

# Kuwait and the Gulf: Five Years after Desert Storm

Feb 21, 1996



## Brief Analysis

**O**n February 21, 1996, two days before the killing of Iraqi defector Hussein Kamel, H.E. Sheikh Saud Nasir al-Sabah, Kuwaiti Minister of Information, addressed The Washington Institute's Policy Forum. He spoke about Kuwait, the Gulf, and U.S. policy on the fifth anniversary of the Gulf War. The following is a rapporteur's summary of his remarks:

The recent return to Iraq of Lt. Gen. Hussein Kamel raises perplexing questions about the Iraqi regime. Kuwait's view is that the former Iraqi defense minister is a wanted war criminal and that his defection was never more than an insincere "Broadway/Hollywood theatrical production." Even more important, however, is the continuing threat to the region posed by Saddam Hussein. While Desert Storm was the appropriate response to the occupation of Kuwait, the world today still needs to grapple with the question of how to rid the Gulf region of Saddam Hussein.

### The "Uncivilized"

The "uncivilized" Iraqi regime has failed to comply with UN Security Council resolutions that are essential for not only the well-being of the Iraqi people but also the security of Kuwait and the stability of the Gulf. Iraq continues to flout key resolutions, including:

Resolution 687 -- Saddam Hussein has still not accounted for over 600 prisoners of war; furthermore, he has not returned goods stolen from Kuwait during the occupation nor sufficiently compensated Kuwait for damages incurred at that time; and finally, he still tries to acquire and develop weapons of mass destruction.

Resolution 986 -- This resolution would provide relief to the Iraqi people, who are suffering because of Iraq's refusal to accept the terms of the oil-for-food offer. Unlike the Iraqi regime, Kuwait is concerned about Iraqi suffering and has provided humanitarian goods to Iraqi defectors. It is important to note that Kuwait has an interest in 986, given that 30 percent of the oil sales will go to paying reparations, including Kuwaiti losses from the war.

In addition to refusing to comply with these (and other) resolutions, Saddam Hussein retains the power to threaten Kuwait and other Gulf countries. The 1994 incident in which Saddam amassed over 100,000 troops on the Kuwaiti border is an example of this continuing threat, and the three regular army divisions remaining south of the 32nd parallel reflect the imminence of this threat. Neither Kuwait nor other Gulf countries can live in safety and in peace as long as Saddam Hussein's regime endures. Furthermore, with his collection of weapons of mass destruction, Saddam poses a grave threat to the rest of the world. In light of these facts, the world community must re-focus its attention on this pending crisis.

### The "Civilized"

Some "misguided individuals" who travel to Baghdad and give comfort to Saddam Hussein label UN sanctions as "crimes against humanity." This is backwards and wrong-headed. In fact, the world community is pursuing the appropriate policy to accelerate the demise of Saddam Hussein's regime. The UN policy is "civilized" because it

emanates from equity, justice, and the rule of law, and this policy serves to isolate Saddam Hussein and his regime for actual crimes against humanity.

#### The "Alternative"

Kuwait's preferred resolution to the Iraq problem would be the replacement of Saddam Hussein's regime by one that will respect human rights and not interfere with its neighbors. However, this ideal may be impossible. Indeed, both Kuwait and the West need to be concerned about the composition of a post-Saddam regime, which could prove a threat no less dangerous than Saddam himself. In Saddam's absence, the ensuing power void could create a civil war whose spill-over could endanger Kuwaiti stability.

#### Kuwaiti Security

Kuwait's security is contingent on preserving its defense alliances both with the GCC and other allies around the world.

Kuwait would like to see a much stronger GCC capable of regional defense. However, establishing a stronger GCC means a lengthy process of negotiating a regional defense pact. The Damascus Declaration was the first step to reaching such an agreement, and Kuwait is "fully committed to all the conditions" of the Damascus Declaration. Kuwait is optimistic -- in the absence of any remaining fundamental obstacles -- that a consensus on a collective security agreement can eventually be achieved. At the same time, Kuwait recognizes the limits of GCC military cooperation.

Kuwait would also like to nurture its important alliance with the United States. Desert Storm created a firm foundation of friendship and strategic coordination between Kuwait and the United States that is manifested through the prepositioned equipment that the U.S. maintains in Kuwait. Furthermore, the joint exercises between U.S. and Kuwaiti troops pose a critical deterrent to Iraqi aggression.

In addition, Kuwait relies on joint defense agreements with Great Britain, France, and other members of the Security Council to ensure its territorial integrity. Such agreements reassure Kuwait of the world's commitment to contain the Iraqi regime, a commitment re-affirmed when Saddam threatened Kuwait in 1994.

In spite of these strong alliances, Kuwait recognizes its responsibility, as a sovereign nation, for establishing its own "viable deterrent defense force." Therefore, it has committed itself to purchasing the best military equipment to prevent, at any cost, another Gulf war. Although Kuwait's economic and social development efforts are hampered by this defense burden, "dual containment" and the "new world order" alone cannot guarantee Kuwait's security in the face of regional threats.

#### Kuwait and Other Countries

Peace Process -- Kuwait is very supportive of the Arab-Israeli peace process, participating through the multilateral talks, and as a state far from the "confrontation zone," has no direct conflicts with Israel. Kuwait specifically appreciated the restraint Israel displayed during the Gulf War. Kuwait does have strong alliances with Syria and Lebanon, who supported Kuwait in the Gulf War, and therefore, Kuwait will not proceed to normalize relations with Israel until there is a resolution of the Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel negotiations. In addition, Kuwait is concerned about a resolution of the Jerusalem issue and other related issues. Kuwait will accept whatever final arrangements the Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese accept. Once all issues are satisfied, Kuwait will follow the Arab community in pursuing a policy on normalization that will be "satisfactory" to the U.S. and to Israel.

Iran -- Kuwait views Iran as an important regional actor. Iran, for example, played a responsible role during the Gulf War, when a different policy by Tehran could have proved very problematic to the anti-Iraq alliance. Therefore, in spite of some areas of dispute, Iranian-Kuwaiti relations are improving to the benefit of overall Gulf security. Kuwait

respects the will of the Iranian people to have whatever government they would like so long as this government similarly respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all other regional countries. In defining regional security arrangements, Kuwait believes it is important that Iran be included as a participant within any future system.

Jordan -- Kuwait still has outstanding problems with Jordan and is not "fully confident" that Jordan will play a major role in the demise of Saddam Hussein. For example, Kuwait is concerned about questionable trade that still flows across the Iraqi-Jordanian border, but if the United States provides assurances about Jordan's behavior, Kuwait will accept these. Jordan could play a major role, however, as a platform for the Iraqi opposition.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Greg Saiontz. ❖

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