

Global Insider:

Iraq-Kuwait Relations

by [Ahmed Ali \(/experts/ahmed-ali\)](/experts/ahmed-ali)

Jun 11, 2010

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Ahmed Ali \(/experts/ahmed-ali\)](/experts/ahmed-ali)

Ahmed Ali is a program officer at the National Endowment for Democracy.

In May 2010, Iraq sent its first ambassador to Kuwait since the outbreak of the first Gulf War. On June 11, 2010, World Politics Review's Kari Lipschutz interviewed Washington Institute Marcia Robbins-Wilf research associate Ahmed Ali about the historical context and current state of Iraq-Kuwait relations.

World Press Review: What are some of the unresolved issues in Iraq-Kuwait relations?

Ahmed Ali: There are two sets of unresolved issues between Iraq and Kuwait -- tangible and intangible. They are closely related and are sources of continuous friction between the two countries. Additionally, they have the ability to feed off of each other and as a result perpetuate a tense atmosphere. The tangible issues include the UN-mandated reparations that Iraq has to pay Kuwait as a result of the 1990 invasion, which total more than \$52 billion. Currently 5 percent of Iraq's annual oil revenue is allocated to these payments. The Iraqi government acknowledges that Kuwait suffered tremendously from the invasion and that the reparations are valid, and has expressed its willingness to fulfill its obligations. Nonetheless, Iraqi officials often plead with Kuwait to forgo some of the reparations, citing Iraq's need of the revenue for rebuilding purposes. For similar reasons, Iraqi officials make the case that Kuwait should be as generous as some non-Arab states in forgiving Iraq's debt to Kuwait. These statements are usually met with outright rejection by Kuwaiti officials. In addition to the financial issues, Iraq and Kuwait have yet to delineate their maritime and land borders. The lack of clear border lines has resulted in some Iraqi fishermen being arrested by Kuwaiti authorities and reportedly mistreated while under arrest, thus leaving some Iraqis indignant. Finally, Kuwait is still searching for the remains of Kuwaitis who were rounded up and bussed into Iraq in the immediate aftermath of the 1990 invasion and who are now presumed dead.

The overriding intangible issue -- and the most difficult to overcome -- is the profound lack of trust. The August 1990 invasion is still traumatic for Kuwait and has created a psychological barrier for dealing with Iraq. Kuwait therefore needs assurances about Iraq's future intentions. The lack of trust is usually deepened whenever any tensions arise between Iraq and Kuwait, and has been exacerbated by statements made by some Iraqi politicians questioning Kuwait's status as an independent state.

WPR: How significant is the restoration of full diplomatic contacts?

Ali: The appointment of an Iraqi ambassador to Kuwait is certainly a welcome development, especially for its great symbolic value. But the degree to which it can help create a new paradigm shift in Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations is unclear.

Kuwait has had an ambassador in Iraq since 2008 and officials from both countries have exchanged visits. That this has not helped in eliminating tensions is an indication that such gestures alone cannot lead to improved relations.

WPR: What are the chances for more positive Iraq-Kuwait relations moving forward, and what issues and/or shared interests could they be based on?

Ali: The impetus for both countries to move forward on a positive trajectory is the fact that Iraq is no longer ruled by Saddam Hussein. This is very important psychologically and should act as a major confidence-enhancer as Iraq's post-2003 governments pursue better relations with Kuwait. Beyond that, economic ties are a mutual interest for both countries. Iraq is actively seeking investors to rebuild its dilapidated infrastructure, and Kuwait's financial and investment prowess should kick-start building the necessary people-to-people relations, while the critical political, territorial, and reparations issues wait for comprehensive solutions. ❖

RECOMMENDED

BRIEF ANALYSIS

Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations

Feb 15, 2022

◆
Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria

Feb 15, 2022

◆
Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)

TOPICS

Arab & Islamic Politics (/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics)

Gulf & Energy Policy (/policy-analysis/gulf-energy-policy)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iraq (/policy-analysis/iraq)

Gulf States (/policy-analysis/gulf-states)