



**The 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Kuwait:
A Look at the History, Evolution, and Future of the US-Kuwaiti Relationship**

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Executive Summary

On August 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The subsequent liberation by a US-led coalition served as a watershed moment in US-Kuwaiti relations. The Gulf War is often viewed as the onset of the close relationship between the United States and Kuwait; a relationship that still endures to this day. Though the two nations had little interaction prior to the invasion in 1990, the common American narrative about the Gulf War portrays the US as single-handedly liberating Kuwait from Iraqi forces and leaving a sizable force in Kuwait to defend the country's sovereignty against Saddam. While certain aspects of this may hold true, this narrative unfairly paints Kuwait as the sole benefactor of American action – that the Kuwaitis have enjoyed a free ride off American military protection. In reality, the relationship between the US and Kuwait is mutually beneficial for both sides, and Kuwait funds the majority of US activities within the Gulf region.

As a response to these misconceptions, this paper seeks to analyze and explain the true relationship between the US and Kuwait. This is done through a careful analysis of the partnership in three main sections. The first section will explain the origins of the relationship prior to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 with the Tanker Wars. The Gulf War served as catalyst to foster relations between the two countries. The second section demonstrates US-Kuwaiti cooperation during and after the war to show the evolution of the military, diplomatic, economic and environmental relationships. The final section analyzes the future of the relationship and offers recommendations for future policy. While Kuwait remains its closest Arab-Gulf ally, the US must not take the relationship for granted and collaboration with Kuwait on a variety of issues will ensure that the relationship continues to flourish.

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A History of the US-Kuwait Relationship and the Impact of the First Gulf War

The Early Relationship: Leading Up to the Gulf War

The relationship between the United States and Kuwait began modestly. In 1889, an American missionary group from the Dutch Reform Church conducted the first non-official US contact with the Gulf region through humanitarian activities.¹ Despite several more US-led exploration trips over the next 70 years, the next prominent interaction came in 1961, as Kuwait gained its independence from Great Britain, thus allowing greater US involvement.²

At the time of Kuwaiti independence, the relationship between the US and Kuwait remained distant, with both countries pursuing divergent interests in the region. The US focused most of its attention on the region's major powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, while Kuwait pursued a relatively neutral foreign policy, seeking to stay out of most regional conflicts. Instead of acquiring outside commitments from major powers for its security, Kuwait relied on the protection of "an informal Arab umbrella".³ Throughout the 1980s, Kuwait purposefully distanced itself from the US to ensure that it was aligned with the will and interests of other Arab nations.

It was not until the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 that Kuwait sought to strengthen relations with the US. To avoid the Iranian threats in the Gulf, Kuwait was forced to turn to the US for protection of its ships and economic interests.

¹ Crystal, Jill. *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.

² "U.S. Relations With Kuwait." U.S. Department of State. August 12, 2014.
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35876.htm>.

³ Ghabra, Shafeeq N. "Closing the Distance: Kuwait and the United States in the Persian Gulf". In *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007. 333.

The Tanker Wars

As the Iran-Iraq War continued, both countries made efforts to break from the stalemated ground war by targeting the opposing side's oil facilities. As the conflict escalated, Iran also targeted states that allegedly supported Iraq. Both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait suffered attacks to their oil infrastructure and their tankers. In 1986, Iran specifically attacked eight different vessels "owned by, or trading with" Kuwait.⁴ In response, Kuwait provided significant economic aid to Saddam Hussein to fight against Iran and to counteract any Iranian influences on its domestic Shia population.

The Tanker Wars profoundly impacted Kuwait's international position. Initially, Kuwait called for international cooperation to keep the Strait of Hormuz open to traffic. In 1984, Kuwaiti Sheik Sabah Al-Ahmed stated that "navigation of [the] Gulf is by no means the concern of the region alone. It is the concern of the whole world."⁵ As a result, the UN Security Council passed resolution 552 condemning Iranian attacks, which provided greater support for the United States involvement in the conflict.⁶ As the Kuwaiti government began to understand the potential benefits of US involvement, it reached out to the US with hopes of reflagging and protecting Kuwait's oil tankers.

Memories of Vietnam still weighed heavily on the minds of Congress and the American people.⁷ This led to initial hesitations to accept Kuwait's request for aid. This hesitancy also stemmed from the nature of the bilateral relationship between both countries. Prior to Kuwait's request, the relationship had been cordial but not friendly.

⁴ Navias, Martin S., and E. R. Hooton. *Tanker Wars: The Assault on Merchant Shipping during the Iran-Iraq Conflict, 1980-1988*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1996. 131.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶ United Nations Security Council Resolution 552, *Islamic Republic of Iran, A/RES/67/97* (1 June 1984). <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/552>.

⁷ "The Gulf War." PBS. January 1996. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/>.

Kuwait strategically played to the US anti-Soviet policy of containment and made overtures to the Soviet Union to help ensure US aid. On March 7, 1987, the US decided to reflag Kuwaiti oil tankers, launching Operation Earnest Will and immediately providing US Navy support. In testimony to Congress on June 16, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Michael H. Armacost stated that the US had very distinct interests in the Gulf: free flow through the Strait of Hormuz, helping moderate states deal with the threat of Iran and checking the influence of the Soviet Union.⁸ Based on Armacost's rationale, Congress officially approved Operation Earnest Will.

The US-Kuwait relationship deepened as the conflict escalated and as Iran utilized Silkworm missiles against Kuwaiti targets. These attacks demonstrated Iran's capability to inflict serious damage.⁹ In response, Washington threatened to destroy Iranian launch pads should Iran fire more missiles against US interests. However, threats failed to deter Iran, and a series of Silkworm attacks persisted against Kuwaiti tankers. US Secretary of State George Shultz described the attacks as "in effect, an attack on Kuwait."¹⁰ The US response was swift – the US navy attacked and destroyed an Iranian Pasdaran naval base. President Ronald Reagan's willingness to use military force to ensure the safety of Kuwait and its merchant ships highlighted the growing relationship. After the Silkworm attacks, the US-Kuwaiti relationship further evolved as Kuwait provided floating barrage bases and electronic reconnaissance facilities for US troops. In return, the US helped Kuwait redeploy surface to air missiles.¹¹

⁸ US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. *U.S Policy in the Persian Gulf and Kuwaiti Reflagging June 16th, 1987.* (Statement of Michael H. Armacost, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs.)

⁹ Wise, Harold Lee. *Inside the Danger Zone: The U.S. Military in the Persian Gulf, 1987-1988.* Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007. 96.

¹⁰ Navias, Martin S., and E. R. Hooton. *Tanker Wars: The Assault on Merchant Shipping during the Iran-Iraq Conflict, 1980-1988.* London: I.B. Tauris, 1996. 154.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

As a sign of the growing cooperation, US Ambassador Nathaniel Howell reported “that Kuwait had admitted publicly, for the first time, the presence of a US warship in its port,” which proved a significant initial step in acknowledging the US-Kuwait military relationship.¹² However, despite a limited US military presence in Kuwait, the relationship remained reserved. While Kuwait started its move away “from a hesitant and distant relationship with the US,” it did not push for “security and cooperation engagement” until the Gulf War.¹³

¹² Ghabra, Shafeeq N. “Closing the Distance: Kuwait and the United States in the Persian Gulf”. In *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007. 338.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 332.

The Persian Gulf War: Forging the Relationship

The Period of the Persian Gulf War

While the reflagging agreement signified a positive turn for the US-Kuwait relationship, both countries continued to view each other with caution. Leading up to the Iraqi invasion in 1990, the lack of cooperation between the US and Kuwait “stemmed from the assumptions and perceptions each side had of the other”.¹⁴ The past actions of the US in Lebanon and Iran gave Kuwait little reason to seek out US power as a guarantor of its security.¹⁵

Moreover, different international events consumed the attention of both countries. While Kuwait dealt with the fallout of the Iran-Iraq War, the fall of communism in Eastern Europe preoccupied US attention. As a result, the actions of both countries continued to conflict. Though the US had provided reflagging assistance and had offered naval security during the Iran-Iraq War, Kuwait denied the US access within its boundaries, refusing to allow US Central Command (CENTCOM) to base American special operations helicopters on its territory¹⁶. At the same time, the US continued to primarily focus on and provide support to Iraq after the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War.

Ultimately, the Persian Gulf War altered the relationship between the US and Kuwait by enhancing their cooperation within the following key policy areas or channels of the bilateral relationship:

- *Military Relations*

¹⁴ Ghabra, Shafeeq N. “Closing the Distance: Kuwait and the United States in the Persian Gulf”. In *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007.

¹⁵ Around this time, the past actions of the US in the Middle East included the withdrawal from Lebanon following the Beirut bombing in 1983.

¹⁶ Crystal, Jill. *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.

The Iraqi invasion surprised both countries. Without a substantial army to prevent external attacks, Kuwait was caught completely unprepared. Historically, Kuwait relied on diplomatic arrangements to deter aggression instead of maintaining a sizeable force. The Kuwaiti military was intended only to cause an aggressor to hesitate long enough for Kuwait to mobilize diplomatic support.¹⁷ Likewise, the US was caught off-guard due to American intelligence reports and statements from Arab world leaders minimizing the possibility of an Iraqi invasion. Even though the US and Kuwait had made progress in advancing military cooperation, the initial shock of the Iraqi invasion did little to improve US-Kuwait military relations. For American policymakers, Kuwait did not significantly factor into the US security calculus for the Middle East. Notably, Assistant Secretary of State John Kelly's announcement that no security arrangement existed between the US and Kuwait reflected the minimal level of cooperation between both countries.¹⁸

Following Iraq's invasion, Kuwait became a primary military concern for the US. While the initial priority was the safety of Saudi Arabia, the US began preparations to roll back Iraqi aggression and reestablish Kuwait's sovereignty. The first US forces to arrive in the region acted more as a symbolic deterrent than an actual defense.¹⁹ However, as Operation Desert Shield came underway, "the building blocks of the defense gradually fell into place."²⁰ As Desert Shield transitioned to Operation Desert Storm, the American military footprint in Saudi Arabia totaled about 265,000 troops.²¹ At the same time, the remaining Kuwaiti forces reconsolidated in Saudi

¹⁷ Crystal, Jill. *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.

¹⁸ Ghabra, Shafeeq N. "Closing the Distance: Kuwait and the United States in the Persian Gulf". In *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007. 339.

¹⁹ Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1995). 54.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

Arabia and joined the US-led coalition, falling under the command of Arab forces led by Saudi Arabian Prince Khalid Bin Sultan al-Saud.²²

With President Bush's fateful announcement in August 1990 that Iraqi aggression would not stand, CENTCOM began strategic planning to liberate Kuwait from Iraq. Over the next few months, despite daunting logistics challenges, the US massed forces in Saudi Arabia to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait.²³

On January 16, 1991, two days after the United Nation's deadline for Iraq's total withdrawal from Kuwait, the US initiated Operation Desert Storm with a massive air offensive against Iraqi forces and their communication and logistics networks. After five weeks of bombing, US and multinational coalition ground forces routed Iraqi forces and drove them back into Iraqi territory. On February 28, 1991, President Bush declared a cease-fire that ended the Persian Gulf War. Defying initial estimates, the US-led coalition needed only four days to liberate Kuwait.

Despite minor hiccups, the Gulf War was an unprecedented display of US military strength. While the US shouldered the majority of the fighting, the Arab coalition members, including Kuwait, made military contributions to the war effort and provided important political and cultural context for the liberation of Kuwait City and for overall US engagement in the conflict.²⁴

More notably, the Gulf War altered the US-Kuwait military relationship from one of disinterest, hesitancy, and caution to that of active cooperation at the highest levels of government. Despite differences in size, culture, and resources, the Gulf War drove the US and

²² Gordon, Michael R. and General Bernard E. Trainor. *The Generals' War*. New York: Back Bay Books, 1995.

²³ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Kuwait to achieve a remarkably high degree of military cooperation within a relatively short time period.

- *Economic Relations*

The oil industry dominated Kuwaiti and Iraqi politics, playing an outsized role in the invasion. Kuwait had an abundance of oil, and Saddam understood the advantages of controlling such a resource. Despite the military and expansionist motivations behind the invasion, economic factors were a driving force throughout the entirety of the Gulf War.

Iraq's historically strong economic position in the Middle East due to its sizable oil reserves changed following the Iran-Iraq War. Eight years of war severely crippled Iraq's economy and left it with approximately \$70 billion in debt.²⁵ While Iraq laid claim to Kuwaiti territory prior to 1990, the invasion was the first time since 1963 that any action had been taken towards annexing Kuwait.^{26,27} Due to Kuwait's high levels of oil production, the Iraqi economy strained under the dual burden of debt and low oil revenue. As the state's economy continued to deteriorate, Saddam looked to annex Kuwait as a way to acquire more oil fields, seize its ports, and solve Iraq's economic problems.

The US feared provoking Saddam into action and hesitated to come to Kuwait's aid. During this time, the Iraqi army was the third largest military force in the world. Many US government officials believed that hasty American involvement would unwisely antagonize the Iraqis and invite aggression.²⁸ However, President Bush soon recognized the strategic importance

²⁵ Halliday, Fred. "The Gulf War and its aftermath: first reflections." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944)* (1991). 223-234.

²⁶ Stork, Joe, and Ann M. Lesch. "Background to the Crisis: Why War?" *Middle East Report* (1990). 11-18.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Gordon, Michael R. and General Bernard E. Trainor. *The Generals' War*. New York: Back Bay Books, 1995.

of Kuwait's oil resources to secure American vital energy interests and of the economic benefits resulting from a potential relationship with Kuwait.²⁹

Besides the economic costs of a military engagement with Iraq in Kuwait, the US faced other economic threats during the invasion. For example, American officials in oil-dependent sectors feared the possibility of Iraq's regional dominance and its repercussions for the oil market.³⁰ US airline companies, among other groups, saw decreases in revenue and customers as transportation prices skyrocketed. Consumer confidence fell and business spending on new products and equipment declined as businesses fought decreasing profits.³¹ Despite fears that Saddam's takeover in Kuwait could lead to disastrous increases in oil prices and declines in business, business community remained confident in US involvement in the conflict.³² Even with gloomy economic forecasts prior to Iraq's invasion, the risk of inaction far outweighed the potential risks of remaining silent.

To a greater extent, burden-sharing agreements to liberate Kuwait further enhanced the US-Kuwait relationship. While the overall costs of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm totaled around \$61 billion for the United States, Kuwait covered a significant portion of the expenses through cash and commodity transfers (i.e. oil). The total cost to the US was approximately \$9 billion.³³ Reports following the conclusion of the conflict indicated that Kuwait's economic costs totaled more than \$200 billion.³⁴

²⁹ George H.W. Bush White House. (1991, Jan. 15). Responding to Iraqi Aggression in the Gulf (National Security Directive 54). Washington, DC.

³⁰ Silk, Leonard. "Economic Scene; The Broad Impact of the Gulf War." *The New York Times*, August 16, 1991. <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/16/business/economic-scene-the-broad-impact-of-the-gulf-war.html>

³¹ Ibid.

³² Letter from Nation's Restaurant Business to George HW Bush. Editor, Charles Bernstein. February 5, 1991.

³³ "Gulf War Fast Facts." *CNN*. September 9, 2013.

<http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/15/world/meast/gulf-war-fast-facts/>

³⁴ Ibrahim, Youssef M. "Gulf War's Cost to Arabs Estimated at \$620 Billion." *The New York Times*. September 08, 1992. <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/09/08/world/gulf-war-s-cost-to-arabs-estimated-at-620-billion.html>.

- *Diplomatic Relations*

At the beginning of the invasion, the US and Kuwait conducted limited diplomatic interactions at the highest levels of government. According to Vice President Cheney, American diplomatic efforts in the wake of the invasion primarily focused on Saudi Arabia.³⁵ Despite a slow start, diplomacy eventually took root as American defense priorities shifted from Saudi Arabia to Kuwait.

Early on, diplomatic cooperation expanded over efforts to protect American and Kuwaiti populations. Under the hardships of the Iraqi invasion, US embassy personnel and Kuwaitis established a diplomatic legacy of collaboration to safeguard and support the populations against the occupation. Ambassador Barbara Bodine, then Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Kuwait, described acts of diplomacy and friendship among US citizens and Kuwaitis. As soon as Iraq announced an order that forbid Kuwaitis to help American citizens, two phone calls came into embassy. The first was from a family that owned a chain of convenience stores with a warehouse full of available food. Despite the Iraq threats, the family offered their services to Americans. Another Kuwaiti who owned a dairy had pallets of bottled water and juice and provided as much of these goods as the Americans needed. These people understood the risks but stated, “You are staying here to support us, so we will support you.”³⁶

³⁵ Vice President Richard Cheney, telephone conference, interview by Capstone Students and Dr. Robert Holzweiss, pre-arranged Q&A, interviewee provided with questions ahead of interview, 15 October 2015, George Bush Presidential Library.

³⁶ Ambassador Barbara Bodine, telephone conference, interview by Capstone Students and Dr. Robert Holzweiss, pre-arranged Q&A, interviewee provided with questions ahead of interview, 12 October 2015, George Bush Presidential Library.

President Bush's first priority was "access to oil and the security of key friendly states in the area."³⁷ Furthermore, President Bush recognized the necessity of a strong global coalition, comprised of a cornucopia of nations to combat the Iraqi occupation. In search of stronger international legitimacy for the coalition, President Bush also sought to include states traditionally at odds with American foreign policy, such as Russia. Additionally, through intermediary talks with Turkey and Oman, President Bush secured Iranian permission for an American presence in the region.³⁸³⁹

³⁷ George H.W. Bush White House. (1991, Jan. 15). Responding to Iraqi Aggression in the Gulf (National Security Directive 54). Washington, DC.

³⁸ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between President Turgut Ozal of Turkey and President George Bush. August 20, 1990. George Bush Presidential Library.

³⁹ Memorandum of Conversation between Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi of Oman and President George Bush, Vice President Dan Quayle, Brent Scowcroft, Robert Gates, DAS Jack Covey, State, Sandra Charles, NSC. August 28, 1990. The Oval Office. George Bush Presidential Library.

The Modern Relationship: In the Aftermath of the Persian Gulf War

Post-War Efforts

The Gulf crisis provided a remarkable impetus for stronger US and Kuwait relations. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the relationship grew as both countries worked to address three pressing challenges to the economic, political, and military reconstruction: combating oil fires and environmental concerns; reconstructing infrastructure and restoring the economy; and rebuilding Kuwait's defense and deterrence mechanisms. Under joint efforts to rectify the tremendous damage inflicted during the war, the collaborative efforts of the US and Kuwait to meet these issues significantly promoted the bond between both countries.

- *Environmental Restoration*

Historically, Kuwait's oil and gas sector accounted for 60 percent of the country's GDP.⁴⁰ Remarkably, the oil and gas sector comprised 95 percent of the state's export revenues. With a heavy reliance on oil and natural gas, environmental aspects became prominent factors for the US and Kuwait during and after the Gulf War.

When defeated Iraqi forces retreated from Kuwait in February 1991, they set fire to over 600 oil wells and purposefully spilled over ten million barrels of crude oil into the Arabian Gulf.⁴¹ This act of environmental warfare was a deliberate strategy to cripple Kuwait's economy and inflict lasting environmental damage. More than half of the damaged wells were located in "the world's second largest oil reserve," the Greater Burgan oil fields.⁴² The staggering number

⁴⁰ Kuwait Facts and Figures. OPEC 2015. http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/165.htm.

⁴¹ Kuwait Oil Fires. NASA Visible Earth. <http://visibleearth.nasa.gov/view.php?id=78594>.

⁴² Seacor, Jessica E. "Environmental Terrorism: Lessons from the Oil Fires of Kuwait." *American University International Law Review* 10, no. 1 (1996). 481-523. <http://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1426&context=auilr>.

of damaged wells required eight months of round-the-clock work before they were finally extinguished.

In addition to adverse health effects caused by the environmental attack, oil spilled into the Gulf led to a deteriorated condition of the natural ecosystems.⁴³ The animal, fishery and plant life within the Gulf suffered greatly from the “greatest oil spill in history.”⁴⁴ As a result, globally-sourced teams assessed potential future damage to the environment and ecosystems in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

The World Wildlife Fund's Science and Research Manager in the UAE, Christophe Toureq, explained to CNN that, “researchers estimated 30,000 water birds were killed by the oil. Fish eggs and larvae were killed by slicks, which in turn reduced the breeding success of some bird species by 50 percent in the year after the spill.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, the oil spill destroyed the fishing industry and Iraqi mines shut down use of the Gulf to regional fishermen.

An effective and swift restoration was necessary due to the proximity of the Great Burgan oil field to Kuwait City and its two million inhabitants.⁴⁶ Between February and November 1991, smoke “containing a hazardous mixture of gaseous emissions and particulate matter engulfed a downwind area as large as 150 by 1000 kilometers.”⁴⁷ This pollution further added to the environmental and ecosystem destruction in the Gulf.

Both U.S. and Kuwaiti officials agreed that immediate repairs were necessary. As a result, Kuwait sought the expertise of international companies due to the magnitude of the destruction. According to Ambassador Gnehm, the Kuwaiti Emir hired two main players,

⁴³ Tutton, Mark. “Lessons Learned from the Largest Oil Spill in History.” CNN: Inside the Middle East. June 2010. <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/06/04/kuwait.oil.spill/>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Duncan, Laurie. "Kuwait Oil Fires, Persian Gulf War." Encyclopedia of Espionage, Intelligence, and Security. 2004. *Encyclopedia.com*. (October 21, 2015). <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3403300444.html>.

Bechtel and Paul Neal "Red" Adair's Wild Well Control Company, to work alongside the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) and extinguish hundreds of well fires.⁴⁸

According to Bechtel, during the first six months of the oil-fires project, the company “deployed a thousand engineering and construction professionals and, with the KOC, brought in 8,500 manual workers of 35 nationalities.”⁴⁹ In addition to the army of workers, Bechtel also imported 200,000 tons of equipment from various countries making the endeavor “the largest peacetime airlift since Berlin.” Furthermore, trained specialists cleared areas of unexploded munitions that included everything from mines to grenades and artillery shells.⁵⁰ Also, despite Bechtel's limited resources within Kuwait, it also built “docking facilities, warehouses, a field hospital, portable housing, and dining halls that served 30,000 meals a day.”⁵¹ After completing the initial phase of firefighting, Bechtel led the official reconstruction plan, known as the *Al-Tameer*, for oil field production with the help of the Kuwait Wild Well Killers Team from the KOC.

Together, both Kuwaiti and U.S. teams developed several innovative methods to achieve pre-war production capabilities in record setting time. By March 1992, well before the estimated completion date, US-Kuwaiti teams restored the oil wells' pre-war oil production capabilities.⁵² Cooperating countries successfully extinguished over 600 oil well fires and implemented *Al-Tameer*.

- *Infrastructure and Economic Development*

⁴⁸ Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm, telephone conference, interview by Capstone Students and Dr. Robert Holzweiss, pre-arranged Q&A, interviewee provided with questions ahead of interview, 21 October 2015, George Bush Presidential Library.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Bechtel Corporation. “Kuwait Oil Field Restoration,” October 2015. <http://www.bechtel.com/projects/kuwait-reconstruction/>.

The Kuwaiti government placed high priority on planning the infrastructure reconstruction. At the war's conclusion, the US government facilitated the restoration of the country. The US Army's 352d Civil Affairs Command immediately began restoring order within Kuwait while the US Army Corps of Engineers rebuilt two airbases and supervised repairs to public infrastructure.⁵³ Foreign funding for the war effort, and Kuwait's oil revenues provided the ability to fund reconstruction.⁵⁴

Soon, Kuwaiti and US officials developed reconstruction plans. The Kuwaiti Task Force (KTF) was a collection of civilian and military personnel from various United States agencies such as the US Agency for International Development, the US Army, and Federal Emergency Management Agency, working alongside their Kuwaiti counterparts. The KTF and Kuwaiti government successfully devised and implemented the plans and programs to restore the legitimate Kuwaiti government, including the National Assembly.⁵⁵

Many outside observers anticipated reconstruction efforts would take years, however, it only took months. Within the first few days of reconstruction, foreign aid flooded the small country. Nineteen new oil wells replaced those damaged in the oil fires; Kuwait's main source of revenue began to rebound after the damage caused during the Iraqi invasion and retreat. Furthermore, to restore power and electricity to homes and businesses, workers repaired the electric power grids and damaged energy infrastructure.⁵⁶ Attempts to reinvigorate the economy by stabilizing financial infrastructure included banking reforms and debt forgiveness programs

⁵³ Crystal, Jill. *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992. 148.

⁵⁴ US Library of Congress. Kuwait - RECONSTRUCTION AFTER THE PERSIAN GULF WAR. <http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/33.htm>.

⁵⁵ Chapin Metz, Helen. "Persian Gulf States: A Country Study- Reconstruction After the Persian Gulf War." *U.S. Library of Congress*, 1993.

<http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/33.html>.

⁵⁶ US Library of Congress. Kuwait - RECONSTRUCTION AFTER THE PERSIAN GULF WAR <http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/33.htm>.

for Kuwaiti citizens. In addition to economic measures, social actions, such as trials for suspected traitors, reestablishment of police forces, and reintegration of those who had fled during the invasion all worked toward re-stitching the damaged social fabric of the country.⁵⁷

- *Defense Cooperation*

Following the success of Operation Desert Storm, the US and Kuwait entered into a ten-year military defense pact, “essentially acknowledging a US security commitment to Kuwait”.⁵⁸ A significant change from Kuwait’s previous policy of non-alignment, the agreement allowed the US to pre-position weapons, train forces, and conduct joint maneuvers with the military. According to Ambassador Gnehm, the US and Kuwait’s post-war agreement to continue joint military exercises indefinitely signified both countries’ commitment to enhanced military cooperation.⁵⁹ Under this arrangement, “the Kuwaitis engaged in a massive military purchasing drive including hundreds of U.S.-built M1A2 Abrams tanks and 40 F-18 Hornet aircraft to serve as the backbone of their new air force”.⁶⁰

Additionally, the agreement welcomed and defined the role of the US presence in Gulf waters. Furthermore, Kuwait provided logistics for a US naval presence and offered facilities at naval ports. The government also agreed to pay for all of the US forces’ in-country costs, such as maintenance, fuel, and food.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Chapin Metz, Helen. "Persian Gulf States: A Country Study- Reconstruction After the Persian Gulf War." *U.S. Library of Congress*, 1993.

<http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/33.html>.

⁵⁸ Ghabra, Shafeeq N. “Closing the Distance: Kuwait and the United States in the Persian Gulf”. In *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007. 341.

⁵⁹ Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm, telephone conference, interview by Capstone Students and Dr. Robert Holzweiss, pre-arranged Q&A, interviewee provided with questions ahead of interview, 21 October 2015, George Bush Presidential Library.

⁶⁰ Terrill, W. Andrew. “Kuwaiti National Security and the US-Kuwaiti Strategic Relationship After Saddam.” *US Army Strategic Studies Institute* (2007). <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/summary.cfm?q=788>.

⁶¹ Ghabra, Shafeeq N. “Closing the Distance: Kuwait and the United States in the Persian Gulf”. In *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007. 341.

In 1994, Iraq provided another stimulus for tighter military relations. After Iraq again adopted a threatening posture along the Iraq-Kuwait border, the US and Kuwait agreed to add twenty-four aircraft to the existing defense forces. To further maintain a larger US troop contingent, 1,300 personnel reinforced by US Marine units deployed.⁶²

As the twentieth century came to a close, the military relationship matured. In particular, with US assistance, Kuwait effectively developed “a credible military option that emphasized the importance of mobile, highly technological forces.”⁶³ By the late 1990s, the Kuwaiti military purchasing programs steadily progressed and “exercise rotations of US combat forces into Kuwait continued to provide valuable joint training, interface, and deterrent value.”⁶⁴

Post-9/11 and the Modern Relationship

The events of September 11, 2001 bound the US and Kuwait even closer together, particularly in military-to-military contact. Kuwait was the only country to allow the US to send troops into Iraq from its territory in 2003. More notably, Kuwait reserved approximately 60 percent of its territory for use by US forces and created new infrastructure and roads to support the US efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶⁵ These operations “moved the US-Kuwait relationship to a higher level of strategic partnership”, and, consequently, the US recognized Kuwait as a major U.S. non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally on April 1, 2004.⁶⁶

⁶² Ghabra, Shafeeq N. “Closing the Distance: Kuwait and the United States in the Persian Gulf”. In *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007. 341.

⁶³ Ibid. 342.

⁶⁴ Terrill, W. Andrew. “Kuwaiti National Security and the US-Kuwaiti Strategic Relationship After Saddam.” *US Army Strategic Studies Institute* (2007). <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/summary.cfm?q=788>.

⁶⁵ Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm, telephone conference, interview by Capstone Students and Dr. Robert Holzweiss, pre-arranged Q&A, interviewee provided with questions ahead of interview, 21 October 2015, George Bush Presidential Library.

⁶⁶ Ghabra, Shafeeq N. “Closing the Distance: Kuwait and the United States in the Persian Gulf”. In *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007. 342.

Over the last few years, the US and Kuwait military relationship has remained steady even with the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011. Today, Kuwait continues to rely on the US military for its security while the US depends on Kuwait to provide a platform for American forces to enter different regions in and around the Middle East. Currently, the US has stationed over 13,000 troops and transferred over \$3 billion in major conventional weapons to Kuwait.⁶⁷ On the other hand, Kuwait has purchased over \$2 billion in foreign military sales from the US and spent over \$9 million to educate over 200 of its military personnel in US military institutions.⁶⁸

In less than three decades, both countries have established a level of positive military collaboration and mutual support rarely seen for an Arab country. Today, the US and Kuwaiti relationship stands as a prominent example that culturally and politically dissimilar countries can find common ground and effectively work together to achieve strong bilateral security and stability agreements.

Conclusion

As one of the notable relationships currently in the Middle East, the close ties between the United States and Kuwait have significantly evolved over the past six decades. The watershed event that sparked the evolution of this relationship was the Persian Gulf War.

In the span of only half a century, the US and Kuwait relationship dramatically progressed from “an acquaintance to a friendship; from a friendship to a partnership; from a

⁶⁷ See Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. *Arms Transfers Database*. <http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.; Kane, Tim. "Global U.S. Troop Deployment, 1950-2005." Heritage Foundation, 2005. <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2006/05/global-us-troop-deployment-1950-2005>.

⁶⁸ Katzman, Kenneth. "Kuwait: Security, Reform, and US Policy." *Congressional Research Service* (2013).

partnership to an alliance; and from an alliance to a strategic alliance”.⁶⁹ Today, the US-Kuwait relationship has become a model for integration and cooperation between the West and the Middle East.

⁶⁹ Ambassador Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, remarks made on 18 February 2016 at *The Gulf War and the Liberation of Kuwait: Reflections after a Quarter Century* symposium, George Bush Presidential Library.

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A Look Ahead: Implications of the US-Kuwait Relationship in the 21st Century

Introduction

During the 21st century, unprecedented levels of globalization and advancements in technology has characterized the international system. Since the end of the Cold War, the rapid pace of international integration has fundamentally altered the nature of the global landscape and of foreign affairs. Like the First Persian Gulf War, modern events commonly have widespread impact on the world stage. As the 21st century unfolds, the US will have to increasingly rely on the strength of its international relationships to maintain global leadership and address international issues.

Over the last 25 years, this notion has been most evident in the Middle East. Despite the current administration's call for a "pivot" to the Asia-Pacific region, the historical record and current trends suggest that the Middle East will continue to play a major role in the US strategic calculus. Today, international relations are critical components of garnering the multilateral action required to address international problems within the Middle East. As a major US non-NATO ally, Kuwait significantly factors into any approach the US may take within the region. Therefore, it is important to look ahead and: 1.) explore the future of the US-Kuwait relationship and 2.) propose ways the US can simultaneously strengthen this relationship and address issues within the Middle East and achieve American interests.

Methodology

To achieve these ends, we initially present a brief overview of American and Kuwaiti interests to set the stage for our analysis. This overview performs a critical role within our

analysis by serving two functions. First, it highlights each country's security environment and role within the international system. Second, it explains the influences that have traditionally shaped the domestic behaviors and international actions of both countries. Providing a fundamental understanding of both countries' vital interests sets the basis for the rationale behind our analysis and serves as a natural "springboard" for the following sections.

To do this, we utilize the 2015 US National Security Strategy (NSS) as the foundational framework to identify current US policy within the Middle East and to establish what the current administration has acknowledged as the US interests are within the region. Additionally, we use US Congressional reports to explain Kuwait's interests, its recent foreign policy stance and its situation within the international system.

After stating and explaining US and Kuwaiti interests, we examine the US's current Middle East policies and the status of the present US-Kuwait relationship. Lastly, we assert various options and recommendations for how the US can simultaneously enhance bilateral relations with Kuwait and address issues within the Middle East.

US Interests

According to the NSS, the key US interests within the Middle East are:

- *Prevent terrorism*

Terrorism originating from the Middle East continues to pose one of the most severe dangers to international security. The NSS explicitly recognizes that the "threat of catastrophic attacks against the US homeland by terrorists ... still persists" today.⁷⁰ The deadly attacks in

⁷⁰ The White House. *2015 National Security Strategy* (2015).
https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf.

Paris serve as a recent reminder that terrorism still remains a significant issue for the international community.

Currently, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) represents the most notable terrorist threat stemming from the Middle East. Taking advantage of the power vacuum left after the long civil war in Syria and the poor governance experiences in Iraq, ISIL “now controls large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria” and has conducted or inspired terrorist acts across the globe.⁷¹

- *Confront external aggression against allies and partners and prevent proliferation of WMDs*

The US has long identified regional stability as a vital interest within the Middle East. Deep-seeded ethnic and sectarian conflict continues to permeate the region and negatively impact regional and international security. The ongoing hostilities amongst the various Middle Eastern countries have given rise to terrorist groups such as ISIL and have caused overwhelming humanitarian crises. Since the end of World War II, the US has attempted to develop and maintain its Middle Eastern alliances and defend its partners to deter aggression and promote democracy, human rights, and peace.

A major factor in preventing aggression in the Middle East relates to the US ability to limit the proliferation of WMDs, particularly within Iran. While the recent “Iran Deal” has seemingly slowed the Iranian nuclear program, Iran still has the potential to covertly develop its nuclear arsenal. The possibility of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons still poses grave danger to regional stability and could lead to arms races and aggression within the Middle East.

- *Ensure the free flow of energy*

⁷¹ “Global Governance Monitor: Terrorism.” *Council on Foreign Relations* (2013). <http://www.cfr.org/global-governance/global-governance-monitor/p18985#!/terrorism>.

Even since before the Persian Gulf War era, the US has considered the free flow of energy from the Middle East to be in its national interest. Energy commodities, particularly oil, have played a key role in driving and maintaining the global economy. As a study by the James A. Baker Institute for Public Policy has stated:

*America ensures that oil flows from the Persian Gulf are available to fuel international trade and economy as part of its global superpower responsibilities. More simply put, the physical oil needs of the US economy can certainly be met fully by protecting oil flows closer to home, from Canada, Mexico, South America, the North Sea, and Africa. But the United States must consider the health of the overall global economic system. The oil market is a global one in which a massive shortfall of oil elsewhere would not only affect the price of oil everywhere including the US but almost certainly collapse the global economic system.*⁷²

Kuwaiti Interests

Kuwaiti interests are primarily a product of internal politics and geopolitical threats.

Besides strengthening the relationship with the US, Kuwaiti interests include:

- *Enhance domestic political stability*

Since the death of Amir Jabir Ahmad al-Jabir Al Sabah in 2006, Kuwait “has lurched from one political crisis to the next, producing a sense of economic and political stagnation”.⁷³

⁷² Jaffe, Amy Myers. “Energy Security: Implications for US-China-Middle East Relations.” *The James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University* (2005).

https://bakerinstitute.org/media/files/Research/6fc605b6/SIIS_AJAFPE_worldenergy071805.pdf.

⁷³ Katzman, Kenneth. “Kuwait: Governance, Security, and US Policy.” *Congressional Research Service* (2015). <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21513.pdf>. 1.

The constant disputes between the Al Sabah and the “oppositionists” in the Kuwaiti National Assembly from 2006 to 2013 caused repeated Assembly suspensions and subsequent elections. These actions have not resolved the differences over the power balance between the executive and the Assembly.⁷⁴

The Arab uprisings that began in 2011 expanded Kuwait’s opposition into the general population and intensified the existing political crises. Tensions grew in 2011 when the opposition forced both the Interior and Foreign Ministers to resign over accusations of misconduct or incompetence. The government also came “under renewed popular pressure following reports that two of Kuwait’s largest banks had deposited \$92 million into the accounts of several parliamentarians – implying that the government had bought the loyalty of the parliamentarians”.⁷⁵ While there have been few major public demonstrations since the last election, unrest and instability continue to underlie and plague Kuwait’s political system.⁷⁶

- *Stabilize Iraq, combat ISIL, and resolve the Syrian crisis*

Currently, Kuwait has “close relationships with the government of Iraq and a direct stake in Iraqi stability”. Most notably, Kuwaiti leaders consider ISIL a direct threat to the security of Iraq and to regional stability.⁷⁷ Kuwait partially attributes the growth of ISIL to the situation in Syria. Like the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Kuwait “asserts that Syrian President Bashar Al Assad’s policies have built support for ISL, and that the organization cannot be defeated Assad still in power”.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Katzman, Kenneth. “Kuwait: Governance, Security, and US Policy.” *Congressional Research Service* (2015). <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21513.pdf>, 3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Besides addressing the threat of ISIL and the situation in Syria, Kuwait has an interest in resolving residual issues with Iraq following the Persian Gulf War. Kuwait has insisted that Iraq pay reparations for damages caused from the 1990 invasion. Currently, Iraq owes Kuwait over \$25 billion, including \$4.6 billion based on post-Desert Storm U.N. resolutions.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Kuwait remains wary of Iraqi extremist groups operating within the southern regions of Iraq. In 2011, an Iraqi militia “rocketed Kuwait’s embassy in Iraq and caused Kuwait to temporarily recall its diplomats”.⁸⁰

- *Defend and balance against Iran*

Presently, Kuwait undertakes high-level engagements with Iran. Kuwait’s sizeable Shiite population is well-integrated within Kuwaiti society, leaving Iran with limited opportunities to exploit sectarian differences. In recent years, Kuwait has hosted numerous Iranian officials, and Kuwait’s Amir has traveled to Iran to meet with Iranian leaders.

However, despite these engagements, Kuwait remains concerned with Iranian activity, particularly Iran’s nuclear program. In June 2015, Kuwait called on the US and other GCC countries to “work effectively to curb Iran’s efforts to expand its influence in the region”.⁸¹

Additionally, Iranian intelligence operations continue to pose problems for Kuwait. “In May 2010, Kuwait arrested some Kuwaiti civil servants and stateless residents for allegedly working on behalf of the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard (IRGC-QF) of Iran in a purported plot to blow up Kuwaiti energy facilities”.⁸² More recently, in September 2015,

⁷⁹ Katzman, Kenneth. “Kuwait: Governance, Security, and US Policy.” *Congressional Research Service* (2015). <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21513.pdf>.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

Kuwait “announced the arrest of 25 Kuwaitis and one Iranian on charges of planning attacks in and spying on Kuwait”.⁸³

- *Stimulate economic growth*

According to Kuwaiti Prime Minister Jaber, Kuwait has become a “welfare state” with an “unsustainable” economic system.⁸⁴ Since 2006, Kuwait has underinvested in capital infrastructure and overspent on public sector salaries and subsidies.⁸⁵ The lack of spending on capital infrastructure and the shortage of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Kuwait relative to other GCC countries has led to a distinct perception of economic stagnation within the country. Only \$800 million was invested into Kuwait from 2000-2010, while total subsidies cost the Kuwaiti government \$17.7 billion annually.⁸⁶

The 2008 financial crisis and the sharp drop in oil prices in 2014-2015 also greatly strained the Kuwaiti economy. The crisis “prevented movement on several major potential drivers of future growth,” including “a joint venture with Dow Chemical to form the largest polyethylene production company”.⁸⁷ More alarming, the recent drop in oil prices “has caused Kuwait to project a budget deficit of about \$24 billion for its 2015-2016 budget year”.⁸⁸

⁸³ Katzman, Kenneth. “Kuwait: Governance, Security, and US Policy.” *Congressional Research Service* (2015). <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21513.pdf>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, To compare, other GCC countries’ FDI figures include: \$10 billion invested in Bahrain, \$73 billion in UAE, and \$130 billion in Saudi Arabia.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Current US Policy and US-Kuwait Relations

Over the past year, the landscape of the Middle East has changed dramatically and shaken the security and stability of the international community. In recent years, US policy towards the Middle East has been seemingly reactive and incoherent.

Judged by the standard of achieving or protecting the interests laid out in the NSS, current policy so far has been barely sufficient.⁸⁹ The Obama administration's approach has certainly prevented another major terrorist attack on the US homeland but has not been successful in stopping the growth of terrorism in other areas of the world, such as the Middle East and Europe. The deadly terrorist attacks in Paris and the resurgence of Islamic extremists, particularly within Iraq and Afghanistan, clearly show the current policy's shortcomings in preventing terrorism.

Similarly, the Obama administration's efforts to achieve the US interest of confronting external aggression against American allies and preventing the proliferation of WMDs have yielded shaky results. For the most part, the US has shielded its major Middle Eastern allies from traditional military aggression. However, several prominent failures have deteriorated US standing within the region. The ongoing Syrian crisis, the collapse of the Iraqi government, the recovery of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the softening of US-Iran relations have led US allies in the region to question US reliability and credibility. The Iranian nuclear deal has had similar consequences. While the deal seemingly stalls the Iranian nuclear program, it possesses no real deterrence mechanism that would prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons covertly and loosens the restraining measures that check Iranian aggression. The deal relies on a healthy deal

⁸⁹ The concept for judging current US policy based on the standard of how well it has achieved the objectives of the National Security Strategy is drawn from: Martin Indyk, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Michael O'Hanlon, "Scoring Obama's Foreign Policy: A Progressive Pragmatist Tries to Bend History", *Foreign Affairs*, May 2012.

of trust from the US and on good faith on Iran's part – a reality that deeply concerns the rest of the Middle Eastern countries, which have depended on the US to keep Iran at bay.

Despite these policy challenges, the US-Kuwait relationship remains relatively strong. However, relations between US and Kuwait have become increasingly complacent and seem to be slowly drifting apart.

Policy Options

According to the NSS, the US faces a wide variety of strategic risks in the pursuit of its interests, such as:⁹⁰

- *Catastrophic attack on the US homeland or critical infrastructure*
- *Threats or attacks against US citizens abroad and our allies*
- *Global economic crisis or widespread economic slowdown*
- *Proliferation and/or use of weapons of mass destruction*
- *Climate change*
- *Major energy market disruptions*
- *Significant security consequences associated with weak or failing states (including mass atrocities, regional spillover, and transnational organized crime)*

US policymakers face daunting challenges in realizing American interests within the Middle East since these risks emanate prominently from this particular area of the world.

The NSS correctly identifies that “in an interconnected world, there are no global problems that can be solved without the United States, and few can be solved by the United

⁹⁰ The White House. *2015 National Security Strategy* (2015).
https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf.

States alone.”⁹¹ Policymakers should consider the potential impact that Kuwait could have in any US strategy to address and overcome the strategic risks and challenges to American interests in the Middle East. Under close examination, Kuwait has a deep connection to many of these risks and can effect US efforts to achieve its interests in the Middle East. As a result, Kuwait should be a primary factor or consideration within US policy for the region.

Thus, to successfully realize the interests and goals of the NSS, an effective US policy towards the Middle East should simultaneously: 1.) strengthen US-Kuwaiti relations by focusing attention on areas where American and Kuwaiti interests converge and 2.) advance US interests in the Middle East while addressing or mitigating the previously mentioned risks found within the region. With these mandates in mind, the US can realistically pursue the following options:

- *Enhance joint efforts to reduce sources of funding for terrorism*

<i>Primary interests strengthened by this option</i>	<i>Primary risks addressed by this option</i>
<p>Kuwait interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Enhance domestic political stability</i> • <i>Stabilize Iraq, combat ISIL, and resolve the Syrian crisis</i> <p>US interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Prevent terrorism</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Catastrophic attack on the US homeland or critical infrastructure</i> • <i>Threats or attacks against US citizens abroad and our allies</i> • <i>Significant security consequences associated with weak or failing states (including mass atrocities, regional spillover, and transnational organized crime)</i>

⁹¹ The White House. 2015 National Security Strategy (2015). https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf, 3.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Kuwaiti citizens have donated directly to both sides of the conflict. Sunni opposition to Bashar al-Assad has been popular in Kuwait among Sunni citizens, who have given generously to the Syrian opposition or to agents and organizations that claim to represent the opposition. On the other hand, Shiite groups within Kuwait, which have been strongly represented in the middle class, have secretly financed the Bashar al-Assad government by donating funds through Turkey and into Damascus. Before the Syrian Civil War, Kuwait was reported to be one of the largest investors in Syria, with an estimated \$800 million invested in the country in 2010.⁹²

Additionally, the Kuwaiti government has had strong relations with Syria since Hafez al-Assad sent Syrian troops to participate in the 1991 liberation of Kuwait. As a result, it is difficult for the Kuwaiti government to balance the prevention of private donations to the Sunni opposition, without having to also stop the private donations of Shiite Kuwaitis to associates of the Syrian regime. Taking action against one group and not the other would inflame sectarian tensions, while taking actions against both would weaken the support of the royal family in both the Sunni and Shiite communities. Therefore, it was politically risky for the Kuwaiti government to adopt strong measures against private donations to the multitude forces or parties within Syria.

As the Syrian opposition evolved into various rebel brigades, ambiguities emerged as to whether donations were being sent for humanitarian purposes, to arm the rebels, or to support the Syrian regime.⁹³ The lack of government control over these donations allowed individuals and

⁹² Dickinson, Elizabeth. "Playing with Fire: Why Private Gulf Financing for Syria's Extremist Rebels Risks Igniting Sectarian Conflict at Home." *The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World* No. 16 (2013). <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2013/12/06%20private%20gulf%20financing%20syria%20extremist%20rebels%20sectarian%20conflict%20dickinson/private%20gulf%20financing%20syria%20extremist%20rebels%20sectarian%20conflict%20dickinson.pdf>.

⁹³ Ibid.

groups within Kuwait to disguise terrorist financing activities as charitable support to either the Syrian rebels or to the Syrian regime.

As the intentions of various donor organizations became increasingly unclear and ISIL grew in power, the US pressured the Kuwaiti government to monitor and prevent the transfer of funds to terrorist organizations within Syria and Iraq. In 2013, Kuwait passed legislation making it a criminal act to finance terrorist groups. However, implementation has been difficult as a result of popular pressure on the government and sympathies of enforcement officers. Instead, the Kuwaiti government has urged that donations go to officially licensed Islamic charities. Even though Kuwaiti financial institutions have tightened their controls on terror financing, most money sent from Kuwait from private citizens to terror organizations is sent through criminal organizations or by using the *hawala* system.⁹⁴

Since the 2013 legislation, the Kuwait government has taken great strides to prevent terrorist financing. The June 2015 bombing demonstrates that these measures have been relatively effective and that ISIL is retaliating by turning its sights to Kuwait. It is critical that Kuwait continues to address the motivations for its private citizens to finance terror organizations.

The US should continue to support the Kuwaiti government's efforts to minimize extremist activities or financing. To accomplish this, the US can bolster sectarian cohesion within Kuwait by working with the Kuwaiti government to establish an inclusive forum from which both Sunni and Shi'a can discuss their concerns. Easing tensions between the sects allows

⁹⁴ Realuyo, Celina B. "Combating Terrorist Financing in the Gulf: Significant Progress but Risks Remain." *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington* (2015). http://www.agsiw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/AGSIW_Combating-Terrorist-Financing-in-the-Gulf.pdf.

both sides to reconcile and overcome differences and mitigates their motivations to finance sectarian and terrorist violence outside of Kuwait.

In addition to this initiative, the US can help expand the broadcast of “Kuwait Youth Radio”, which is a program designed by the Kuwaiti government to publicize service announcements and promote tolerance and unity. The US has implemented similar programs in the past. During the Cold War, the US created Radio Free Europe to serve as an anti-communism tool and an instrument to build a collective European identity. Today, Radio Free Europe has grown and evolved to promote and support US interests across Europe. The US could extend its influence and expertise into Kuwait by not only promoting Kuwait Youth Radio, but also implementing similar, US-run broadcasts. More recently, the US has supported Pakistan’s “Radio Mashaal” to counter pro-Taliban and radical messages over the airways.⁹⁵

The US can use a similar approach with Kuwait Youth Radio and provide expertise and equipment to help the Kuwaiti government develop these broadcasts. Strengthening Kuwaiti cohesion and fighting the sectarian ideology of terrorist organizations will be critical to preventing the dangerous consequences of terrorism within Kuwait.

- *Strengthen presence in Kuwait*

<i>Primary interests strengthened by this option</i>	<i>Primary risks addressed by this option</i>
<p>Kuwait interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Enhance domestic political stability</i> • <i>Stabilize Iraq, combat ISIL, and resolve the Syrian crisis</i> • <i>Defend and balance against Iran</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Catastrophic attack on the US homeland or critical infrastructure</i> • <i>Threats or attacks against US citizens abroad and our allies</i>

⁹⁵ For more on Radio Mashaal, see *Then and Now: Free Media in Unfree Societies*. <http://www.rferl.org/info/history/133.html>.

<p>US interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Prevent terrorism</i> • <i>Confront external aggression against allies and partners and prevent proliferation of WMDs</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Significant security consequences associated with weak or failing states (including mass atrocities, regional spillover, and transnational organized crime)</i> • <i>Proliferation and/or use of weapons of mass destruction</i>
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The Middle East is currently experiencing a large amount of violence, and Iran is using the situation to expand its sphere of influence and enhance its regional power. Iran is currently involved across the Middle East but most notably in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Iran is currently backing President Bashar al-Assad’s regime with weapons, training, and finances.⁹⁶ Currently, Iran is exacerbating the Syrian crisis and working against both US and Kuwaiti interests.

In Iraq, Iran is looking to secure a foothold within the government and solidify its hold over the Middle East. Even though Iran is currently supporting the resistance against ISIL, it is doing so to achieve its goal of regional hegemony. Iraq’s former Prime Minister Maliki founded the Hash’d al-Sha’abi or People’s Mobilization Units (PMUs) to guard against Sunni militias. Presently, Iran is backing a 100,000 strong force with finances and arms that falls under the

⁹⁶ Saul, Jonathan and Parisa Hafezi. “Iran boosts military support in Syria to bolster Assad.” *Reuters*, February 21, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-iran-idUSBREA1K09U20140221>.

“umbrella” of the PMUs.⁹⁷ Most notably, Iran is building these forces to protect its two main interests in Iraq, Shia holy sites and its land access to Syria.⁹⁸

In the broadest sense, almost any Iranian action in the Middle East is contradictory to US interests. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has attempted to counter or hinder American policy interests in the region. During the American military operations in Iraq, the Iranian regime provided manufactured parts to improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to Iraqi insurgents. Iran also continues to sponsor and fund Hezbollah and Hamas, terrorist organizations that attack Israel and undermine regional stability. Most recently, Iran violated the 2015 nuclear agreement by testing ballistic missiles.

Countering Iranian expansion and aggression is a key way to prevent external aggression against US allies and counter terrorism in the Middle East. The US can implement certain policies that will improve the US-Kuwait relationship and secure American interests. In response to the Iranian threat, the US should increase its presence in Kuwait and utilize the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to support Kuwait and enhance US standing in the Middle East.

To accomplish these aims, the US can increase military and defense cooperation with Kuwait and the GCC by deploying a brigade-size element of 3,000 to 5,000 military personnel to Kuwait. Recent policy agreements between the US and Iran have made GCC states uncomfortable, and US reliability within the region is critical to the area’s stability. Currently, the US Navy’s 5th Fleet is stationed in Bahrain and the US Air Force possesses a major base in Qatar.⁹⁹ Placing more troops within Kuwait would further boost US reliability and credibility

⁹⁷ Sharafedin, Bozorghmehr. “Iran pledges to expand missile capabilities, defying Obama.” *Business Insider*. January 1, 2016.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/r-defiant-iran-pledges-to-ramp-up-missile-program-in-challenge-for-obama-2016-1>.

⁹⁸ Naji, Kasra. “What is Iran’s game plan in Iraq?” *BBC*. June 16, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33075894>.

⁹⁹ For more information, see US Naval Forces Central Command. <http://www.cusnc.navy.mil/>.

among the Gulf States by assuring them that the US will not abandon them in times of policy change or crisis. Kuwait has readily welcomed US forces on its territory and stationing more troops in Kuwait sends a message that a unified coalition is ready for any aggressive actions against Kuwait and the other GCC members.

Utilizing the GCC is a prudent way for the US to develop relations with Kuwait and achieve its interests because it is an existing institution in the region that fosters cooperation and holds prestige among the Gulf States. Recently, high level diplomatic interactions between the US and Kuwait, such as summits and state visits, were emphasized more than daily communications. The US should capitalize on these factors by creating a liaison position between the US and Kuwait that specifically deals with GCC issues or concerns. This position would facilitate and enhance daily interactions between the US and Kuwait. It would also allow the US to integrate itself within the GCC and assure the GCC members of the US commitment to the region.

- *Manage oil resources and encourage economic diversification*

<i>Primary interests strengthened by this option</i>	<i>Primary risks addressed by this option</i>
<p>Kuwait interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Enhance domestic political stability</i> • <i>Stimulate economic growth</i> <p>US interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ensure the free flow of energy</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Global economic crisis or widespread economic slowdown</i> • <i>Climate change</i> • <i>Major energy market disruptions</i>

Kuwait's economy and national welfare is entirely derived from and dependent on oil production.¹⁰⁰ Oil still represents 90% of Kuwait's government revenues and about half of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).¹⁰¹ Despite its substantial sovereign wealth fund, which holds an estimated \$550 billion, Kuwait finances have suffered with the drop in oil prices over the last two years.¹⁰² Additionally, oil has become an expensive fuel to power the country's utility sector. Currently, Kuwait loses out on significant export revenue for each barrel of oil that goes towards domestic power generation. Even with its sizable sovereign wealth fund, Kuwait has tremendous incentive to decrease its reliance on oil and reform its economic system to keep up with the growth of other GCC countries, such as Bahrain and the UAE.

Despite its domestic consumption, Kuwait manages its oil sector extremely efficiently. Rather than attempt to involve itself in an already well-functioning energy sector, the US can seek to help Kuwait in its oil security, while also helping to develop their other renewable energy resources to maximize revenue and lower domestic oil consumption to increase its exports.

The Ministry of Electricity and Water in Kuwait indicated that they expect the energy demand to triple by 2030. This poses a large problem for electricity, especially in the capital of Kuwait City. Much like the collaborative efforts to put out the oil well fires during the Gulf War, the US and Kuwait could work together to develop solar and wind power as an alternative means of energy. Since Kuwait has already collaborated with Berkley and Oakridge National Laboratories to develop similar labs, opportunities exist to further alternative energy initiatives.

¹⁰⁰ Pollock, David. "Kuwait: Keystone on US Gulf Policy." *The Washington Institute*, Policy Focus #76. November 2007.

¹⁰¹ Katzman, Kenneth. "Kuwait: Governance, Security, and US Policy." *Congressional Research Service* (2015). <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21513.pdf>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

While Kuwait has hoped to partner with international companies, Kuwaiti officials are hesitant to allow outside influences access to its energy sector. However, by securing the oil sector and taking a complementary approach to developing renewable resources, the US can strengthen its relationship with Kuwait and boost Kuwait's economic revenue.

Recommendations for Prioritizing Options

“As powerful as [America is] and will remain, our resources and influence are not infinite. And in a complex world, many of the security problems we face do not lend themselves to quick and easy fixes. We have to make hard choices among many competing priorities and we must always resist over-reach” – President Barack Obama, 2015 National Security Strategy¹⁰³

President Obama has correctly identified that policy prioritization and avoiding over-reach are the primary challenges for future American policy towards the Middle East. To address these challenges, a successful policy towards the Middle East must effectively link means and ways while balancing short-term considerations with long-term goals. With this in mind, American leaders should sensibly prioritize and implement the previously laid out options to strengthen the US-Kuwait relationship, advance US interests in the Middle East, and prevent the exhaustion of US resources and influence. Consequently, to realize these objectives, the US should utilize the following timeframe:

- *Short-term: Continue cooperative counter-terrorism efforts within Kuwait*

The NSS and other important US government reports, such as the 2015 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review and the Department of State-USAID Joint Strategic Goal

¹⁰³ The White House. *2015 National Security Strategy* (2015).
https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf.

Framework, suggest that a “short-term” goal must be addressed immediately, ideally within two or three years. Since terrorism poses the most pressing threat to both American and Kuwaiti security, the US should focus on bolstering and collaborating with Kuwait in counter-terrorism matters.

Channeling US effort and resources toward enhancing the current counter-terrorism measures already underway in Kuwait will have an immediate, positive impact on the US-Kuwait relationship and strengthen the joint interest of preventing terrorism. Working with Kuwait to expand broadcasts of “Kuwaiti Youth Radio” and to create a forum to foster Sunni and Shi’a dialogue is a smart way to propagate religious and national cohesion in Kuwait and reinforce its defenses against Islamic extremist narratives.

Additionally, the US should initially direct its energies to the counter-terrorism option in the near-term because it is the least complicated to implement. Since this option effects only internal changes within Kuwait’s borders and is not heavily influenced by international factors such as the global economic market, US efforts will see fast and meaningful results.

- *Mid-term: Bolster military presence in Kuwait and facilitate the creation of the Kuwait-GCC liaison position*

As with the short-term option, the NSS and other prominent government reports, like the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review, the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance, and the 2013 President’s Climate Action Plan, suggest that a “mid-term” goal should be realized in approximately four to six years. These reports or strategies use the year 2020 as a benchmark to

reaching specified “performance goals”.¹⁰⁴ Unlike, the short-term policy priority, the mid-term priority requires time and nuance to accomplish the identified goals.

Managing regional power relationships and dynamics between states is a complex task that cannot be rushed. Bolstering the US military presence in Kuwait and facilitating the creation of the Kuwait-GCC liaison position is a mid-term priority due to the geopolitical consequences associated with these measures. The US should increase the American military troop count gradually to avoid antagonizing Iran into renegeing on its recent agreements to halt its nuclear program. Hastily increasing American troop levels in the Middle East would create a security dilemma for Iran and would jeopardize the rapprochement between the US and Iran. Iran would perceive the deployment of an additional brigade-size force close to its border as a US containment effort.

On the other hand, the US cannot afford to move too slowly and risk losing the already dwindling confidence of its current allies in the region. Building US force presence and establishing the Kuwait-GCC liaison position incrementally over the next four to six years would show the US commitment to the Middle East and to securing regional allies. US leaders should implement these actions over a period of years to strike the proper balance between immediately reassuring allies, cementing a long-term presence and commitment to the region, and mitigating the consequential hostilities that could emerge from an American force build-up. While taking these steps may not seem like a substantial physical effort on the part of the US in the short-term, they are symbolic acts and meaningful gestures of America lending its strength and security to its regional allies, helping them to understand that the US will not forget them in times of crisis or policy change.

¹⁰⁴ See The White House. *2014 Quadrennial Defense Review; the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance; and the 2013 President's Climate Action Plan.*

- *Long-term: Ensure the security of Kuwait's oil sector and provide technical and logistical support to Kuwait's domestic alternative energy resource initiatives*

In the NSS, President Obama explicitly states that the US “will lead with a long-term perspective. Around the world, there are historic transitions underway that will unfold over decades”.¹⁰⁵ The implication of this statement is that a long-term prioritization should be framed and implemented over a period of 10 years or more. The long-term policy priority is not an urgent or unstable security matter and can realistically be achieved only over a considerable period of time.

Oil has been a key staple throughout the history and evolution of the international system and will remain an essential pillar of the global economy. Additionally, oil is the sole natural resource and the foundation of Kuwait's economic wealth. Under these current circumstances and realities, US leaders should place long-term priority on ensuring the security of Kuwait's oil sector and developing its alternative energy resources. In the foreseeable future, alternative energy sources are highly unlikely to replace oil as the primary energy resource driving the global economic market. As a result, Kuwait has had little interest in shifting its focus from oil to other energy options.

Placing long-term prioritization on the security of Kuwait's oil sector and the development of its alternative energy resource initiatives is a prudent choice for American policymakers. Since Kuwait is fiercely protective of its oil sector and global reliance on oil is unlikely to change, the US should not make the mistake of pushing this policy on Kuwait. Emphasizing this policy option in the short- or mid-term ignores more pressing threats, including terrorism and Iranian aggression, and risks straining the US relationship with Kuwait.

¹⁰⁵ The White House. *2015 National Security Strategy* (2015).
https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf.

Conclusion

As the US role in the Middle East continues to evolve, an essential aspect of US strategy towards the region must remain the same: the high level of broad cooperation with Kuwait. Since the First Gulf War, the US has grown to rely on its strategic alliance with Kuwait to achieve American interests in the Middle East. American leaders and policymakers need to continue to foster the close US-Kuwait friendship to address the volatile problems that stem from the Middle East and now threaten the security of the international system.

Today, the instability and violence that characterize the Middle East have shaped an uncertain future for the region and complicated the way forward for US strategy. Despite the unpredictability of the region and the unclear path ahead, Kuwait stands as an undeniable partner in an area full of hostile actors and geopolitical problems. Future policies toward the Middle East should recognize Kuwait as an invaluable contributor to US interests. As a result, American policymakers should consider ways to achieve US interests in the Middle East while strengthening the US-Kuwait relationship. While effective policies must properly prioritize and balance means and ways, the US would be wise to remember the following:

“Kuwait is one of our most important partners in the region, and we have a very strong bilateral defense agreement, as well as working together on a whole range of economic and social security issues. [...] So we appreciate the strength and leadership of Kuwait and its friendship. And we are looking forward to extensive cooperation in the future.” – President Barack Obama, September 13, 2013.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ The White House. “Remarks by President Obama and Amir Sabah Al-Sabah of Kuwait After Bilateral Meeting” (2013). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/13/remarks-president-obama-and-amir-sabah-al-sabah-kuwait-after-bilateral-m>.

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