The Kuwaiti-American Relationship under the Shadows of the Palestinian Cause

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Abstract
This article investigates the United States’ relationship with Kuwait after its transformation from a sheikhdom to a state in 1961. This research looks into this relationship from a diplomatic perspective. It focuses on challenges that the young nation faced on both a regional and international level concerning its sovereignty and security. On the regional level, Kuwait needed to be recognized as a sovereign state because of the Iraqi claims that Kuwait was part of Iraq. Therefore, Kuwait supported the Palestinian cause, which was the core of the Arabic identity, to gain recognition and acceptance. Meanwhile, Kuwait had to cooperate with the world’s superpower to secure its independence among hostile neighbors. Kuwait looked to the United States for security. However, the problem is that the United States supported Israel, the major enemy of the Arabs. Consequently, the Kuwait-U.S. relationship had become tenuous, surrounded by complex circumstances. Thus, under these circumstances Kuwait had to balance its pro-Arab stance with its need for security, provided by the United States.
Introduction

Upon gaining independence from Great Britain in 1961, Kuwait was transformed from a sheikhdom to a state. The young nation faced many domestic, regional, and international challenges concerning its internal politics, sovereignty, and security. On the domestic level, Kuwait faced a strong Arab nationalism movement, which demanded political reform of the government system. Meanwhile, the Arab nationalists were against the British and American presence in the region and explicitly supported Palestinian causes. Therefore, the Kuwaiti government had to take into consideration the Arab nationalists’ demands to rebalance the domestic politics.

On the regional level, Kuwait needed recognition as a sovereign state by other Arab countries because of the Iraqi claim that Kuwait was actually part of Iraq. The Kuwaiti government had to play an essential role in Arab causes in order to gain this recognition and acceptance. Thus, Kuwait supported the Palestinian cause, which was the core of the Arab identity at that time.

On the international level, Kuwait had to cooperate with the world’s superpowers to secure its sovereignty and independence among hostile neighbors. Kuwait looked to the United States for security because of their long history together; however, the United States supported Israel, a major enemy to the Arabs. This support complicated diplomatic relations between Kuwait and the United States, causing a dilemma. On the one hand, the Kuwaiti government was concerned about its security among revolutionary neighbors and needed U.S. support. On the other hand, Kuwait needed explicitly to support the Palestinians to balance its internal politics and to get respect from the Arab world, which was mostly against the United States.

The main argument of this paper is that Kuwait’s strong rhetoric-and on several occasions, substantial support for the Palestinian cause-was always a driving force behind its reluctance to have a close political relationship with the U.S. government. Kuwait had to balance its pro-Arab stance with its need for security, provided by the United States. This paper attempts to answer the following questions: What are the domestic, regional, and international challenges facing Kuwait? What is the nature of the U.S.-Kuwait relationship? What kind of support has Kuwait offered for the Palestinian cause? How does U.S. support for Israel affect the U.S.-Kuwait relationship?

Domestic Challenges

Beginning in the early eighteenth century Kuwait was ruled by the Sabah family, and Kuwait’s economy depended on pearling, shipbuilding, and long-distance trade (Crystal 37). Kuwait’s political structure was based on tribal
codes, and the Sheik was the head of the Sheikdom. However, the merchants of Kuwait have also had political power due to their control of the mercantile and pearling economy. In 1921 the merchants managed to persuade the Sheik to form an administrative council (Crystal 5), but the council was short lived. In 1938, after a long struggle with the ruling family, the opposition merchant community succeeded in forming a Legislative Assembly, which was also short lived (Crystal 47). Nevertheless, the structure of the Kuwaiti community and economy was trending toward public participation in the political life.

Kuwaiti support for the Palestinians began in 1921 when Haj Aiman Al-Hussini, the Grand Mufti of Palestine, visited Kuwait to raise funds for the restoration of Alaqsar, the Holy Mosque in Jerusalem (Almidiris 9). In 1933 the Kuwaiti support went beyond fundraising when a group politicized Kuwaiti youths sent a denouncing letter to the British political agent in Kuwait in regards to the British policy in Palestine, which was under a British mandate (Almidiris 9). In 1935 Haj Aiman Al-Hussini visited Kuwait again to build support for the Palestinian-Jewish conflict and many people were sympathetic. In 1936 the Kuwaiti people began to raise funds and organize committees to support the Palestinian struggle; interestingly the Kuwaiti political opposition formed these committees (Almidiris 11). Also in 1936 the opposition managed to form the Educational Council, and they asked Haj Aiman Al-Hussini to send teachers to Kuwait to help develop the education system (Almidiris 14). The British were skeptical and opposed the Palestinian teachers but in the end they agreed, after performing background checks (Almidiris 15).

In 1947 the United Nations General Assembly passed the Partition Plan for Palestine, which riled Kuwait’s students and they organized a demonstration (Almidiris 18). There was a tangled relationship between the Kuwaiti opposition and the Palestinian cause, since most of the opposition were merchants and had political power and the financial ability to support the Palestinians.

In the 1940s and 1950s things started to change due to the new oil economy, which allowed the Sheik to have the upper hand. He limited the merchants’ political participation (Crystal 73). However, during the 1950s new opposition groups came into existence that were attached to Arab nationalism or were pro-Nasser (Crystal 81). Meanwhile, a large number of expatriate Arab Iraqis, Egyptians, and later on Palestinians came to work in Kuwait due to the economic boom, and carried with them Arab nationalist ideas, which strengthened the opposition (Crystal 81). The opposition was structured under social clubs, such as the Graduate Club, the Teachers Club, and the National Culture
Club. They also organized a Clubs Committee and began to press their reform
demands (Crystal 82). The Kuwaiti government feared the potential of the Arab
nationalists to galvanize the streets (Crystal 81). The nationalists had sup-
ported decolonization movements in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, but their
central issue was the Palestinian cause (Al Khateb 125). During the 1956 Suez
Crisis-the Tripartite Aggression-the Clubs Committee pressed the Sheik to
implement an oil embargo upon France, Britain, and Israel and asked all of
Kuwait Oil Company’s workers to strike, which they did (Almidiris 22). During
these events some of the oil company’s vital facilities were sabotaged by the
rioters (Almidiris 22) The Arab nationalists and the Clubs Committee organized
an “Israeli imports boycott campaign” (Almidiris 24), and the Palestinian cause
created great domestic pressure for the Kuwaiti government.

Regional Challenges

Kuwait is a small state located in the Persian Gulf and surrounded by big
and hostile countries: Iraq lies to the north, Saudi Arabia to the southwest,
and Iran to the east. Kuwait’s population at independence was only 321,621,
but they had 10 percent of the global oil reserves. The geographic location,
the small population, and the oil wealth raised a serious security issue, which
was Kuwait’s first concern.

Iraq had claimed Kuwait as part of its territory since the time of King
Ghazi of Iraq, in the 1930s. Thus, when Kuwait gained its independence in
1961 from the British, they signed a protection agreement, the Anglo-Kuwait
treaty. Iraq supported Kuwait’s independence from the British but still claimed
Kuwait as part of Iraq. After the signing of the Anglo-Kuwait treaty, Iraq
announced publicly that Kuwait was a state subject to imperialism (Panas-
pornprasit 38). Abd al-Karim Qasim, the Iraqi president, continued his claims
and announced to the world that Kuwait was historically a part of Basra. As a
result of the Iraqi claims, the British honored the Anglo-Kuwait treaty and
began sending troops to Kuwait. That incident illustrates the kinds of chal-
lenges that Kuwait has faced since independence.

Iraq also pressured the Arab League to not recognize Kuwait’s sover-
eignty. For this reason, Kuwait had to prove to the Arabs that it could play an
effective and essential role in their issues and causes. The biggest such issue
was Israel; most of the Arabs were involved in the conflict with Israel. Thus,
Kuwait tried to support the Palestinian cause and this played a critical role in
gaining recognition from the Arabs as a sovereign and independent state.

The Palestinian population in Kuwait formed the second largest group,
after native citizens, and Kuwait contributed generously to them (Panas-
pornprasit 43). Approximately 540,000 Palestinian refugees lived in Kuwait, equal
to 21 percent of the total population. This created mischief within Kuwait (Bagahat 141). As a result, the Palestinian cause greatly influenced Kuwait’s politics and foreign policy.

Kuwait was the birthplace and headquarters for many Palestinian organizations. “Many of the original founders of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) began their careers and formed their revolutionary strategy in Kuwait” (Joyce 50). Kuwait financed most of the PLO and allowed the establishment of military training camps (Assiri 50). There were also strong Islamic and Arabic ties connecting the two peoples. Palestine is a holy land for the Muslims, so there is a religious compulsion to support Palestinians. In addition, the Kuwaiti people were affected by the ideology of “Arab nationalism,” which dominated the masses and created pressure on the Kuwaiti government.

International Challenges

As mentioned, after gaining independence from the British, Kuwait faced many regional and international challenges that affected its security. Kuwait was anxious about Iran, and there was also Iraq, which had been hostile toward Kuwait for three decades (Assiri 9). Due to these threats, Kuwait needed help in securing its sovereignty. The young nation had the Anglo-Kuwait protection treaty with the British, but the British were planning to withdraw from the region. Consequently, Kuwait turned to the Americans.

The American relationship with Kuwait started in 1910 when the Dutch Reform American Mission established the first hospital (Joyce xvii). The establishment of this hospital created strong social relations with the Kuwaiti community. A new stage of the relationship evolved in 1938 with the discovery of large quantities of oil. Kuwait did not have the technical expertise to develop its own oil fields, so two foreign oil companies—the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and the American Gulf Exploration Company—formed the Kuwait Oil Company (Joyce xix). The economic relationship developed further in 1948 when Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah awarded the Americans the rights for oil drilling operations in the border zone between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Official relations with America began in 1951 when the U.S. government asked the British government for permission to open a consulate in Kuwait. After independence in 1961, the American consulate became an embassy. Diplomatic relations between the two countries however have always been complicated by U.S. support for Israel. Kuwait was concerned about its security among revolutionary and untrustworthy neighbors after the British withdrawal from the region and was reliant upon American assistance and friendship, but Kuwait is also part of the Arab world, which was mostly against any American
presence in the region. Kuwait’s radical Arab milieu and some of the neighbors viewed its cooperation with the United States as cooperation with Israel.

With that said, Kuwait’s post-independence foreign policy was influenced by two main national goals (Assiri xiv). The first goal was political and military security, and the second was integration with Arabic ideology and Islamic values. For the first goal, Kuwait’s main objective was to survive as a sovereign nation, which required a close relationship with a superpower. Kuwait used its oil wealth to achieve this goal.

For the second goal, Kuwait had to follow an acceptable policy and show support to the Arab and Islamic causes. Kuwait tried to achieve Arabic and Islamic identity through supporting the Palestinians and denouncing Israel, which was the core of Arab ideology. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s the Kuwaiti government strongly opposed U.S. support for Israel and also condemned all Israeli aggression toward the Arabs. Even though the support or the aggressions were small, Kuwait had to announce opposition while at the same time trying to maintain an acceptable dialogue with the United States. Because of this predicament, Kuwait’s foreign policy was complicated by two opposing discourses: one with the Arabs and the second with the United States.

1960s

The Palestinian cause resulted in a special relationship with the Arabs, based upon interrelated consequences (Sayigh 21). The Palestinian cause was related to Arab “state-building” and the construction of separate-country nationalism. In addition, the Palestinian struggle and the refugees influenced the Arab states and led to a complex domestic and regional politics especially with the frontline states in confrontation with Israel: Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon (Sayigh 21). The conflict with Israel played a critical part in initiating the Cold War politics in the region and led to a parallel Arab Cold War (Sayigh 18).

Kuwait was far from the frontline with Israel but it had been influenced by the Palestinian cause. The first wave of Palestinians that moved to Kuwait between 1948 and the early 1950s were doctors, engineers, teachers, and educated persons and they had a decisive impact on the country’s development process (Ghabra). By the 1960s the numbers of Palestinians had increased and Kuwait became the Promised Land for some Palestinians due to the political system and the economic opportunities. The Palestinian population grew from 15,173 in 1957 to 77,712 in 1965 (Al-Nakib 24). After 1963 the Kuwaiti government allowed the Palestinians in Kuwait to manage and control their own schools; they had nine schools (Almidirís 33). Kuwait approved all the Palestinian civil societies and non-profit organizations to establish branches (Almidirís 34).
The first announcement from Kuwait after gaining independence concerning the Israeli issue came on August 19, 1963, when violence broke out and Israel attacked the Syrian border; most of the Arab world condemned this action. The Kuwaiti Amir delivered a speech condemning the Israeli aggression and blaming the world's superpowers, particularly the United States.

In February 1966, the United States, under President Johnson, agreed to sell 48 Shyhawk bombers to Israel (Puschel 13). Kuwait protested, and countered by making an arms deal with the British as a political protest (Panaspornprasit 45). Kuwait wanted to play a major role in the events to prove to the League of Arab States that it could play an essential role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Kuwait felt diminished after the League granted the young nation only limited membership because of Iraq’s dissent. Also, Kuwait refuted the Iraqi claims that Kuwait was subject to imperial powers, which could affect Kuwait’s position on Arabic causes.

In 1967 Nasser announced that Egypt was determined to put an end to the Israeli-Arab conflict. Meanwhile, the worker unions in Kuwait—most of them working at Kuwait’s oil company—sent their representatives to meet with Nasser and offer support and announced that they were going to strike. They declared that they had done it in 1956 and they were going to do it again. These announcements put Kuwait under great pressure (Almidiris 36, 38).

The War of June 1967 between the Arab world and Israel was a turning point in the history of the region. Both superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—were working hard to gain allies in the region. Egypt and Syria were pro-Soviet and the U.S. stood beside the Arab monarchies and the other countries in the region (Oren 13). For Kuwait the situation was complicated, as it was a small state with a small population that could not aid the Arab war preparations with troops. Kuwait did not have the military capacity to participate in the war. In spite of that, Kuwait formed the largely symbolic Al-Yarmouk Brigade to show solidarity with the Arabs (Assiri 51). Also, in June 1967, the Kuwaiti government announced it would suspend oil shipments to Britain and the United States because of their support of Israel. The Amir issued a decree comprising two major articles:

Article 1 - We declare and confirm that the state of Kuwait has been in a state of defensive war with the Zionist gangs in occupied Palestine as of this morning 5 June 1967.

Article 2 - The premier will communicate this decree to the National Assembly. The foreign minister will communicate it to all concerned. (Panaspornprasit 46)
The U.S. State Department sent a telegram from its embassy in Kuwait to explain the Kuwaiti situation:

After reaffirming the U.S. not supporting Israel during hostilities, I asked Sabah for his personal view. He asked me to understand the reasons Kuwait had participated in the propaganda war and had cut off oil to U.S.-UK. I told him that I had understood pressures, politics, psychology and tactics, and that I had reported them fully to Washington. (Nasser)

Kuwait did not want to cut its ties with the United States, but it wanted to assert support for the Palestinians. At the same time, Kuwait showed sympathy toward the Arab causes. These contradictory stances were the only apparent way to create a balance between Arab demands and Kuwait’s need for security from its neighbors. Kuwait satisfied the Arabs by supporting them in the war while at the same time indicating to the U.S. government that these stances were part of war tactics and would not affect the relationship.

The U.S.-Kuwait relationship entered a new era on January 16, 1968, when the British announced they would withdraw from the Gulf region by January 1971 because of financial considerations (Panasponprasit 48). Kuwait’s major concern was the Iraqi threat, so they were anxious about the British withdrawal (Sirriyeh 13).

For the United States, the situation was also complex. First, the threats to the Gulf region included Iraq, Iran, and the Soviet Union, while at the same time the United States was involved in Vietnam (Sirriyeh 41). Consequently, President Johnson invited the Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Sabah to Washington DC (Panasponprasit 52). Most of the meetings were about the security of Kuwait and what the U.S. government could offer to Kuwait. The U.S. Secretary of State declared that the U.S. government “has a serious interest in the independence and security of Kuwait” (Nasser).

The Kuwaiti Amir saw this statement as leading to an imperialist treaty that would anger Kuwait’s radical neighbors especially if there were military bases in Kuwait. Kuwait did not want direct military assistance, but they did want to know that the United States would support them if needed. Kuwait had to create a balance between the need for security and the Arabic ideology, which was against any U.S. military presence in the region.

1970s

In 1970 the Jordanian civil war, Black September, broke out between the regime and the Palestine Liberation Organization (Almidiris 40). Kuwait’s civil organizations announced their support for the PLO and asked the Kuwaiti
government to stop all economic support to Jordan (Almidiris 41). Also, they managed to mobilize the public with furious demonstrations (Almidiris 41). Kuwait’s Crown Prince Sheik Said went to Jordan and helped Arafat, the PLO president, to flee the conflict. Temporarily, Kuwait suspended all economic aid to Jordan (Almidiris 41).

As the British withdrawal approached in May 1971, the Americans elected President Richard Nixon, who sent Vice President Agnew to visit Kuwait. Most of the Kuwaiti newspapers and public organizations condemned Agnew’s visit and described it as continued imperialism, because Agnew’s visit coincided with the British withdrawal (*Al-Hadaf*, “Public Opposition”); the government and the people perceived Agnew’s visit as an attempt to replace the British.

After this visit, the Kuwaiti people had a feeling that the United States was not serious about solving the Arab-Israel conflict, only wanting to secure oil resources. The U.S. government was busy with the Vietnam War and “as Charles Kupchan points out, no additional U.S. forces were readily available for a special assignment in the Gulf” (Panaspornprasit 49).

The Americans then suggested another solution. Dr. Henry Kissinger, assistant to the president for national security affairs, devised the “Twin-Pillar” policy, which stated that Saudi Arabia and Iran should work together peacefully to secure the region and the United States would arm the Gulf states so they could protect themselves. This policy made Kuwait feel comfortable, because it did not include any direct U.S. intervention in the region. At the same time, this policy worried Kuwait because it remained situated between Iran, “the U.S. policeman in the Gulf,” and Saudi Arabia. Both had support from the United States, which might prove dangerous to Kuwait.

A visit to Kuwait in 1972 by U.S. Secretary of State William Rogers was also described negatively by Kuwaiti newspapers. *Akhbar Al-Kuwait* reported this visit as follows: “Rogers’ visit to the region is only an attempt to manipulate the Arabic opinion... this visit carries an imperialist and Zionist agenda which Rogers is trying to achieve” (*Akhbar Al-Kuwait*, “Public and Student Organizations Condemn Rogers”).

The Kuwaiti Amir did not meet with Rogers, but Prime Minister Sheik Jabir was the head of the delegation. During the meeting they discussed two issues-Iran’s role in the region and the Arabic-Israeli conflict (Panaspornprasit 54). At the same time, the Kuwaiti government propagated a negative image about American policy toward the Gulf by implying imperial plans and Zionist support.

Part of the Twin-Pillar policy was to arm Kuwait (Sirriyeh 85). The United
States agreed to support Kuwait with military equipment, but it required American staff to operate and maintain it. Kuwait had an issue with American military staff being in Kuwait-Kuwait had doubts about the Iraqis’ response toward an American military presence in the region because the U.S. offer occurred during the Kuwait-Iraqi border dispute and might escalate the situation. Israel subsequently protested against this arms deal, claiming that it would affect Israeli security (Panaspornprasit 59).

The year 1973 was crucial to Kuwait. First, it had a border dispute with Iraq, and second, the October War began with Israel. On March 20, 1973, Iraqi troops occupied Kuwait’s police post and two Kuwaiti policemen were killed. Many Arab states tried to solve the dispute. Meanwhile, there were reports of Soviet and U.S. vessels moving toward the north part of the Gulf after an urgent meeting between the Gulf states and the superpowers (Assiri 55). Iraq was kept busy by other developments in the region as well.

In October 1973, the Arab-Israeli conflict started again, and Kuwait played a part. Kuwait’s contribution to the October War was sending “two symbolic military units to the Egyptian and Syrian fronts,” because of the limited number of troops that Kuwait had available and the Iraqi threats (Assiri 51).

In addition, Kuwait participated in the Arab oil embargo against the United States because of its support for Israel. The Kuwaiti Sheikh Jaber, the Crown Prince, “asserted in his meeting with U.S. Congressman James McClure that Kuwait would prolong its ban on oil exports to the United States as long as Israel occupied Arab territories” (Panaspornprasit 61). Kuwait also warned that it would boycott all American commercial ties.

In the United Nations, Kuwait’s Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah supported the Palestinian people (Assiri 52). The oil embargo worried the United States and Nixon described the situation in a message to Congress saying that the United States was heading toward the most acute shortages of energy since World War II (Sirriyeh 182). Consequently, Kuwait organized an OPEC conference and suggested that they increase oil prices, and they agreed (Assiri 51).

Meanwhile, U.S. Senator William Fulbright declared that the United States could use force to take over Middle East oil. This statement worried the Kuwaiti people and created anger against American policy in the region. The Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Talea* ("American Threat") reflected the Kuwaiti people’s anxiety by saying “this threat from the U.S. should be taken seriously, so Kuwait needs a patriotic stand from everyone to face these threats.”

After the October War of 1973, Egypt and Israel reached an agreement (Troops Disengagement Agreement 1974-1975) to cease firing (Tibi 128).
Kissinger was the negotiator of these delegations. There was news that the United States would support Israel with advanced weapons to avoid any similar scenarios in the future. So the Kuwaiti Minister of Social Affairs Sheikh Salem Sabah Al-Salem had a meeting with the American ambassador in Kuwait to explain the Kuwaiti stance, stating that “this weapons deal would be an obstacle in gaining peace” (Al-Khaq, “New Kuwaiti Initiative”).

Kuwait could not continue with the oil boycott because oil was its only source of income, which was why OPEC agreed to increase oil prices. At the same time, Kuwait could not cut all commercial ties with the United States because most of Kuwait’s commodities were imported from the Americans and it would create a crisis in the Kuwaiti market. These two discordant policies affected Kuwait negatively. Many American Congressmen opposed the U.S.-Kuwait arms deal, and Israel also recognized Kuwait as a major player in the conflict. This policy made the United States focus more on Kuwait, especially in 1974, when Kuwait began military deliberations with the Soviet Union, which made the United States agree to provide Kuwait with advanced arms.

From this point, Kuwait-U.S. relations would take another turn for three main reasons. First, Kuwait signed an arms deal with the United States for advanced weapons. Second, the United States would have a new administration under President Jimmy Carter with a new agenda toward the region. Third, the region would face new waves of changes such as the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Camp David Peace Agreement, and the first Gulf War between Iraq and Iran. However, Kuwait would continue to support the Palestinian causes and resist any direct intervention from the United States in the region, while keeping a dialogue with the U.S. administration. Kuwait tried to maintain a distance that would enable it to mediate between all sides.

President Jimmy Carter came to office in January 1977, with an agenda to bring peace to the region and stop the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially between Egypt and Israel. Kuwait sent a message to the new administration saying that the U.S. government should try to understand the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict and try to provide solutions to the problem (Assiri 68).

During this time the Kuwaiti government was trying to mediate between its Arab neighbors and the United States; the Kuwaiti government began to understand that with the U.S. supporting Israel, the Arab and Palestinian demands—which comprised a full Israeli withdraw from what they perceived as Arab lands—would never be achieved. Ergo, the Kuwaiti Minister of Cabinet Affairs stated in March 1977 that the Palestinians needed a homeland (Assiri 68).

At the same time, the Kuwaiti government did not want to start any
relationship with Israel. That is why, when Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian president, visited Jerusalem in 1977, the Kuwaiti government showed indignation. Kuwait also communicated to the U.S. administration that they should recognize the PLO as the legitimate authority representing the Palestinian people (Al-raft Al-Amm, “Kuwait Indicates to the U.S.

The U.S. administration was paving the way for an agreement between Egypt and Israel in order to end the conflict. When Sadat signed the Camp David agreement with Israel, many of the Arab states started a boycott against Egypt but Kuwait did not protest. Kuwaiti officials stated that this agreement would not affect the Arab struggle with Israelis (Assiri 73). However, the Kuwaiti people and the Arab governments were full of anger against the Camp David peace treaty. Therefore, the Kuwaiti government undermined the Egyptian stance and supported the PLO to please the Arabs and the Kuwaiti citizens; they also rejected the boycott with Egypt to keep the relation with the United States.

The Arab nations held a conference in Baghdad to discuss the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, the Camp David Agreement. They agreed to cut relations with Egypt. The Kuwaiti government did not want to cut all relations with Egypt, but with the Iraqi pressure, Kuwait agreed to join the Arabs in their diplomatic cut. Nevertheless, Kuwait maintained an economic relationship with Egypt. The Kuwaiti act of maintaining the economic relation with Egypt was a part of their cooperation with U.S. policy.

Under the circumstances of the Camp David Agreement, Kuwait arranged a meeting between Andrew Young, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, and Zehdi Tarzi, the PLO’s UN observer, to discuss the current situation of the Palestinians (Assiri 52). Israel protested against this meeting (Overdale 236). The meeting led to a newspaper protest in the United States. This event led to Andrew Young’s resignation on August 15, 1979 (Assiri 52).

In 1979, the Islamic revolution occurred in Iran. Kuwait and the other Gulf states immediately started to have doubts about the new regime. The U.S. administration offered security by forming a military pact in the region under U.S. supervision. The Kuwaiti government refused the U.S. proposal and they indicated that the Gulf states could protect themselves (Panasporn-prasit 76).

The revolution in Iran created a shortage in oil production, which affected the market, so Kuwait and the other OPEC members agreed to increase the oil price. Some U.S. officials translated this move as a sign of opposition against Camp David. The Kuwaiti ambassador in Washington, Khalid Jafar, announced that “there is no relation between the Kuwaiti stand on the
Egyptian-Israeli treaty and the increase of the oil price; this move is just because of the economic difficulties in the world market” (*Al-Qabas*, “Kuwait’s Ambassador in D.C.”).

The rejection of the military cooperation and the increase of the oil price by the Kuwaiti government made some U.S. officials declare that the United States could use force to protect its oil interests in the Middle East (Panas-pornprasit 76). This was not the first time that a U.S. official had announced such a threat to the Gulf states.

Another major event occurred in 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The Kuwaiti government opposed this action. The radical regime of Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan created a critical situation in the Gulf region and forced the United States to think again of sending troops to the Gulf. The Kuwaiti government remained opposed to any U.S. troops in the Gulf, even though some Gulf states agreed that the United States could use their ports for military operations (Panas-pornprasit 85).

The Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan did not strengthen Kuwait-U.S. ties; rather, it weakened them. Before President Jimmy Carter ended his term, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had frozen “a multi-million-dollar loan to the World Bank to protest a decision to deny the PLO observer status at the Bank” (Assiri 52). President Jimmy carter announced his opposition to this action.

**1980s**

In the 1980s, the Kuwait-U.S. relationship entered another new phase. The United States had a new administration under Ronald Reagan, the region faced the Iraq-Iran war (the first Gulf War), Egypt faced decline as leader of the Arabs and supporter of Palestinian causes, and Kuwait suffered hostility from the Iranian regime.

At the beginning of the Reagan administration, Kuwait condemned the new U.S. administration in the United Nations for their support of Israel, as well as their refusal to recognize the PLO unless the PLO agreed to recognize Israeli rights in Palestine. In response, Kuwait’s ambassador to the UN delivered the following speech:

> For thirty-five years the world community did not solve the Palestinian problem. For thirty-five years the Palestinian people suffered under this occupation. The U.S. supported Israel, “their spoiled child,” to build their military, so Israel could achieve their inhumane goals. (*Al-Hadaf*, “Kuwait Condemns the U.S.”)

The region faced another Arabic-Israeli conflict in 1981, when Israel
bombed the Iraqi nuclear plant using information provided by the United States (Overdale 238). Israel went further and attacked Lebanon. Under these circumstances the Kuwaiti ambassador in Washington D.C., Saud Nasser Al Soba, delivered a speech at the Washington International Club condemning Israel’s hostility toward the Arabs:

Israel should know that they are affecting the American interests in the region by following such a hostile policy toward the Arab nations. This policy affects the friendly relation between the Arabs and the United States of America. Also the United States of America should understand that their support to Israel made Israel continue their aggressive plans in the region.... The United States of America has to recognize the PLO as the legitimate authority that represents the Palestinians.

In his closing remarks he mentioned that Israel would not have attacked Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria without American support (Al-Seyassah, “Our Ambassador”).

Kuwait further showed the new U.S. administration its stand on the Palestinian cause in 1983, when the United States nominated Brandon W. Grove Jr. to be the American ambassador to Kuwait. Kuwait rejected Grove because he had served at the American consulate in Jerusalem. Kuwaiti officials justified this decision by saying that this comes from the “national stand toward the Palestinian cause” (Assiri 52).

These three stands from the Kuwait government-two speeches and the rejection of the American ambassador-showed how the Palestinian cause was one of Kuwait’s foreign policy priorities. These stances were meant to show the radical regimes in Iraq and Iran that Kuwait was supporting the Arabs and Islamic causes. On the one hand, Kuwait needed Iraq’s protection from Iran, so Kuwait supported Arab sensitivities by supporting the Palestinians. On the other hand, Kuwait’s support for the Palestinians showed Iran that Kuwait was not on the American side.

This political stance from Kuwait coincided with Iran’s idea of exporting the Islamic revolution to the Gulf states. The Iranian regime used the Gulf-U.S. relationship as an excuse to export the revolution. Yet, these stands from Kuwait created a gap with the United States, although the Iraq-Iran war would lessen that gap.

In 1981, the Persian Gulf faced one of the longest wars in the region—the first Gulf war—which affected all the Gulf states and the whole world because of the oil resources that the region contains. When the first Gulf war broke out Kuwait remained neutral, not favoring one side or the other. Kuwait’s decision
for neutrality came from its critical position as a small state between two major and radical regimes.

Iraq remained a major threat to Kuwait because of Iraq’s claim over Kuwait in 1962 and the border dispute in 1973. Along similar lines, Iran was a dangerous neighbor because of its ideas of exporting the Islamic revolution to the Gulf states. The Kuwaiti government was anxious, because exporting the revolution would create chaos in the region. But when the Gulf war broke out, the Kuwaiti government thought it had gotten rid of two problems. The first was the Iranian threat of exporting the revolution; Kuwait saw Iraq as an obstacle in the face of the Iranian regime that could reduce the threat. The second was the frequent Iraqi threats toward Kuwait. The war kept Iraq and Iran busy.

The worst-case scenario happened in 1982 when the Iranians drove back the Iraqis and achieved a victory. The Gulf states feared that if Iraq fell, “the rest of the Gulf states might follow in its steps” (Assiri 70). So, Kuwait was obliged to support Iraq in the war by providing loans, oil, and logistical support, which allied Kuwait with Iraq. Simultaneously, Kuwait tried to keep a good relationship with Iran and not show too much sympathy toward one side or the other.

Unfortunately, the Iraqis began a new war strategy in the early 1980s of attacking Iran’s oil tankers in an attempt to damage Iran’s economy. As a consequence, Iran attacked Kuwait’s oil tankers because Kuwait was allied with Iraq. Iranian sympathizers in Kuwait also bombed many public places in Kuwait City. As the danger in the Gulf accelerated, Kuwait began to change its policy toward the United States, and there was a concomitant decline toward the Palestinian cause.

Iran first attacked a Kuwaiti oil tanker in 1980, although most of the recorded attacks took place between 1984 and 1987. “By the end of 1987, eleven vessels under the Kuwait flag had been attacked by Iran” (Assiri 71). Not only Kuwaiti oil tankers had been attacked, but also the Saudis lost some of their tankers, and neither state had the military capability to face down Iranian air power.

Under such circumstances, in 1984, both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait requested arms from the United States; they wanted Stinger missiles (shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles). This request occurred at a time when the United States did not have an ambassador in Kuwait. Therefore, the Saudis received Stinger missiles but the Kuwaiti request was rejected (Panasponprasit 92). In the Kuwaiti newspaper, Al-Anbaa, a Kuwaiti official announced that the government was disappointed by the American rejection of
the arms deal (Al-Anbaa, “Kuwait Feels Disappointed”). The United States announced that there were limited Stinger missile for sale to foreign countries.

At the time, some U.S. officials raised concerns over the probability that the missiles would come into the possession of the many Palestinians in Kuwait, which would create a threat to Israel’s security (Panaspornprasit 92). The U.S. rejection of Kuwait’s request was thus a direct result of Kuwait’s strong support for the Palestinians.

After this disappointment, the Kuwaiti defense minister visited Moscow to talk about an arms deal and to see what the Soviet Union could offer. He made the request to the Soviet Union to create pressure on the U.S. administration so that they would agree to the Stinger missile deal. Unfortunately, the ploy did not work with the U.S. administration.

By this time, the Kuwaiti policy toward the United States had changed significantly. First, Kuwait’s security and economy were under direct threats from the Iranian regime. Second, Kuwait had always feared that a protection treaty with the United States would make its radical Arab neighbors angry. However, at this time Iraq was also getting support from the United States, which made Kuwait’s request for help from the United States a more acceptable matter.

In 1985 the Kuwaiti ambassador to the United Nations asked the world community to reach a peaceful solution to the Palestinian problem and also asked the world’s superpowers to stop supporting Israel (Al-Watan, “Kuwait Assertive”). This time the Kuwaitis used more peaceful language in their speech, adopting the term “world superpowers” instead of directly naming the United States.

The situation in the Gulf region was critical, and many Kuwaiti oil tankers had been damaged. Anthony Cordesman, a strategic analyst, announced in the Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Watan that there was an unofficial dialog between the Gulf states and the United States concerning the Iranian threat to the Gulf and that it was possible that the United States would send its air force to Kuwait if the Kuwaiti government asked for U.S. military support (“Washington D.C. Is Ready”).

The U.S. administration did not want to sell arms to Kuwait but they were ready to send troops to the region. This U.S. stance made Kuwait hesitate to agree to the offer. Kuwait had so far refused any direct military assistance from any superpower in the region. To avoid that, Kuwait used a new strategy to protect its oil tankers—the ships would carry the flag of a superpower. They realized that Iran would not attack an oil tanker with such a flag because it was trying to avoid direct confrontation with any superpower.
In 1987 Kuwait signed an agreement with the Soviets to raise the Soviet flag on Kuwait’s oil tankers. The Kuwaiti government wanted help from the United States so they played the Soviet card. The Americans were persuaded to accept Kuwait’s request to reflag her oil tankers with the U.S. flag. The Reagan administration agreed to two propositions: (1) to expedite procedures for the registry of eleven Kuwaiti oil tankers under the American flag; and (2) to provide appropriate protection by U.S. military force (principally U.S. Navy ships) to the eleven reflagged Kuwait oil tankers while operating in the Persian Gulf region and transiting the Straits of Hormuz (Panaspornprasit 103).

Even though there were many laws and restrictions regarding the use of the American flag on foreign ships, the American administration agreed to the reflag policy with Kuwait. Then on May 17, 1987, Iraq attacked the USS Stark, an American ship, and the United States announced that they would increase U.S. defenses in the Gulf (Assiri 104).

Meanwhile, Kuwait refused to accept any American bases or support facilities. Many Arab countries were criticizing Kuwait for the reflag policy and Kuwait tried hard to legitimize its stand. The Arab countries saw the reflagging policy as an increase of U.S. influence in the region, which it was. Hence, Kuwait’s minister of defense declared that “we will not allow U.S. bases to be erected in Kuwait no matter what they may be or in any form they may take and there is no way possible that pressure can be exerted on us from outside to erect such facilities” (Assiri 107). Kuwait was trying to balance its stand between the Arabs and the Americans.

Iranian hostility toward Kuwait was escalating; however, and in October 1987, Iran attacked a Kuwaiti oil field, causing severe damage to the field. The U.S. administration condemned the Iranian aggression and President Reagan warned the Iranian regime that “if they continue their hostility they will pay a high price for their actions” (Al-Qapas, “Kuwait Asks the U.S.”).

The U.S. reflagging of Kuwait’s oil tankers increased their presence in the region, which provoked the Iranians to challenge the Americans. The Iranians used a new tactic, which was mining the shipping routes in the Gulf. This tactic affected many Kuwaiti oil tankers and merchant ships. The American army attacked and destroyed Iranian oil and military targets while Iran was attacking American and Kuwaiti ships (Assiri 108). These incidents brought the Kuwait-U.S. relationship closer and again changed Kuwait’s policy toward the United States. Kuwait started to provide logistical support, free energy supplies, and temporary offices for 150 American servicemen (Assiri 107). This shows that the situation was critical, such that Kuwait had to abandon some of her earlier claims against the United States as an ally with Israel and as an imperial power.
The tension increased in the Gulf, and perhaps the conflict was broadened by bringing in more outside participants. So, the “United Nations passed a resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire” (Assiri 108). Kuwait wanted to further improve its relationship with the United States, and thus its own security, and a request was made to purchase U.S. F18 aircraft. However, some U.S. Congressmen were opposed to the deal, saying it could affect Israeli security (Panasponprasit 109).

Kuwait’s Crown Prince, Sheikh Said Al Soba, paid an official visit to the United States to negotiate a Kuwait-U.S. arms deal. After a long negotiation between the Reagan administration and the Congress, an agreement was reached (Panasponprasit 111). During this visit, Sheikh Said delivered a speech at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. officially announcing that there were alliances between the two countries. However, there was no defense treaty between them and the Kuwaiti defense minister said that “the time had not come for setting up U.S. military facilities on Kuwaiti territory” (Panasponprasit 115).

These changes were critical, especially for Kuwait, which had led the Arab opposition to America. For the Arabs, the United States was still an imperial power and the ally of Israel and any economic or military presence meant that the country was under threat. Also, U.S. support for Israel was an essential element in determining Kuwait’s relationship with the United States. Although, the Iraq-Iran war and the direct Iranian threat to Kuwait’s security made the ideas of the U.S. imperial agenda and the U.S. support to Israel minor obstacles in the way of military cooperation.

The major historical turning point in the Kuwait-U.S. relationship occurred when Iraq invaded Kuwait, on August 2, 1990. As Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait, the U.S. administration under President George H. W. Bush condemned this invasion, saying “this will not stand.”

There were many divergent opinions about the involvement of the U.S. administration in the Iraqi invasion. Some politicians said that the United States had given the Iraqi regime the green light to invade Kuwait after a meeting between Saddam Hussein and the American ambassador in Iraq, April Glaspie. Others dispute this version of events. In the meeting Saddam asked Glaspie to what extent the U.S. government was going to be involved in Arab-Arab affairs, and Glaspie is said to have responded that “we have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts like your border disagreement with Kuwait” (Panasponprasit 124).
The United States wanted a base in the Gulf and Kuwait was against this idea. Therefore, according to some politicians, if Iraq invaded Kuwait, they would turn to the United States for help and the United States would have a foothold in the region. Still, on September 7, 1990, the Kuwaiti Amir met with the U.S. administration and they discussed the possibility of a military solution in Kuwait. The Amir declared that Kuwait would cover all the costs of the military effort. After five months of fighting, President Bush announced, on February 28, 1991, that Kuwait was liberated.

Shortly after the liberation, Kuwait signed a ten-year security agreement with the United States. The agreement involved military cooperation, an arms deal, and U.S. access to Kuwait facilities. Many Arab states, including Iran, criticized Kuwait’s agreement with the United States. They argued that this agreement would divide the Arab world and affect regional security (Panas-pornprasit 134).

In the following years, Kuwait became a stronger friend of the United States, and in 2003 the U.S. administration recognized Kuwait as the first U.S. strategic ally in the region. The first Gulf war had ended the special relation between Kuwait and the Palestinians. The PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat has shown support for the Iraqi invasion even though other officials were against the invasion and remained loyal. As expected, after the liberation the Palestinian community was under restriction and many of them had to leave. The anger of the Kuwaiti public continued after the Gulf war (Zelkovitz 96).

In conclusion, the Palestinian cause has played a major role in Kuwait’s history since 1961. It complicated the relationship between Kuwait—the newly independent state—and the United States of America. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s the Palestinian cause occupied most of Kuwait’s newspaper headlines. In addition, the Palestinian people were the second largest group in Kuwait. The Palestinians made a major contribution to establish most of Kuwait’s government sectors. Kuwait treated them with special care, better than other Arab workers. The Palestinians in Kuwait controlled their own schools and organizations. Further, the Palestinian Liberation Organization established its first headquarters in Kuwait. Kuwait was the Promised Land for most of the Palestinians. The Palestinian cause occupied a vital part in the public milieu where the political opposition highly regarded the cause. The Kuwaiti opposition, especially the Arab nationalists, had to show solidarity with the Palestinian cause since it was the core of the Arab identity and the symbol of the decolonization struggle. Meanwhile, they had to link themselves to the
greater Arab world to add more pressure on the government. The Kuwaiti
government understood the opposition and showed sympathy and support for
the cause.

On the regional level, most of the newly independent Arab countries
supported the Palestinian cause. It was the core of the decolonization image
that most Arabs wanted to maintain. In addition, the cause was part of the
state-building process, particularly for the frontline states in confrontation with
Israel. When Kuwait signed a protection agreement with the British in 1961,
the Iraqi regime opposed the agreement, saying that Kuwait is under imperial-
ism. The Iraqi regime used the colonialism-imperialism card to pressure
Kuwait’s government among the Arab countries. Kuwait understood this
equation and if Kuwait wanted to be acceptable among the revolutionary Arab
countries, it had to show solidarity.

On a different level, the struggle between the Arabs and the Jews was
shaped by the Cold War contexts where both parties were trying to gain allies
in the region. The Soviet Union supported Egypt, Syria, and later on, Iraq.
Most of the Arab monarchs and Israel were U.S. and British allies. Kuwait
worked hard to get recognized by the revolutionary Arab countries through the
Palestinian cause, but Kuwait kept an acceptable dialogue with the U.S. and
the British. It has had to deal with the Palestinian cause on three different
levels: domestic, regional, and international.

To some extent, Kuwait has shaped the Palestinian cause because of its
contribution. Of course, Kuwait’s support was regulated; most of the support
was rhetoric, although it was occasionally substantial, due to Kuwait’s politics
and qualifications. In contrast, the Palestinian cause has shaped Kuwait on
three levels: its domestic politics, its regional situation, and its international
diplomacy. This was obvious during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. However,
in the 1990s things changed dramatically. Iraq invaded Kuwait and the official
PLO stand was with the Iraqi regime. Evidently, after the first Gulf war,
Kuwait’s support for the Palestinian cause ended and the Kuwaiti public
sympathy toward the cause faded.
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رئيس التحرير الأستاذ الدكتور: وليد خالد الربيع

صدر العدد الأول في رجب ۱۴۳۴ هـ - أبريل ۱۹۱۴ م

* تهدف إلى معالجة المشكلات المعاصرة والقضايا المستجدة من وجهة نظر الشريعة الإسلامية.
* تشمل موضوعاتها معظم علوم الشريعة الإسلامية: من تفسير، وحديث، فقه، واقتصاد وتراثية إسلامية، إلى غير ذلك من تقارير عن المؤتمرات، ومراجعات كتب شرعية معاصرة، وفتيات شرعية، وتعليقات على قضايا علمية.
* تنوع الباحثين فيها، فكانوا من أعضاء هيئة التدريس في مختلف الجامعات والكليات الإسلامية على رقعة العالمين: العربي والإسلامي.
* تخضع البحوث المقدمة لمجلة إلى عملية فحص وتحكيم حسب الضوابط التي تحددها الهيئة، ويوفر بها كبار العلماء والمختصين في الشريعة الإسلامية، بهدف الارتباط بالبحث العلمي الإسلامي الذي يخدم الأمن، ويعمل على رفع مجالها، نسال الموالى عز وجل مزيداً من التقدم والازدهار.

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