

Kuwait, Iraq, and Challenges in the Gulf

Nov 12, 1998



Brief Analysis

On November 10, 1998, Gen. Fahad al-Amir, deputy chief of staff of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces, addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. The following is a rapporteur's summary of his remarks. [Read a full transcript. \(templateC07.php?CID=184\)](#)

Kuwait's participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is strong and committed. Members of the GCC are bound by a common economic, regional, and political outlook, and cooperation is now being extended into military fields. The GCC's strategic objectives are to protect the stability of the region, to prevent international disputes in the Gulf, and to support the United Nations in its work. Yet, the GCC has not developed a military structure and thus is not currently an effective deterrent to threats against Kuwait. As a result, Kuwait currently relies on a defense structure comprising Kuwaiti forces, the U.S.-led coalition, and the Arab League, while anticipating the development of GCC forces.

Kuwait is actively developing its own military capability. Yet, the country faces a variety of challenges in this effort. Insufficient manpower, reflecting Kuwait's small population, prevents the country from fielding the necessary number of military personnel. Kuwait's finite resources limit the extent to which military growth is possible. Finally, Kuwait faces the challenge of balancing diplomacy and force. Kuwait does not want the development of its military forces to be perceived by its neighbors as aggressive, and it does not want to create an arms race in the region. Therefore, Kuwait must develop its forces slowly, mindful of both diplomatic and military considerations.

Missiles: The foremost threat to Kuwait, in the future, will come from missiles. Every country in the region is working to develop and increase the range of such weapons, and rogue states are willing to sell the technology. Moreover, producing an effective ballistic "shield" is expensive and difficult. Thus, Kuwait is looking to cooperate with other countries, including the United States and members of the GCC, to develop a missile defense program.

Iraq: Currently, Iraq poses the greatest threat to the security of both Kuwait and the entire region. Under the leadership of Saddam Husayn, Iraq has consistently blocked UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) investigations intended to detect any Iraqi development weapons of mass destruction. Iraq has ignored the UN.

Saddam does not care about the Iraqi people. Ten years ago, he used chemical weapons against his own people at Halabja. The effort to contain Saddam's regime via sanctions has been ineffective. Iraq continues to trade with Turkey, Iran, Jordan, and others. Therefore, the United States and the international community must take military action, targeting Saddam himself as well as his military machine. Specifically, his military infrastructure, including his lines of communications and his command-and-control system, should be destroyed. The goals should be to limit Iraq's military capability and to get rid of Saddam himself. Saddam simply does not understand diplomacy without force. He would use both biological weapons and weapons of mass destruction to deter a military campaign. Yet, the United States and its allies have the capability to stop him before he is able to resort to such dangerous measures.

> The United States would have the full support of the GCC as long as its objective in undertaking military action

against Iraq were truly to remove Saddam and his military capabilities. The entire Arab world would support moves toward a stable Iraq and the end of suffering for the Iraqi people. Yet, if the objective of the strike were merely a show of force, support from several GCC members would be doubtful. Economic ties to Iraq prevent certain nations from supporting strikes against Iraq, unless such strikes are designed to remove Saddam from power and to liberate the Iraqi people.

Popular Arab opposition to U.S. activity against Iraq is often the result of the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as poor economic conditions in Arab states. Many Arabs associate Saddam's aggression with promoting the strength of the Arab side of this conflict. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, Saddam linked the military assault to an Arab reconquest of Jerusalem. As a result, he has often gained the support of Arabs for his actions. Development of a comprehensive solution for the Arab-Israeli dispute would decrease Arab opposition to U.S. military action against Iraq.

> Iraq is on the brink of revolution. Southern Iraq already is a base for Saddam's opposition. In many places in southern Iraq, Saddam's forces clearly do not "control the night." Saddam's Ba'th party has carried out egregious acts, and the Iraqi people want revenge. Yet, the Iraqi people fear Saddam and cannot act before his military strength is stifled. Once his military capabilities are suppressed, the Iraqi people would be ready to act against Saddam. U.S. airstrikes may well be a sufficient catalyst for an Iraqi rebellion; foreign ground troops would not be necessary. Also, U.S. financing of an external opposition on its own would contribute little toward removing Saddam from power. The opposition must be supported by U.S. military intervention. Every avenue for removing Saddam from power must be explored. For its part, Kuwait supports Baqr al-Hakim, the Iraqi Shi'i opposition leader based in Iran, in his efforts against Saddam.

The establishment of a large "no-drive-zone" in southern Iraq would help to stifle Saddam's lines of communication and prevent him from bolstering his military forces in the South. Iraqi military divisions in the South are large, but they are old.

> Following an uprising, Iraq will not disintegrate. The states in the region, as well as the United States, want to see a united Iraq. Yet, civil war is imminent.

Iraq's future: Another leader must take over and rebuild Iraq through developing its economic resources, not its military arsenal. If a new government were to create a stable Iraq, Kuwait would support its development efforts. At this point, however, nothing definite can be said about whether Kuwait would cancel the debt that Iraq currently owes Kuwait as a result of the Iran-Iraq war.

◆ This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Laura Zarembski.

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