported the UN Security Council resolution as it could conceivably have led to the restoration of its lost territory, arguably reflecting the pragmatism that had encouraged Cairo to seek to restrain Syrian actions before a series of steps made war seemingly unavoidable in June 1967.

Aligned with the PLO

Kuwait’s public position toward the post-war diplomatic initiatives reflected the dichotomy in the Arab world. An increasing number of Arab regimes now saw diplomacy as the only way to recover territory from Israel, hopefully, from the perspective of its neighbours in particular, without the addition of another Arab country, Palestine, whose political representatives were, from the late 1960s onwards, to cause major instability in Lebanon and Jordan. However

¹³ The US assessed that, “Retention of sovereign independence will remain the core of Kuwait’s policy, though endorsements of Arab brotherhood and solidarity are in many cases genuine and will continue.” US embassy to State Department, April 28th, 1969 (A081).

¹⁴ UK Ambassador, Noel Jackson, quoted in Robert L. Jarman, Sabah Al-Salim Al-Sabah – Amir of Kuwait 1965-77 (A Political Biography) (London; London Centre of Arab Studies, 2002) p.235.

¹⁵ Kerr, *op.cit.*

advocating a diplomatic solution that, by definition, excluded the increasingly popular *fedayeen*, the only forces that appeared capable and willing to challenge Israel, was risky for Kuwait, given the mood of popular Arab opinion. Notably, Kuwait gave the new PLO chairman, Yasser Arafat, political support, even as his rising profile and authority among Palestinians appeared to upset Egyptian desires to move closer to the US-backed peace process, after Cairo had in 1969 sought the PLO's constraint in Lebanon and then acquiesced in Jordan's crushing of PLO fighters in 1970-71. Despite the Palestinians' guerrilla activity in Lebanon, Kuwait continued to provide an institutional, but not guerrilla, base for Fatah, in the face of criticism in Beirut and later Amman. Kuwait's long-standing identification with the Palestinian cause was overlapping with popular Arab opinion, including that of its most threatening neighbour, Iraq, as well as Syria, and from 1969, Libya, who supported the armed struggle and rejected accommodation with Israel. Kuwait shared the radical Arab states' opposition toward international diplomatic efforts involving compromise with Israel, but only because it could not be seen to publicly back such initiatives.

Thus Kuwait, despite its private sympathies, refused to publicly endorse the mission of the UN Secretary General's special representative Gunner Jarring, following the passing of UNSCR242. In private conversation with US ambassador Howard Cottam in advance of Amir Sabah Salim's trip to Washington in December 1968 (see Chapter 7), Crown Prince Jabr Al-Ahmed had said that if an agreement as a consequence of the Jarring mission could assure a "just and equitable solution", then Kuwait "would then lend it her support, even though this would be contrary to its deep convictions that Palestinians should be able to retrieve their homeland." However, the Kuwaiti crown prince was explicit that he did not want word of this to get out publicly. In other words, the emirate was not prepared to run the risk of laying itself open to charges of compromising the *fedayeen* for a process that may fail to roll back Israel's recent territorial occupation, but would be happy to fall in line with her fellow Arab states if the process turned out to be successful. Nor would Kuwait do anything to assist what appeared to be improved prospects for a diplomatic breakthrough following the 1973 war, even though Syria looked as if it would embrace an initiative if it could be seen to provide a role for the PLO in negotiations.

Neither Egypt nor Saudi Arabia were prepared to explicitly support reining in the *fedayeen* in Lebanon or Jordan. Therefore there was little expectation that Kuwait would shift from its official position of full solidarity with the guerrillas, even when specific incidents included attacks on non-Israeli targets and were therefore perceived as nothing other than terrorism by western governments. In March 1973, following the assassination by PLO gunmen of the US ambassador

in Sudan, the Amir was quoted in the Lebanese press expressing “unlimited support for the *fedayeen*”¹⁶. While not a direct reference to the incident, but rather to the right of the *fedayeen* to pursue the armed struggle, the comment angered the US administration. Foreign minister Sabah Al-Ahmed then clarified that Kuwait did not support attacks on non-Israeli targets¹⁷. However no senior Al-Sabah official was prepared to specifically criticise the Palestinian guerrillas for any of their actions, aside from 1974, when they were conducted on Kuwaiti soil (see Chapter 5) and the factions responsible were condemned by PLO chairman Yasser Arafat.

Kuwait’s adamant defence of the rights of the Palestinian *fedayeen* could conflict with its non-aligned position in the Arab world. In November 1969 Egyptian president Gamal Abdul-Nasser negotiated the Cairo Agreement with the *fedayeen*. The deal tried to take both a radical and a pragmatic position, maintaining the *fedayeen*’s right to bear arms and conduct operations in defined areas, but not to contradict Lebanese sovereignty and security. This then became the position of the Kuwait government. However, both the Lebanese and Jordanian authorities were greatly irritated with the “holier than thou” attitude of both Kuwait officials and the Kuwaiti press in suggesting that, as “frontline states”, they should be doing more¹⁸. It was unsurprising therefore that the Kuwaitis’ attempt at mediation in the crisis in Jordan proved forlorn. Kuwait strongly criticised Jordan after the “Black September” crushing of Palestinian fighters in 1970, a position in line with that uniformly adopted by Arab leaderships. Jordan was also being systematically attacked in the Kuwaiti press over what was seen as its repression of the Palestinian resistance, a position in tune with popular sentiment across the Arab world. Privately, most Arab governments, including Kuwait, had increasingly less time for the *fedayeen*, but were conscious that the guerrillas’ deeds were popularly lauded and put their own relative inactivity toward the occupation in a bad light. Kuwait’s divided feelings over the issue were shown by its adoption of the “logic” of the failed Cairo Agreement toward events in Jordan. Kuwait stated its belief that the *fedayeen* in Jordan should respect the kingdom’s sovereignty, but it also upheld their right to conduct armed struggle. At the October 1974 Arab summit in Rabat, the Kuwaitis were again to effectively align with the PLO in supporting the decision to recognise them as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians”. This was hardly a source of major discomfort, given that the decision was, with the exception of Jordan, unanimous. The decision to legitimise the PLO’s position of responsibility for leading and liberating the Palestinians reflected the political realities

¹⁶ US embassy Kuwait to State Department, 18th March 1973 (Secret telegram, numbered 227)

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ US embassy Kuwait to State Department, May 27th, 1969 (A111).

of a regional shift begun after 1967. This was compounded by the emergent “triple alliance” of Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia that had fought or financed the 1973 war in order to accommodate internal pressures, particularly within Egypt, and achieve comparatively limited territorial and/or political goals, rather than liberate Palestine. Non-alignment in the Arab world, while generally preferred by Kuwait, and adhered to in terms of avoiding firm alliances, could not be maintained on the issue of Palestine.

Iranian and Iraqi threat potential

While the Palestinian issue would begin to raise practical concerns as well as presentational ones for Kuwaiti foreign policy, the emirate’s immediate backyard, the Gulf region, was viewed with greater concern. The political environment was being seen by officials as more fluid; specifically due to the “retreat of British influence” following the UK’s announced withdrawal from the Gulf region in January 1968¹⁹. In the immediate aftermath of the announcement, Kuwait found itself sharing similar concerns as Iraq about Iran. Iran was the most militarily powerful Gulf state, and was signalling its desire to fill the resultant strategic vacuum that the UK’s departure would create. Shortly after the UK decision was made public, Iran reasserted a long standing claim to the Gulf Arab island of Bahrain²⁰, and a year later was to threaten US oil companies engaged in drilling on the island of Abu Musa, which it maintained a claim to and which, under British control, had formed part of the Trucial State of Sharjah. In April 1969, Iran also directly challenged Iraq’s attempt to enforce a 1937 agreement that Baghdad interpreted as giving it control over the whole of the Shatt Al-Arab (Arvand Rud) waterway, which in the south of Iraq separated it from Iran and provided a significant part of Iraq’s limited access to the Gulf. The sailing of an armed Iranian battleship down the Shatt defied Iraq’s provocative demand that all shipping display the Iraqi flag. Iraq’s response was to expel a large number of Iranian passport holders from Iraq, believing, as did Kuwait about Iranian nationals resident in the emirate, that some of them might be used as 5th columnists, a concern that Kuwait even had about its own

¹⁹ According to Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali. US embassy Kuwait to State Department April 28th, 1969 (A081).

²⁰ Described by Alinaghi Alikhani as a 100 year old claim that was “becoming increasingly unrealistic”, he assessed that the Shah had to find a way, in the context of Britain’s planned relinquishing of control of the Gulf island along with Qatar and the Trucial States, of saving Iranian national face over the claim. Alinaghi Alikhani (Editor), The Shah and I - The Confidential Diary of Iran’s Royal Court (The Diaries of Asadollah Alam, Minister of Court, 1962-77) (London; I.B. Tauris, 1971).

“Iranian” population²¹. However Iraq lacked any significant ability to project military strength, something from which Kuwait leaders took heart. Border tensions between Iraq and Iran persisted though, and Iran would conduct a proxy war in Iraqi Kurdistan that lasted until 1975.

Iran was increasingly seen by Kuwait as a potential threat to regional and internal security. Its claims on majority Shia Arab Bahrain might, it was feared, stir up difficulties with the approximately 25% of the Kuwaiti national population who were Shia; while as many as 15% of the total Kuwaiti population were estimated by the US to be Iranian nationals²². Kuwait was in no doubt that Bahrain could not be allowed to fall into Iranian hands, believing that this would be a strategic setback for Kuwait. Given Iraq’s relative internal weakness, a factor compounded by the further upheaval caused by the Baathist coups of 1968, and Iran’s financial and intelligence assistance to the leading Kurdish opposition forces, then Iraq might have been considered by Kuwait as less of a danger than Iran, at least if a “balance of threats” analysis is applied²³. Iraq’s ongoing internal instability partly offset the concerns Kuwait had about the ideological assertiveness of a “revolutionary” regime in Baghdad that had poor relations with Egypt and for a period was allied with fellow Baathi Syria.

However, while Iran was potentially an indirect threat to Kuwait, it was not seen by the Al-Sabah leadership as likely to directly attack or to promote instability in the emirate, even though this might be a consequence of Tehran’s policies elsewhere in the Gulf. Gregory Gause argues that ideology, and in particular its deployment in a manner capable of threatening the internal stability of another country, enables a more comprehensive assessment of the “balance of threat” to any given country. The resultant “aggregate of the power threat”²⁴ to Kuwait suggested that Iraq continued to constitute a greater problem, given that Iran had not threatened Kuwait directly, as Iraq had appeared to do in 1961; made incursions into its territory, as Iraq began to do from 1969;

²¹ To assert his point, Jabr Al-Ali claimed that there were 600,000 “Iranians” in Iraq. According to official Kuwaiti census data, Iranian nationals numbered 40,842 in 1975. The shaikh was no doubt counting the one third of Kuwaiti nationals who were Shia, many of whom were of Persian extraction, as “Iranians”. Even then his arithmetic is suspect, given that the total population of the country at this time was less than a million. Kuwait however had long been concerned about illegal Iranian and other workers from neighbouring countries in the emirate. A former Iranian official told the author that only 15,000 of the 40,000 or so Iranian nationals in Kuwait were registered with the embassy in 1976. Personal interview, December 2005.

²² According to the US embassy, Kuwait. Telegram to State Department, April 28th 1969 (A081). Given the Kuwaiti census data of 1975, confirmed to the author by Iranian sources, then the US calculation appears overstated.

²³ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (New York; Cornell University Press, 1990).

²⁴ F Gregory Gause III, “Balancing What? Threat Perceptions and Alliance Choice in the Gulf,” *Security Studies*, Winter 2003-04.

nor, unlike Iraq, deployed ideological assaults against Kuwait, which conceivably could have weakened its internal position.

In Kuwait's case, however, an ideological threat was largely a weapon that Iraq and, to a lesser extent Egypt and Saudi Arabia, could deploy against the emirate to undermine its perceived external security, and to a lesser extent Kuwait's internal political management, by periodically upsetting the Al-Sabah's desire and ability to build friendships within the Arab world. In this sense the ideology of Arab nationalism was largely an externally motivated tool that Kuwait in turn was obliged to wield in order to enhance her legitimacy rather than to seek to de-legitimise other states. This contrasts with a largely internally motivated commitment to Arab national causes suggested by a constructivist assessment of the role of ideology in Arab states' foreign policy²⁵. In common with other Arab states, Kuwait deployed Arab nationalist ideology as a "tool of foreign policy"²⁶. In this respect Kuwait's use of Arab nationalism, albeit sitting oddly with its international defence relations, was not dissimilar in its utilisation of an appropriate foreign policy image to that adopted by a diverse range of Arab regimes. According to Bassam Tibi,

"Since the 1950s pan-Arab nationalism had been a more or less an obligatory doctrine in most Arab countries, although often expressed more in words than in deeds. This is true of feudal states such as Saudi Arabia, pseudo-socialist states such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq, and of pseudo-democratic parliamentary states such as Lebanon²⁷ .

In writing on the role of ideology in Middle Eastern states' foreign policy, Fred Halliday stresses the importance of, "values and images, not least the rival theatres of public display between rulers²⁸". Kuwait understood the need for presentational correctness when packaging its foreign policy. However it did not seek an alignment or to bandwagon as a consequence of any assessment of where the "true" balance of threats lay. Thus, when examining the dangers from both Iran and Iraq during this period, both as distinct threats to Kuwaiti security and in terms of the increasing danger by the early 1970s that war might break out between them, potentially

²⁵ For example, Michael N Barnett and Jack S Levy, "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments – The Case of Egypt 1962-73", *International Organisation* XLV (1991). p.369-395.

²⁶ Ajami, *op.cit.*, p.453.

²⁷ Bassam Tibi argues that in the "post-colonial era" Arab nationalism "has degenerated into an ideology to mask existing social contradictions and deficiencies." Tibi, *op.cit.*, p.175.

²⁸ Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2005) p.29.

involving Kuwait, the amirate's leadership expressed public support for Iraq, but its practical co-operation with Baghdad was only given under duress.

Iraq-Iran tensions threaten Kuwait

When Iraq decided to issue Iran with an ultimatum regarding the operation of shipping in the Shatt Al-Arab waterway, it took the precaution of extending its troop position south of the port town of Um Qasr, its only practical outlet in the Gulf. This move, Iraq claimed, was given the "green light" by Kuwait, whose territory was, as a result, penetrated a short distance south of the international but un-demarcated border, which itself lay just to the south of Um Qasr. Kuwait's interior and defence minister, Saad Abdullah, argued that, despite Iraqi claims, the amirate had not given official approval of the penetration at a meeting he held with the Iraqi vice-president and the Iraqi defence minister to discuss the issue. The incursion in any case occurred prior to it being discussed at the rapidly convened bi-lateral meeting in Kuwait²⁹. As the incursion could be presented by Iraq as a defensive necessity vis-à-vis an Iran widely perceived in the Arab world as an increasing threat in the wake of the British planned departure, this was plainly something that Kuwait felt unable to argue with and hence a de facto green light could be suggested. The presence of Iraqi troops just inside a border that, despite Kuwait's constant urging, Iraq had refused to agree to being demarcated ever since it recognised Kuwait in 1963, was not something that it was practical politics to argue against, especially when Arab solidarity was almost obligatory.

While Kuwait undoubtedly had its concerns about Iran's wider objectives in the region, and needed to be seen to be siding with fellow Arabs when they came into conflict with Tehran, it was neither the foreign policy style of the amirate nor within its capabilities to ally against Iran. As senior shaikh, Jabr Al-Ali Al-Sabah, observed of the Iraqi-Iranian tensions in 1969, "Kuwait is too small to take an outspoken separate policy on such a question."³⁰ In contrast to his

²⁹ Majid Khoury, *Socialist Iraq - A Study in Iraqi Politics Since 1968* (Washington; Middle East Institute, 1978) p.156. Khoury interviewed Shaikh Saad Abdullah Al-Sabah, Kuwait's defence and interior minister, who held the meeting with Iraqi vice-president Hardan Al-Tikriti and defence minister Salih Majid Ammash in April 1969.

³⁰ Jabr Al-Ali Al-Sabah also commented to the US embassy that the "repercussions" of tensions between Iraq and Iran did not bother Kuwait. He argued that Iran was "knocking big heads so that small ones would tremble." In saying this Jabr Al-Ali was mindful of Iraq's attempt to strengthen the will of Bahrain in the face of Iranian claims to it; Iraq's defence minister Hardan Al-Tikriti visited Bahrain during the same month that Iraq tried to prevent Iranian shipping in the Shatt Al-Arab waterway, and that it made its first incursion into Kuwait. The US embassy expressed its scepticism about the shaikh's analysis, with some

sometimes rash observations, Jabr Al-Ali's comment was a fair reflection of Kuwait's sense of what was feasible in foreign policy terms. Kuwait did offer to mediate between Iraq and Iran during this period. However the emirate was not viewed as having the weight, nor specifically would it have been trusted by Iran to take a neutral posture vis-à-vis an Arab neighbour that was understood by Iran to have been effectively bought off by the Kuwaitis in order to stave off a perceived threat³¹. As tensions increased between Kuwait and Iraq in the run up to the British departure from the Gulf, tensions that some Kuwaitis linked to the UK's improved relationship with Iraq (see Chapter 7), Kuwait was not minded to try to seek an accommodation with Iraq directly. However Kuwait's periodic financial inducements to Iraq, and to a number of relatively poor but powerful Arab states, was maintained in order to try to yield some influence or at least acceptance.

To the suggestion that Kuwait might have considered approaching Iraq to discuss some form of alignment, given the impending power vacuum in the Gulf, and given the assertiveness of Iran, the then oil and finance minister (1967-75), Abdul-Rahman Al-Ateegi, commented recently, "How could we approach Iraq? Never! We knew what the Iraqis think.....we knew we had a problem with them (concerning) the borders...³²." However there was also a practical consideration that made an alignment with Iraq at this time inconceivable. "We knew that Iraq was in a very bad situation....They are not secure even in their own country, so we could not ask anything from them," said Al-Ateegi³³.

Regional alliances unattractive

Aligning with Iraq, or more plausibly with Egypt, which, from Kuwait's perspective, was at a safer remove and with whom Kuwait was always conscious of the need to maintain good relations, would have obviously run the risk of exposing the emirate to pressure from Iran, its

justification, given that Iran's action vis-à-vis Iraq had their own momentum. It also seems doubtful that Kuwait was not bothered about events between its two powerful Gulf neighbours. If Kuwait was not worried at this point, then the beginning of border clashes between the two powerful neighbours of Kuwait in 1972 seems likely to have changed that perspective.

³¹ Retired Iranian official. Off the record interview, London, November 2005.

³² Abdul Rahman Al-Ateegi. He was also finance minister from 1975-81. Personal interview, Kuwait, February 2005.

³³ Ibid.

close and militarily powerful neighbour³⁴. Such alignments would also have been wholly out of kilter with Kuwait's ongoing attempt to build a closer defence relationship with the US in the wake of the UK's announced departure from the Gulf, given that Baghdad and Cairo had not had diplomatic relations with the US since the 1967 war. Therefore non-alignment within the Arab world also reflected Kuwait's established preference for extra-regional security partnerships.

Saudi Arabia, however, was a country that Kuwait would have to accommodate more as Egypt's weight declined after the 1967 war. External security co-operation though would be constrained. In part this was due to Saudi Arabia's continued hostility toward the emirate's internal politics and relative political openness, given that Kuwait was still allowing those whom Riyadh judged to be the two countries' common enemies to reside there. In Saudi Arabia, according to a British official, "The Kuwaitis (in general) were dismissed as creatures of Nasser, betrayers of secrets, harbourers of Soviet and Iraqi subversive networks...[T]he Saudi attitude is naturally different from their attitude towards the Kuwaiti Government. The Amir of Kuwait is, so to speak, a 'traitor to his class'..."³⁵. Following the UK's announced departure from the Gulf, however, speculation periodically abounded in the region that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait would work more closely with Iran, something that the Shah early on suggested to the Kuwaiti amir could be expressed by some form of defence co-operation between all three countries. Despite their mutual development as "pillars" in a US-backed security structure in the Gulf (see Chapter 7), Saudi Arabia was wary of too close a relationship with Iran, a country with far greater military clout. From Kuwait's perspective, Saudi Arabia's geographical proximity would have made too close a security relationship uncomfortable, while historical resentments (see Appendix 1) and contemporary distrust compounded the emirate's desire to prioritise friendship but to avoid seeking a formal alliance. Given Iran's strength and seemingly threatening posture in the region, to adopt Stephen Walt's terminology³⁶, Kuwait might in theory have considered "band-wagoning" with Iran in order to constrain the historically distrusted Iraq. After all, Iran was to become key to US strategy in the Gulf following the British departure. However the pan-Arab ideological prop of Kuwait's foreign policy made an alignment with Iran unthinkable. On the other hand, Kuwait's desire to maintain good relations across the wider Middle East region, save the obvious case of Israel³⁷,

³⁴ "Whatever brotherly relations I have with Egypt, I cannot put Iran aside. Whether the time of the Shah or the clerics, I can't put Iran aside. Iran is a neighbour taking the whole (eastern) side of the Gulf.... (Its) population exceeds all of and Syria and Iraq (combined), and so you cannot ignore Iran." *Ibid.*

³⁵ W. Morris, UK embassy, Jeddah to FCO, December 3rd, 1968 (FCO 8/1171).

³⁶ Walt, *op.cit.*

³⁷ Kuwait claimed to the US that she increasingly feared an Israeli attack. US embassy, Kuwait, to State Department, April 28th, 1969 (A081). A possible attack was something actively discussed by the Kuwaiti

meant that Kuwait sought to engage with Iran as much as possible, all the more so when it became evident that Tehran would exploit the power vacuum in the Gulf.

Abdul-Rahman Al-Ateegi commented recently that he had encouraged the Kuwaiti leadership to engage with Iran because of the amirate's close relations with Egypt. This made Kuwait concerned to ensure that her relations with Iran would not be negatively affected as a consequence. According to Al-Ateegi, "Relations were so harsh (between) Egypt and Iran...it (was) reflecting (badly) on our relations (with Iran).³⁸" A long delayed official visit to Iran by Amir Sabah Salim took place in January 1968, following a visit he had made three years earlier in his capacity as prime minister. The intervening period had not seen major bi-lateral tensions, and the visit proved largely ceremonial, despite some initial discussion, following the UK's announced departure from the Gulf only two days earlier, of Iran's historic claim to Bahrain³⁹. Given the continuing poor state of Egyptian-Iranian relations, Kuwait was conscious of the need to use the goodwill the visit to Iran was expected to generate to ensure they had "cordial relations"⁴⁰. After all, Kuwait was well aware that Iran, like Saudi Arabia, resented the political platform enjoyed by Arab nationalists in the national assembly, while Kuwait had continued to be concerned over the large number of illegal Iranian nationals in the amirate. The Shah's reciprocal visit to Kuwait in November took place against the backdrop of intense speculation in the region about the consequences of the British-announced withdrawal from the Gulf, and Iran's assertion of its claim to Bahrain. This had only inflamed KMAN and others in the assembly, and tensions were created by Iran's objections to what it, exaggeratedly, saw as strong Nasserite activism in the amirate⁴¹. Bahrain was the dominant theme in more than two hours of dialogue. Kuwait's identification with the need for Bahrain, a fellow Arab country, to be independent was plain, even to the point of bravado. The Kuwaiti amir apparently made clear to the Shah that Kuwait itself had, "...No problem with you...the only issue for us is Bahrain. I can't beat you, but if you decide to use force with Bahrain, I will be there fighting with them."⁴²

press in 1969, especially after the amirate was identified by the Israeli ambassador to the UN as playing an active military and political part in what was seen as the Egyptian war effort.

³⁸ Al-Ateegi, *op.cit.*

³⁹ According to Robert Jarman, aside from discussion of the continental shelf, which impacted on some of the as yet undefined maritime boundaries between the two countries; and periodic concerns about Iranians illegally resident in Kuwait, there had been no major problems to concern Kuwait in their bilateral relationship. The mutual desire to symbolise the stable basis of relations was indicated when Iran issued a commemorative stamp in honour of the Amir's visit. Jarman, *op.cit.* p. 235-236.

⁴⁰ Al-Ateegi, *op.cit.*

⁴¹ According to the British embassy, the Shah's previous conception of Kuwait as a "monster" had been somewhat dispelled by the visit. Jarman, *op.cit.*, p.238.

⁴² Al-Ateegi, *op. cit.*

Mediation embodies non-alignment

However Kuwait was not interested in increasing tension in the Gulf region over this or any other issue. It was well aware that the Shah had to think of his internal constituencies just as the Arab states, including Kuwait, had to think about their's, and that Iran needed a "face-saving formula"⁴³. Kuwait also hoped to use the November 1968 meeting with the Shah in Kuwait to mediate in the Bahrain dispute, and thus extend its mediation role generally; a conception of its identity wholly in tune with its preference for co-operation, not division, within the region. Amir Sabah Salim, who had been particularly keen on developing this identity for Kuwait, even to the point of naiveté (see Chapter 3), used the occasion to press the Shah to consider some form of international fact-finding mission on what status Bahrainis wanted for their island after 1971, confident that the one thing they did not want was absorption into Iran. At the time Kuwait felt pleased that its concerns on Bahrain and what it advocated as a mechanism for its resolution was, in its view, to contribute to the solution⁴⁴. In 1969 Iran and Britain put their differences aside over Bahrain and agreed to a UN fact-finding mission, which would visit the island and consult with the populace, in an exercise that, on the assumption that independence would be advocated, rather than the worst case scenario for Iran of support for federation with her southern Trucial states, was understood by Iran as a means to get itself off the hook, having so strongly staked its claim to the territory⁴⁵.

⁴³ As observed by the then Kuwaiti ambassador to the US, the Amir's son, Shaikh Salim Sabah Al-Salim Al-Sabah. UK embassy Kuwait (FCO 8/1990)

⁴⁴ However, the then Kuwaiti foreign ministry undersecretary, Abdullah Bishara, played down Kuwait's influence with Iran on the Bahrain issue, suggesting only that the emirate had "some quiet impact" on the finding of a compromise. Personal interview, January 2003, Kuwait.

⁴⁵ The precise method of consultation of the Bahraini populace was to cause considerable dispute between Iran and Britain, with Iran actually wanting a plebiscite, something that was understood by Kuwait and the UK to be anathema to the ruler of Bahrain. The idea of the UN "consultation" had been taken up by the UK and would eventually be finessed to Iran's satisfaction. It was imperative for the Shah to be seen to resolve the problem of his claim to Bahrain in a manner that would be seen at home to be in the Iranian national interest. Alam, *op.cit.* p.31 and p.85-86. The fact finding mission eventually took place in early 1970 and resulted in overwhelming support for full independence, rather than the rule of the Shah or joining the Gulf Arab states' federation.

Federation provides no hinterland

Kuwait believed that the British-proposed Federation of Arab Emirates (FAA) was of benefit as a union of formerly British-protected emirates with whom Kuwait could have influence and which could therefore strengthen her own position in the region (see Chapter 3). This was especially the case as Iran and Iraq were looked to by Kuwait with increasing concern, and relations with Saudi Arabia, though amicable, were periodically problematic. However Kuwait was acutely aware of Iran's attitude to the FAA, which was rightly perceived as a "creature of the British", and that too strong a bloc, especially one including Bahrain, was not welcome in Tehran. Kuwait's attitude toward the FAA was further complicated by the ambiguous views toward Kuwait and each other, among the Trucial States and the potential additional members of the proposed federation, Bahrain and Qatar. There was also hostility in Abu Dhabi, as well as Oman, toward Saudi Arabia over the disputed territory of Buraimi, which continued to poison relations. On the other hand, many of the FAA's putative members looked toward Saudi Arabia, as the leading Arab actor in the Gulf, to provide support; for their part, both Qatar and Bahrain maintained close relations with Riyadh as they considered their future options. If Kuwait was to have any prospect of shepherding the FAA it needed to gain the confidence of Saudi Arabia, but Riyadh did not look with favour on a FAA in which Kuwait would be a leading actor. Since the mid-1960s Kuwait had sought to promote a leading role exclusively for itself over the southern Gulf emirates, without regard for what Saudi Arabia or Iran thought⁴⁶, and seemingly oblivious to the widespread hostility of her target audience. However the fact that the federation was to eventually emerge successfully, albeit in a smaller form and lacking the partnership with Kuwait that the emirate had sought, was partly due to Saudi Arabia's willingness to back the project. In fact in seeking to ensure the formation of what became the FAA, Kuwait was obliged to seek direct involvement by Riyadh⁴⁷.

The federation had looked as if it was going to be destabilised as soon as it was due to be formed as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), when the departure of the British immediately saw Iran seize both the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands that had been under the authority of Ras Al-Khaimah. (Iran had reached an understanding with Sharjah over dividing sovereignty over the

⁴⁶ Abdul Rahman Al-Ateegi commented privately two years later that Kuwait's concern was what the Trucial states, Bahrain and Qatar thought about the proposal; Kuwait did not, he said, consult Saudi Arabia over it. UK embassy telegram to Foreign Office, 1st July, 1973. (FCO 8/1993).

⁴⁷ Abdul-Latif Hassan Al-Rumaihi, "The Dynamics of Kuwaiti Foreign Policy" (Exeter, U.K.; Exeter University, 1983), p.157.

other Gulf island in dispute, Abu Mousa). This obviously increased Kuwait's concerns about Tehran's ambitions in the region. Otherwise, however, the formation of UAA went ahead smoothly on 31st November 1971, for all the Shah's desire to prevent the formation of a bloc of Arab Gulf states, suspicious as he was of British objectives in the Gulf area and desirous of keeping the southern Gulf amirates weaker by being divided⁴⁸. Kuwait was to remain concerned that divisions within the UAA – Dubai for example had traditionally looked to Iran for their political as well as business orientation⁴⁹ – could be exploited by Iran to weaken the federation⁵⁰. Bahrain and Qatar were established as separate sovereign states and admitted to the UN in 1971. The Sultanate of Oman also joined the UN at this time. Ras Al-Khaimah did not enter the United Arab Emirates until a year later, out of opposition to what was widely believed in the Arab world to have been a conspiracy between Iran and the UK, with the ending of Iran's opposition to Bahraini independence apparently being rewarded with the provision of a British "green light" for Iran to take the Tunbs. For once the "conspiracy" appears to have been borne out by reality⁵¹.

Not dispirited by how the politicking over the UAA turned out, Kuwait continued to see the establishment of a federation as a positive development and to articulate that co-operation among the Gulf Arab states would be of mutual benefit. This thinking had been behind its, partly self-serving, efforts to foster co-operation in the 1960s. In the early 1970s the Kuwaitis would play a leading role in fostering Gulf Arab cooperation, providing money and often the headquarters for a variety of economic partnership projects, some of which have stood the test of time. While such schemes were firmly in line with the efforts of senior Al-Sabah to promote closer working with its fellow amirates, the proposal of specifics owed a lot to the enthusiasms of senior bureaucrats across government working within a dedicated unit, the Committee for Co-operation with the Arabian Gulf States⁵². By the mid-1970s the Kuwaiti crown prince, Jabr Al-Ahmed, would return to the rhetorical theme, urging that co-operation among all the states of the Gulf occur across a number of fields, and arguing that, "some form of union or unity be built on a just and solid basis for the sake of the people of the Gulf and the security of the region⁵³." Coinciding

⁴⁸ The Shah had suggested privately that Iran should do what it could to prevent the federation ever being formed, and considered offering bi-lateral defence guarantees to each Trucial state. Allam, *Ibid.*, p.155.

⁴⁹ As of 1971 the Crown Prince of Dubai was reportedly continuing to refer to himself in conversation as one of the Shah's "loyal servants", Allam *op.cit.*, p.155.

⁵⁰ Foreign minister Shaikh Sabah Al-Ahmed commented to this effect in conversation with the British Ambassador, Archie Lamb. Telegram from British embassy Kuwait to FCO, 8th December 1974 (FCO 8/2195).

⁵¹ Off the record interview with former Iranian official. November 2005, London.

⁵² Al-Rumaihi, *op.cit.* p160-163

⁵³ Abdul-Reda Assiri, *op.cit.*, p.76.

with efforts to set up a forum for all eight Gulf littoral states, the suggestion was not that far from Iranian ideas, except that Kuwait appeared to have in mind that Iraq should be as much a part of any initiative as Iran. The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), founded in 1981, would in many ways embody these earlier aspirations; it was a response to the desire for enhanced security, but as a reaction on the part of the Gulf Arab amirates and monarchies to the then threat from Iran and, to a lesser but significant extent, Iraq.

Kuwaiti concerns about the Shah's ambitions over the Arab side of the Gulf region were inevitably deepened by Iran's seizure of the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands, which was portrayed throughout the Arab world, and within Kuwait by the press and especially vociferously by KMAN in parliament, as an attack upon the Arab nation. The Kuwaiti amir chose to target his concerns at the British, finding them an easier scapegoat⁵⁴. Kuwait though did make clear its displeasure with Iran. Diplomatic relations patently could not continue at the high level seen in 1968, and Iran's new ambassador was barred from receiving his credentials in Kuwait for nearly a year following the occupation of the islands⁵⁵. However Kuwait did not abandon its policy of engagement with Tehran, evidently believing that this was the best way to ease the tensions caused by Iran's actions elsewhere in the Gulf, even if the Kuwaiti government was criticised for continuing to maintain relations with Iran by its Arab neighbours as well as by the Kuwaiti national assembly. In late 1972 the Kuwaiti parliament passed a resolution urging a boycott of government contacts with Tehran. The Shah continued to periodically express anger with both Kuwait's press and the parliament, complaining, following the 1971 election, about the presence of what he described as "Habash's boys" (supporters of the Palestinian leftist leader) in the national assembly⁵⁶. The fact that the Shah was misguided in his sense of the political allegiance of KMAN and of its importance in Kuwaiti politics does not detract from the negative impact that the perception of the parliament, and thus of the Al-Sabah's method of rule, caused to bilateral relations. The importance of Iran as the pre-eminent military power in the Gulf, and how this could be used to Kuwait's benefit, was however underscored when Iraq occupied a Kuwaiti border post at Al-Samita (see below).

To emphasise where the mainstream in the Kuwaiti national assembly were and to use them as an advance guard in an effort to build closer relations again with Iran, the government encouraged

⁵⁴ US embassy, Kuwait, January 4th, 1972 (A2).

⁵⁵ John Wilton, Annual Report (1972), UK embassy to FCO, January 1973 (FCO 8/1987)

⁵⁶ US embassy, Tehran, to State Department, January 1971 (POL14)

the formation of a parliamentary delegation, headed by the assembly speaker, to visit Tehran in June 1973. The move was ardently attacked by the “anti-Iranians” in the national assembly, but the Kuwaiti leadership paid them little heed and made its support for the trip explicit⁵⁷. Despite the goodwill this trip generated, and the fundamental concern about Iraq that they both shared, Kuwait and Iran diverged in their approach to the Gulf, much to the disappointment of Britain. UK speculation about a “joint initiative” on the Gulf to be instigated by the Shah, but intended to be launched with the support of Kuwait and other Arab amirates, came to nothing⁵⁸. Iran was attempting to use the US’s emphasis on Tehran and Riyadh as “pillars” of a US security framework in the Gulf in order to reach a better political understanding with her Arab Gulf neighbours. Kuwait for its part was sensitive to domestic and regional speculation about a mooted “triple alliance” in the Gulf between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, not least given Iran’s membership of CENTO.

Kuwaiti concerns about Iran were to increase when the ongoing Dhofari rebellion in Oman led to Iranian troops entering the Sultanate in December 1973⁵⁹. While the presence of some 1,000 Iranian troops in the Dhofar region had been at the request of the Sultan, who maintained good relations with Iran, and had followed the support of Saudi Arabia, the UAA, India and Pakistan, and the involvement of some Jordanian troops, it was a set-back for Saudi Arabian ambitions to oversee an Arab solution. A residual Iranian troop presence was to remain after the bulk had departed in early 1977⁶⁰, finally departing following the Iranian revolution in 1978/9. While Kuwait’s discomfort at Iran’s involvement would to some extent have been assuaged by the financial and military assistance of a number of Arab states in Oman’s security, Kuwait believed that it was further evidence of Iran’s territorial ambitions on the western side of the Gulf, although the emirate did not believe there was a direct Iranian threat to itself.

⁵⁷ KMAN and those MPs of a similar “Nasserite” perspective used ideological language to denounce what they saw as Iranian threats to the Arab nation and were thus commonly referred to as anti-Iranian in western embassy communications from Kuwait. Contrastingly, the defence and interior minister, Shaikh Saad Abdullah, saw the national assembly delegation off at Kuwait airport. UK embassy, Tehran to FCO, 4th July 1973 (FCO 8/1990).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ As expressed by Kuwaiti foreign minister Shaikh Sabah Al-Ahmed to the UK ambassador to Kuwait, Archie Lamb (FCO 8/1990)

⁶⁰ The residual force was to depart following the Iranian revolution of 1978-79. Shaikh Zayyed, President of the UAA, was to pronounce himself relaxed about the Iranian involvement, noting, dryly, that the Arabs had been asked first. UK embassy to Foreign Office, June 1974 (FO8/2193)

Saudi-Kuwaiti relations hurt by Yemen factor

Saudi Arabia shared Kuwait's concerns at Iran's posture in the Gulf at a time when Iran was also able to undermine Iraq, both in terms of its internal security and by putting it under direct pressure through border attacks. At the same time Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were concerned about residual Iraqi ambitions. On the one hand Iraq's relative weakness was not welcomed as it had allowed Iran to seek to fill the regional void left by the British; on the other, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were wary of Iraq's ideological attacks and what appeared to be an Iraqi desire to redraw its border with Kuwait by stealth. However there were also tensions in the Saudi-Kuwait relationship, albeit to a markedly smaller extent. Saudi Arabia had an ongoing perception that Kuwait was too close to radical Arab states and to South Yemen in particular. This made it all the more unlikely that Kuwait would seek Saudi support for its southern Gulf policy. A visit by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia to Kuwait in 1968 - the second that year as Riyadh tried to ensure that developments in a post-British Gulf region would not be to its disadvantage - did not go smoothly. One factor was Kuwait's willingness to fund the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), having recognised it shortly after it was founded following the departure of the British from Aden in November 1967. Such was the extent of Saudi Arabian tensions with the PDRY that its troops were to cross the border into south Yemen for a period in 1969.

The Yemen Arab Republic (YAR; North Yemen), at least, was less of a thorn in Kuwait-Saudi relations these days. After the withdrawal of Egyptian forces following the agreement at the Arab League's conference in Khartoum in September 1967, it became conceivable that Saudi Arabia would before long recognise the YAR, which in 1970 it did. This step was warmly welcomed in Kuwait, not least as it created greater equilibrium in the emirate's Arab relations, given the tension between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia over the former's recognition in 1963 (see chapter 3) of the YAR, whose republican forces Riyadh has sought to weaken in the course of the civil war. Ironically, Kuwait had broken diplomatic relations with North Yemen when Egypt's soon to be departing troops authored the overthrow of the comparatively long-standing government of President Abdallah Sallal in November 1967. By doing so, Kuwait was emphasising its commitment to an end to external Arab intervention in the Yemen Arab Republic and the beginning of some distance in the emirate's policies from those of Egypt. However Kuwait was soon keen to restore its relations and financial support for the YAR. The contradictions inherent

in maintaining relations with the ever radicalising PDRY but not having them with the YAR added to the impetus for Kuwait to resolve its differences with Sana'. Prior to Riyadh's about-turn in its relations with the YAR, Kuwait had re-opened relations at a time when the US too was considering recognising the Sana' government, prompted by the Egyptians' earlier troop departure.

Kuwait's confused southern peninsula policy

The fact that Kuwait was the only Arabian Peninsula country to maintain air links with the self-styled Marxist revolutionary regime of the PDRY, and periodically provided aid and soft loans, as well as to the YAR, despite increasing concern within Kuwait at the cost of doing so⁶¹, was a source of grievance in Saudi Arabia. After all, Aden was the base and principal funder of the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG), which was later to merge with another organisation, strengthening its ability to resist British-assisted Omani attacks⁶². Implicitly the "occupied Arab Gulf" included Kuwait⁶³, but the emirate was able to avoid direct hostility from the south Yemenis. This remained the case even when Kuwait gave political support to Sultan Qaboos, the newly-installed Omani leader, who took power at the behest of the British in 1970. Furthermore, Kuwait did not criticise his initiation of military action, taken in common with British troops, against PFLOAG-supported Dhofari rebels in 1971, while the Amir privately expressed sympathy with the British over the campaign. This was a marked foreign policy shift by Kuwait. After all, Kuwait had given political support to the Oman-based Imamate against the forces of Sultan Qabous's father from the late-1950s. Furthermore, Kuwait had continued to treat a representative of the Oman Imamate as tantamount to a member of the diplomatic corp, just as the emirate had previously allowed opponents of southern Gulf regimes to organise within Kuwait or travel via the emirate (see Chapter 3). Some observers believe that this practice was still occurring in the case of PFLOAG fighters en route to Oman⁶⁴, a possibility

⁶¹ As expressed by Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali. US embassy, Kuwait to State department, April 28th, 1969 (A081)

⁶² It was thus renamed the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf, and ideologically shifted to a national-democratic as opposed to Marxian orientation.

⁶³ Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy – The Case of South Yemen* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.166. Fred Halliday related to the author that he asked PFLOAG representatives in 1970 (prior to their 1971 renaming as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf), whether the word "occupied" in their title included Kuwait. Their answers were ambiguous.

⁶⁴ Kelly, *op.cit.* p.137. Kelly adds that in the late 1960s Kuwait remained a "clearing house for much of the clandestine movement of revolutionaries and weapons in the Gulf area."

that may have reflected what, in the Arabian Peninsula at this time, was Kuwait's exclusive direct air links with Aden.

With Egypt's withdrawal from Yemen after the 1967 war, and thus the decline of its influence within the Peninsula, Cairo's defining of "correct" foreign policy stances in the Arabian Peninsula was less important to Kuwait. An adjustment by Egypt against the South Yemen-backed PFLOAG did not contradict Kuwait's relations with Egypt in that Cairo's relations with South Yemen's revolutionaries had been problematic, even before the formation of the PDRY in November 1967. From then on, Aden maintained its links with the leftists within MAN who opposed Cairo, including those within the PLO⁶⁵ (see also Appendix 6). At the same time, in continuing to fund the PDRY, Kuwait was supporting allies of leftist Arab nationalists agitating in the Gulf, and an Aden government that questioned the legitimacy of the FAA and then the legitimacy of the independent states of the UAA, Qatar and Bahrain when they applied to join the Arab League in 1971⁶⁶. Kuwait would attempt to offset the multiple contradictions of its foreign policy toward Oman and South Yemen by once more seeking to mediate in Yemeni affairs, especially after Omani troops clashed with PFLOAG fighters inside the South Yemen border in 1972. In 1973 Kuwait sought to broker a deal between the Omani authorities and the PFLOAG⁶⁷. In an indication of Kuwait's good relations with the PDRY, and in recognition of the emirate's previous efforts at mediation within Yemen, Kuwait was appointed by the Arab League to a five country mediating committee that also included Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt and Syria. The eventual end of the Dhofari guerrilla campaign in late 1975, following the earlier constraining by the PFLOAG of its focus to Oman-only operations, put an end to these contradictions in Kuwaiti foreign policy. (Only a year earlier, Oman had expelled the Kuwaiti attaché because of the emirate's relations with South Yemen⁶⁸). With the revolutionary struggle of the former PFLOAG effectively curtailed, and its Arab nationalist energies diverted into a separate and largely political campaign in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia recognised the PDRY in 1976.

⁶⁵ This did not preclude co-operation between Egypt and the PDRY, however, when interests converged against Israel. Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy* op.cit., p.175.

⁶⁶ For South Yemen's attitude toward the emergent independent Gulf Arab states, see Halliday, *Ibid.* p.167.

⁶⁷ Fred Halliday, *Arabia without Sultans* (London; Penguin, 1974) p.354.

⁶⁸ Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy* op.cit., p.166.

Domestic politics find regional disfavour

There were several other reasons for difficulty between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Kuwait's national assembly, and the amirate's continued openness to radical political opponents of neighbouring regimes, including those of the Al-Saud, found great disfavour in Riyadh. In 1974 Kuwaiti felicity to political exiles was extended to Shaikh Hassan Safar, the senior Saudi Shia cleric whose political activism has seen him expelled from the kingdom, along with several colleagues; a year later however they had moved on.⁶⁹ Kuwait's tribal policy succeeded in angering Saudi Arabia too, as it could interfere with the kingdom's internal patronage networks (see Chapter 5). Saudi Arabia was also frustrated that Kuwait continued to allow the Palestinian *fedayeen* to use Kuwait as an organisational base with little constraint. Funding for armed action conducted in Israel or from neighbouring countries was considered acceptable. However, their free (political) rein in Kuwait troubled Saudi Arabia, not least as this was even extended to leftists groups who were anathema to both Kuwait and Riyadh, the main funders of Fatah from 1968 onwards⁷⁰.

A sort of regional equilibrium

However Saudi Arabia and Kuwait shared mutual concerns about Iran and Iraq – the apparent threat from the latter having brought the kingdom and the amirate together in 1961. With the end to hostility between Cairo and Riyadh following the 1967 war, Kuwait's key Arab relationships were less contradictory, and the now greater importance of her relations with Saudi Arabia was emphasised. In a reflection of Egypt's prioritisation of its territorial requirements closer to home, it re-established diplomatic relations with Iran in 1970, following the removal of the impediment created by the death of Nasser that year. His vitriol against the Shah had further poisoned

⁶⁹ During this period Kuwait was also allowing a small number of exiled members of the Iraqi Shia Islamist party, Al-Da'wa, to reside in the amirate, where they, and the rest of the Iraqi community, were closely monitored by the extensive Iraqi intelligence presence. Arguably there were long-term benefits in this risky strategy as Al-Da'wa, and later SCIRI, who were hosted rather more openly from 1991, became the leading parties in the coalition that dominated the Iraqi government formed in 2004.

⁷⁰ There was a tightening of the internal environment for Palestinian institutions in Kuwait following the Japanese embassy incident in 1974; however there was a sense of too little too late. (See also chapter 5). British ambassador John Wilton, in reference to two earlier hijacking incidents whose culprits ended up on Kuwait soil, argued that, while previously Kuwait had "purchased immunity from Palestinian outrages... [now] the real price Kuwait pays for not having the Palestinians be beastly to her is not being able to beastly to them, even at the risk of annoying the Saudis and the Moroccans not to mention the Americans." A.J. Wilton, Annual Dispatch 1973, to FCO, 6th January 1974 (FCO8/2188).

relations following the ending of diplomatic relations in 1964. Kuwait's regional relations were, overall, moving into greater equilibrium.

When, in March 1973, tensions increased between Iraq and Kuwait following Iraq's seizure of a border post inside Kuwaiti territory, Saudi Arabia was the only Arab state that was militarily supportive. Kuwait turned to Riyadh straight away⁷¹, knowing that Saudi Arabia was the only Arab country whose geographical location and political weight would enable it to respond. Saudi Arabia sent several thousand troops to the Saudi-Kuwaiti border and made clear that it was prepared to intervene⁷². On the other hand, Kuwait was to argue in 1974 that the recent settlement of the Buraimi territorial dispute between the Kingdom and Oman and the UAA had been at the latter's expense, and that too much had been conceded to Riyadh⁷³. The sensitivity about Saudi weight and influence was, and remains, not uncommon among the smaller Gulf Arab amirates; Kuwait was no exception.

However, for all their mutual concerns and sensitivities, Kuwait viewed Saudi Arabia as its most important relationship in the Gulf, believing that its friendship served to balance the friendly relations it had with the other key Arab power at this time, Egypt. Kuwait though did not look on its friendship with Saudi Arabia as being maintained at the expense of Egypt⁷⁴, despite the different interests that, up to June 1967 at least, had seen Saudi Arabia and Egypt sponsor rival blocs within the Arab world. For all the relative decline in Egypt's political weight in the Arab world, Kuwait continued to foster its relationship with Cairo with high levels of financial support. At the same time, Kuwait's foreign policy stances for the most part fitted with the, now more mildly, progressive line from Egypt. However this was not born of any great affection among the Al-Sabah⁷⁵ for an Egyptian regime that had on occasions targeted the ruling family for rhetorical

⁷¹ Abdullah Bishara commented that Kuwait "engaged the Saudis on the border question....(and that the resultant) Saudi (military) dispatch was well received (in Kuwait)." Bishara, *op.cit.*

⁷² Richard Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq: Historical Claims and Territorial Disputes* (London; Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1993) p.116.

⁷³ In private Kuwait would harshly criticise Saudi Arabia. For example a senior Al-Sabah figure cited a recent oil conference as an example of how regional events were, in Kuwait's view, being manipulated to serve Riyadh's interests. Lamb, *op.cit.*

⁷⁴ In commenting on events throughout the period from independence through to the 1967 war, Abdul Rahman Al-Ateegi told the author, "(Our) key ally was Saudi Arabia..." This, Al-Ateegi said, provided a balance with our relations with Egypt, but was not, he stressed, a relationship Kuwait cultivated against Egypt.

⁷⁵ According to the leading KMAN figure, Ahmed Khateeb, when Gamal Abdul Nasser collapsed in Kuwait in 1970, shortly before his eventual death that year, he was taken to the Amir's palace. Sabah Salim, says Khateeb, told the press, "I assure you....he will be alright," but deep in his heart he wanted him to die." Ahmed Khateeb is obviously not a dispassionate observer. However this also makes him very

attack, and which had been seen by the Kuwaiti leadership as regionally destabilising and, to a lesser extent, a potentially disruptive force within Kuwait, given the traditional closeness to Egypt of the Kuwaiti Arab Nationalist Movement (KMAN – see Chapters 2 and 5). The formal Kuwaiti eulogies for President Gamal Abdul Nasser upon his death in 1970 were ritualised affirmations of the Egyptian leader's undoubted status in the Arab world and of Kuwait's rhetorical need to emphasise that its foreign policy continued to be conceived in Arab national terms⁷⁶. Despite the weakening of the radical, populist variant of Arab nationalism in the region post-1967, Egypt remained the pre-eminent player in Arab politics, and Kuwait would continue to be mindful of this⁷⁷, as it was of the increased importance within the Gulf region specifically of Saudi Arabia and Iran, and of course the perceived ongoing direct threat to Kuwait from Iraq.

Funding friendships or resentments?

Egypt's importance to Kuwait was reflected in the fact that it would continue to be one of the largest recipients of soft loans from the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development (KFED)⁷⁸. Cairo had always been one of the top beneficiaries of a fund that has also benefited Arab countries who rather less identifiably participated in the Arab national struggle, whether through force of arms or ideologically⁷⁹. In addition Kuwait was a prime mover in financing a number of

well qualified to judge the strength of the attachment of senior Al-Sabah to Nasser, the pre-eminent Arab nationalist figure of the 1950s and 60s, and thus to the progressive, Arab nationalist causes the Egyptian leader espoused.

⁷⁶ The Amir said of Nasser that he was, "One of this nation's greatest men and leaders." (US embassy Kuwait to State Department, Amiri speech October 26th, 1970. (A132))

⁷⁷ Amid the hyperbole, the reality of Kuwait's ongoing need to ensure that it was not too out of step with Egyptian priorities was emphasised. The Amir said, "We on this occasion would like to emphasise that Kuwait, which stood by the UAR (Egypt) in her struggle and her constructive efforts to unite the Arab ranks, will live up to her promises and will always stand by the side of her elder sister, backing her and cooperating with her in all spheres."

⁷⁸ For the period 1970-71, Egypt was the second largest recipient of monies supposedly paid as soft loans from the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development. It received 16.4% of total support given to Arab countries. Iraq, however, only received 3.7% and PDRY did not receive a single payment. Surprisingly perhaps, the relatively conservative republic, Tunisia, received the largest financial support from the fund during this period, at 17.9% of the total. Halliday, "Arabia Without Sultans", *Ibid.* p.440. This continued a pattern of aiding its strongest (needy) supporters that had begun in 1961, and the KFED's attempt to provide aid to projects of a practical nature. The Kuwait Fund was to maintain this approach, with Tunisia, Sudan and Jordan receiving generous assistance throughout the 1970s and 1980s, while Syria and Egypt, two key supporters in 1990-91, were, respectively, its top recipients as of end-2004.

⁷⁹ According to Dr Ahmed Khateeb, the Kuwaiti government expressed their commitment to Arab national causes, but gave money from the Kuwait Fund in accordance with US requests. That may be right, but is somewhat dwarfed by the priorities of its often informal and one-off aid payments, whose recipients were often not those that Washington would approve of.

collective Arab funds whose principle recipients were the poorer, often radical, states of the region. These included the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development. This had been founded in Kuwait in 1971 under some pressure from the Arab League, which had urged Kuwait to push approval for a large portion of the new organisation's funding through the national assembly⁸⁰. However much larger amounts of money, often disbursed in undisclosed amounts as grants (unlike the theoretically repayable loans from the KFED), while harder to calculate, emphasise the emirate's prioritisation of aid to comparatively heavyweight "progressive" Arab states and causes. Kuwait made direct payments to Iraq to try to garner support; made similarly discrete payments to Fatah (the leading PLO faction); contributed "steadfastness" payments to Egypt and the other "frontline" states, as well as monies paid to Egypt and Syria on a strictly informal basis; and funded North and South Yemen. Taken together this presents a picture of Kuwaiti largesse that prioritised aid for countries or organisations perceived by Kuwait as either a direct threat militarily, or as capable of generating ideological hostility. The success of this "dinar diplomacy" policy is however another matter. In its early incarnation under Amir Abdullah Salim, the Kuwait Fund was seen in the Arab world as distributing largesse born of a genuine identification with Arab causes and with Arab countries in need. However, as Kuwait's disbursement of monies increased, especially as its oil wealth grew exponentially following the oil crisis of 1973-4, then her aid began to be looked on in the region with a more jaundiced eye. The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, which was re-branded as the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development in order to aid non-Arab countries as well, was, after 1973, to provide financial support to a number of sub-Saharan African countries, as well as increased support for non oil-rich Arab countries, who had suffered from the sharp rise in oil prices that had increased the wealth of Kuwait.

The politics of resentment was to grow within the Arab world at how the fruits of the 1973 war were managed, and precisely who gained. This in turn was to fuel part of the tension behind the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war and the rise of Islamism⁸¹. The rise of grassroots movements, in some cases reflecting historically resonant trends in their societies, provided an outlet for local resentments as economic disparities grew. Kuwait tried to accommodate this developing regional trend, which was to later gain ground in the emirate too, by ritually peppering the presentation of both foreign and domestic policy with reference to Islamic as well as Arab nationalist verities,

⁸⁰US Ambassador John Patrick-Walsh to US State Department, February 22nd 1971 (A-22)

⁸¹ See Fouad Ajami, The Arab Predicament, in relation to the causes and consequences of the Lebanese civil war specifically. See also both Ajami op.cit. and Tibi op.cit. in relation to popular frustrations with the outcome of the 1973 war and with Arab nationalist regimes and ideology.

and emphasising its economic beneficence. However, in this more divisive regional environment, Kuwait's use of its oil wealth, and the attitudes that were felt to accompany it, meant that its financial largesse, although still a tool of a foreign policy that sought to project an attachment to Arab and wider solidarities, became less effective in diplomatic terms. In the case of Iraq though, Kuwait's oil wealth would continue to be a necessary, if not always durable, price of reducing hostility, or worse, from Baghdad.

Al-Samita attack emphasises Iraqi threat

At bottom Iraq would remain the primary focus of Kuwaiti security concerns. Former Kuwaiti officials, curiously perhaps, differentiate between the incursion of 1969, and the attack on the border post at Al-Samita, some 2 km south of the Iraqi port of Um Qasr, and the capture of a further police position close by, on March 19th/20th 1973⁸². Perhaps this was due to alleged Kuwaiti government complicity in the earlier incursion. However it may also have reflected the genuine difficulty in defining precisely where the border lay, given Iraq's refusal, to Kuwait's enormous frustration, to agree to its physical demarcation despite the signing of a mutual recognition agreement in 1963. Indeed, such was the difficulty in defining how much of an incursion had actually occurred in 1973, that a senior official in the British Foreign Office was to tell HM Government after the Al-Samita attack that the incident followed an incursion some six months earlier when Iraq entered to a depth of one km within an area "*claimed by Kuwait south of Um Qasr (my emphasis)*"⁸³. The Iraqi attack on the police post at Al-Samita had followed an earlier Iraqi incursion into this "claimed area". The incident in late 1972 occurred when the Iraqis had begun building a road south of an artillery position seemingly put in place by Iraq as part of an ongoing desire to extend the area of its control around the strategically vital port of Um Qasr⁸⁴. By the time of the Al-Samita incident, the police post actually lay "between Iraqi lines"⁸⁵.

⁸² Abdul-Rahman Al-Ateegi observed that Iraq adhered to the "Arab League line" when it moved south in 1969, and that they apparently stayed their side of it. In contrast he commented that the events of 1973 were "different" to incidents that had occurred previously, but stressed that the attack on Al-Samita was "not an invasion...(but) a clash in between two (police) stations...You can talk about the Iraqis' aim (in launching the action)...but a very small number of forces clashed," he said.

⁸³ RM. Hunt, Head of Middle East Department, Foreign Office, in a written briefing to Private secretary, Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home, 22nd March 1973, FCO 8/2193

⁸⁴ UK Cabinet Office, 22nd March, 1973, FCO8/2193

⁸⁵ Hunt, *op.cit.*

However Kuwait was in no doubt on this occasion that a clear infringement of its sovereignty had occurred. The emirate was strengthened in its angry determination to oblige Iraq to withdraw by the fact that, for the first time since the 1930s, a border dispute had led to the loss of Kuwaiti lives: two border policemen who had tried to reinforce the Al-Samita post when Iraqi troops initially occupied it and a post nearby. The Kuwaitis could perhaps judge the 1969 incursion to be bearable on the basis of the line that Arab League troops policed in 1961. However, as of March 20th 1973, it was clear that a small contingent of Iraqi troops had raised the Iraqi flag an additional 2km south of where the 1969 incursion had taken place; itself lying south of what was understood by Kuwait, the UK, and seemingly the international community, to be the border⁸⁶. The incursion had taken place within a couple of weeks of Iraq making territorial proposals to a visiting Kuwaiti government delegation headed by foreign minister Sabah Al-Ahmed. These had appeared to offer demarcation as per the Kuwaiti interpretation of where the border lay, but only if the Gulf islands of Warba and Bubiyan were excluded, and either transferred or leased to Iraq⁸⁷. An oil pipeline project connecting Iraq to Bubiyan would also, under these latest Iraqi proposals, be able to enlist the support of a “third party”⁸⁸, which, given the presence of Soviet engineers in developing Um Qasr following their Treaty of Friendship signed a year earlier, compounded the unacceptability to Kuwait of the Iraqi proposals.

British officials in Kuwait assessed that the short-term desire to extend control around Um Qasr, emphasised by the taking of the Al-Samita border post, was intended to put pressure on Kuwait to concede the strategically vital island of Warba⁸⁹, which lay directly east of the Iraqi port, and, together with the larger island of Bubiyan lying to its immediate south, meant that Iraq’s ability to access the northern Gulf headwaters was subject to the emirate’s co-operation⁹⁰. Given Kuwait’s defence alliance with the UK, and relative closeness with the US, this was understandably looked on with some concern in Baghdad⁹¹. The Iraqis argued that the Al-Samita incident had occurred when the Iraqi garrison that had entered in 1969 had moved to the southern-most point of a 2km operation zone previously agreed with Kuwait, and whose purpose was to reinforce the port of

⁸⁶ A UK MoD map drawn up in 1965 for example defines the international border as running about 2km south of Safwan, and then heading south-eastwards to a point barely south of the Iraqi port of Um Qasr on the Khawr Abdullah (DEFE 11/616).

⁸⁷ Khadouri, *Ibid.* p.158.

⁸⁸ Kelly, *Ibid.*, p.253.

⁸⁹ British Ambassador to Kuwait, John Wilton to the FCO, 25th March 1973 (FCO 8/1991)

⁹⁰ Hunt 22nd March 1973, *Ibid.* The UK official described Bubiyan as “...strategically placed to control the approaches to Um Qasr.”

⁹¹ See Khadouri, *Ibid.* for a good sense of Iraqi foreign policy concerns in relation to its territorial dispensation with Kuwait.

Um Qasr⁹². While claims of a prior agreement over reinforcing Um Qasr had been disputed by Kuwait, Iraq's emphasis on "securing" its southernmost port city, and its seemingly related ambitions over nearby Warba, suggests that its the greater objective may have been less about territorial domination of Kuwait by stealth, than to extend its access and defence capability, at Kuwait's expense, at the northern headwaters of the Gulf. In part this would have been to offset pressure from Iran with whom it had engaged in violent border clashes between 1972-3. For Kuwait, however, the precise motivation behind the territorial encroachments were less important than the fact that they occurred – a perspective that was later vindicated when encroachments continued after Iraq and Iran had seemingly resolved their border dispute⁹³. Kuwait had been unwilling to discuss leasing Warba and Bubiyan without Iraqi willingness to demarcate what it considered Baghdad had recognised as the international boundary in 1963. Compromise on this was not, in the words of a former senior Kuwaiti foreign ministry official, "the Arab way"⁹⁴. With Iraq's increasing closeness to the Soviet Union, Iraq's stepping up of activity inside Kuwaiti territory from 1972, Baghdad's assertion that sovereignty over the islands had not been determined and should in fact be ceded or at least compromised, and the direct linking of this to the assertion that Iraq is a "Gulf state"⁹⁵ were now being seen with increasing concern in Kuwait.

After the Al-Samita incident a demand was issued by Kuwait for the immediate Iraqi withdrawal to the "Arab League line", and that there should be a prompt demarcation of the border in accord with the 1963 agreement. The emirate's troops were initially mobilised in armoured vehicles to within six miles of that boundary⁹⁶. There were some reports that Kuwaiti troops had moved much closer to the border, albeit probably short of where the Iraqis had been positioned⁹⁷. Strong statements were made by both Kuwaiti defence and interior officials about the willingness of the emirate's troops to fight the Iraqis, and even to attack the nearest Iraqi town should they advance

⁹² Khoury, *op.cit.* p.156.

⁹³ According to Abdullah Bishara, then a senior foreign ministry official, "(Iraq) used the pretext of pan-Arabism to grab Kuwaiti territory... (Iraq) had had a row with the Shah... and (then) expanded south in Kuwait... (this was) creeping annexation." Personal interview, 20th January 2003, Kuwait.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ According to Issa Hamed, director of political affairs at the Kuwaiti foreign ministry official, in 1972 Iraq condemned Kuwait for the presence of a survey party on Bubiyan, arguing that its status had not been agreed. It was also of considerable concern to Kuwait that Iraq was now describing itself as a Gulf state, with explicit implications for its territorial dispensation with Kuwait (As reported by P. De Courcey-Ireland, UK embassy Kuwait, Telegram to FCO, 21st February 1973 (FO8/1991)).

⁹⁶ R. Hunt, Head, Middle East Department, FCO, written briefing for Private Secretary to Alec Douglas Home, Foreign Secretary, 21st March, 1973 (FO8/1991)

⁹⁷ John Wilton to Alec Douglas-Home, 20th March 1973 (FO8/1991)

further south⁹⁸. However Kuwait was keen that Arab mediation be used to encourage the Iraqis to withdraw, or at least to move north from Al-Samita. In addition to an Arab League mediator, senior representatives were sent from Egypt and Syria, while, incongruously perhaps, confidence, at least publicly, was invested by the Kuwaiti leadership in the prospect of mediation by Yasser Arafat while King Hussein also offered his services. While hopeful that a solution could be found that would be underwritten by the leading Arab states and therefore presented an “Arab solution” in a manner more convincing than the outcome of the 1961 crisis, Kuwait judged that nothing short of the demarcation of the border would constitute a real solution and the means to prevent the threat of border incursions occurring again in the future as they had repeatedly over the previous few years⁹⁹.

Kuwait was not remotely hopeful however that this would be delivered by what in many respects was half-hearted Arab mediation. Only Saudi Arabia had distinguished herself among the Arab countries in being prepared to take military measures, along with the, otherwise widely suspected, Iran in an offer of military intervention that was privately appreciated by Kuwait. Statements on the crisis issued from virtually all Arab capitals, including Riyadh and Cairo, evinced a distinct air of “a plague on both your houses” for perpetuating this “distraction” as the prospect of another Arab-Israeli war loomed¹⁰⁰. Iraq obviously had no problem with this turn of events. Despite making clear that it would only negotiate bilaterally, and not on the basis of the 1932 or 1963 agreements, Baghdad was facing no explicit demand from the Arab League or other Arab parties to withdraw to the “Arab League” line at least. However Kuwait’s relatively early establishment of diplomatic relations with North Yemen, and the latter’s resentment at Iraqi interference in North Yemen, seemed to have accrued at least some dividends when Egypt’s allies in Sana’ sent the Kuwaiti amir a telegram condemning the Iraqi actions¹⁰¹.

⁹⁸ According to Mohammed Riad, a mediator appointed by the Arab League Secretary General, Kuwait’s defence and interior minister Saad Abdullah had told him that if the Iraqis advanced toward Abdali they would fight them; he was apparently less verbose about Warba, despite its strategic importance, where apparently only five Kuwaiti policemen were present. *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Kuwait told Arab mediators that, “The crisis would be considered unresolved” unless the withdrawal to the Arab League line and demarcation of the border were dealt with. UK embassy to FCO, 26th March 1973 (FCO 8/1991).

¹⁰⁰ Radio reports were transcribed by the BBC Summary of World Broadcasts and are contained in Foreign Office correspondence with the UK embassy, Kuwait, March 1973 (FCO 8/1991).

¹⁰¹ The Yemen Arab Republic’s prime minister Abdullah al-Hajri sent a telegram to the Kuwait amir expressing his “regret” for what happened at Al-Samita and “condemning the Iraqi occupation,” according to a report broadcast on Kuwait radio. *Ibid.*

Domestic opinion within Kuwait was clearly, even militantly, behind the government in its demand that Iraq withdraw and agree to the demarcation of the border in accordance with Kuwait's understanding of where it lay. Kuwaiti youth and students, the latter were otherwise a hotbed of radical Arab nationalist stances (see Chapter 5), dominated a demonstration following the highly emotional funeral of the two dead Kuwaiti officers. The demonstrators demanded that the government arm them and allow them to go to the border. Among many of the officers in the Kuwaiti military there was a determination that the armed forces should show their resolve, a position that was to grow as other territorial incursions occurred over the next 18 months. This mood among the officers had encouraged the standing to of forces close to the Iraqi border when the Al-Samita incursion first occurred. That, and indications that military advisors from Britain's Royal Air Force might well enter the conflict if they came under attack (see Chapter 7), in addition to troops from Iran and Saudi Arabia, helped to ensure that Kuwait maintained its defiant stance toward Iraq. For its part the Kuwaiti national assembly produced a statement within hours of the incident that urged Iraq to withdraw to the "international boundaries"¹⁰². A couple of weeks earlier the UK embassy had reported that because KMAN and other Arab nationalist sympathisers in parliament had, following the broad-based parliamentary delegation that a month earlier visited Baghdad, expressed support for Iraq's position on the border dispute, the government had encouraged the assembly to go into secret session¹⁰³. Yet there was little evidence of any equivocation in the KMAN MPs' support for the statement the assembly produced after the subsequent incident at Al-Samita, which was wholly in accord with the government position.

Kuwait was acutely conscious of the difficulty of enjoying Tehran's support in the context of trying to build Arab solidarity for Kuwait's defence. Iraq's vice-president Saddam Hussein would soon define the Gulf as "a vital part of Arab territory, which is the object of external designs related to a grand imperial project in the region."¹⁰⁴ With Iran presented as threatening to Arab interests, not for the last time Saddam Hussein would pose as the Arabs' defender in the Gulf region. The ideology of Arab nationalism was deployed by Iraq as it informed Kuwait that it

¹⁰² The statement condemned incursions and attacks on the Al-Samita police post on Kuwaiti territory, and stated that the boundary is a matter of international recognition and was agreed in 1963 between the two countries (UK embassy, 20th March (FCO 8/1991)).

¹⁰³ John Wilton wrote of the KMAN MPs expressing the "straight Iraq line" in the assembly and the press and that this led to the secret session thereby preventing the counter arguments of the "silent majority" from being heard. Letter to Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home, 7th March 1973 (FCO8/1991).

¹⁰⁴ FCO assessment of Iraq and its regional ambitions. Supplied to UK embassy Kuwait, June 1974 (FCO8/2193)

should adjust the insistence on negotiating on the basis of previous agreements, and accommodate itself to wider Arab interests of which Baghdad was seemingly the exclusive defender. At the same time, Iraq used the increasing tension with Israel to try to present the border issue as little more than a “spat”, peripheral to ordinary Kuwaiti and wider Arab interests.

In the end Kuwait’s support from the two pivotal Gulf players, and residual, but undeclared, UK backing, helped ensure that events did not escalate further. However, the partial success for Kuwaiti policy of Iraq withdrawing its troops from Al-Samita the following month could have been encouraged by a financial payment by Kuwait; certainly this is what one senior Kuwaiti official believed Iraq had been seeking in the first place¹⁰⁵. The Kuwaiti press had been speculating for some time that a proper demarcation deal would have to be paid for, just like the 1963 recognition. The withdrawal though was a long way short of a comprehensive deal. Even after pulling out of Al-Samita, Iraq remained in occupation of some Kuwaiti territory and, it was reported, at the time of the Al-Samita incursion had put some small infantry contingents on the Kuwaiti islands of Warba and Bubiyan¹⁰⁶, a key strategic interest of Baghdad. Kuwait did not have any reason to expect that the support of Iran or Saudi Arabia would secure an Iraqi withdrawal other than from the most publicised presence of Iraqi troops at Al-Samita.

Without the mobilising impact of Kuwaiti deaths, the government may well have lacked the stomach to continue to press the issue. The unwillingness of other Arab countries to unequivocally condemn Iraq for provoking the border dispute, or at least for seeking to strengthen its position by force of arms, partly reflected the greater Arab preoccupation with rising tensions with Israel in the lead up to what became the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. For once the official Arab rhetoric, as transmitted by state-owned broadcasting services, reflected a genuine desire to project a politically unified front vis-à-vis Israel, given the common interest of Arab regimes in deflecting popular criticism, and even upheaval, after the 1967 war¹⁰⁷. With Egypt in the front-

¹⁰⁵ According to Kelly, *Ibid.*, p284, “several million Kuwaiti dinars” were paid once Iraqi withdrew. Some 11.6 million Kuwaiti dinars were lent that year to Iraq by the Kuwaiti ministry of finance, the first official loans since recognition was secured in 1963. Abdul-Latif Hassan Al-Rumaihi, “The Dynamics of Kuwaiti Foreign Policy”(Exeter, U.K.; Exeter University, 1983), p. 217. Suleiman Majid Al-Shahin, under-secretary, ministry of foreign affairs, 1980-99, commented, Iraq was “looking for money not occupation.” Personal interview, 19th January 2003, Kuwait.

¹⁰⁶ According to unsubstantiated reports referred to by Kelly, *Ibid.*, p283, and based on one other source, Schofield, *Ibid.*, p.117. Khadouri, *Ibid.*, for example, notes that Iraq withdrew from Al-Samita but makes no mention of any other areas Iraq held within Kuwait.

¹⁰⁷ Thus their ideological stances on the border crisis between Iraq and Kuwait were highly instrumental, and in many instances, not least Egypt and Syria, were designed to offset their relative powerlessness to constrain Baghdad in the manner they had previously.

line of the conflict with Israel, and having withdrawn from its foothold in the Arabian Peninsula, Cairo was plainly not in position to play the pivotal role in the generation of Arab support for Kuwait it did in 1961. For their part, however, the lead actors within the Gulf region had taken precautionary steps against an Iraq that, although militarily contained, remained capable of further military action within Kuwait and was still therefore a potential threat to their own geo-strategic interests.

Kuwait's Arabist oil construct

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had been resisting increased calls in the region for the deployment of the "oil weapon". However, their language had begun to change in 1973, in tandem with discussions between Egypt and Syria, and eventually Jordan, over a war that would be fought with the objective of restoring Egyptian and Syrian territory occupied by Israel in 1967. As such, the 1973 war and the consequent oil boycott are presented by Stephen Walt as being pursued by an alliance of principally Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia who targeted Israel and its ally the US in order to break the "diplomatic logjam" and ensure the return of occupied territory¹⁰⁸. This neo-realist reading of events has undoubted relevance for the military interlocutors who, unlike in 1967, were plainly not bounced by a mutual ideological competition of the kind identified by Michael Barnett¹⁰⁹, but were identifying strategic goals. However, the conversion of Kuwait to support an oil embargo that, unlike the one introduced after the 1967 war, would make a major economic impact, reflected different imperatives of which the chief driver, ideological positioning, lends itself to a constructivist analysis. Kuwait could not afford to be seen to be dragging its feet on an emergent Arab consensus whose only dissenting voice over the economic component was Iraq. A long standing Gulf Arab desire to secure better terms from the western oil companies and to maximise oil reserves helped to remove any economic disquiet the raising of prices and the cutting of output levels would cause. Once the decision to specifically target the US for an oil embargo had been initiated by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait felt compelled to support it.

¹⁰⁸ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (New York; Cornell University Press, 1989) p.123-124.

¹⁰⁹ Michael N. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York; Columbia University Press, 1998).

What Barnett characterises as the largely “symbolic politics” behind Arab states’ relations explains a Kuwaiti decision in line with a long standing desire to portray its foreign policy in Arabist terms. Barnett argues that the “symbols and shadows” of 1967 had mostly disappeared by the time of the 1973 war and that the differing interests of the Arab interlocutors made them less susceptible to “symbolic sanctions” from each other, thereby facilitating some diplomatic progress after the war¹¹⁰. However, for Kuwait, symbolism was very much in evidence in 1973/4. Its avowed desire to see the realisation of the embargo’s official objectives was less important than ensuring that it was seen to provide what Walt refers to as the “symbolic support” of other Arab states¹¹¹. As the most significant Gulf Arab oil producer after Saudi Arabia, Kuwait’s contribution to the economic impact of the embargo was more than symbolic. Kuwait however took no part in the attempt to co-ordinate common approaches among the leading members of the Arab alliance. Rather, Kuwait’s adherence to measures that targeted the US, and affected the UK as well as Holland, and therefore went beyond the economic self-interest of raising oil prices and conserving output, was a reflection of how a revived Arab nationalist imperative regionally had to be embraced by the emirate. This was less an attempt to offset internal security challenges of the kind Barnett identifies as, for example, prompting Jordan’s embrace of an undesired conflict in 1967, than part of an ongoing foreign policy construct that Kuwait used to offset both regional and internal criticism in light of its traditional defence alignment with the UK, and now increasingly the US. This was not a construct that threatened to delegitimise the existence of states like Kuwait, in contrast to Barnett’s assumptions about the threat, up until 1967 at least, posed by Arab nationalism to Arab state sovereignty. Rather, Arabism was a language that Kuwait drew on as a safety net to ensure it maintained the sympathy of Arab countries, the most important of which, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, had no strategic interest in seeing Kuwait absorbed by its principal claimant, Iraq.

Before the 1973 war, Kuwait, like Saudi Arabia, had wanted to provide financial support for Egypt, not so much to encourage war, as to maintain Egypt’s internal stability and encourage its realignment away from the Soviet Union and toward the US. In this sense Kuwait’s support for Egypt was part of an attempt by oil-rich Gulf Arab states to leverage economic muscle to reshape international alliances in the Middle East, thus fitting with Walt’s assessment of how conservative Arab states aligned with Egypt to use military and economic power to promote diplomatic progress under a US umbrella. However Kuwait had earlier feared that an oil boycott of the US

¹¹⁰ *Ibid* p.182.

¹¹¹ Walt, *op.cit.* p.288.

would upset this objective, believing that using economic muscle would undermine US support for engagement with Egypt. Therefore the Kuwaiti switch, as war clouds gathered, in favour of the oil boycott shows how Kuwaiti foreign policy on this question evidenced the prioritisation of the symbols of Arabism, of using an Arab national construct as a tool to counteract perceived security vulnerability. Wider regional alignment considerations proved not to be Kuwait's priority; not did it conceive itself as able to do more than support such possibilities.

Encouraging new regional alliances

Kuwait was obviously playing second fiddle to Saudi Arabia's lead role in preparation for the war in October 1973. Whereas Riyadh was privy to the war planning, Kuwait's role was strictly financial. To Barnett the "conservative oil-rich Arab states" were building political influence. Beginning with their leading financial role in the aftermath of the 1967 war in contributing to the survival of the Egyptian and Syrian regimes, he argues that this played a significant part in the eventual decision by Cairo to go to war in 1973 as its funding would otherwise decline and as domestic radicalism and mass military mobilisation would become an untenable combination¹¹². The doubling of Arab financial assistance to Egypt following the decision to form the Arab Defence Council (ADC) in January 1973 was due to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia increasing its financing of both Cairo's military spending and of its overall government budget. This certainly made war possible and was seemingly encouraged by the fact that Egypt was distancing itself from the Soviet Union¹¹³, and thus funding from Kuwait seemed to become more than a relatively obligated expression of its fealty to the pan-Arab cause. Kuwait had already indicated it was willing to support Anwar Sadat's weakening of Egypt's USSR connection in favour of the US, by being willing to discuss financing possible Egyptian arms purchases from the US, and enabling training on UK-supplied Lightning aircraft to take place in Kuwait¹¹⁴.

Kuwait's frustration with the Egyptian and general Arab reaction to the events at Al-Samita was to lead to it threatening to reduce its commitment to the ADC and specifically the offer of

¹¹² Michael N Barnett and Jack S Levy, "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments – The Case of Egypt 1962-73", *International Organisation* ILV (1991) p369-395

¹¹³ Barnett and Levy *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ John Wilton, UK embassy Kuwait to Foreign Office, Annual Review, January 1973 (FCO 8/1993). Wilton noted in relation to Kuwait's possible support for an Egyptian realignment, that in July 1972 Sadat had dismissed the Soviet military advisors.

Lightning aircraft¹¹⁵. However, neither this, or rumours that Kuwait was considering reducing Kuwait's symbolic commitment of troops to the Al-Yarmouk brigade stationed in Egypt came to anything. Kuwait maintained appropriate pan-Arab rigour in its commitment to the collective Arab effort against Israel through funding and the contribution of, an admittedly, small quantity of men and materiel. Kuwait was not seeking to influence war and peace decisions, rather it was accommodating itself to the increasing need to provide financial and political support to Egypt and Syria as war loomed, albeit seeing opportunities in the process to encourage Egypt's international realignment. As the region became increasingly preoccupied with preparations for war, ideological adherence to pan-Arab goals were, temporarily at least, reinvigorated as the cloak in which Arab states' foreign policies were dressed. This trend would only last until the immediate aftermath of the war, when the Arab states once again divided; this time over how best to spend the accrued political capital, in particular from the increased leverage provided by the use of the oil weapon¹¹⁶.

Kuwait brandishes the oil weapon

The Kuwaiti leadership had given a strong public indication some months before the war that it supported the use of the oil weapon, indeed officials had hinted at a measure of this order as far back as 1970. Like its earlier desire to use financial largesse to effectively fund diplomatic engagement between Cairo and Washington, Kuwait's backing for the oil boycott was, in part, an attempt to help secure the same outcome, economic pressure for Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967. When regional tensions rose and war appeared increasingly inevitable, made all the more possible by Kuwaiti and other Gulf Arab funding of the frontline states, Kuwait was quick to fall in line with the increasingly militant Arab mood and to state baldly her enthusiasm for using the oil weapon. Press opinion in the emirate was firmly encouraging such a step, but Kuwaiti officials had long been talking of the possibility. In April 1973 the Amir, Sabah Salim Al-Sabah, stated, "When zero hour comes, we shall use the oil as an effective weapon in the battle." He added that Kuwait was likewise prepared to manipulate the oil price to bring pressure to bear directly on the USA to influence Israel¹¹⁷. Saudi Arabia had been indicating its conversion to supporting an oil embargo and therefore Kuwait needed to ensure that

¹¹⁵ UK embassy to Foreign Office, 26th March 1973 (FCO8/1991).

¹¹⁶ See Ajami, *op.cit*

¹¹⁷ Kelly, p386, *op.cit*.

its stance fitted with the emerging Arab consensus. Internal factors were also an element, as pressure for 100% public ownership continued from Arab nationalists who had increased their representation in the national assembly (see Chapter 5). At the same time, an embargo was increasingly being discussed in the Arab world, whether among leading OPEC members or by Egypt¹¹⁸, with whom Kuwait and all the other Arab oil producers were effectively aligned against Israel.

Following the rather limited impact of the relatively uncoordinated oil embargo announced after the 1967 war (see Chapter 5), Kuwait had played a lead role in the formation of, and hosted the headquarters of, OAPEC (the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries)¹¹⁹. In 1971 the lead actors in the impending conflict with Israel, Egypt and Syria, although they barely produced oil, were admitted to the club, along with the UAA (including oil-rich Abu Dhabi) and (relatively oil-poor) Bahrain. The formation of such an organisation, which had little institutional clout, reflected how much the political interests of the Arab oil producing states was conceived of as something to be collectively determined with the Arab “frontline” states and in need of such a collective, Arabist gloss. In the course of the 1973 war, as Egypt and Syria appeared to be gaining the territorial advantage, OAPEC issued a formal announcement that it was responding to the US decision to air lift arms supplies to Israel by reducing oil output by 5% for each successive month that Israel remained in occupation of territory acquired in the course of the 1967 war. Countries judged to be “hostile” to the Arab cause and supportive of Israel, such as the US, were to be embargoed from receiving any oil. Europeans, including the UK, were treated in a more unpredictable fashion (see Chapter 7). While Kuwait had been one of the first Arab oil producing states to make vociferous noises about using the oil weapon, the key country in determining the extent of the collective embargo and, given the size of its output, the one country that had the ability and willingness to make more substantive unilateral cuts, was Saudi Arabia. It was Saudi Arabia to whom Egypt would eventually turn when it decided to leverage the weight it felt it had now acquired with the US and to cancel the embargo ahead of any potential territorial concessions.

By early 1974 the oil price had nearly quadrupled, as OPEC oil producers assumed that, in an exceedingly tight market, this could be borne by consumers without any international consequences. Thus Arab oil producers were being more than compensated for their cuts to

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.387

¹¹⁹ Formed in January 1968, it initially consisted of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Algeria and Libya.

national output, while the economic pressure in oil-dependent countries, with the exception of those Arab countries receiving generous subsidies from the OAPEC countries, was immense. President Anwar Sadat's decision to urge cancellation of the embargo was met with formal objections by Kuwait. The emirate's oil and finance minister had issued highly charged comments at the height of the crisis, which created considerable friction between Kuwait on the one side, and the UK and the US on the other (see Chapter 7). The impression Kuwait wanted to create was that the only consideration of its oil policy was that which would cause the most pressure to end Israel's occupation. It was never prepared, however, to try to hold out for any specific terms. Its bottom line, put forward at OAPEC meetings, was "sharing the pain with our brothers in Egypt and Syria"¹²⁰. Once the leading frontline state, Egypt, had decided it wanted a way out of the pain in the form of a US-brokered return of at least Egyptian territory, then Kuwait was happy to ease its own international diplomatic discomfort; there was certainly no financial price being paid by the emirate, quite the opposite. In public Kuwait expressed frustration that the embargo was being ended, but few took this stance at face value¹²¹. In private Kuwait was to stress to Egypt, once Cairo had secured the agreement of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, that a decision to end the embargo needed to be presented properly¹²². The political wisdom or otherwise of President Sadat in forfeiting collective economic leverage in return for the uncertain outcome of greater US engagement in resolving the territorial conflict was not something that concerned Kuwait at this time. The shift to bilateral approaches from what, officially at least, had been defined as a collective Arab conflict with Israel, and which led directly to the US brokering of separate disengagement agreements between Israel, and Egypt and Syria respectively, would not be criticised by Kuwait. The 1974 disengagement agreements, and the more controversial 1975 "Sinai II" agreement that saw further Israeli disengagement that all but ended the state of war with Egypt, were not seen by Kuwait as steps that it was appropriate for it to pass judgement on. The principal Arab military interlocutors had determined how economic leverage should be utilised and when it should be ended. With Saudi Arabia taking the lead in slapping down critics of Sinai II, Kuwait saw no reason to publicly assess the rights and wrongs of Egyptian decision-

¹²⁰ According to the then oil and finance minister, Abdul-Rahman Ateegi, this was Kuwait's purpose in backing the boycott. Personal interview, *Ibid*.

¹²¹ According to the then US ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Herman Eilts, the Kuwaitis expressed frustration that the embargo was going to be lifted, but in Washington and the region "this was dismissed as good Arab nationalist rhetoric" Personal interview, Boston MA, USA August 2000.

¹²² Abdul-Rahman Ateegi was anxious that Kuwait not be seen to be falling in line with Egypt's desire to end the embargo without the cover of collective decision-making. He met with Anwar Sadat in April 1974 and, according to Ateegi, told him, "...we can't waive this by order in Cairo. This is not good for you or for us." As a result a subsequent OAPEC meeting decided to postpone the announcement until all the Arab oil producers met at an OPEC meeting in Vienna. *Ibid*.

making. Kuwait had seen the embargo as a useful opportunity to make a high profile expression of a foreign policy supposedly rooted in Arab solidarity; this it had succeeded in doing.

Kuwait's joining of the oil embargo did not follow deliberation on its foreign policy options. Kuwait's support, says its then oil and finance minister, was due to the "mood" in the Arab world, not coercion from its neighbours. In fact the only country that might have been willing to coerce an appropriate stance from Kuwait regarding oil issues was Iraq. In 1972, for example, Kuwait had seen participation as a way of controlling output for the benefit of conserving Kuwait's oil reserves over the longer term, but also to meet a short term need of not being seen by Baghdad to be profiting from the slowdown in output following the latter's dispute with the Iraqi National Oil Company (INOC) over compensation claims. When Iraq moved to nationalise INOC, even though this was not the favoured approach of Kuwait, whose preferred method was to negotiate an extended stake in its oil resource, Kuwait understood that it had to be seen to be backing the policy, especially when it was also under pressure in the national assembly to drive a harder bargain with the international oil companies¹²³. However, by the time of the collective Arab decision on production cuts, Kuwait and Iraq had clearly diverged, with Iraq arguing that having nationalised its oil industry, then it should be exempted from making production cuts that would only hurt itself and therefore the Arab world (as opposed to the partly foreign-owned oil sectors in the other OAPEC countries).

Kuwait had raised its standing on the regional and international stage as a result of the oil embargo. The decision to abandon it did not immediately lessen this profile as international and Arab attention, albeit in different ways, focussed on how the Gulf Arab producers used their immensely increased oil revenues. Kuwait was widely seen as enjoying its ability to play on a much bigger stage. In doing so it had at least partially escaped the attention its foreign policy necessarily had had to pay to what was acceptable in Baghdad. British officials believed that the Al-Samita crisis had encouraged Kuwait to take a more independent stance, conscious of how accommodating Baghdad had singularly failed to prevent hostile Iraqi action¹²⁴. However it was never very likely that Kuwait would take Iraq's side and oppose an oil boycott that had been building up for some months prior to the war's outbreak, in part due to the emirate's public

¹²³ US embassy Telegram to US State Department. (day unknown, June 1972, A70). Iraq also ensured that it had financial commitments from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Libya to help it financially should production be cut by INOC for a significant period. See Khadouri *op.cit.*

¹²⁴ AD Harris observed that Kuwait was pursuing a notably more independent line following Al-Samita, but suggested that since then there had been signs of Iraq "tweaking the reins" again.

support for the measure. Kuwait had deployed its oil wealth on a larger stage, first in the collective Arab conflict with Israel and then, following the ending of the boycott, in what became a debate with Europe in particular, over their economic interdependence and about policy toward the Middle East. Associating itself with pan-Arab causes and avoiding inter-Arab alignments had always been the way that Kuwait had hoped to offset its bi-lateral existential conflict with Iraq. However, in the aftermath of the 1973 war with Israel, Kuwait's raised profile within the Arab mainstream and internationally would provide little deterrence against Iraq.

Pan-Arabism fails to protect Kuwait

After a further military incursion into Kuwait by Iraq occurred in December 1974, Kuwait found itself more diplomatically and militarily exposed than it had been in March 1973. The extent of the incursion was more ambiguous than previously, with British officials, for example, initially unsure if an incursion had actually taken place, and then assuming that it had been talked up by the Kuwait deputy chief of staff and by military intelligence. However the Kuwait government and media were in no doubt that it had occurred, railing against the unwillingness of Arab governments to engage with the issue, even to the level, itself seen as disappointing by Kuwait, that had occurred the previous year. OAPEC had ended the oil embargo in March 1974, which Kuwait duly presented as assisting its ability to aid the "comprehensive struggle against the aggressor"¹²⁵, implying it would increase disposable revenues to aid Arab causes. With the abandonment of collective Arab economic action and disputes over the diplomatic way forward, Iraq sensed an opportunity to advance its interests vis-à-vis Kuwait with greater impunity.

Kuwait had tried to accommodate Iraq's practical need for greater access from the Gulf, given the pressure on its existing outlets at Basra and Um Qasa, by agreeing in early 1974 an economic deal with Iraq whereby Kuwait's ports could be used by its northern neighbour. These ports were the source of large quantities of goods; according to some reports these included military hardware, that ended up in Iraq throughout the 1970s¹²⁶. However Iraq clearly felt that, with the collective Arab front fraying, this was an opportune moment to put pressure on Kuwait for more than

¹²⁵ Amiri Speech, October 1974 (FCO 8/2193)

¹²⁶ Abdul-Reda Assiri, *Kuwait's Foreign Policy – City-State in World Politics* (Colorado; Westview Press, 1990)

economic co-operation. The benefits of Arab solidarity, if they did deter Iraq during the height of the oil crisis, were plainly very limited in the aftermath.

Following the latest Iraqi territorial penetration, which *Al-Rai Al-Amm* reported was, like before, some 2km into Kuwaiti territory, the Kuwaiti newspaper wrote of “the unacceptable state of anxiety” this had created. Bemoaning the fact that it had elicited only a muted response from other Arab capitals, the conservative daily, owned by and politically close to the crown prince, decried the:

“...[D]ashing of hopes for Arab solidarity which emerged in the October War.” It added, “It’s surprising that Egypt and Syria, which are aware of the sacrifice made by Kuwait in the context of the Arab battle, have not lifted a finger to maintain Arab solidarity.¹²⁷”

There was more than embellishment in the implication of hardships having been endured in Kuwait¹²⁸, but there was no doubt that the two frontline Arab countries had been, and continued to be, generously funded by the Gulf Arab oil states. Kuwait had also been one of eight non-frontline Arab countries that sent troops – in Kuwait’s case adding to its existing troop presence in Egypt with a contingent on the Syrian side of the occupied Golan Heights.

The Iraq penetration and the lack of wider Arab interest in it also saw bitter press suggestions that Kuwait should respond by devoting itself to “another cause” than the Arab “national dream”, and should “concentrate on ensuring security for herself”¹²⁹. These comments were pointedly targeted to coincide with the arrival of Egypt’s prime minister, Abdul-Aziz Higazi, who was on a scheduled visit to Kuwait to discuss “social and economic co-operation” i.e. the amirate’s ongoing high level of financial support for Egypt now that the war was over and it was focused on less costly, diplomatic efforts to regain its territory.

However exposed Kuwait may have felt within the Arab context, this did not prevent it from taking fairly robust action near the border in an attempt to deter Iraq from further incursions. A battalion of troops were immediately dispatched to the border zone to build a trench at the “conflict point with Iraq”, a road was constructed running east of Um Qasr to the sea, and a new

¹²⁷ Editorial, *Al-Rai Al-Amm*, 1st December 1974 (FCO 8/2193)

¹²⁸ In the period leading up to the war, Kuwait, together with Iraq, Libya and Algeria, symbolically stopped its oil production for one hour in a gesture of opposition to US support for Israel. Libya, apparently, managed to at least keep the effort going for a day. Freedman, *op.cit.*

¹²⁹ *Al-Rai Al-Amm op.cit*

border post was put in place. The mood was one of determination to appear strong in the face of Iraq's incursions. While the (now) chief of staff, General Mubarak Al-Sabah, in common with the senior political leadership, wanted to project calm about the border situation, his deputy, General Salah Mohammed Al-Sabah, and younger officers beneath him, seemed determined to talk up the incursion in order that definitive steps be taken to try to deter further encroachments at the border¹³⁰. More significant in preventing further Iraqi military moves, however, was probably the ongoing potential for Iran to intervene in any crisis, which its exaggeration of the extent of Iraq's latest incursion suggested it did not mind provoking. Pressure continued to be applied by Iraq in 1975 when further proposals were tabled by Baghdad for a territorial solution that, while it appeared to abandon what, from a Kuwaiti perspective, was the wholly unacceptable Iraqi desire for sovereignty over Warba and Bubiyan islands, presented proposals for leasing Warba and for the effective occupation of one half of the far larger Bubiyan island. These proposals did nothing to ease the Kuwaiti concern that the islands would not only become a de-facto permanent Iraqi hold on strategic territory in the northern Gulf, but could serve as a bridgehead for Baghdad's ally, the Soviet Union (see Chapter 7). Iraq's proposals to Kuwait were in marked contrast to the perception among its other neighbours that, in the wake of the 1975 Algiers Agreement with Iran, Iraq had become more accommodating¹³¹. The agreement, formally signed in Baghdad in June, saw Iraq abandon what had been presented as the Arabs' interest in maintaining sovereignty over the Shatt Al-Arab (or Arvand Rud) waterway, in return for an end to Iran's sponsorship of the Kurdish revolt inside Iraq. Kuwait had seen the Algiers Agreement as an opportunity to press Iraq to agree the border demarcation, now that Baghdad's claimed need to enhance its territorial depth in the face of an Iranian threat was apparently no longer relevant. Kuwaiti officials would continue to stress that without a resolution of the issue, deep suspicions and resentment would remain in Kuwait about Iraqi objectives¹³². However the Kuwaiti interpretation of the Iraq-Iranian accord did not find favour in Baghdad, where the extension of its unilateral ability to enhance the security of the Iraqi port of Um Qasr was still presented as imperative¹³³.

¹³⁰ Peter Hinchcliffe, deputy head of mission, UK embassy Kuwait, to Foreign Office, December 1974 (FCO 8/2193).

¹³¹ In general this appears to have been true. For example, Iraqi overtures to Saudi Arabia, see below. Also Gregory Gause III notes that there was some moderation of the Iraqi ideological onslaught against Syria and Jordan in 1975. Gause, *op.cit*

¹³² Khadouri, *op.cit.* p.159,

¹³³ *Ibid.*

Lebanese alignment

Kuwait continued to ride the wave of its heightened profile after the oil crisis and became a player, albeit a secondary one, in the inter-Arab politicking intended to end the Lebanese war that had begun in 1975. The war was to impact on many Arab countries who, in their desire to offset its domestic impact, became involved in the internal politics of Lebanon to greater or lesser degrees. Events in Lebanon had had an impact on Kuwait's decision to suspend its parliament (see Chapter 5). However Kuwait's role in Lebanon was to lend the support of the conservative oil-rich Arab states to attempts to end the conflict, albeit in a junior capacity to Saudi Arabia. The Riyadh Agreement of 1976, building on previous inter-Arab attempts to mediate a solution, committed Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria to sending military observers to Lebanon¹³⁴. Iraq, whose enmity with Syria had resumed the vicious ideological contest begun in the aftermath of the 1973 war, reserved special opprobrium for Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the pre-eminent funders of Syria and of Egypt, for underwriting the dominant role of Syria in Lebanon¹³⁵.

In September 1976, Iraq conducted another penetration of Kuwaiti territory, again of around 2km, but this time the incursion continued for ten months, with troops from either country facing each other across the border, and yet more attempts at Arab mediation including the Saudi leader, King Khaled¹³⁶. This was an increase in its pressure on the emirate that coincided with the worsening of their bilateral relations following their differences over oil policy and the outbreak of the Lebanese war. Kuwait's maintenance of good relations with the other key players in the Arab world, now in common cause over Lebanon, was another example of how the emirate was effectively deviating from its professed regional non-alignment policy. However this was not motivated by a desire to balance against what Kuwait continued to see as its greatest regional threat, but it was an alignment in as much as it excluded Iraq. Aside from the events of 1961, Kuwait had avoided inter-Arab alignments, even at Iraq's expense. However in the Arab world post-1967, this was longer feasible.

The decline of Egypt's regional weight and the related rise of Saudi Arabia as a regional player and, following the British departure from the Gulf, its increased importance as the pre-eminent

¹³⁴ See Taylor, *op.cit.* for an account of Arab politicking over Lebanon.

¹³⁵ Iraq was to state in reaction to the Riyadh Accord of October 1976, "The masses will settle accounts with the reactionary regimes of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait whose riches underpin the treachery." R. O. Freedman, *Soviet Policy Towards the Middle East Since 1970* (New York; Praeger 1978) p.261.

¹³⁶ Al-Rumaihi, *op.cit.*, p.120; Schofield, *op.cit.* p.119.

Arab state in Kuwait's backyard, created a new inter-Arab reality where the emirate was a player in tandem with its fellow oil-rich Arab neighbour. This did not reduce Kuwait to being a tool of Riyadh, as strong differences over Kuwait's internal policy evidenced, but it did mean that accommodating the kingdom took on greater importance. Egypt's tenuous alliance with Syria in 1977 quickly dissolved in December of that year when President Sadat confirmed Cairo's determination to find a bilateral solution to the conflict with Israel, by flying direct to Jerusalem and addressing the Israeli parliament in favour of a peace accord between the two states. Kuwait's ability to maintain a non-aligned stance within the Arab world was thus weakened further. Maintaining friendship and accommodation with both Egypt and Saudi Arabia had effectively been the props of Kuwait's non-alignment in the Arab world and the wider Middle East. However the decline of the influence of Egypt, a country that in many ways had been Kuwait's most important Arab relationship since 1961, had reached its apotheosis in a decision by Cairo to effectively absent itself from influence in the Arab world¹³⁷. However Kuwait still declined, like Saudi Arabia and Jordan, from siding with Syria, much less Iraq, in their respective "rejection" and "steadfastness and confrontation" fronts against Egypt's "betrayal". Kuwait was genuinely shocked, as might be expected when the country that had helped shape its adherence to Arab nationalist norms, left the ideological battlefield. However, while Kuwait came under direct pressure from Iraq to side with its Rejection Front, the emirate maintained a relative distance¹³⁸. Among the Gulf Arabs, strong criticism of Egypt was left to Saudi Arabia, but neither the kingdom, Kuwait, nor the southern Gulf Arab states desired to overtly align against Egypt on this issue¹³⁹. Kuwait's ailing leader, Sabah Salim, would bemoan the increasing inter-Arab divisions as he neared his demise¹⁴⁰. However, the emirate's foreign policy style continued to be to avoid taking overt sides, even, as far as possible, in relation to the existential threat it perceived from Iraq.

¹³⁷ Or at least until the inter-Arab exigencies of the 1980s Gulf war required Egypt to be allowed back in to the Arab fold.

¹³⁸ According to Abdul-Rahman Ategi, who attended an inter-Arab meeting in Baghdad shortly after President Sadat went to Jerusalem, Kuwait faced considerable pressure from Iraq, Syria and the PLO chairman Yasser Arafat to join an anti-Egyptian front in opposition to Sadat's initiative. However, "thank God", he said, the emirate did not ever consider joining either the Iraq-led Rejection Front, or the Steadfastness and Confrontation front led by Syria and including the PLO.

¹³⁹ Kuwait did not cut its funding to Egypt until after it signed the peace accord with Israel in 1979. In the wake of the Camp David process, Iraq seized the initiative and in 1978 hosted an Arab League summit at which Kuwait agreed a series of payments to the three remaining frontline "confrontation" states and to the PLO. Assiri, *op.cit.* p.151.

¹⁴⁰ Just prior to his death in December 1977, Amir Sabah Salim said that in his political life, "My sole aim is to do my best to unify all Arabs. It is a matter which grieves me deeply particularly at this stage when I see so many divisions." Jarman, *op.cit.* p.316-7.

For virtually the whole period following the 1967 war until Egyptian president Anwar Sadat flew to Jerusalem in November 1977, Kuwait had been able to be, as the Arab nationalist ideological line had it, “in the same trench” as both Egypt and Saudi Arabia and most other Arab governments. Playing a leading role in the 1973/4 oil boycott was hardly uncomfortable for a Kuwait that had presented Palestine as the key totem of its pan-Arab foreign policy credentials, while Kuwait’s support a fairly pronounced role in favour of a “pax-Syriana” to end the Lebanese civil war was in keeping with past efforts to mediate in internal or intra-Arab disputes. At the same time, moving closer to Saudi Arabia did not exclude Kuwaiti engagement with Iran, which was to develop considerable tension in its relations with Saudi Arabia in the Gulf region post-1971. This conciliatory approach was largely a reflection of Kuwait’s traditional foreign policy desire to avoid alliances and to seek understandings with all the key regional players. On Palestine, Kuwait was prepared to take a different stance from Egypt, which, despite its weakened position post-1967, would continue to be the main Arab player in the conflict with Israel, up until November 1977 at least. Kuwait’s refusal to endorse the post-1967 international diplomatic politicking was less about Saudi influence than the decline of Egyptian weight within the region, and the importance to Kuwait of not being too far adrift from the Arab mainstream, both at the popular and regime level, on such a touchstone issue.

The bottom line though for Kuwait was the perceived threat from Iraq, despite its relatively modest military capabilities. Since 1969 this had been emphasised for Kuwait by a series of incursions and an accompanying rise in ideological attacks. The “aggregate” balance of threat came from Iraq, but the policy response was not, for the most part, what those who apply a neo-realist approach to Arab states’ foreign policy would have expected¹⁴¹. Kuwait in many ways ploughed its own furrow on foreign policy, judging its limited size and military capability as a reason to avoid regional alignments, rather than what might have been the expected but, from its perspective, risky venture of seeing alliances as the best guarantor of security. Kuwait’s ideational packaging of policy in the Arab world served to underwrite this largely regionally non-aligned approach, avoiding rhetorical fratricide, but emphasising its adherence to mainstream pan-Arab identifiers in way that was qualitatively different to Saudi Arabia’s conservative Islamism. However, after 1967 Kuwaiti foreign policy was equally likely to be cast in Islamic as Arabist terms, a factor that reflected both regional shifts, most obviously embodied by Saudi Arabia’s creation of the OIC, but also Islamist developments at the grassroots, a factor that Kuwait had domestically patronised (see Chapter 5). In addressing Kuwait’s oil policies in the

¹⁴¹ See Gause and Walt *op.cit.*

post-1973 war environment, which had included the abandonment of the oil embargo in April 1974, Amir Sabah Salim Sabah emphasised the rising oil prices as a shift in resources from the developed world. Shrewd language perhaps, given the rising anger in the Arab world at who had really benefited from the war. The Kuwait Fund's recasting from its exclusive Arab focus enabled the amirate to direct considerable largesse toward poorer Islamic, and often non-Arab, states. Almost in the same breath the amir stressed Islamic verities at home and a new policy of funding international radio broadcasts in a variety of languages to Islamic countries "in order to spread awareness of Islam in these countries and to acquaint them with Kuwait"¹⁴². Kuwait was always more inclined than so-called "secular" Arab states to cast its policies in terms of Islamic identity, and to an extent there appeared to be genuine personal religious adherence among many of the senior Al-Sabah¹⁴³, who expressed language rarely heard from senior officials in the so-called progressive Arab states. However, a foreign policy shift was also occurring, reflecting both regional and local developments.

Kuwait was clearly conscious that the long-standing basis of its foreign policy may no longer be adequate. Kuwait's ritualistic appeals to Arab unity in the midst of what proved, despite collective Arab diplomatic forays, to be an ongoing conflict in Lebanon, and her vaguer comments about divisions elsewhere in the Arab world, were largely a reflection of despair. Nor for that matter did Kuwait's increased political closeness to Saudi Arabia, and the practical co-operation evident in their finalising in 1974 of the demarcation of the Neutral Zone¹⁴⁴, provide any guarantee of Kuwaiti security. Indeed, their mutual relations continued to be subject to numerous grievances, albeit that the closure of the assembly had helped improve matters. Notably, having taken ten years over the land demarcation, and despite forming a joint technical committee, the two countries could not resolve the maritime delimitation of the Neutral Zone until as recently as July 2000. The potential for exploiting energy reserves in the area meant that sovereignty over two tiny uninhabited islands, Qaru and Um Al-Maradim, which lay off the Kuwaiti half of the Neutral Zone, was strongly disputed. Given Kuwait's desire to continue to broaden the basis of its international support, notwithstanding its essential orientation toward the US, in late 1975 the Kuwaiti foreign minister's visit to Moscow resulted in agreement on a large

¹⁴² Amiri speech, October 1974, transcribed and included in telegram from UK embassy Kuwait to Foreign Office (FCO 8/2195).

¹⁴³ Amir Sabah Salim reportedly remarked in his final days that Kuwait's objective had been to "defend the religion of Islam and the dignity of the Arab nation." Jarman, *Ibid.* p.316.

¹⁴⁴ According to Khadouri, *Ibid.*, the territorial delimitation of the Neutral Zone was finally agreed in 1974. The formal division had been agreed by both countries in 1966 (see Chapter 4)

armaments deal that caused consternation in Saudi Arabia and in the US¹⁴⁵ (see Chapter 7). Kuwait's engagement with the USSR was in line with its long standing policy of pursuing good relations with all the permanent members of the UNSC. Specifically, however, Kuwait had in mind befriending the Soviet Union in order to secure the latter's support to offset pressure from its ally, Iraq. Winning the support of the USSR in 1963, after all, had been important to finally securing Iraqi recognition later that year. The upshot of the arms deal, however, was tension with Saudi Arabia. In mid-1977 this saw Saudi troops occupy both Qaru and Um Al-Maradim¹⁴⁶. While wholly lacking the strategic and geo-political significance of Iraq's incursions south of Um Qasr, this event, carefully hushed up and quickly resolved by very senior discussions between Riyadh and Kuwait¹⁴⁷, caused the emirate considerable shock, not least given Saudi Arabia's intervention on Kuwait's side during the earlier Al-Samita crisis.

While Iraq was keen to improve terms with Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of its concessions to Iran in 1975, and to engage with the smaller Gulf states, seemingly including Kuwait, the latter's concerns over border incursions were not assuaged. An agreement delimiting the Iraqi-Saudi neutral zone in 1975 on the same, equal basis as that agreed between Kuwait and Saudi a year earlier¹⁴⁸ encouraged Iraqi attempts to improve its relations more widely and even saw a conference in Muscat in November 1976 at which Iraq and Iran joined the six Gulf Arab monarchies and emirates in discussing Gulf regional co-operation. The proposal did not get off the ground, but a seemingly more modest one, on environmental standards for shipping in the Gulf, brought Iran, Iraq and the Gulf Arabs to Kuwait where an agreement was signed in 1977. However, the dispute with Kuwait, which continued to report further incursions by Iraq, would remain an obstacle to improving understandings between Iraq and Saudi Arabia and therefore with the smaller Gulf Arab states, while disputes over approaches toward Lebanon were also a key source of division between Iraq on one side and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait on the other, with its own implications for Iraq-Kuwait border tensions.

Iraq was not above attempting a softer approach to Kuwait as a way of enabling better relations with its wider Gulf Arab neighbours, however. It may also have been responding to the Soviets stepping up of relations with Kuwait. In June 1977, for example, Iraq and Kuwait agreed to form

¹⁴⁵ Freedman, *op.cit.* p.217; and Assiri, *op.cit.* p. 81-2.

¹⁴⁶ Abdul-Reda Assiri, *Kuwait's Foreign Policy – City-State in World Politics*, Westview Press, Colorado, USA, 1990. p82.

¹⁴⁷ Assiri, *Ibid* p.82,

¹⁴⁸ Khadouri, *Ibid* p161.

a “joint management committee” with the intention of discussing ways of at least containing the danger of tensions spilling over from their differences¹⁴⁹. A month later Iraq offered to withdraw from the positions it held inside Kuwait, presenting this announcement as an indication of its intent to settle the border dispute in an amicable manner¹⁵⁰. The lack of resolution of the latter however would continue to emphasise the importance of Iran as well as Saudi Arabia to Kuwaiti security calculations. A naval visit by Iran to Kuwait, for example, was seen by Kuwaiti leaders as a useful part of its deterrence against Iraq¹⁵¹.

The bottom line for Kuwait, however, as it smoothly transitioned from the largely figurehead leadership of Sabah Salim, who died on December 31st 1977, to the more assertive rule of the Jabr Al-Ahmed, would continue to be the need to offset a perceived vulnerability *vis-à-vis* Iraq. In the period leading up to the Iranian revolution of 1978-9 at least, Kuwait’s policy responses to this requirement remained the avoidance of overt alignment within the region; “correct”, or at least inoffensive, stances on pan-Arab issues assisted by financial largesse; and the ongoing, but relatively discrete, search for supportive defence relations internationally.

¹⁴⁹ Schofield, *op.cit*

¹⁵⁰ Khadouri, *op.cit.*, p.159.

¹⁵¹ According to a former Iranian official, Amir Sabah Salim thanked Iran for “intervening” after another Iraqi border incursion had occurred. The arrival of three Iranian warships and some 50-60 naval personnel had however been planned for months. Off the record interview, London, November 2005.

Chapter 7

International dimensions 1967-77

One week prior to the formal announcement on January 16th, 1968 in the House of Commons, Britain's minister of state at the Foreign Office, Gorowny Roberts, visited the Gulf Arab leaders to inform them that in three years time Britain would withdraw its military presence in the area. It was explained to Kuwait that the UK's termination of its treaties of protection with the other Gulf amirates would mean that the commitment to Kuwait's defence, agreed upon at the time of the country's independence in 1961, would also come to an end. Kuwait's former balance between international security and regional relations would be further undermined as Egypt's weight in the Arab world declined after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. In contrast, after the 1973 war, Saudi Arabia's economic strength and its conservative, Islamic values grew in influence. The result of these developments for Kuwait was that it faced a Gulf region in which Iran was moving to fill the security vacuum left by the UK, leaving Saudi Arabia as the only Arab player to whom Gulf Arab states could look to counter perceived threats. However Kuwait, while increasingly subject to Saudi influence, followed the existing course of its foreign policy in avoiding regional alliances, including with Riyadh, and sought to offset a comparatively more exposed regional position by bolstering its defence relations with the US, but with only partial success.

Largely symbolic contributions to Kuwait's security continued to be made by the UK as its former primary regional role gave way to a semi-detached US security role in the Gulf. On the one hand the US approach fitted better with the amirate's desire to keep western defence alliances discrete and at arm's length; on the other Washington delegated its security interests to the two leading Gulf players, Iran and Saudi Arabia, countries that Kuwait eyed warily and that it had no desire to ally with. In mid-1977, however, the US initiated steps that would lead to a gradually more interventionist approach to the region¹, especially after the Iranian revolution and the beginning of the Iraq-Iran war. In the 1980s this would make it possible for Kuwait to shift its strategy and secure a partial alignment with the US after the amirate had abandoned its non-

¹ What a year later would begin to take on the shape of a US "Rapid Deployment Force" in the Gulf followed a presidential directive issued by President Jimmy Carter in August 1977.

aligned regional stance and, like Washington, aided Iraq in the course of the eight year long war with Iran.

End of formal UK commitment

Britain's decision to depart from virtually all of its territory "East of Suez" had its greatest implications in the Gulf for the nine southern Gulf shaikhdoms that were still under a treaty of protection with the UK. Following the end of Britain's defence commitment they became the United Arab Emirates (UAA), a seven-member federation of the former Trucial States; and the independent states of Bahrain and Qatar. Regarding Kuwait, it made inevitable a change to the UK's defence commitment represented in Clause D of the Exchange of Letters². This was a change that the Kuwaiti amir and the British ambassador³ had both initially hoped could be finessed without having to terminate the defence commitment under which Britain had militarily intervened shortly after the emirate had become independent (see Chapter 4). Even the perceptibly more Arab nationalist crown prince, Jabr Al-Ahmed, was happy to keep some semblance of British protection, however limited⁴. The amir was deeply shocked by Mr Roberts' announcement, not least because the comments of the British minister when he had visited the region only two months earlier, had implied a rather more long term commitment⁵. Crown Prince Jabr Al-Ahmed would claim that he had told the British minister on his earlier visit that UK troops would have to leave the Gulf region eventually because of popular opposition to their presence⁶. However both the amir and the British ambassador looked to an amendment rather than a wholesale abandonment of the bilateral agreement, and specifically hoped that a UK commitment to provide air defence from its bases in Cyprus could be maintained. Earlier Foreign Office advice, while making clear that the defence commitment as an obligation had to end, suggested that Clause D could be reinterpreted, thereby avoiding the political damage that an abrupt ending could cause to Britain's standing in Kuwait and the region, and avoiding any obligation to register a new interpretation with the UN. However, a later Foreign Office

² Paragraph "d" stated "Nothing in these conclusions shall affect the readiness of Her Majesty's Government to assist the government of Kuwait if the latter required such assistance" Quoted in a Foreign Office telegram to British Embassy, 27th March, 1968, FCO 8/102.

³ Ambassador GG Arthur to FCO, 18th January 1968, FCO 8/47.

⁴ John Graham commented, "...[I]n practice he (Jabr) didn't want the fig leaf of British protection to be removed." Personal interview, 16th November, 2000.

⁵ GG Arthur to Foreign Office, January 28th, 1968, FCO 8/48

⁶ "Uncertainty on Kuwait treaty", January 30th, 1968, *The Times*.

judgement suggested that any change to the defence obligation would have to be passed to the UN, something that the Kuwaitis, while desiring a “gloss” that would amend the clause rather than terminate the commitment, were keen to avoid.

While the British government wished to make clear that no element of its former defence commitment could remain as an obligation, both the UK and Kuwait were keen to find a form of words that would soften the impression of a termination, which the UK feared could encourage Iraq to threaten Kuwait. The British ambassador suggested that reference be made to the intended 1971 pullout, but without specifically stating that the UK’s defence commitment had ended; the Foreign Office hoped it would include a statement that the change in commitment “will not affect HMG’s readiness to assist the Kuwaiti Armed Forces with supplies training and advice on the same basis as in the past”⁷. However the UK government, like the Kuwaitis, was also keen to avoid this issue becoming too public. Britain feared entanglement in potentially difficult questions in parliament. For Kuwait, having what would effectively be a termination of the British defence commitment subjected to a very public re-registering with the UN, held little appeal. The new wording would provide little deterrence against regional threats, but by being made public would still suggest the emirate was dependent on the UK. The result was that no “gloss” was put on the former commitment and the first official announcement that the 1961 agreement had been terminated came on the 13th May 1968 when a new Exchange of Letters were issued, ending the original agreement and stating that the termination had been initiated by Kuwait⁸. Given that Kuwait had objected to any rewording going to the UN, then effectively it was responsible for the termination of the 1961 agreement; however there was little doubt that this presentation of events was intended to save face on both sides. Furthermore, it enabled Shaikh Jabr Al-Ahmad to tell the National Assembly two months later that, “Kuwait would neither need nor would accept any foreign presence, British or otherwise, in the area.”⁹

The new Exchange of Letters included the phraseology, “...[R]elations between our two countries will continue to be governed by a spirit of close friendship and co-operation¹⁰.” While confirming the inevitable, that the two countries would continue to have a close relationship in defence as well as economic matters, this form of words also suited the British Labour Government’s desire to end the UK’s formal Gulf defence obligations, whilst emphasising its

⁷ GG Arthur to Foreign Office 18th March 1968, FCO8/102

⁸ GG Arthur to Foreign Office, 12th May 1968 (Telegram Number 112)

⁹ JB Kelly, *Arabia The Gulf and the West* (Basic Books; USA, 1980) p.172.

¹⁰ Quoted by Sam Falle, British ambassador to Kuwait Telegram to FCO, 23rd January 1969 (FCO 8/1069)...

residual role in military training and supply. The interpretation of the defence commitment so readily acted upon by the British in July 1961 had been watered down by the Labour Government in its February 1966 White Paper (see Chapter 4), in part due to the abandonment of the British base in Aden, expected in 1968. In retrospect at least, the decision to offset the planned pullout from Aden with a partial redeployment of RAF and army units to the UK's bases in Bahrain and Sharjah can be seen as a holding operation. In July 1967 a new defence white paper stated that Britain would markedly reduce its presence in the Far East by 1970/71¹¹. As conflict with Indonesia had ceased a year earlier, and the UK government had made preparations in March 1967 to bring the Aden pullout forward to November 1967, cabinet consideration of ending the UK's defence commitments in both the Far East (with the exception of the crown colony Hong Kong) and the Middle East seemed inevitable¹². Within the Labour cabinet there was little inclination to oppose what had been a pattern of constraint on defence commitments and expenditure since it came into office in 1964, and what had been a steady abandonment of Britain's international defence and territorial commitments since 1945. Furthermore, the decision to terminate, rather than continually reduce, its "East of Suez" commitments followed a decision to renew the UK's application for European Common Market membership. Domestic UK politics accelerated a seemingly inevitable process. Cabinet agreement necessitated a sharing of burdens as a wide-ranging programme of cuts was introduced in the wake of Sterling's devaluation in November 1967. Neither the new right-wing Labour chancellor, Roy Jenkins, who was avowedly pro-European, nor the predominantly left-wing mood of the party in the country, allowed for any sentiment for perceptibly "colonial" commitments.

Kuwait can't buy protection

In this environment, the willingness of the Kuwaiti amir, together with the rulers of the lower Gulf states, to fund the cost of the British commitment in their region in order that the announced decision, as least as far as it applied to the Gulf, could be postponed, was always likely to be a non-starter. It was neither politically expedient nor practical to reverse a decision on the basis of verbal commitments, which in the case of Kuwait at least, could not be publicly stated and the payment of which would have to be made via its southern Gulf Arab neighbours. The Kuwaiti

¹¹ Dennis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (Penguin Books; London, 1989), p.293.

¹² *Ibid.*, and Richard Crossman *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister – Volume Two, 1966-68* (London; Hamish Hamilton, 1976)

leadership feared the reaction of Arab nationalists in the region and at home to any news of them clinging on to the British commitment with financial inducements¹³. This made the Kuwaitis' desire to use financial incentives to prompt a change of heart by the British politically unreliable¹⁴. Within three months, despite continuing to express ongoing puzzlement about the absoluteness of the termination, the Kuwait ruler had plainly adjusted to the reality of a decision that had been made. In the context of the spin put on the British decision by the crown prince, Shaikh Jabr Al-Ahmed, who had said it "did not directly affect Kuwait", Amir Sabah Salim heeded his advisors and adopted a more indifferent tone.

Gulf destabilisation fears

Despite this, Kuwait was concerned at how significant the direct and "indirect effect" of the pullout could be. The immediate Kuwaiti fear was that the current pattern of deterrence could break down: Saudi Arabia could take all of the claimed Buraimi territory from Abu Dhabi, Iran would then take Bahrain, and therefore Iraq would not hesitate to annex Kuwait, argued a senior official¹⁵. However Jabr Al-Ahmed put on a braver face, and declared that Kuwait would take immediate steps to bolster its armed forces, without making reference to the expected British role in supply and training, in order that "Iraq could not just walk in." UK military assessments dismissed Kuwait's military capability as having little more than delaying potential in the event of an opportunist, as opposed to a full scale, attack. In the event of the latter, the UK continued to envisage itself intervening, at least until the wider Gulf pullout at the end of 1971¹⁶. In the short term, neither Kuwait nor the UK saw a direct threat from an internally weak Iraq in a Gulf in which Iran was powerful¹⁷. The Kuwaiti crown prince declared that he "...could not believe that

¹³ "Politically they would fight shy of courting the unpopularity with the Arab nationalists (both within and outside Kuwait) by offering financial support to keep British forces in Arab countries." GG Arthur to FCO, 14th January, 1968 (FCO 8/47). The British ambassador also mentioned the "difficult year" for the Kuwaitis financially, following devaluation and the "steadfastness" payments to Israel's Arab neighbours after the 1967 war. However Arthur considered Kuwaiti financial support feasible. Three days later he reports the amir as willing to offer to make such payments via Kuwait's southern Arab neighbours if she felt confident of a positive reply. (FCO 8/47).

¹⁴ Notably, the desire of the UK defence secretary to push through the reduction of the defence commitment to Kuwait in 1966 had reflected uncertainty over whether the new amir would be able to uphold the agreement. (See Chapter 4).

¹⁵ This scenario was privately outlined by the amir's eldest son, Shaikh Salim Sabah, ambassador to the UK, as reported by the UK ambassador to Kuwait. G.G. Arthur to M. Weir, 8th February, 1968 (FCO 8/42).

¹⁶ UK Chief of Staff, Ministry of Defence, 22nd October 1968 (DEFE 11/617)

¹⁷ DEF 11/617 *op.cit.*; and Frank Brenchley, Britain and the Middle East – An Economic History 1957-87, (London; Lester Crook, 1989)

the occupation of Kuwait by force would be acceptable to Kuwait's other neighbours, to world opinion or to the UN – Kuwait's independence and personality were now well-established.¹⁸ In terms of the "indirect threat" to Kuwait caused by the withdrawal, Kuwait's leaders raised the spectre of events in South Arabia where unreformed shaikhdoms had been unable to resist radical pressures following the British withdrawal from Aden. An outcome even more detrimental to UK interests could occur because, as Jabr Al-Ahmed put it, Iran was directly involved in the Gulf. Iran's assertion of its claim to Bahrain had raised Kuwaiti fears that Britain's departure would prompt an unstable southern Gulf region in which Iran faced little resistance to a more assertive, if not outrightly aggressive, policy.

Amir seeks US defence commitment

From 1968 the British defence role in Kuwait and the lower Gulf would become less pivotal, while Kuwait was conducting its economic relationship with Britain with largely short-term commercial considerations in mind. Against the backdrop of a weakening of Kuwait's traditional western defence prop, the Kuwaiti amir undertook a three day state visit to the United States in December 1968. One of the factors that made the amir's state visit attractive to the US, during the awkward interregnum between outgoing president Lyndon Johnson and newly elected president Richard Nixon, was that it would be the first visit since the June 1967 war by a representative of what it termed the "Arab east" i.e. the Gulf Arab states. Prior to the visit the State Department had said that the visit would be "...useful to us in stressing publicly that there are moderate Arab regimes with which we still enjoy close relations."¹⁹ However it was Kuwait's intention that the visit should provide some reassurance as to what these "close relations" might mean if the emirate was territorially threatened. In May 1968, the USSR had made its first significant naval visit to Iraq, affirming its ongoing support, a stance not affected by the Baathist takeover two months later. In the context of the UK's termination of its defence agreement, this only increased Kuwaiti concerns. The US State Department was very aware of the dangers, from its perspective, of a vacuum in the Gulf, and thus it told the White House "...[W]e hope that the USSR will not

¹⁸ Report on Jabr Al-Ahmed's meeting with Reginald Maudling MP, Ambassador G.G. Arthur, 10th February 1968 (FCO 8/137 B22/9).

¹⁹ US State Department Confidential Briefing to the White House prior to the Amir's Visit, November 1968, A210.

fail to notice the (amir's) visit as an indication that the US Government will continue to have an interest in Gulf affairs after 1971²⁰.”

For their part the Kuwaitis now accepted the need for a more public face to their relationship with Washington. Immediately after the British announcement in January 1968 that it was pulling out of the Gulf, the Kuwaitis asked when the US navy would visit the emirate. This Kuwaiti desire only grew after the USSR naval visit to Iraq, contrasting markedly with Kuwait's prevarication over previous US requests that its navy dock at a Kuwaiti port. The Kuwaitis continued to want to promote an impression that they were non-aligned internationally as well as regionally. However, despite its relatively good relations with the USSR, Kuwait did not encourage the Soviets to make a naval visit to the emirate. The Kuwaitis also made a number of approaches to US officials about buying arms, to which the standard US response throughout this period was that the Kuwaitis should continue to look to the UK as the principal source of supplies. Relative discreteness in Kuwait's western defence relations would continue to be the watchword, however. Thus the amir came to the US for a largely ceremonial occasion, but with an agenda, agreed among the Kuwaiti leadership, to secure private understandings that the emirate could rely on the US to militarily intervene in Kuwait's defence if necessary.

The Kuwaiti amir, together with the foreign minister Sabah Al-Ahmed, conducted talks with President Johnson and with Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Despite some suggestions that the amir would have liked a US defence commitment to replace that of the UK, he did not come to Washington looking for a public declaration by the US that it would defend Kuwait, nor would one have been compatible with how the emirate projected its foreign policy for regional consumption²¹. However the Amir directly asked if “we could expect armed support” if there was an attack on any of the Gulf Arab countries. Receiving what for the most part were inevitably bland responses from the outgoing president, given the constitutional position, the amir continued to press Johnson and Rusk in order to be sure “who he could count on.” From Washington's perspective regarding the visit, there was “no particular thing to achieve: relations were good and

²⁰ A210, *op. cit.*

²¹ According to Dayton Mak, Sabah Salim asked him in a private capacity in 1967 whether the US would make a public commitment. A request of this kind was never formally submitted however. It was the belief of Herman Eilts, then US ambassador to Riyadh, that this is what Kuwait wanted in 1968. This view was firmly rebuffed by other US officials however, including William Brewer, who headed the Arabian desk at the State Department at the time and had served in Kuwait. *Ibid.*

the [part US-owned] Gulf oil company was operating normally.²²” However from Kuwait’s perspective there was plainly quite a lot to try to achieve.

To Rusk’s suggestion that “a group of Gulf states” should agree a mutual defence arrangement among themselves, the Kuwaitis were dismissive²³. After all, such a policy would have had to include Iran to have had substance, and as such would have appealed to Iran, the UK and, in time, the US. Yet the amir told Johnson that the greatest security threat in the region did not come from the “Arab side of the Gulf”. Furthermore, a mutual defence pact would have excluded Iraq in what, politically at least, would have been a US-backed alliance. Thus the fundamental balance of Kuwaiti foreign policy would have been upset. An alignment that included Iran would, by definition, have excluded Iraq and Egypt. The ambassador to the UK, in an earlier discussion of such an arrangement, argued that Kuwait needed at least one “progressive Arab state,” otherwise “its association with such a group would weaken its security²⁴. Rusk, however, did go further than his president in stating that the US had a “serious interest in an independent Kuwait²⁵, although he necessarily emphasised the constitutional difficulty in telling the Amir precisely what a future administration would do in particular circumstances. This position was repeated by Rusk when the amir met with President-elect Nixon, although pointed reference was made to the US decision to move destroyers to the Gulf when British troops entered Kuwait in 1961.

It is unlikely that the Kuwaiti side would have expected to have achieved more than this regarding its primary policy interest²⁶. Kuwait was keen to stress its belief that Iran could be helped to find a way out of its claim to Bahrain and that the Shah had invited Kuwait to work toward a mechanism to achieve precisely this. However, the Kuwaitis were also plainly hoping that they could use this issue and that of their shared concern at the Soviet “foothold” in South Arabia to encourage the US to be more engaged politically in the region and in a way which, it hoped, would aid the standing of Kuwait. To this effect they also discussed how US relations with Egypt could be improved, something the amir urged, and how the Kuwaitis might be able to help to facilitate this. It is likely that the Kuwaitis would have carried Cairo’s blessing for its attempt

²² William Brewer, Country Director, Arabian desk, US State Department 1966-70. Personal interview, Falmouth, MA, USA, 15th September 2000.

²³ Sabah Al-Ahmed told the secretary of state tartly that they would not be looking for a mutual defence treaty among the Gulf states.

²⁴ Telegram from UK embassy Kuwait to Foreign Office, January (day unspecified) 1968 (FCO 8/47)

²⁵ Howard Cottam, US ambassador to Kuwait. to US State Department November 1968. Telegram no. 194.

²⁶ According to Abdullah Bishara, then a senior foreign ministry official, “He (the Amir) felt satisfaction...he had laid his list of concerns at the door of the White House.” (Personal interview, 20th January 2003, Kuwait).

to promote rapprochement, which later would include the offer of finance and facilities for US defence support. Palestine was not Kuwait's priority on this trip, nor would it be a foreign policy preoccupation of its leaders from now on²⁷. However it remained an important domestic and regional concern at both the popular and governmental level; one that Kuwait had no intention of exposing itself to criticism over.

While Kuwait succeeded from an American perspective in "putting itself", and for that matter, its security concerns, "on the map"²⁸, it could not have achieved any "concessions". Nor, if a meeting had been held with President Nixon subsequent to his entry to the White House in January 1969, would this have enabled a fully empowered president to have reassured the Kuwaitis any more. The US assessment was that the "net effect of the Amir's visit and conversation has been to strengthen Kuwaiti confidence that Americans have real interest in Kuwait²⁹." Kuwait had gone as far as it could in courting the Americans, given its need to be mindful of relations with leading Arab states and of internal opinion. Had Kuwait been prepared to boldly embrace the "moderate" image the US had of it and therefore expose itself to widespread opprobrium in the region and at home by publicly supporting the, ultimately doomed, Jarring Mission, any subsequent reassurance that President Nixon may have been able to give in private regarding the US commitment to Kuwait's security would have been undermined by a weakening of the emirate's careful cultivation of mainstream Arab opinion.

The Saudi foreign minister, Omar Saqqaf, expressed criticism of the Amir for seeking security guarantees from the US and, he believed, Iran, deeming this "quest...entirely unnecessary³⁰." His argument that Iraq was not presently a threat, and that Saudi Arabia would certainly not invade Kuwait, may not have been disputed by Kuwait, but would not have been seen as sufficient reassurance. Iraq was internally preoccupied but had increasing Soviet support. For its part, Saudi Arabia was not capable of filling the vacuum left by the British, nor would it be interested in working closely with Iran to do so. For Kuwait an effective "band-wagoning"³¹ with Iran in order to provide security against the feared renewal of Iraqi threats, would have been in line with the

²⁷ 10th July 1969, Telegram from US ambassador Howard Cottam to State Department (A132).

²⁸ Brewer, *op.cit.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Quoted in Telegram from US Embassy Jiddah to State Department, 4th January 1969 (POL23KUW XR DEF 1 KUW).

³¹ A concept, along with the more common alliance against threats, used by Stephen Walt to try to explain Middle Eastern states' alliance patterns. Stephen Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (New York; Cornell University Press, 1990).

emirate's emergent defence alignment with the US. However it would have removed the security prop provided by its alignment with the vagaries of Arabism.

By the early 1970s the Nixon administration had worked this regional emphasis on Iran and Saudi Arabia into a strategic policy, "Twin Pillars", with Iran serving as its primary "pillar" and Saudi Arabia, militarily and numerically weaker and subject to greater regional sensitivities, supposedly picking up the secondary "pillar" role. These countries, despite being in an increasingly close military alliance with the US, had little practical basis for direct co-operation in the Gulf and retained strong suspicions of each other. Furthermore, the "Nixon Doctrine", expressed, with Vietnam very much in mind, as leaving "primary responsibility for the affairs of the world" to local nations, meant that what the US regarded as the "two main regional powers"³² would be primarily responsible for security in the Gulf. This was, however, underpinned by US support and what the US still valued as the long tradition and "parallel nature of American and British interests in the Persian Gulf"³³. This did not necessarily require cooperation between the two "pillars", and in any case was to represent a particular and increasing reliance on the main pillar, Iran.

In its desire to see an end to foreign bases in the Gulf, Iran shared the same official outlook as that of Kuwait – together they had opposed, along with Saudi Arabia and "progressive" Arab governments, the US's announcement in December 1971 that it would lease the former UK naval base in Bahrain. Iran was in a position to become the pre-eminent Gulf actor with US military support, and thus there was a logic in opposing a highly visible, potential future constraint on its power. For Kuwait, falling in line with regional opposition to the US naval presence in Bahrain was in keeping with the ideological packaging of its foreign policy. However the stationing of the US naval squadron in the leased base, as opposed to the access rights it had been granted in Bahrain since the 1940s, would provide the US with an effective means to conduct operations in the Gulf and thus enable it to do as the amir had requested and be able to intervene to defend the Gulf Arabs. Prior to the US's announcement regarding Bahrain, the Kuwaiti amir had expressed frustration with the commander of the US's Middle East Force over the limitations on the presence of US naval warships in the Gulf and had appeared to be comfortable with what he erroneously described as a US "base" in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia and with US "bases" in Iran³⁴. It

³² The phrase used by Assistant Secretary of State for NESAs Affairs Joseph Sisco in House testimony August 8th, 1972, quoted by Alinaghi, (footnote) *Ibid.*, p282.

³³ Alinaghi, *op.cit.*

³⁴ Report on COMIDEASTFOR Admiral King's meeting with the Kuwaiti Amir, 7th October 1969 (A176).

may well have been that the military realities of US intervention and a beefed up naval presence had not been fully considered by the Kuwaiti amir or the wider leadership, believing perhaps that US fighter aircraft and access rights in Saudi Arabia was sufficient a regional intervention capability. After all, the Kuwaiti crown prince, Jabr Al-Ahmed, had been happy with only a residual British defence “fig leaf” and had balked at the post-Aden expansion of its presence in Bahrain.

The US understood the careful political line that the Kuwaitis had to walk for internal and regional consumption, describing it as “the country’s basic Arabism”, but contrasting this with the government’s actual practice³⁵. Kuwait was among those that the US believed could be broadly counted as being supportive of US interests in the Gulf; yet the emirate remained wedded to international neutrality, or the impression of it at least. Kuwait was only concerned about the Soviet Union in so far as Moscow’s relations with Iraq could have a negative impact on Kuwait’s position in the Gulf. President Johnson’s flattering reference to the emirate’s “role of leadership” in the region³⁶ reflected the hope rather than the expectation that, together with Kuwait’s financial patronage in the Arab world and identification with free enterprise, would come the adoption of desirable foreign policies. However the US also knew that the Kuwaiti government’s need to be heard saying the right thing regarding the Palestinians served as the principal inhibitor on “...moderation on oil, money and trade³⁷”. In a sense this would be borne out by Kuwait’s strident posture during the 1973-4 oil embargo, but Kuwait’s economic policies, in so far as they affected western business partners, were largely pragmatic. There is little evidence, however, that Kuwait’s foreign policy was affected by what the US also believed was Kuwait’s “need for us as an ally in preventing the spread of communism in the area.” For example, Kuwait took a markedly different line than international or regional friends regarding South Yemen, which was supported by both the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). However, despite this, pursuing increased understandings with the US would be a priority for Kuwait.

³⁵ “Kuwait: 6 Monthly Country Appraisal”, US Embassy to State Department, July 10th, 1969 (A132).

³⁶ Transcript of conversation between President Johnson and Amir Sabah Salim, December 12th, 1968, Public Papers of President Lyndon B Johnson, President Johnson Library, Texas, USA.

³⁷ Kuwait: 6 monthly country appraisal, July 10th, 1969, Telegram to State department, A132

US defence and security role begins

By the time of Black September in Jordan, the US began to fear that Palestinian leftists might conduct attacks on US interests in the emirate. By the following year, Washington was asked to help in the formation of an internal security command centre, a role their ambassador, John Patrick-Walsh, believed exceeded that which had been formerly exercised by the British. The UK had had military and security advisors in Kuwait, and, after 1971, ran the Kuwait Liaison Team to provide training. However, by the end of 1971, Patrick-Walsh was informing the State Department that “the doors are open” as far as US defence interests in Kuwait are concerned.

“The Kuwaitis have quietly contemplated their future in the midst of turbulence, and have decided that their future rests with us,” he wrote. Measuring the shift in the short period since his arrival in late 1969, Patrick-Walsh commented, “...[S]tarting from a position of bristling antagonism they have come full circle to a position of intimacy and basic trust. This is particularly true in respect to internal security and defence matters,”³⁸ wrote Walsh, in reference to the Kuwaiti decision to strengthen internal and external defence forces in co-ordination with the US.

Oil ownership meets economic and political objectives

Following the departure of the British from the Gulf, Kuwait (in common with the rest of the Gulf states, including Iran,) was planning for a closer defence partnership with the US, without wishing to negate the useful symbolism of its residual defence co-operation with the UK. At the same time Kuwait would continue to protect its wider position in the Arab world by maintaining a firm stance in support of the Palestinians, and, in common, with fellow Arab oil producers in particular, taking a greater proportion of national oil production into state ownership. The Kuwaiti oil and finance minister, Abdul Rahman Al-Ateegi, was to state that the motive behind urging Kuwaiti “participation”, i.e. ownership stakes in the Kuwait Oil Company, was part of a wider initiative among the Arab oil producers to ensure they had “...[e]ffective control over

³⁸ Transcript of report sent by US ambassador John Patrick-Walsh to Secretary of State, 17th November 1971 (contained in the US Department of State Telegram November 1971 to US consulate, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, POL23 KUW, “Secret” telegram No.762). Patrick-Walsh also noted that US arms sales could take advantage of the recent decision to grant Kuwait “Foreign Military Sales” status, thereby providing US financial assistance, the absence of which had caused great antagonism in the Kuwaiti security establishment.

investment and production decisions, an active role in production operations, and a real influence in world oil markets³⁹”. There had been Kuwaiti officials who talked privately in much tougher terms, mindful it seemed of regional pressures in the event of another Arab-Israeli war⁴⁰. However the direction of Kuwaiti oil policy remained pragmatic. The participation negotiations, whilst erratic and, ultimately, to culminate in the introduction of 100% government ownership by 1975, were pursued steadily and relatively co-operatively with the international oil companies. It was clear to the oil and finance minister⁴¹ and therefore to Kuwait’s leadership, that “nationalisation” in the sense that Al-Ateegi meant it, of outright expropriation with little negotiation over acceptable compensation terms, would be damaging to the country’s “international relations” i.e. to relations with both the US and the UK.

Al-Samita a step too far

Despite the formal ending of their defence agreement, the UK ambassador invited the Kuwaiti chief of staff to consider British intervention when Iraq’s latest territorial incursion led to clashes at Al-Samita in March 1973 (see also Chapter 6). However, in a pointed reflection of their changing relationship, General Mubarak Al-Sabah declined, stating that Britain’s military support had already been sufficient. He was referring to the approximately one hundred British troops in the Kuwait Liaison Team (KLT), half of whom were positioned just south of the border town of Abdali, while an RAF contingent was training recently UK-supplied Lightning aircraft. British pilots could intervene if there was a “risk to other troops,” while British soldiers attached to a Kuwaiti armoured regiment were expected to “deploy forward” with their Kuwaiti colleagues should this be necessary⁴². The UK assessed that the decision to keep their British military trainers in place meant that, had Baghdad been considering moving further south, they would have “...[G]ot the message that it wasn’t going to be that easy.”⁴³

³⁹ Press conference, January 26th, 1973, Kuwait (*Middle East Economic Survey* Vol. XVI, No 14).

⁴⁰ Ashraf Lutfi, former head of the Amiri Diwan, talked of a collective Arab plan that in Kuwait’s case at least included 100% nationalization. Telegram to State Department, October 28th, 1968 (A354).

⁴¹ *Middle East Economic Survey*, *op.cit.*

⁴² PRH Wright, Head MED, Foreign Office, to private secretary, Secretary of State Douglas-Home, 23rd March 1973, FCO8/1991

⁴³ Sir John Wilton, Personal interview, Falmouth, UK, 2000

British officials downplayed the Kuwaiti fears of a Soviet angle to the events, a perspective seemingly borne out by the fact that Saddam Hussein was summoned to Moscow⁴⁴ to account for an action which would also have upset Soviet attempts to forge a better relationship with Iran, with whom a treaty of friendship had just been signed. A senior US State Department official emphasised to the author that the USSR turned down an Iraqi offer of access to Um Qasr, considering the waters of the northern Gulf too shallow for its navy⁴⁵. Doubts about the significance of a Soviet danger may partly account for the decidedly cool reaction of the US to the events at Al-Samita. Certainly Washington, seeking to uphold détente and keen to make a reality of the Nixon Doctrine, would not have wanted to over-react. Although expected by the British to defend their ally if need be, the Soviets did not want to become embroiled in a regional conflict, and in general had considerable reservations about their would-be allies among the “progressive” Arab states⁴⁶.

The US appeared to foreshadow its stance just prior to the 1990 invasion when, in 1973, the State Department made clear it wanted to sound “neutral” and publicly urged an Arab League solution for fear that, if it condemned the incursion, Washington’s relations with Iraq and with other Arab countries would be damaged further⁴⁷. The UK had also privately urged Kuwait to find an Arab solution, but Kuwait decided to publicly condemn the Iraqi attack on the police post. On the ground, however, Britain was effectively in deterrent mode alongside Kuwaiti troops. Not that its role was much appreciated in the emirate; some Kuwaiti officials even suspected a British conspiracy⁴⁸.

Embargo puts Arabism before US friendship

Kuwait’s desire to discretely strengthen the defence relationship with the US alongside rhetorical and practical fealty to the Arab national cause would be at its most strained during the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the subsequent embargo of oil sales to the US. The US’s emergency

⁴⁴ Majid Khadouri, Socialist Iraq - A Study in Iraqi Politics Since 1968 (Middle East Institute, Washington DC, 1978)

⁴⁵ Personal interview with Herman Eilts, US ambassador to Saudi Arabia 1965-70 and Egypt 1973-77.

⁴⁶ See Robert O Friedman, Soviet Policy Towards the Middle East Since 1970 (New York; Praeger, 1978) and Page op.cit for the limitations of Soviet influence on Arab politics and so-called progressive regimes and their militaries.

⁴⁷ Summary of conversation between US ambassador to Kuwait, Francois Dickman, and UK ambassador John Wilton, 22nd March, 1973 (FCO8/1991).

⁴⁸ P.J. Wright, 24th July 1973 (FCO8/2003).

supply of fighter jets to Israel as the tide appeared to be turning in favour of the Egyptian and Syrian forces caused considerable political frustration on the part of foreign minister, Sabah Al-Ahmed, and other representatives of non-combatant Arab countries, including the Saudi foreign minister Omar Saqqaf, during an appointment with President Nixon. The meeting took place in the wake of Saudi proposals to double the posted price of its oil. Although this fitted with the expressed desire of oil producers to raise posted prices, its scale and timing was an attempt to leverage political pressure on Israel from western oil consumers. Economic interests and political stances toward the Palestine Question were overlapping.

UK relations still valued

For all Kuwait's apparent enjoyment of a political platform for its professed Arab nationalism, the amirate was also keen that its international relations should not be fundamentally compromised. Only one month into an embargo that had angered the British government, Kuwait proposed that UK energy companies be offered guaranteed quotas of Kuwait's participation oil. Kuwait's importance to the UK economy had been underlined as the amirate's Sterling holdings rocketed. The amirate was persuaded by the British government to "recycle" some of its mounting Sterling holdings by investing more in the UK. Its willingness to do so was helped by the arrival in 1975 of James Callaghan, the first time a serving British foreign secretary had visited Kuwait⁴⁹. The balance of UK-Kuwaiti relations had shifted significantly since 1971, a factor also reflected in Kuwait's gradual spreading of some of its currency holdings outside of Sterling altogether. Callaghan's visit had also been intended to emphasise the UK's residual military role in the region. The UK continued to provide defence training in Kuwait and was still a major supplier of arms to the amirate as well as to its powerful neighbours, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Britain had an ongoing, if reduced, presence in the Gulf exemplified by regular military visits and exercises⁵⁰, and enjoyed improved relations with Iraq. Kuwait's desire for advice from Britain about Iraq and prospective developments in the region was to increase in the more uncertain regional environment after the end of the oil embargo⁵¹. Notwithstanding the UK government's fear that the Kuwaitis may be tempted to again express the "pan-Arab rigor" they

⁴⁹ Sir A.T. Lamb, UK ambassador to Kuwait, 1974-77, personal interview 2000

⁵⁰ 1974 Defence Estimates White Paper 21st January 1974 (CAB 129/174)

⁵¹ Kuwaiti officials, including defence and interior minister Saad Abdullah, privately admitted to British officials their lack of knowledge about what was going on in Iraq.

displayed during the embargo, the two countries understood their mutual interest in maintaining close relations.

US relations take priority

Kuwait's relations with the US during the course of the oil embargo were not to suffer the marked increase in tension seen in Saudi-US relations. The Al-Saud's principal role in the embargo had made it the focus of US diplomacy, and the apparent target of more abrasive attempts to emphasise Washington's interest in the free flow of oil. Ambiguous talk by the US of "counter measures" when the embargo was first declared, had developed, some seven months after the embargo had been lifted, into direct US references to military action if the interests of industrial nations were threatened. At the same time strong statements were made by Saudi Arabia in which destruction of oilfields was threatened in reprisal for any hint of US intervention⁵². Kuwait was initially not immune from engagement in some similarly heated rhetoric at the beginning of the embargo; however it avoided any direct verbal engagements with the US. In time the combination of strategic steps taken by the western oil consumers, Washington's relatively successful diplomacy in the wider Arab world, and common regional interests typified by the Dhofar rebellion in Oman, helped take the heat out of the issue. Part of the US's successful diplomacy was exemplified when it brokered military disengagement agreements with Egypt and Syria, while relations with Cairo in particular continued to improve, a development in which Kuwait had been playing a part. Following the 1973 war, the Soviet Union also came in for considerable criticism in the Arab world, including sections of the Kuwaiti press, for what was perceived to be its inactivity during the conflict and caution in the aftermath. Therefore Egypt's move toward the US was a step the Kuwait could afford to discretely encourage. For all the verbal sparring and rising tensions between the Gulf Arab oil producers and the US in particular during the embargo, Washington remained Kuwait's pre-eminent focus for its efforts to build an international defence partner, as indeed it was for Saudi Arabia and Iran. However there was concern among the US's international allies that events in Vietnam indicated a wider weakening of Washington's political will. While this did not encourage Kuwait to consider a major international realignment, it did suggest that improved relations with the USSR, which after all remained close to Iraq, and, to a lesser extent, China, could be beneficial to the emirate. Kuwaiti-Soviet relations could also

⁵² JB Kelly, *op.cit.*

specifically incentivise the US to make good on existing commitments to modernise Kuwait's air defences.

Communist relations boosted

Kuwait was to step up relations with the Soviet Union when the foreign minister Shaikh Sabah Al-Ahmed paid a visit in December 1975. The trip produced a form of words that Kuwait hoped might encourage Soviet restraint of Iraq, and, from the USSR's perspective, suggested the possibility of capitalising on recent Gulf Arab tensions with the western powers and on Kuwait's professed non-alignment.⁵³ In August 1976 Kuwait initialled an agreement with the USSR to buy US\$300 million worth of SAM7 air to air and ground to air missiles as well as tanks, advanced artillery and anti-personnel weapons⁵⁴. Some accounts suggested far higher costs and more extensive commitments. However the Soviet arms, which began arriving later that year, were not to be a prelude to the arrival of Soviet military trainers, emphasising what for Kuwait was a deal intended to gain influence with Moscow and to concentrate minds in Washington. The Kuwait leadership wanted the US to make good on the earlier recommendations to supply air defence and other equipment, acknowledged by Congress as evidence of the amirate's desire for "closer co-operation" but frustrated due to objections by pro-Israeli congressmen⁵⁵. Unsurprisingly the US was highly concerned about the deal, but claims it was able to persuade Kuwait to ease off on the scale of its discussions with the Soviet Union by suggesting that otherwise the chances of US air defence batteries being supplied were limited⁵⁶.

Sensing an opportunity to broaden the basis of its international support, and to exploit China's desire to end its isolation, Kuwait had broken with Taiwan and established full diplomatic relations with Peking as early as 1971. Although in doing so Kuwait was decidedly out of kilter with many of its Gulf Arab neighbours, China had recognised the amirate ten years earlier, since when business relations had grown. At a time when Iran was seeking to build relations with the

⁵³ "Peace and security in this area (Persian Gulf) could be strengthened by prohibiting foreign interference in the affairs of this region, by insuring freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf, and by establishing trust and good neighbourly co-operation among all the states in the Gulf zone on the basis of non-interference in each others internal affairs and respect for the right of each to free and independent development." Quoted p217, Freedman *op.cit.*

⁵⁴ Abdul-Reda Assiri, *Kuwait's Foreign Policy – City State in World Politics* (Boulder; Westview Press, 1989), p.81

⁵⁵ Assiri, *op.cit.*

⁵⁶ Frank Maerstrone, ex-US ambassador to Kuwait 1976-79, personal interview 2000

PRC, and the US was beginning its diplomatic engagement with the People's Republic, the Kuwaiti move in 1971 was a bold but far from reckless broadening of friendships in keeping with its long standing practice.

A manageable balance of relations

As measured by defence supplies and training packages, by the end of 1977 the US's commitment to Kuwait, while growing, remained relatively limited⁵⁷. However their defence relations showed every likelihood of expanding over the short to medium term, albeit subject to ongoing Congressional constraints and Kuwait continuing to play off the US and USSR. Kuwait had sought to maximise acceptance among its neighbours for its independence and for what had developed into a sometimes controversial courting of international allies. Its policies had proven largely successful, although its outreach to the Soviets had, by the time of the above proposed arms deal, threatened to destabilise relations with Saudi Arabia.

Kuwait therefore entered the period of Amir Jabr Al-Ahmed's rule, following the death of Shaikh Sabah Salim in December 1977, struggling to put its international relations on a firm basis that did not contradict key regional relations. However the priorities of Kuwait's foreign policy were in place: an increasingly close relationship with the US; and mostly positive relations with Washington's strategic allies in the Gulf region, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and also with Egypt, which from 1974 was effectively the third pillar in the US's Middle East strategy. In this sense there was actually less of a disconnect in Kuwait's foreign policy than there had been in the aftermath of the 1967 war, when the defence alliance with the UK seemed at odds with the rejectionist mood among both Arab belligerents and ordinary opinion, while regime changes hurt western interests in South Arabia, Iraq and Libya, and caused upheaval in Jordan.

However the key to balancing Kuwait's international defence relations with both the UK and the US was the same as it had been at the time of its independence in 1961: a non-aligned regional policy, facilitated by mediation and largesse, and adherence to the touchstone Arab cause of Palestine. While it had been politically sensitive, the relationship with the UK had offset Kuwait's relative external exposure by providing an off-shore defence guarantee as the country felt its way toward a regionally non-aligned but essentially Arabist foreign policy following independence.

⁵⁷ Assiri, *op.cit.*

Over the 1970s Kuwait's relationship with the US would develop aspects of the defence relationship it formerly had the UK. However this could not provide the emirate with the same assurances that the UK's more pronounced role in Kuwait and the wider Gulf had given. By 1977 Kuwait was patently less dependent on international allies as a regional security prop. The seeking of an "Arab solution" in the face of Iraqi territorial incursions, and the upholding of an Arab oil embargo that targeted the US and the UK, emphasised what had become Kuwait's primary foreign policy considerations, albeit that such policies were inadequate in meeting its external security concerns. In late 1977, when President Sadat went to Jerusalem, Palestine effectively fractured the harmony between Kuwait's promotion of Egypt's realignment toward the US, and the emirate's fealty to the Arab cause. The outcome would emphasise Kuwait's need to pursue close relations with Saudi Arabia and, consequently, the pursuit of a relatively conservative foreign policy in terms of the emirate's "Arabism" and in its international relations. For the most part this was maintained, although circumstances in the 1980s deepened Kuwait's relationship with the US, but in the process ended its regional non-alignment, a step that contributed to the ultimate failure of its foreign policy in 1990.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the factors driving Kuwait's foreign policy during a relatively short, but intense, period, both in the region and domestically. It started with Kuwait's independence in 1961 and the subsequent UK military intervention; traced the impact of the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars; examined Kuwait's role in the 1973/4 oil embargo; and ended in 1977. This was the year that Egypt began its direct engagement with Israel, and that Amir Sabah Salim died, ushering in the rule of Jabr Al-Ahmed, who remained amir until his death at the beginning of 2006. Egypt's policy shift in 1977 severely weakened its regional influence for much of the next 15 years and therefore removed it as a prop of Kuwaiti foreign policy. Within 12 months, Iran was to begin a period of internal upheaval that culminated in the overthrow of the Shah. With a corresponding rise in Iraqi ambitions and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, Kuwait's increasingly forlorn attempts at upholding its regional non-alignment policy were over.

The international relations theories that underpinned this thesis' emphasis on the regional and international components of Kuwait's foreign relations - neo-realism and constructivism - cannot wholly explain what, in combination, created a duality, if not outright contradiction, in policy during the 1961-77 period. Kuwait adopted an Arabist foreign policy construct that was largely focussed on external legitimacy in order to offset regional threats born largely of its strategic location and enormous oil assets. Kuwait's relative autonomy from internal pressures and institutional constraints fitted with the domestic realities identified by those who have deployed an essentially Foreign Policy Analysis approach to Arab states' decision making. This helped to emphasise how Kuwaiti decision-makers were not, for the most part, measuring external policy in terms of internal legitimacy problems. However the specifics of the Kuwaiti case have shown how domestic autonomy was aided by the combination of "correct" Arabist stances externally and, drawing on the work of writers who have examined Kuwait from the perspective of rentier theory, the internal patronage afforded by oil wealth. At the same time, the Kuwaiti leadership maintained defence relations with the UK, and then pursued them with the US, in contradiction with a professed Arabism. Backing up a foreign policy presented in ideological terms, Kuwait sought to reduce its perceived external vulnerability by publicly deploying its oil wealth in support of Arabist causes and by making payments to radical Arab states. Kuwait's international

alignments were at variance with many of the assumptions behind constructivist understandings of foreign policy. However its deployment of ideology to deflect external security pressures did not correspond with neo-realist assumptions either, nor did its, for the most part, avoidance of regional alliances. In short, Kuwait utilised Arabist ideology, oil money, and western defence partnerships to deter what was primarily conceived of as an external threat. Its foreign policy in this period does not therefore fit neatly into any one theoretical framework.

In separating the internal, regional and international dimensions, I have been able to assess their relative significance in the determination of Kuwait's foreign policy. In this way the importance to Kuwaiti foreign policy of different Al-Sabah leaders, of top non Al-Sabah officials, and of the national assembly and related political trends, has been considered. Kuwait's attention to regional security threats and to the adoption of policy stances mindful of Arab opinion has been explored. Finally, the weight Kuwait gave to its international relations, primarily the traditional relationship with Britain and the development of relations with the US, has been addressed.

Foreign policy was decided by the senior Al-Sabah leadership, but not in a manner recognisable to students of government decision-making in western countries. This was not a matter of cabinet majorities, minuted proceedings, or long term considerations. Rather, broad lines were understood, thereby allowing some autonomy for particular expertise. Indeed, other than oil, Kuwaiti foreign policy was often little more than a generalised Al-Sabah consensus. It was less policy of the concrete, programmatic kind, than a collection of broad stances, of predictable responses, that reflected the importance to Kuwait, a militarily inconsequential and perceptibly politically vulnerable Arab state, of keeping within the mainstream of an identifiable Arab regional consensus. This did not mean that Kuwait lacked foreign policy aspirations, as is often suggested of relatively weak states. However, Kuwait's publicly declared policies identified with the touchstones of Arab nationalism, a construct that for the emirate was largely a rhetorical, defensive prop, rather than the tool of regional influence it would, for example, be for Egypt, at least until the 1967 war.

The senior Al-Sabah, most obviously Jabr Al-Ahmed, the crown prince and premier for much of the 1961-77 period; and his half brother, Sabah Al-Ahmed, the foreign minister, would tend to adopt stronger Arabist rhetoric than Kuwait's rulers, whether Abdullah Salim (1950-65) or Sabah Salim (1965-77). On occasions this would suggest potential differences of substantive policy to, for example, the ostensibly pro-British Sabah Salim. However, in practice, for example in the

case of Jabr Al-Ahmed's threat to reduce Kuwait's Sterling investments in response to a dispute over oil revenues, these were merely tactical moves designed to enhance the amirate's bargaining position.

Kuwait forged a foreign policy balance based largely on external, but also periodic internal, security concerns. This encouraged it to maintain its mostly discrete defence alliance with the UK and the search for "understandings" with the US, offset with an identifiably "pro-Arab" foreign policy stance within the region. The contradictions in this balance produced tensions across Kuwait's internal, regional and international relationships, however for the most part it proved successful, at least during the period with which this thesis was concerned.

In Chapters 2 and 5, the thesis considered the dynamics of Kuwait's internal political dimension. During the period from 1961-67, Kuwait moved from a mostly benign exercise of authority largely concentrated in the hands of Amir Abdullah Salim, to a more authoritarian polity in which Jabr Al-Ahmed was the driving force. Kuwait held existential concerns about large number of foreign Arab nationals in its population, which included Palestinians in the public sector, Egyptian oil workers, and initially a small, but significant, number of Iraqis in its armed forces. Kuwaiti Arab nationalists, who were largely supportive of Gamal Abdul Nasser's regime in Egypt, coalesced with exiled Arab nationalists and, it was feared, might seek to manipulate foreign Arab residents. This encouraged a domestic political clampdown from 1966 to 1971, which by the late 1960s had gone so far as to weaken the Al-Sabah's compact with some leading merchant families who normally preferred political co-operation to open disputes with the government. The government's shift to relatively authoritarian practices included manipulation of the national assembly election in 1967 to favour tribal and other conservative interests that were more easily controllable by leading Al-Sabah, thus setting the pattern for much subsequent practice. This had some impact on foreign policy in terms of an end to what some more conservative Al-Sabah saw as pandering to communist states such as East Germany and North Korea. However, the broad lines of foreign policy were unaffected by the domestic clampdown. Indeed Kuwait's adherence to Arab policy norms, and its support for radical regimes, backed up by financial largesse, made it all the easier to clamp-down with relative impunity from the opinion of its Arab neighbours; all the more so following the decline of Egyptian influence after 1967. When the Kuwaiti government returned to a policy of relative internal repression in 1976, and unconstitutionally suspended a national assembly that had threatened to upset the amirate's regional as well as internal relations, the broad lines of foreign policy retained their Arabist

identifiers. In fact, Kuwait's desire to maintain its "pro-Arab" regional relations encouraged the suspension in the first place.

In Chapters 3 and 6, the regional context for Kuwait's adoption of a pan-Arab foreign policy construct was explored. The primary existential fear created by Iraq's territorial assertions in 1961, and Kuwait's periodic territorial concerns regarding its northern neighbour after Baghdad's begrudging recognition of Kuwait in 1963, emphasised what would be a key constant in the amirate's foreign policy: a non-aligned, but identifiably pro-Arab, regional political stance designed to retain the initial support shown by key Arab states for Kuwait's independence. As seen in Chapter 6, in the aftermath of Britain's decision in 1968 to depart from the Gulf, Kuwaiti security concerns would to an extent shift to Iran. At the same time, Iran's regional assertiveness further emphasised to Kuwait the residual insecurity it felt vis-à-vis Iraq. Baghdad used its nascent conflict with Iran to justify territorial encroachments into Kuwait, most strikingly at Al-Samita in March 1973. In the face of Iran's suspicion of the amirate, Kuwait actively sought engagement with the Shah, whose desire to contain Iraq saw him warn off Baghdad from making further incursions into the amirate. Once the apparent regional plaudits Kuwait received for its overt expression of Arab solidarity in the 1973-4 oil embargo had died away, and inter-Arab division over the politics of disengagement with Israel and regarding the Lebanese civil war grew, the amirate was exposed to further territorial pressure from Iraq, and a strong sense that it lacked support within the Arab world as bigger issues took precedence.

Kuwait had played a major role in funding Egypt's realignment from the Soviet Union to the US, seeing the latter's strengthened regional role as beneficial to offsetting the USSR's support for Iraq and as bolstering the position of the Gulf Arab countries. However Egypt's reduced regional weight, and gradual movement toward bilateral peace with Israel, also began to lessen the constraints on Iraqi and Iranian competition for Gulf hegemony. Following the Iranian revolution, an open contest ensued in which Saddam Hussein's Iraq was, after a previous perceived capitulation to Iranian power, now able to pose as the new citadel of Arabism. This left Kuwait exposed. Though having inevitably drawn closer to Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of 1967, and especially following the British departure in 1971, Kuwait did not want to rely exclusively on Riyadh, but by the end of the decade non-alignment no longer appeared viable.

Kuwait's regional fears had earlier necessitated non-alignment. This in turn meant it had little choice but to retain the international defence prop of its foreign policy, given the unpredictability

of its regional position. In Chapter 4 we saw how a partly manipulated Kuwait provided an opportunity for Britain, which had been weakened in the region, to assert its remaining relations in the Middle East by demonstrating a willingness to defend Kuwait within days of its independence in June 1961. After the departure of British troops, Kuwait's adherence to the construct of Arab unity, represented by the entry of an Arab security force, would ensure the emirate "legitimacy" through acceptance in the Arab League; and the political palliative of cash would secure its recognition by Iraq. However, we also saw how Kuwait was, despite British fears, unwilling to bargain away the UK defence commitment to ease the process of recognition from Iraq that some other Arab states were also keen to facilitate on that basis. The practical expression of the UK's defence commitment would, over 1965-7, be steadily reduced without any major concern from Kuwait. The emirate believed that the security of its position within the region had improved due to its careful courting of Arab states and, to an extent, the Iranian government. Despite this, Kuwait essentially remained in an alliance with Britain, thereby providing a discrete backdrop against which it could project overt statements of adherence to Palestine and, ironically, in support of Arab nationalists opposing British interests in Aden and Bahrain. Recognising the unpopularity regionally and internally of even this "offshore" defence partnership, and hoping to ensure that it was not beholden to just one, possibly unreliable, international guarantor, in 1965 Kuwait sought a "secret" US commitment to its defence, having considered asking Washington to substitute for the UK's public commitment within months of the 1961 intervention.

After the UK's regional withdrawal announcement in 1968, and fearful of the security vacuum that raised concerns about both Iran and Iraq, Kuwait actively sought a clear-cut but wholly private defence commitment from the US. In Chapter 7 we saw how the emirate's leadership accepted the value of, inevitably vague, statements by both the departing and the incoming US president. Both Kuwait and the US preferred to build implicit understandings, rather than specific commitments, through naval visits, military and security advisers, and the US's entry to the formerly largely exclusive UK preserve of defence sales. The limitations upon this relationship, in the wider context of what remained a limited US Gulf security role further exacerbated by its perceptible international weakness in Vietnam, and Kuwait's sense of increased vulnerability in the region, encouraged Kuwait to flirt with the USSR in 1975. This development was in line with her desire to project non alignment internationally as well as regionally, but ultimately was a trend that would be beholden to the greater concern about US and Saudi reaction, concerns that reflected what, by 1977, had become Kuwait's principle relationships at the international and regional level respectively.

Of the different factors shaping Kuwaiti foreign policy considerations, Kuwait's regional relations proved the more significant over the period from 1961-77. International defence relationships were important for the emirate. However the desire for an "over the horizon" commitment limited the extent to which Kuwait could utilise these friendships to deter regional threats, albeit that the UK defence guarantee enabled the emirate to more confidently assert an Arabist stance in its early post-independence years. The limitations to the deterrence that international allies could provide was compounded after 1968, when the US only partly filled the role that had been largely vacated by the UK, and Washington preferred to outsource its regional security interests by extensively arming its principal Gulf allies, Iran and Saudi Arabia. While naval visits to Kuwait would be allowed after 1968, this was a long way short, for example, of the right to use Saudi air and naval facilities, which the US exercised. In keeping the UK and the US largely at arm's length, Kuwait was prioritising a foreign policy that sought to respond to perceived regional vulnerability by publicly adhering to Arabism. Kuwait endorsed foreign policy stances that were closer to Egypt (at least up to 1967) than Saudi Arabia, affirming an essentially rejectionist position on Palestine that was at one with regional and domestic opinion, and giving political and financial support to Arab nationalist opposition groups in the southern Gulf and even for the Marxist regime in south Yemen.

The internal dimension is arguably the least significant element in determining Kuwaiti foreign policy. This thesis has given considerable attention to the different internal factors that affected decision-making on foreign policy, but concludes that their significance was more as a reinforcer of what became a relatively constant formula. For example the connection between Egypt and the Kuwaiti "branch" of the Arab Nationalist Movement bolstered the emirate's radical posturing and communist bloc flirtation of the early years of Kuwait's independence. However Kuwait's confidence in its foreign policy's Arabist credentials and its judicious use of financial support for Egypt and other radical Arab nationalist states enabled it to clamp down on domestic radicalism and "re-balance", in the words of Shaikh Jabr Al-Ali Al-Sabah, its international relations away from communist countries.

The emphasis of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) on the internal factors shaping policy making proved useful in thinking about the domestic Kuwaiti context. The emirate's foreign policy determination is largely the preserve of the top layer of a hereditary ruling family, and whose opaque decision-making is characterised by informality and generalisation. This also emphasised

how decisions were, and could be, exercised in a manner largely autonomous from the domestic environment, and how external factors generally over-rode prospective internal “inputs”. As such the assumptions underpinning the typology adopted by Adeed Dawisha in examining the key players in the exercise of decision-making in Middle Eastern and especially Arab states, helped provide a theoretical framework for exploring the domestic dimension of Kuwait’s foreign policy. Ultimately, however, the external environment would shape the decisions of a few key players in Kuwait; decisions that did not so much see the international and regional environments as providing “capacity” or “constraint” as Dawisha saw in the very different case of Egypt, but were seen, defensively, as generating threats that had to be managed.

Therefore this study of Kuwait has given greater attention to neo-realist and constructivist analysis of the region, but these too have revealed significant limitations. Both see Arab nationalism as presenting a threat to the authority and even the security of some states, whether as a tool of a given country, most obviously Egypt, which sponsored Arab nationalist opposition groups throughout the Arab world, thereby increasing the “balance of threat” felt by many states; or as a popularly endorsed ideology that in and of itself could create internal credibility problems for governments. Thus both Stephen Walt and Michael Barnett identify ideological imperatives behind Jordan’s decision to enter the 1967 war, with its large Palestinian population obliging an alignment with the kingdom’s more powerful rivals, Egypt and Syria. While the leadership in Kuwait periodically saw regional developments, most notably Black September and the Lebanese Civil War, as potentially affecting its internal position vis-à-vis the large exiled Palestinian population resident in the emirate, it did not adopt a firmer line on Palestine in response. Rather, Kuwait viewed the closure of the national assembly as partly a precautionary step in light of local Palestinian anger over events in Lebanon, but also as a way of assuaging Syria over assembly criticism of its role in Lebanon. Some, relatively piecemeal, constraint occurred on Palestinian political activists from the leftist PLO factions after the shock of the 1974 terror incident that involved external actors but raised questions about local involvement then, or in the future. Arguably, domestic constraint on Palestinians or Kuwaiti Arab nationalists was balanced by maintaining a firm position on Palestine in line with the PLO mainstream that the emirate continued to fund. It was this close historic and financial relationship that for the most part made Kuwait feel it had rather less to prove than for example Jordan, a country by definition on the frontline of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Kuwait in a sense had long functioned as a Fatah base within clearly defined and respected lines of operation, but without an implicit security threat that shaped Kuwaiti foreign policy. The fact that the Palestinian political leadership and community in

Kuwait proved to be a very profound security liability in 1990 does not mean that they were effectively internal determinants of foreign policy twenty years earlier, although it obviously raises questions about the wisdom of Kuwait's regional and Arabist orientation in its foreign policy.

This brings us to the more general question of how Kuwaiti foreign policy was formulated. Kuwait's black box of decision-making was confined to a small coterie of senior Al-Sabah, who, as this thesis argued, worked for the most part according to general understandings, with an increasing authority over both foreign as well as domestic policy being held by Crown Prince Jabr Al-Ahmed as the period wore on. This thesis has partly been able to open up this closed process by conducting first hand interviews with senior Kuwaiti and western officials and by reference to UK and US embassy reporting during the period. The question of the relative weight Kuwaiti decision-makers placed on a succession of challenges, and the priority they afforded to the different elements of the amirate's foreign policy package, has had to proceed from this "evidence" and from my own interpretation of it. Theory can be an external guide, but it cannot explain the specific foreign policy priorities of the Al-Sabah.

Throughout the period with which this thesis was concerned, the Kuwaiti foreign policy balance can be regarded as a success, in so much as there was no comprehensive territorial invasion, nor did the amirate prove vulnerable to any overt external coercion that could have distorted the country's political or economic life. Judged with the benefit of hindsight, however, Kuwait's exposure to overt Iranian pressure in the course of its war with Iraq in the 1980s, and, most profoundly, Kuwait's temporary demise as an independent state following Iraq's invasion in 1990, suggests fundamental flaws in the amirate's foreign policy.

Of relevance to this thesis is whether the turbulent events Kuwait directly experienced from 1980 onwards can be attributed to flaws in a foreign policy developed in the 1960s as a balance between Arabism and discrete international defence partnerships. The Iraq-Iran war (1980-88) saw Kuwait abandon its professed regional non-alignment in favour of overt political and financial support for Iraq, the country that had been judged by Kuwait as its greatest threat. This in turn saw the amirate exposed to internal attacks sponsored by the revolutionary Shia Islamic regime in Tehran, and, increasingly, over the course of Iran's war with Iraq, attempts by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard to sink Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Gulf. The apparent switch in Kuwaiti foreign policy in part reflected a qualitatively different reaction it felt toward the new

regime that came to power after the 1978/79 Iranian revolution than that of the Shah it replaced. The revolution in Iran had seen demonstrations in sympathy in the emirate held primarily by Kuwaiti Shia, as there had been in other Gulf Arab states and more widely in the Middle East. The rhetoric of the revolution, and the widespread sympathy among Kuwait's Shia community for a regime that appeared bent on exporting revolution across the Gulf, created considerable apprehension on the part of the Kuwaiti government, and over time would engender strong sectarian antipathy from the majority Sunnis toward the Shia population, whether they held Kuwaiti nationality or not.

Kuwait would have found it difficult to have stood aside from the war that Iraq began with Iran in 1980. The common threat from Iran felt by Arab governments inevitably encouraged Kuwaiti cooperation with Iraq. However Kuwait's relations with Iran under the Shah, while broadly positive, had already proved themselves subject to what the emirate felt was the greater priority of displaying Arab solidarity. Worryingly for Kuwait, the Iraq-Iran war saw a series of border incursions by Iraq into the emirate with the apparent objective of enhancing access to the northern Gulf headwaters in the face of Iranian military pressure. In the context of a revolutionary transformation in Iran, Kuwait had shifted from leaning toward Iraq in the previous phase of conflict, to a firm alignment that saw the emirate provide generous financial grants and soft loans, the use of Kuwaiti ports for Iraqi imports of arms as well as civilian goods, and turning a blind eye to further Iraqi incursions. The new regime in Iran, and the context of an all-out war as opposed to the periodic border conflicts seen from 1969-75, made it very difficult, if not impossible, for Kuwait to do otherwise. Practical expressions of fealty to Arab solidarity had been required at the time of the 1973-4 oil embargo when a collective Arab interest was underpinned by regional and internal pressure to act. It was inconceivable that Kuwait would now act differently than its fellow oil-rich Arab states in the face of an Iranian regime engaged in an all-out war with Iraq; the longer, or even relatively short, term consequences of aiding Iraqi military capabilities were not considered. The emirate hoped that, through finance and practical steps reflecting its strategic location, it was emphasising its indispensability to Iraqi and wider Arab interests. However in the process of allying with Iraq, Kuwait made itself more vulnerable to Iranian-sponsored attacks, which in the early 1980s included the bombing of western embassies, an attempted assassination of the amir, and the sinking of oil tankers. Kuwait would then be left wholly exposed when, within two years of the war's end, Iraq decided to invade Kuwait. After the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in August 1990, Iraq once more renounced what had been the ostensible objective of eight years of war with Iran - sovereignty over the Shatt Al-Arab - in

order to accommodate the strategic “loss” caused to Iran by the apparent ending of Kuwait’s independence.

In the 1980s Kuwait abandoned its residual regional non-alignment. A balance of threats analysis suggests that Iran was a greater concern to Kuwait than Iraq. However this was significantly due to the support Kuwait was giving Iraq in the war, itself arguably reflecting the threat of greater territorial incursions than those that were periodically conducted by an Iraq on a fully-fledged war footing. Ideational factors both enhanced Kuwait’s sense of internal as well as external security threat from Iran, and underpinned the Arabist obligation on Kuwait to be “on-side” with Iraq. A more neutral Kuwait would possibly have made it more difficult for Iraq to count on sidelining Iran in 1990, if this was part of Baghdad’s calculation. However Kuwait lacked the confidence to withstand the pressure to firmly align with Iraq in 1980.

Kuwait, along with the other Gulf Arab states, had seen the Iraq-Iran conflict as necessitating an assertion of a distinct common interest among six, largely oil-rich, conservative monarchies and emirates. Within 12 months of the war’s beginning, Kuwait, which had previously sought to promote southern Gulf co-operation, played a leading part in setting up the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). This brought the six Gulf Arab states together in a common framework originally intended as a vehicle for forging political and security co-operation among countries that to a greater or lesser degree felt threatened by both Iraq and Iran. With Iran encroaching on Kuwaiti as well as Iraqi interests - with the 1986 seizure of the Fao peninsula and a stepping up of Iranian attacks on Kuwait and other Gulf states’ oil tankers - the Kuwaitis sought a GCC commitment to the defence of Bubiyan island and a collective defence of member states’ shipping¹. After the rejection of this proposal, Kuwait took the step that more overtly internationalised the regional conflict by inviting the Permanent Five (P5) members of the UNSC to re-flag Kuwaiti shipping and therefore make themselves responsible for safe passage of “their” oil tankers. Kuwait’s initiative helped end a conflict that, after eight years, saw ever decreasing benefits for either side. Kuwaiti officials and observers emphasise how the emirate’s approach to the Soviet Union, after initially failing to get the US to agree to the commercial hire of US-registered vessels or to the re-flagging of Kuwaiti ones, was intended to stimulate Washington into seeing the geo-strategic importance of stepping up its role in Gulf security, whilst ensuring a genuinely international presence. The 1980 “Carter Doctrine” had asserted a US interest in dealing with any (Iranian)

¹ Abdul-Reda Assiri, Kuwait’s Foreign Policy – City-State in World Politics (Colorado; Westview Press, 1990), p101

threat to regimes within the region, while the US had gradually been extending its naval presence over the decade. However, it took Kuwait to stimulate what became a lead US role in re-flagging and a military escort of first Kuwaiti and then Saudi and other Gulf shipping. As the US took a more forward role in containing Iran, Kuwait was stepping up its defence relations with Washington. While initially Kuwait still had to play to regional and internal sensitivities, by the time of Iraq's invasion in 1990 the Kuwait-US relationship had become more pronounced, albeit some way short of an alliance.

The balance of power in the region had radically changed since 1977. The Iranian revolution and the eight year long war with Iran had seen Iraq's relationship to the US in some ways mirror that formerly enjoyed by Iran. While Kuwaiti moves to encourage reflagging had helped to create a clearer impression of a US commitment to the emirate, they had also brought the US into sharper conflict with Iraq's enemy, Iran. Against this background, a combination of strategic interest and ideological posturing encouraged Iraq to invade Iran. In the context of some internal discontent during the war and over its outcome, Saddam Hussein arguably transferred his motivations against Iran in 1980 to Kuwait in 1990. However the background to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, stood in marked contrast to its periodic territorial incursions into the emirate from 1969 onwards. To varying degrees, there was a strategic element to the former incursions. This particularly seemed to be the case when major tensions or outright conflict between Iraq and Iran emphasised the vulnerability of Iraq's position in the northern Gulf, and Kuwait was being pressed by Baghdad to make concessions over Warba and Bubiyan. However in 1990 Iran was not a threat to Iraq, while Baghdad was giving greater emphasis to financial and oil-related complaints against Kuwait. This suggests that Iraq lacked a clear strategy and was unable to extract itself from an escalating crisis in which there little to constrain its actions.

Kuwait's foreign policy in 1990 was not in direct contradiction of its foreign policy in 1977. Kuwait had, however, been obliged to shift closer to Iraq and to an Arab alignment against an Iran that seemingly could no longer be befriended as a regional counterweight. Kuwait had not though abandoned its Arabism. It had held firm to many of its core policy stances, although it was doing so in a region that was more divided and where regional non-alignment had proven impossible. Kuwait's Arabist construct patently failed to offset the threat from Iraq, for whom there was no contradiction in presenting its national interest in swallowing Kuwait in Arabist, "anti-colonial", colours, and, in doing so, garnering the effective support of some of the greatest recipients of Kuwaiti aid. At the same time Iraq drew widespread popular sympathy in the Arab

world by playing to the Arab nationalist touchstone, Palestine. Egypt, which had once been a pillar of Kuwaiti Arabism, lacked regional clout. Saudi Arabia, militarily dwarfed by Iraq, had had its counsel on oil policy pointedly ignored by Kuwait.

Before Iraqi troops had entered Kuwait, the emirate had shifted toward meeting its northern neighbour's economic demands, including the reduction of its oil output. A sudden Kuwaiti concession on the islands would not however have been in keeping with Kuwait's previous approach to Iraq. Kuwaiti officials and politicians emphasise that, despite being willing to talk, the leadership in the 1960s and 1970s would never have countenanced leasing the islands in order to get a border demarcation agreement with Iraq. This remained the case right up to 1990, encouraged by Iran's desire to prevent Iraq gaining a strategic advantage.

Would less attention to Arabism in the 1960s and 1970s, including the symbolic badge of Palestine, and greater, public, courting of enhanced security support from the US and/or a combination of P5 actors have served Kuwait better, in light of events post-1977? The answer depends on the likelihood of Kuwait achieving anything other than the discrete defence relations it already held with the US, which in 1990 had so signally failed to deter Iraq from invading. In light of the Iranian revolution, the US had begun to shift from its policy of delegating the maintenance of Gulf security to local actors. However an increased military presence in the Gulf and the US's development of a doctrine to justify intervention, did not affect the leading, and largely malign, role that Iraq and Iran were allowed to play in the security of the region, and specifically toward Kuwait. By the end of the 1980-88 war, the US still lacked formal security arrangements with Kuwait or the other Gulf Arab states, despite having basing rights in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. By its own subsequent admission, the US did not give much consideration to Kuwaiti security concerns, and saw the re-flagging in wider geo-strategic terms². Kuwait had not desired a public commitment from the US when the UK announced its departure in 1968. At the same time, given the US's delegation to Iran of the primary role in the security of the Gulf during this period, and Iran's ability to offset Iraqi pressure on Kuwait and other Gulf Arab states whose security the US held as in its strategic interest, there was little likelihood that the US would have wanted to give a firm public commitment to Kuwait that would have had to have been given to its Gulf Arab neighbours as well.

² Personal interviews with William Brewer, Head Arabian Peninsula desk, US State Department; and Herman Eilts, former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Kuwaiti regret, post-1990, at how much it had “Arabised” its foreign policy at the expense of its own security needs³ had to some extent been prefigured in the frustration expressed in the mid-1970s at a lack of effective Arab action to uphold its security. After 1990 this would take on an especial bitterness, with the collaboration of some Palestinians in Kuwait with the invading Iraqi forces and the support for Iraq expressed by Yasser Arafat. However the US had long understood the instrumentality of what it called Kuwait’s “basic Arabism”, and there is no evidence that any willingness on the part of the amirate to take up stances out of step with the Palestinian leadership, but apparently more helpful to Washington, would have facilitated a more overt US commitment to Kuwait.

Kuwait could have been more willing to differentiate between fealty to Arabism in terms of Palestine, and putting a greater public emphasis on US defence relations, without necessarily expecting or desiring an overt defence commitment. It took until just prior to the Iraqi invasion for Kuwait to feel confident enough about regional and internal reaction to, for the first time, publicly admit that the US was paying the amirate a naval visit. By 1988 it is arguable that, in a Gulf and wider Middle East in which Kuwait no longer enjoyed the broad support that its regional non-alignment had previously afforded, a wiser Kuwaiti policy would have been to more actively befriend the US. By this stage official basing rights could have been offered to the US, although there would have been no guarantee that the US would welcome such a forward posture toward Iraq.

More fundamentally, however, it is not clear that a more co-operative public stance would have made any difference to Washington’s attitude to Kuwait’s border dispute with Iraq. The US was no more willing to pronounce on Iraqi-Kuwaiti territorial issues in July 1990 than at the time of Iraq’s incursion into Kuwait in March 1973. The US would not have needed to make an overt commitment to Kuwait in order to deter Iraq prior to the 1990 invasion. The UK’s intervention in 1961 had emphasised to Iraq the strength of Britain’s formal defence commitment to Kuwait and helped to prevent rhetorical assaults from going any further. With the benefit of hindsight at least, it can be argued that an offshore US naval mobilisation and a strong message to Baghdad would have had the same effect in 1990.

The occupation and the subsequent US-led war to liberate Kuwait meant that, from now on, Washington’s semi-detached Gulf security posture, whether delegated to regional pillars or

³ Abdullah Bishara, former senior foreign ministry official. Personal interview, Kuwait, January 2003.

proxies, would be abandoned as the US effectively became the regional hegemon and pursued the constraint of both Iraq and Iran in a policy approximating to the widely used label, "dual containment". The proven weakness of Kuwait's position, and its inability to forge sufficiently strong and reliable enough friendships in the region to ensure her security, saw the emirate abandon the vestiges of balance of its foreign policy in favour of an unambiguous political and security alignment with the US. Elements of Kuwait's Arabism would remain, but the principal totem, Palestine, would largely be confined to continued hostility to Israel. Relations with the PLO, which the Kuwaitis had strongly supported and funded; and with Yemen, Jordan and Sudan, who, despite the emirate's support, essentially sided with Iraq, were terminated. Kuwaiti relations with the PLO were not to be normalised until the death of Yasser Arafat in 2004.

Iraq invasion raises long term questions

Kuwait was the only Arab state in which there was widespread support for the US administration's decision in 2003, in company with the UK, to invade Iraq. The emirate's role in providing the exclusive territorial base for the ground invasion, and for the continued flow of coalition troops to Iraq, has left Kuwait regionally exposed. The aftermath of an unstable Iraq had reduced Kuwaiti confidence in its future stability. However its security concerns are now largely related to internal factors. Kuwait, in common with Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni-led GCC states, has resumed aspects of the existential paranoia witnessed in the early years of the Iranian revolution about the loyalty of their Shia populations. Sunni Islamist pressures have raised serious security fears related to the insurgency in Iraq. In the event that the US-led coalition will exit Iraq without having resolved the internal challenges, Kuwait cannot re-adopt the deployment of ideology to advance its security. Kuwait is compromised, given the firmness of its alliance with the US and its role in the war in Iraq, in the eyes of radical Islamist opinion at home and in the region.

More fundamentally, over the longer term, Kuwait and Iraq look set to return to a discussion of territorial issues. For a significant section of the new Iraqi political elite, the borders are still an unresolved question. UN Security Council Resolution 833, passed in 1993, underwrote the 1963 Iraq-Kuwait border agreement. However this is no guarantee that what included a controversial, and disputed, demarcation of claimed maritime delimits in the northern Gulf, which run mostly to the south of a de facto Iraqi-Kuwaiti boundary line, will remain acceptable to future Iraqi

governments. A more stable Iraq in which the US retains interests will raise questions about Kuwait's ability to resist territorial concessions, and about the long term strategic utility of Kuwait – something that in the 1970s was not a high priority for US administrations. As such, Kuwait's trading of its Arabist construct for a full-blown US defence and political alliance could make its long standing prime foreign policy objective of offsetting external security threats begin to look shaky.

Arabism has largely lost its meaning, and certainly its utility, as a tool of states' foreign policy, while the desirability of Arab state sovereignty is no longer questioned, at least by governments. However, while Iraqi territorial claims toward Kuwait can no longer be dressed up in Arabist terms, they could easily come to the fore again as an issue of Iraqi national "rights". More positively, respect for its stance toward the former Iraq regime, at least among those parties linked to Iran, with whom the emirate has since 1991 fostered far healthier relations, could enable a more durable relationship, assisted by Iran's traditional interest in upholding Kuwaiti sovereignty. As ever, Kuwait's relations with Iran and Iraq will need to be pursued mindful of Saudi Arabian concerns. At the same time, Palestine is far from dormant as a popular issue in the Arab and Islamic world. However, whereas it once had such instrumentality for Kuwaiti foreign policy, public statements of solidarity lack the ideological cache that the emirate's historic relationship with Fatah afforded.

The careful, if albeit contradictory, balance of Kuwaiti foreign policy in the period from 1961-77 is essentially dead. Events in the 1980s saw the emirate obliged to abandon regional non-alignment and to develop a more public relationship with the US. Events in the 1990s saw Kuwait largely isolated in the region at the same time as it deepened its US and UK alignment. Kuwait's foreign policy is today beholden to the vicissitudes of US policy in the Gulf, and to the emirate's more traditional policy of trying to build Arab support by financial generosity, in particular in neighbouring Iraq. Kuwait's policy options had always been limited. However, during the period with which this thesis is concerned, it was able to deepen its regional role, in part as a reaction to the political and security pressures of the time, and, from 1968, to the declining regional importance of the UK. Kuwait today continues to avoid regional alignments but seeks to broaden, where possible, its regional and extra-regional relations, whilst maintaining a strong emphasis on its defence and security partnership with the US. The regional environment, however, continues to be the key consideration of Kuwait's foreign policy. Radical Islamist, non-state, security threats have increasing importance but provide little scope for the leadership to deploy ideational

constructs as a foreign policy response. Despite this, the emirate continues to assert and to encourage conservative Islamic values, albeit largely as a tool of domestic political management, and to express Arab and Islamic loyalty in its statements on Palestine. At bottom, Kuwaiti foreign policy's primary focus still concerns security threats and is still managed by a small coterie of decision-makers. As such, Kuwaiti foreign policy from 1961 to 1977, and to a lesser but still important extent today, is best approached in terms of its threat perceptions, and the alignments and ideological commitments with which it has sought to counter them.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The Majlis Movement

At the time of its independence in 1961, Kuwait had seen a stronger and more political assertion of merchant interests than in the Gulf amirates granted independence after the annulling of their treaties of protection with Britain 10 years later. Unlike Qatar, Bahrain and Dubai's merchants had asserted themselves through municipal platforms in the 1920s and '30s. However, unlike Kuwait, in Bahrain and Dubai this had not led to the institution of a legislative body, no *majlis al-shoura* (consultative council), through which more elite merchant families would increasingly seek to direct the political life of the country. By 1930 Kuwaiti merchants, influenced by a similar body operating in Bahrain, and building on their successful agitation that they be allowed to found an educational council to provide schooling, received approval for founding a municipality elected and funded by tax-paying local merchants who financed public services in Kuwait City. (This was not wholly unprecedented in that a consultative body had advised Shaikh Mubarak Al-Sabah at the turn of the century.) A key element motivating the demands for legislative authority in the 1930s however was economic. The hardship caused by the decline in trade with Nejd in Saudi Arabia, and the competition from cheap pearls manufactured in Japan following the depression in Europe, had hurt Kuwaiti merchants. This had been combined with a number of attempts by the Al-Sabah to secure income and to redress the economic imbalance by taxing the merchants' pearling revenues. At the same time the discovery of oil in 1934 emphasised that economic power was about to shift from the merchants. The leading merchants' belief that they were important, if subsequently not always active, participants in the Kuwaiti political system – and that the Al-Sabah were “first among equals” - was also given practical expression in the merchants' agitation for a formal role in decision making when, in 1938, they tried to secure a council (*majlis*) of leading merchants that would have legislative authority. Economic necessity was motivating a desire to enter the political realm at a time when exclusively Al-Sabah rule was threatening their economic interests. The “Majlis Movement” also had a significant external dimension, however. Following the 1936 unrest in Mandate Palestine, opposition to Britain's Peel Commission proposal in 1937 to divide the country into two states, and widely opposed expansion of Zionist migration, a period of considerable agitation in the Middle East occurred that, in Syria and Iraq in particular, contributed to a growth of Arab nationalist affiliation.

Most of the merchant elite in Kuwait looked to Britain, the protecting power, for support for their political aspirations. However, their political and financial support for the Palestinian struggle came to be seen by Shaikh Ahmed Al-Jabr (r.1921-50) as needing a public hearing in the face of Iraqi attacks on him over the issue and over the merchants' domestic agitation. Thus external Arab criticism of Kuwait's Arab nationalist credentials would at this early stage overlap with domestic political consciousness outside of the ruling family, a development that would continue to shape foreign policy. In the late 1930s the ruler faced externally supported domestic agitation for a legislative body that could wind-back unwanted tax measures whilst pronouncing on foreign affairs, not least Arab national causes like Palestine. The merchant elites, by definition more travelled and more educated than most of the Al-Sabah, were well aware of the wider convulsion in the Arab world that was growing in opposition to the role of Britain, Kuwait's protector, in the region. Although Britain did not station troops in the amirate, the defence relationship was plain, and the military presence was acute in a number of neighbouring countries. On occasions, however, in light of the 1899 Treaty of Protection, British troops were present in Kuwait. This could be appreciated too e.g. they played a key part in constraining the excesses of the Wahhabi tribes from Nejd in central Arabia at various points following their expansion in the region as Ottoman authority waned. However, under the 1899 treaty, the British were able to agree the 1922 Treaty of Uqair that appeased emergent Al-Saud power at the expense of two thirds of Kuwaiti territory. Despite this, there was not widespread Kuwaiti hostility to Britain until the 1930s. However when Britain made an about-turn and opposed the Majlis Movement, this helped to spur anti-British feeling among some merchants in Kuwait, which, after all, was a natural component of the emergent Arab nationalism.

Iraq's public claims to Kuwait in 1938, following the discovery of oil in the amirate four years earlier, was partly a reaction to domestic political upheaval in Kuwait which appeared ripe for exploitation, providing Baghdad with an opportunity to use the Majlis Movement to try to strengthen pro-Iraqi sympathies in order to aid its territorial ambitions. However, while this raised existential fears for Kuwait's future among the Al-Sabah and their British ally, the key driver for the Majlis Movement had been domestic; its ultimate collapse had been significantly affected by the fact that its backing was a result of an alliance between elite Sunni merchants and a section of the Al-Sabah that began the long standing practice of exploiting the legislature for their own career objectives. The Majlis Movement had been given a significant lease of life by the willingness of the younger members of the Al-Salim branch of the ruling family, who in a move

foreshadowing subsequent Al-Sabah manipulation of assembly members, sought to use their merchant allies to bolster their challenge to the concentration of power by Shaikh Ahmed, from the Al-Jabr line. Members of the Al-Jabr and the Al-Salim, descendents of the first two sons of Shaikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, have by tradition acceded as ruler, and thus these two lines dominate family and governmental politics. However, less privileged merchants had not been brought behind the Al-Salim challenge, while those from the Shia minority were mobilised by the ruler, Shaikh Ahmed, against the Majlis. Amir Abdullah Salim's later decision, following independence, to allow an elected national assembly was not seen favourably by some senior members of the Al-Ahmed line, while future Al-Sabah relations with the assembly would be characterised by calculations of internal family competition.

Initially the ruling family had been encouraged by the British Political Agent to set up a council which, in 1938, functioned for a few months before being disbanded. However, support for what is sometimes dubbed the "Majlis revolt" or "movement" in Arabic, came from younger ruling family members, in particular the future amir, Abdullah Salim and his brothers. The young shaikh was to become the president of a second Majlis in 1939. Elections were eventually conducted to the council and it would seek powers over external as well as domestic functions, including over oil revenue, that, if agreed, would conceivably have reduced the ruling family to a largely ceremonial role, an objective that it is not unusual to find being advocated by some merchants in Kuwait today. As a result of this apparent threat to the ruling family, however, and following a shift in position by the British government, the Majlis was permanently wound-up by the ruler, Shaikh Ahmed, who deployed bedouin troops to close the body down.

Appendix 2: Merchant co-option post-1945

The years following the disbanding of the *majlis* in 1939 saw the arrival of significant oil revenues. The social compact that had seen the leading merchant families acquiesce in the rule of the Al-Sabah was reinforced by the flow of oil that now allowed the ruler to be the dispenser of patronage to the merchants. The merchants' interest in political matters would not be eradicated, but as long as the rapid development of the country after the Second World War benefited them, a de facto understanding was maintained whereby an authoritarian, if benevolent, system of rule over domestic affairs was exercised by the ruler. However the gathering Arab nationalist consciousness during and after the events of 1938-9 continued, and this could still engender anti-British feeling, even after the rapid development of the country in the 1950s. The securing from the Kuwaiti government of major contracts for exclusively British companies caused tensions, as was admitted to the author by the former deputy political agent in Kuwait (1954-58), Sir John Moberly. This compounded the anti-British sentiment expressed in Kuwait during the 1956 Suez war. However oil wealth tied the leading merchants so closely to the ruler as dispenser of this vital "rent" that agitation against the existing political order began to seem unthinkable. A key part of this emergent political economy was the land purchase scheme that in the 1940s and 1950s saw the Al-Sabah consolidate their new found oil wealth by land speculation as the city expanded and plots that had previously been considered worthless desert tracts took on increasing value as development of the city rapidly occurred. In a process of calculated royal munificence, the many Al-Sabah who were benefiting from this process sold on their land to leading merchants at what were effectively "knock-down" prices. This enabled the latter to become excessively wealthy from land holdings alone. It is a process that continues to this day and which during the 1960s was also a way of extending the web of patronage to the so-called middle class or less privileged merchants who were to assert themselves in the national assembly. Furthermore, the Amir's exclusive manipulation of oil revenues paid by the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), set up as a 50-50 partnership of British Petroleum (BP), and the US company Gulf Oil, enabled significant contracts to be given the merchants. Indeed many key merchant family members were also direct representatives for British and other companies supplying the expanding Kuwaiti market.

Appendix 3: UK and US regional interests pre-1961

The US's "Eisenhower Doctrine" of March 1957 preceded by one year the Iraq revolution when the British were powerless to intervene in one of what at that point was one of two independent Hashemite kingdoms that had negotiated with London the removal of British bases. Only a few days later, the events in Iraq, where a regime still allied with Britain was bloodily overthrown on July 14th 1958, encouraged both Washington and London to intervene in two countries where Nasserite Arab nationalists were strong but did not necessarily constitute an imminent threat to the survival of two regimes with whom the US and the UK were allied. US marines landed in Lebanon in an operation that although largely Mediterranean-based, had in its naval component had seen a cruiser positioned off the Kuwaiti coast. Then shortly afterwards, Jordan, where British troops re-entered after having only closed down the British bases two years previously, Britain's prime minister Harold MacMillan ordered to airlift in British forces in response to a request from Jordan's King Hussein on July 17th 1958.

Throughout almost all of the period following the 1958 overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy, and arguably until the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf war, Amman would continue to bandwagon with Iraq; plainly Jordan did not share the hostility to Iraq that lay behind Saudi Arabia signing up to up to the ALSF alongside the UAR. Kuwait did not need the UK to tell it that the federation proposal was unacceptable. The three way federation that had been proposed by Iraq in 1958 had preceded the overthrow of the Hashemite regime in Iraq and, although initially strongly encouraged by Britain, was soon acknowledged by London to have been something that most Kuwait leaders would have found difficult to embrace against domestic and regional opposition and residual suspicions of Iraq. Having initially tried to persuade Shaikh Abdullah Salim that Kuwait should join the union, British officials recognised that such an unlikely unionist project would have put Kuwait under an intolerable strain; not least given the expectation of opposition, including from Jabr Al-Ahmed, and, it was believed, the possible abdication by the ruler, Abdullah Salim. This in turn, Britain judged, would have brought the danger of some senior Kuwaitis inviting Egyptian support, and of Britain having to respond by staging an armed intervention in support of Abdullah Mubarrak, the deputy ruler, who was judged "the only shaikh who might then co-operate with us." Abdullah Mubarrak's ambitions for the leadership were thwarted by the ruler shortly before independence when Abdullah Salim obliged him to resign.

Appendix 4: The 1964/5 Cabinet crisis

The 1964/5 cabinet crisis, in which the national assembly prevented the formation of a new government for more than a month, saw Amir Abdullah Salim come under pressure within the ruling family to close the assembly down, or, at the least, act within his constitutional authority to suspend it, pending further elections. However Abdullah Salim understood the need to ensure that the differing interests and political beliefs that were being played out in the increasingly rancorous national assembly, and in public life generally, should as far as possible be managed by consensus rather than authoritarian control. The assembly was not a direct shaper of foreign policy, however, in the way that some leading merchants had apparently believed, and nor was the cabinet crisis liable to greatly influence the political direction of the government, other than to weaken the interest of the leading merchants in personal involvement in the political process and especially government. The so-called Kuwaiti “plutocrats” or “oligarchs” were not the victim of an internecine class war waged by less wealthy merchants, as suggested in some British embassy accounts from the period, nor would this have implications for the latter’s political influence in Kuwait.

One way in which the leading merchants felt that their interests were being undermined, however, was in the government’s articulation of a foreign policy line believed to have been influenced by the organised and highly vocal 12 MPs who were members of the Kuwaiti branch of the region-wide, Movement for Arab Nationalism (KMAN). The pan-Arabism of KMAN was of the kind espoused by Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser and was seen by some Kuwaitis as potentially damaging to national and business interests. Partly in reaction to this, the senior merchant and president of the assembly, Abdul-Aziz Al-Sagr, persuaded Thunayan Al-Ghanim and four other business confidantes to join the cabinet. In the eyes of the assembly majority this was political and business cronyism, and they used the constitutional bar on maintaining business interests when in government as the means to oppose the senior merchants’ candidature. Prime minister Sabah Salim (1963-5) tried to persuade members of KMAN to take up two cabinet posts as well, but to no avail. The country’s first cabinet crisis took hold as 31 elected MPs rejected the cabinet as proposed. Sabah Salim tendered his resignation, which was refused, while internal family intrigue at the time of the crisis suggested that the most senior member of the Al-Jabr line and future amir, Jabr Al-Ahmed, finance minister (1963-65), might take over premiership duties if he could hold on to the financial purse strings. Jabr Al-Ahmed and his half-brother

Sabah Al-Ahmed seemed happy to allow Sabah Salim's efforts to shore up his government come to nothing, but could not be seen to be acting directly to undermine a government approved by the amir. Jabr al-Ali, however, nephew of Sabah Salim, and minister for Islamic guidance, was judged by the US as possibly having encouraged the revolt. Notably, KMAN, with whom the two senior members of the Al-Jabr line sought to foster links, did not back the revolt of the so-called "lesser merchants".

Appendix 5: Palestinians in public life

A leading naturalised Palestinian, Adil Jarrah, was a senior official in the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry throughout the period. Adil Jarrah was also a cousin of the first chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Ahmed Shuqairy. The position of ambassador to the US throughout the 1960s was occupied by Talat Ghussein, a much respected naturalised Palestinian from a senior West Bank family. In addition, Ashraf Lutfi was head of the Amiri Diwan, the ruler's "cabinet office" in the early years of independence, until he was replaced by fellow Palestinian, Hani Qaddoumi.

In February 1964, the then Kuwaiti finance minister Shaikh Jabr Al-Ahmed suggested that in order for the emirate to provide aid to the newly formed PLO, customs duties should be increased, and that all Palestinians living in Kuwait should have a political "tithe" of 5% deducted from what were largely government, and therefore generous, salaries. In this way the emirate could show its public support for the PLO without burdening the Kuwaiti exchequer and thus without reducing the monies available for Kuwaiti nationals. Adil Jarrah was ambitious regarding the Palestinian contribution. He argued that the tithe should be 10%, and, like one or two other naturalised Palestinians in key government positions, believed that, through its wealth, the Kuwaiti Palestinian community could be a bridge to the large but poorer Palestinian communities in Lebanon and Jordan. This was not an insurrectionary agenda of the kind pursued elsewhere by Palestinians after 1967. Jarrah however believed that Kuwaiti legitimacy in the Arab world could be strengthened through the positive contribution of Kuwaiti Palestinians to the officially expressed aspiration at the Arab summit that a "Palestinian entity" be established. Jabr Al-Ahmed's specific proposals, and Adel Jarrah's development of them, were a pro-active attempt by the Kuwait leadership and elite Palestinians in the government service to get out in front of the Arab League's expectation of Arab state support for the PLO. However many middle class Palestinians in Kuwait feared that it could upset relations with Jordan and Lebanon where enthusiasm for the Palestinian entity was more muted. The Kuwaiti leadership did not want KMAN to set the pace on how to handle the pro-Egyptian PLO. Shortly afterwards the Kuwaiti leadership decided to allow the proposed Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), the PLO's "army", to set up training bases in the emirate. The Kuwaiti ministries of defence and interior were comfortable with this as the PLA could be carefully watched and kept entirely separate from Kuwait's armed forces who played no role whatsoever in the former's activity.

Appendix 6: Kuwaiti Arab Nationalist Movement (KMAN)

The KMAN leader in the 1950s and for much of the 1960s, Jassim Qitami, was a merchant whose elder brother had been killed by the police at the time of the suppression of the Majlis Movement in 1939, and, ironically perhaps, had become deputy under chief of police Shaikh Sabah Salim (1939-59), until resigning over the clampdown on the disturbances following the 1956 Anglo-French Suez invasion. Qitami had also formerly been in business partnership with one of the leading families with whom he remained close. Ever the pragmatist, Qitami had moved from support for Kuwait's immediate union with the United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria founded in 1958, to trying to build what he considered to be a constructive opposition, after controversially playing a leading part in public demands for reform in 1959, and had not been above considering a seat in cabinet in 1964. The Arab nationalism of the kind advocated by Qitami and KMAN was typically supported by the less privileged, public sector employed Kuwaiti nationals, but was particularly espoused by merchants and small business people, a socio-economic profile shared by KMAN MPs themselves. Dr Ahmed Khateeb, who was effectively KMAN's deputy leader, was a doctor by training who had served as Amir Abdullah Salim's personal physician and who had married into influential circles. He was also a businessman who, by 1967, was observed by his US interlocutors as enjoying a very comfortable lifestyle. Khateeb was keen to stress to his MAN comrades outside of Kuwait that revolutionary aspirations were not appropriate in the emirate.

In the aftermath of the 1967 war and the consequent radicalisation of much of the MAN leadership, its Kuwaiti branch was increasingly judged by the increasingly dominant leftist trend within MAN as having too much influence. KMAN was effectively the leader of MAN's branches in the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia. The "left" MAN leadership trend attacked the inherent "reformism" of KMAN, which largely led the parliamentary opposition in Kuwait. At the same time Dr Ahmed Khateeb, one of the leading MAN figures when it was founded in the late 1940s in Lebanon, considered the Marxian ideology being adopted by MAN as inappropriate, especially when a MAN conference decided to commit the movement to revolutionary violence in all "regional" theatres, including Kuwait. KMAN was to be demoted from being the lead player in the Gulf leadership, and then in July 1968 MAN decided to replace KMAN with a new organisation. Dr Khateeb and his organisation favoured a more gradualist path to socialism but were "replaced" by a less representative organisation committed to revolutionary means. The new

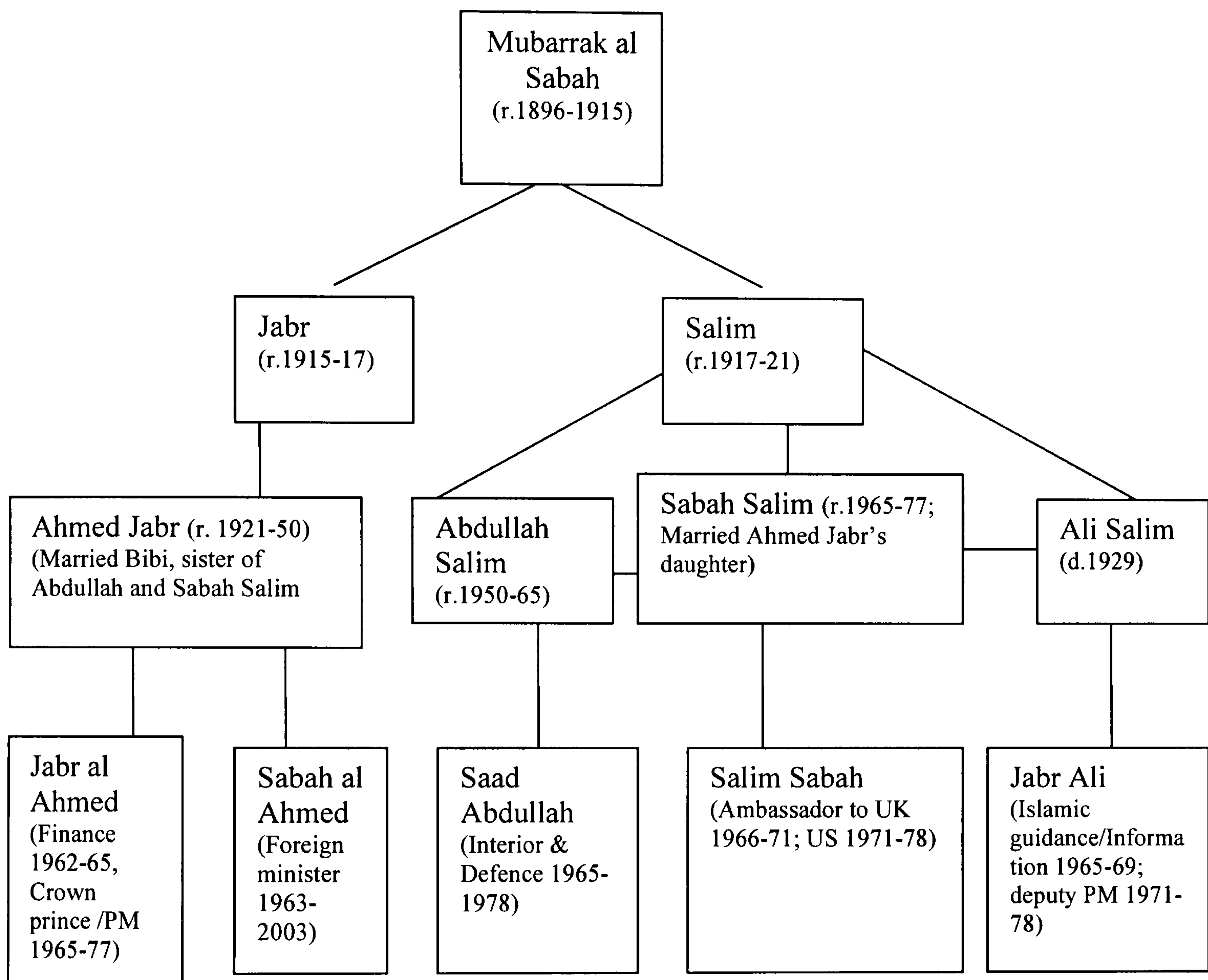
Kuwaiti branch, which was made up of far less representative leaders, subsequently voted to expel the original KMAN leadership as they were judged insufficiently sympathetic with the revolutionary ideology that at the same time was seeing the Palestine MAN branch evolve into the Marxist-orientated, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) under the leadership of Khateeb's original MAN comrade, Dr George Habash.

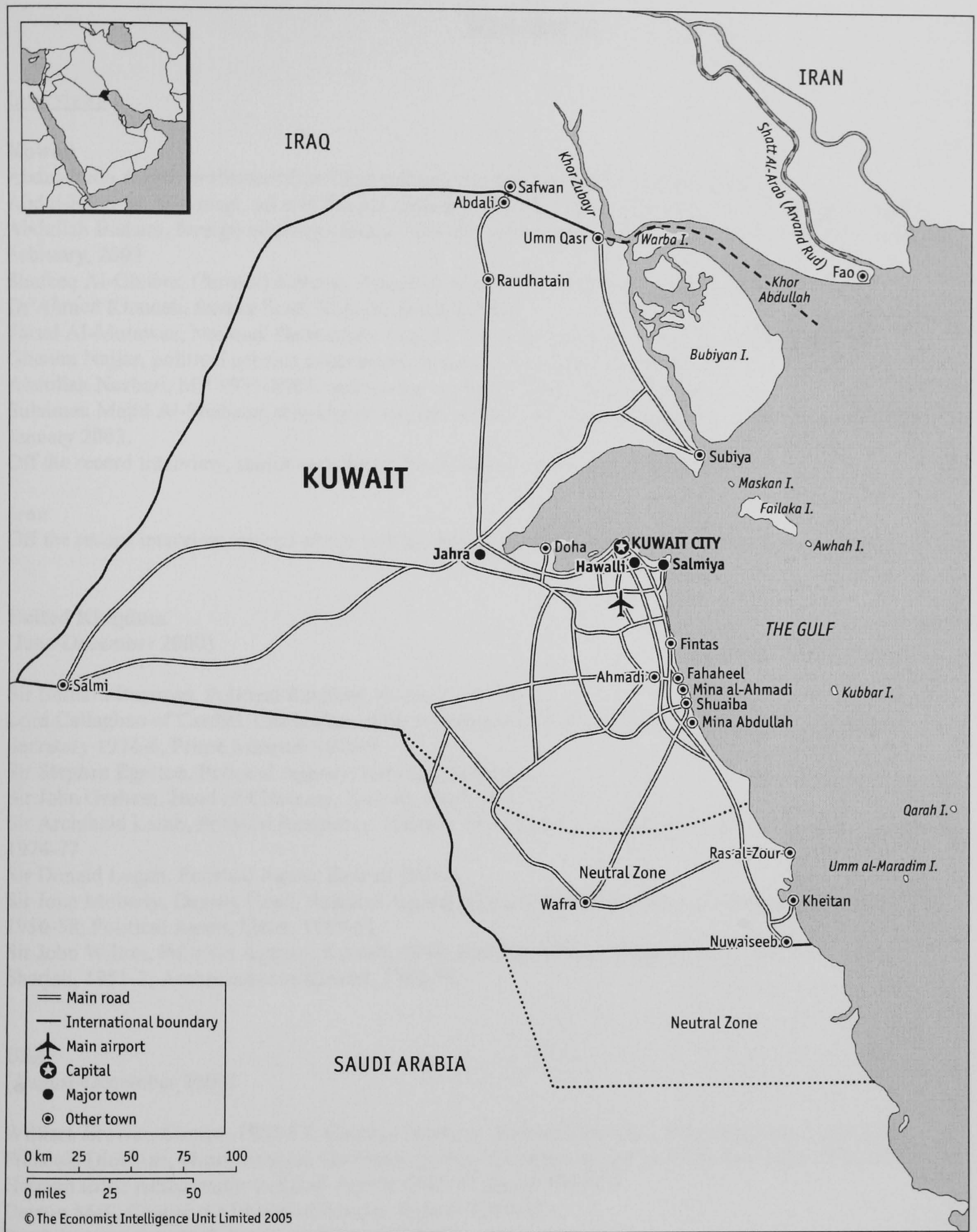
In May 1968, the US embassy reported to Washington that Dr Khateeb had agreed that "violence is the only solution". This did not however incline the US to think that Khateeb's opposition to the revolutionary "solution" in Kuwait was anything other than genuine. Senior Al-Sabah though retained their suspicions, even in the less tense environment following national assembly elections in 1971 that were markedly fairer than four years earlier. For his part the US ambassador was to assess that KMAN had loosened its commitment to Nasserism in the aftermath of the 1967 war. The distancing from Nasserism was most acute in the case of Jassim Qitami, who, following the post-1967 period of political introspection among nationalists in the emirate and the wider region, formed a splinter organisation that in the 1971-75 assembly became known as "progressive nationalists".

The Kuwaiti government had specific concerns about KMAN's historic connection to the leading figures in the Palestinian faction, the Popular front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The Al-Sabah were also subject to some external pressure over this relationship. From 1968, the PFLP, and breakaway groupings, had begun to attract international notoriety for terrorist attacks in Europe. The PFLP were definitely outside of what most Kuwaitis, including the leadership, viewed as the Palestinian mainstream embodied by Fatah and its leader, Yasser Arafat. The leader of the minority Marxist wing of KMAN, Sami Munayyes, took over the editorship of their organisation's weekly house journal *Al-Talia* when it began publishing again in 1968 after a banning order earlier in the year. The US argued that that year the paper "spent more time defending the PFLP than the (Kuwaiti pan-Arab) nationalists". However, whether it was the radical Sami Munayyes or the dominant reformist trend under Ahmed Khateeb, KMAN remained out of step with the avowedly revolutionary philosophy of the PFLP, which had patently moved beyond Nasserite pan-Arabism. For Ahmed Khateeb, and even Sami Munayyes, the decline of the plausibility of pan-Arabism on the old basis had not encouraged a revolutionary commitment to "nationalism in one country" of the kind espoused by the PFLP leader Dr George Habash. While the Kuwaiti authorities remained hostile to the PFLP, a perspective encouraged by their links to the one and only incident of a hijacking on Kuwaiti soil, they did not think that sympathetic

editorials were indicative of an underground conspiracy. Nor for that matter did they decisively remove the PFLP presence in the amirate, even after the 1974 hijacking.

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William Brewer, Consul, 1955-57; Country Director, Arabian Peninsula, State Department, 1966-70

Francois Dickman, Head, Arabian Gulf section, State Department, 1972-76; Ambassador, 1981-85

Herman Eilts, Ambassador to Saudi Arabia 1965-70, Egypt 1973-77

Dayton Mak, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, Kuwait 1961-64

Frank Maerstrone, Ambassador to Kuwait 1976-79

Talcot Seelye, Vice-Consul, Kuwait 1956-57, Consul 1957-60; and Desk Officer, Arabian Gulf, State
Department, 1961-64

William Stoltzfus, Vice-Consul, Kuwait, 1954-56, and Ambassador, Kuwait 1972-75

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