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DEMOCRACY IN KUWAIT

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Kuwait, unlike most of its neighbors, has a well-established national identity and a long history as a democratic nation. In this paper, I have focused on two recurring themes in Kuwaiti history. One, the preservation of a sense of community in the face of radical economic, social and political transformations; the second, internal rivalry over the conventions governing relations among members of the community.

I have gone through the Kuwaiti history and pointed out the various stages of democracy. It is worth mentioning that democracy can be traced to the eighteenth century when the Kuwaiti people unanimously chose their own leader from among the Al-Sabah family. Kuwait remains an example to follow for her sisterly Arab countries in this part of the world. However, much work is still ahead and the Kuwaiti people are expected to go on building a more modern democratic country in the Arabian Peninsula.

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DEMOCRACY IN KUWAIT

One of the characteristics of the people living in Arabia is their desire to live independently, in peace and free from any external threats from neighboring communities or foreign invaders. Arabia remains relatively secure within its borders. Its long history shows a remarkable kind of community that has been ruled by its people. It manages to have an identity of its own and has preserved this identity during its relatively long history. Progress was easy for them since the norms and the traditions of the tribe bound each member of the community. Therefore, Kuwaitis managed to coexist in this part of the world.

Some people of Arabia settled in the northwestern part of the Arabian Gulf. Those people called their new country Kuwait, a diminutive of the word "KUT," meaning fort or castle. Therefore, the word "Kuwait" was originally derived from the word "KUT" and its citizens came to be known as Kuwaitis. Those people unanimously agreed, in the second half of the eighteenth century, that Sabah the First be their own ruler. This choice established a community that could have an identity of its own that was both different and similar in many ways, from identities of other regions of Arabia.

The pace of development during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was relatively small. The people of Arabia had few contacts with people living in other countries. Their needs

involved finding food and clothing and maintaining a safe place to live.

The Kuwaitis have been a part of Arabia for many years. They left their place in central Arabia and began looking for a much better place to live. After settling in their new country, the Kuwaiti people managed to exist and set up their own political regime. During the period preceding independence in 1961 they were subject to many political experiences. These experiences led them to work for the establishment of a democratic regime where every citizen enjoyed the same rights and held similar responsibilities. Many attempts were carried out to find out an acceptable form of democracy.

THE COMMUNITY

Kuwait is an Islamic society. However, it has long had a small Arab Christian community, the product of missionary activities early in this century, and a small resident foreign Christian community. According to the 1980 census, 87,000 Christians lived in Kuwait. Most of them were foreign workers, mainly from southern India. The constitution guarantees freedom of belief thus allowing Christians to worship publicly without hindrance. The non-Muslim and the non-Christian population comprised about 30,000 inhabitants. A small Jewish community also existed in the period between World War I and World War II. However, the overwhelming majority of Kuwait's citizens and other residents today are Muslims. Islam is the state religion and

constitutionally, Islamic law is the main source of legislation. Since the Islamic identity is so important, the government has consciously attempted to link the Kuwaiti identity to Islam, through state support of religion in the school curriculum, and by playing a prominent role in Islamic conferences.

Kuwait is also an Arab Gulf society. Kuwaitis are heirs to the larger Arab traditions, and identify themselves nationally as Arabs from Kuwait. In addition, Kuwait also has a specifically Gulf identity sharing the same norms and traditions with the people of Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. This identity is a unique local mix of the Islamic and Arab identities with liberal borrowings from African, Indian and Persian cultures. These connections are evident, as Mohammed Al-Rumaihi and others pointed out, in artifactual similarities from architecture to furniture, and by the families and individuals who, for political and economic reasons, chose to move from one part of the Gulf to another. This Gulf identity was clearly visible by the 1940s and grew in the 1950s through cultural clubs and literary magazines.

Finally, Kuwait has a specifically Kuwaiti identity, a sense of citizen loyalty narrower than any of its other loyalties. This particular Kuwaiti identity emerged initially as a result of the shared experiences of migration and the common effort to build a new society in a part of the Arabian Peninsula. The pre-oil economy knit the society together, as all were involved in

some way or the other in the shared enterprise of wrestling a living from the desert and the sea. This identity continued to grow in the period following World War II. The Iraqi invasion of 1990 did much to consolidate this sense of specifically Kuwaiti identity.

This identity has been nurtured by social institutions. As elsewhere, the family forms the basis of the society in Kuwait. The importance of the family is enhanced in Kuwait by the country's small size. Another factor that has helped in supporting this identity is the *diwaniyyah*, a place where regular weekly meetings are held. Visitors attending the meetings of the *diwaniyyah* are generally men who are relatives and friends of the owner of the *diwaniyyah*. They often meet to discuss business and politics, arrange introductions, obtain or grant favors through the development and maintenance of what is known as connection. As an institution of Kuwait society it maintains and consolidates the identities of the extended family, and social class. The *diwaniyyah* is one of the most important social institutions linking the individual and the State. For the individual, the *diwaniyyah* is the place where he can establish personal connections with State officials. For the State, the *diwaniyyahs* are listening posts. Following the National Assembly's closure in 1986, the Emir publicly encouraged the *diwaniyyah*, calling it a more genuinely representative institution than the old

Assembly. The diwaniyyahs also helped organize the underground resistance to Iraqi occupation following the invasion in 1990.

POLITICAL LIFE IN KUWAIT

The main theme in Kuwait's history is the internal rivalry: the recurring tension over the rules governing relations among members of the community. The sense of being Kuwaiti has never been equally shared by all members of the community. The word *community* has never meant equality. Although Kuwaitis closed ranks against outsiders, this front has always marked internal tension over access to power, status and wealth. These rivalries often found expression in explicitly political debates over the conventions governing the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, resulting in a recurring altercations between representation and repression in Kuwaiti politics as the extent of political space was defined and redefined. Rarely however, have these debates been allowed to threaten the basic consensus of the larger Kuwait national identity. Despite all internal and external efforts to destabilize the political life in this newly born state, Kuwait remains intact from any foreign intervention in its local affairs. Therefore, it is not strange to notice the birth of a new form of democracy in this part of the world. This kind of democracy characterizes the political life of Kuwait and gives it the status it deserves, and makes it unique among its Arab Gulf neighbors.

Kuwaitis have proven to be able to solve their own differences peacefully. This is a characteristic of the Kuwaiti Community. However, it is worth mentioning that one of the political movements that had an impact on Kuwaiti political life was the Majlis Movement of 1938.

It is well known that the political power rested in the hands of an oligarchy dominated by the founding Bani Utub elite. Kuwait's leaders, the Al-Sabah rulers, dominated this oligarchy, but never with absolute power. Their need for revenue, which they collected through taxes on pearling and trading boats, forced them to rely on the captains and boat owners who oversaw the trade, sold the pearls, controlled the crews who harvested them, and remitted the taxes. The merchants used the occasion of paying taxes to express their views on political life in the community to the government. In a sense, they used their taxes to buy political power. When a ruler tried to govern without the merchants' consent, their organized opposition could pressure him to relent. One struggle occurred in 1909 when the leading pearl merchants left Kuwait for Bahrain to protest new taxes imposed by Sheik Mubarak. They returned to Kuwait only after Sheik Mubarak's retraction of the taxes and eventual apology.

A greater struggle occurred in 1921, on the death of Sheik Salem. In 1920, after the Battle of Jahrah, between Kuwait and Arabia, a council of the leading men persuaded the ruler to request British help. Following Salem's death, the leading

merchants established a twelve-man council that petitioned the ruling family to include the merchants in the succession decision. Little is known of this council, which lasted only for two months before collapsing from internal disagreements and perhaps from Al-Sabah pressure. In part, the council was a delayed response by the merchants to the increasingly authoritarian government. However, it did provide precedent for later efforts.

With the very first trickle of oil revenues, the political relationships at the top began to change. Unlike taxes, oil revenues did not go through the pearling merchants on their way to the Sheik but went directly from the oil companies to the ruler. In the 1930s the ruler's new oil revenues began to increase the distance between the ruler and the ruled. In 1935 Sheik Ahmed received his first payment from KOC, and by 1938 he had a small but regular income from oil. These revenues threatened to displace the customs and other taxes paid by the merchants as the leading state revenues.

When oil arrived, Kuwait was in the midst of an economic crisis, prompted by the decline of the pearling industry, due to the Great Depression. The merchants feared that they would not enjoy the same control over oil revenue that they had from the revenues generated by pearling and trade. It was the first hint that their relationship with the ruler was in jeopardy. They requested that the Emir allocate oil revenues for development of

health, education, and infrastructure issues rather than a personal income for the Sheik. It was an effort on the part of the notables to salvage something of their imminently fading power. It did not succeed in turning back the tide, but it did allow them to retain more political power than they might otherwise have had.

THE MAJLIS MOVEMENT

The Majlis Movement, the Council Movement, arose in 1938. The merchants began to organize politically within the institutions. They dominated the new Education Council which the merchants had set up to oversee the new school system they were trying to establish and the Kuwait Municipality, an elected merchant institution, both created in the 1930s. Early in 1938 merchants began circulating petitions and leaflets and displaying antigovernment posters demanding reforms—a greater say in succession and public policy, an expansion of social services such as health and education, and an end to corruption in the ruling family.

When the ruler responded with force, arresting and beating one dissident, the merchants doubled their efforts. In June 1938 the merchants held an election and chose from among their ranks a Legislative Assembly to formally protest the ruler's policies and to implement new reforms. They also organized Kuwait's first political party, the National Bloc.

Outside their new institutions the merchants sought allies in the ruling family. They found one in the person of Sheik Abdullah Al-Salem, a prominent yet dissident Sheik who had been passed over for succession. Sheik Abdullah agreed to lead the Legislative Assembly, and reluctantly Sheik Ahmed also agreed to accept the Assembly. In July the Assembly prepared a basic law that asserted the Assembly's intention and its right to pass legislation in the areas of security, finance, social and foreign policy. Again, Sheik Ahmed reluctantly agreed. In the following six months the Assembly energetically set about enacting legislation. It restructured the tax system, introduced public health regulations, opened schools, introduced reforms in the judicial system, and began new construction projects. If the ruler was displeased with some of these reforms, he was even less happy with the new laws the Assembly had introduced restricting the expanding power of the Al-Sabah family that included restrictions on market monopolies.

By December 1938 Sheik Ahmed decided the assembly had gone too far. When the Assembly demanded that it, rather than the Sheik, should henceforth receive checks from the oil company, the ruler considered this as an attempt on the part of the merchants to reassert their historical economic power over him. Since he no longer needed the merchants' taxes, he no longer needed to listen to their ideas on policy. He had no intention of formally

relinquishing the new independence oil had given him, and in December of the same year, he dissolved the Legislative Assembly.

When the Assembly members and their supporters fought back, Sheik Ahmed rallied Bedouin forces that surrounded the Assembly supporters and forced their surrender. The ruler then held elections for a new assembly, but when this body refused to ratify the constitution he submitted, he dissolved this new Assembly, too. The opposition fought back one last time. In March 1939 when a dissident was arrested for giving an antigovernment speech, his supporters' efforts to obtain his release erupted in a small confrontation in which the police opened fire, killing one merchant and wounding two others. Having subdued the crowd, the ruler now introduced harsher measures, executing the speaker who had set off the disturbance and arresting the assembly members. So new was this kind of political opposition, that the ruler had to build a jail for the detainees. Kuwait's security force was growing.

The Assembly failed for two reasons. First, the opposition was unable to expand its merchant base into a unifying national movement. Secondly, in its effort to develop new allies, the opposition looked for forces outside of Kuwait. Unfortunately for them, they lost popular support. At home the merchants were unable to consolidate their support among dissidents in the ruling family. When the ruling family, as a whole, felt threatened, Sheik Abdullah Al-Salem did not stand against them.

The assembly's problems ran deeper than that. The merchants who joined the Assembly and took part in the Majlis Movement were overwhelmingly Sunni. However, a significant number of Kuwaitis were then Shia, members of a sectarian minority. Although many Shia families had long lived in Kuwait, others had newly arrived in Kuwait, the consequence of migrations from Iran during the early part of the century. Kuwait's Shia never joined this movement which they saw as exclusively Sunni. Indeed, the movement leaders were very concerned about the growing Shia presence and tried to introduce a census. As the movement progressed, its actions and those of the Assembly only confirmed Shia fears. When the Assembly tried to oust the Sheik's personal secretary, a Shia supporter, the Shia grew apprehensive.

In the end many Shia felt so threatened that they made active efforts to leave Kuwait for good. In 1938 over 400 Kuwaiti Shia approached Britain with requests for citizenship.

CONSOLIDATING THE KUWAITI IDENTITY

The Kuwaiti community, a mixture of many nationalities, made the Kuwaiti Government rethink the ways and means to protect the citizens from the possible competition between them and other nationalities. The Kuwaiti Government placed economic limitations on non-Kuwaitis. They could not hold certain jobs and generally did not earn wages as high or enjoy the same fringe benefits as Kuwaitis. They could not own land or businesses. In

addition, they could not participate in the stock market. In general, non-Kuwaitis were excluded from economic areas.

Moreover, the Kuwaiti Government placed social limitations on the non-Kuwaitis. Zoning separated Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis residentially. Marriage to Kuwaitis, especially to Kuwaiti women, was rare. Hence foreigners did not participate in the Kuwaiti family networks or in the usually nationally segregated Kuwaiti sports and cultural clubs. Foreigners did, of course, form their own social networks and organizations, but these generally functioned apart from their Kuwaiti counterparts.

Kuwait also placed political limitations on non-Kuwaitis. First, the State had strict naturalization laws. In the past it had required thirty years residency requirements for non-Arabs and fifteen for Arabs. The fulfillment of a series of other conditions faced them including being a Muslim, knowing Arabic, and contributing to the State. Until 1980 the State limited naturalizations to fifty people a year. Even then, naturalization did not entitle these Kuwaitis to vote for twenty years or to hold elective or ministerial posts. In 1980 the Government amended the Nationality law, allowing the naturalization of Arab residents after fifteen years and for non-Arabs after twenty years and also ending the fifty-person-a-year rule. However, the rate of naturalization did not increase dramatically.

Similar to role of the family, the State is the second major instrument of socialization. Kuwait's leaders have tried to use the State both to build a Kuwaiti identity and to inculcate values conducive to their continued rule primarily through the State education system, the State media, the State employment, and the State services.

As elsewhere the State school system has played a key role in political socialization. During the second decade of this century, the Kuwaiti merchants began to encroach on the educational prerogatives of the religious elite. Sunni merchants, unhappy with sending their sons abroad for higher education, established the first modern school in 1911, a more specialized school for training in writing and bookkeeping as well. Many attempts were made to build other schools. However, the Kuwaiti Government decided to put the educational system under its direct supervision. By 1950 the Kuwaiti educational system was under the direct supervision of the Government. This educational system now offers free education to every Kuwaiti child. In addition, this system demands a sense of Kuwaiti identity and loyalty to the ruler and the State.

The media is the second important State instrument of political socialization. As in many developing nations, the broadcast media are state-owned with some of the print media in private hands. The Government has made affirmative use of the State media to encourage the development of a Kuwaiti identity.

Other State institutions, such as the Ministry of Information and the Kuwait News Agency, also publish a regular range of historical and cultural works designed in part to educate the population of Kuwait on the importance of their heritage.

Finally, the State has been an instrument of socialization through its role as employer and provider of social services. The State is a massive employer, hiring the majority of working Kuwaitis. Not only does State employment directly instill a sense of state nationalism, but also it encourages Kuwaitis to think of themselves as set apart in a more subtle way. State employment for Kuwaitis is a guaranteed right—a right non-Kuwaitis do not enjoy. The notion that being a Kuwaiti is a special status has made the Kuwaiti citizens feel distinct from other less privileged non-Kuwaiti Arabs.

Thus a strong and positive identity emerged a sense of the Kuwaitis being distinct from all the others living in Kuwait, and even from the other residents of the Gulf countries. Kuwaitis now feel they are more privileged than non-Kuwaitis. This led to the formation of a basic unity among the citizens in the modern Kuwaiti society.

The second theme that has dominated Kuwait's history is the development and protection of its small community from external threats. Although oil, restructured the domestic and international environment, it did not weaken either Kuwait's sense of identity or its perceived vulnerability. Since the mid-

eighteenth century Kuwaiti people have had a distinct sense of themselves as being Kuwaitis. They have also enjoyed a larger political identity as well as citizens of the Gulf as Arabs, as Muslims, and as members of the world community.

HISTORY OF DEMOCRACY IN KUWAIT

Kuwait was well on its way to becoming a nation long before it was a state. Kuwait has been an independent state only since 1961, but it has been a distinct political entity since it was founded early in the eighteenth century. Although the original families who migrated to Kuwait from central Arabia did not differ ethnically or religiously from the families they left behind, the act of migrating and establishing a new community created strong new bonds among them. From the start, Kuwait was set apart from its neighbors by its possession of the rudiments of a national identity. Kuwait has had two centuries to work with the issue of democracy as an accepted form of the political system. Although Kuwait has not resolved its national problems, it does have a solid core with which it can work.

The old town of Kuwait was built in the early eighteenth century approximately 1716. The Bani Khaled tribe the dominant tribe of northeastern Arabia settled in Kuwait. They called it Qurain. By the mid-eighteenth century this town was known as Kuwait.

The Bani Utub, the founders of the political city-state of Kuwait, did not arrive in Kuwait until the early eighteenth

century. Originally, the Bani Utub were no more than loosely bound, interrelated families who came to Kuwait together from central Arabia, where they traced their origin to Unaizah tribe. These families left Arabia as migrants in the late seventeenth century, a period when famine forced people to migrate to other places where they could settle and live in an environment that could support them.

After settling in Kuwait, the Bani Utub began to earn a living through pearl diving, boat building, and trade, taking advantage of Kuwait's fine harbor. Their undertakings were successful and the colony grew. Its fleet soon rivaled that of Muscat, the other large Gulf naval power. In addition to the maritime trade with India and Africa, Kuwait also became an important stop on the land trade routes that linked India, Persia, and Arabia to Europe. The nineteenth century was a period of general prosperity for Kuwait. European travelers, who began passing through Kuwait in the late eighteenth century, noted the active commerce on land and sea. When the British political resident visited Kuwait in the 1860s, the town had nearly 20,000 inhabitants.

Kuwait could enjoy prosperity and political stability in part because of the protected political space in which it developed. In the eighteenth century, when Kuwait was founded, that area of eastern Arabia enjoyed a certain peace and stability as a result of Bani Khaled rule. The Bani Khaled allowed Kuwait

the space to grow and offered a measure of protection from outside threats. The late eighteenth century was also a period of rapid state formation and destruction in the region, with new forms of political rule appearing and disappearing throughout the Gulf. Kuwait's location and size, however, left it vulnerable to outside powers.

From the earliest days, Kuwait's leaders could only survive by careful diplomacy and manipulation of the local balance of power. From the surrounding tribes to the Ottoman forces to the European traders, Kuwait was forced to strike a series of deals with all the regional powers. These shifting alliances allowed Kuwait to develop a surprising degree of autonomy by the mid-nineteenth century. Although most of the states in the gulf region fell under direct Ottoman or the European rule, Kuwait remained independent. This form of autonomy reinforced a sense of Kuwaiti identity.

The Bani Utub built a new identity for themselves in Kuwait. Although they remained loyal to the Bani Khaled, the new settlers soon became able to rule themselves by adding new political institutions to contain and regulate the life of the community. The most important institutions were those involving leadership. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Al-Sabah had become the leading political family, from whose ranks all successive rulers have arisen. The first recognized ruler was Sabah I, who ruled for a short time in the 1750s followed by that of Sheik Abdullah.

During Abdullah's rule, the Al-Sabah family became the uncontested ruling family of Kuwait. The early leadership structures proved durable, guaranteeing an unbroken succession of the Al-Sabah rulers from the mid-eighteenth century on.

Originally the Al-Sabah rule was based on competence rather than on conquest or hereditary claims to greatness. They had only a conditional right to rule, dependent on continued political performance and on the support of the town notables who, during the nineteenth century, played a role in selecting the ruler from among the leading members of the ruling family. Rulers governed in consultation with the leaders of the Bani Utub families who had accompanied the Al-Sabah on their Arabian migration. The early rulers of Kuwait managed to establish good relationships among other tribes settling in other parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Kuwait's relationships with its neighbors formed the basis for political alliances that emerged in the twentieth century when the tribes began to settle certain parts of Arabia. The Al-Sabah family ruled well, and their continuing competence deepened their legitimacy.

Sheik Abdullah's long rule helped in solidifying the leading political institution of the new community, the ruling family. In his early years Sheik Abdullah consolidated Al-Sabah's power. He spent his later years on external matters; in particular, the struggle between the Bani Khaled and the Wahhabis. During this period of insecurity, Sheik Abdullah established Kuwait's

relationship with Britain through its local agent, the British East India Company. Kuwait's first formal contact with Britain came in 1775 when the Persians occupied Basra. As a result of tension between Britain and Persia in this period, Britain rerouted some of its trade through Kuwait. In the 1790s Sheik Abdullah housed the company's Basra representatives for two years. In return, the representatives offered Sheik Abdullah some temporary help against his enemies.

Through the nineteenth century, Abdullah's successors consolidated the Al-Sabah supremacy in Kuwait and maintained Kuwait's autonomy from its Arabian and Ottoman neighbors. It was during the rule of Abdullah that Kuwait began to move away from a century of neutrality, as he began turning toward the Ottomans who had long wanted a closer relationship. Abdullah approached the Ottomans with the offer of a closer Kuwaiti alliance in exchange for the guarantee of local autonomy in Kuwait. Although Sheik Abdullah's brother and successor Mohamed, maintained his predecessor's Ottoman alliance during the mid-eighteenth century. After four years in power, he was overthrown by his brother Mubarak. It is with Mubarak's rule that Kuwait's modern democracy began.

MUBARAK THE GREAT

Mubarak the Great, the founder of modern Kuwait began his political career under the leadership of Sheik Mohamed, who put Mubarak in charge of desert security and tribal relations.

Mubarak, however, had his own political ambitions. He had fears lest Sheik Mohamed should lead Kuwait to become incorporated into the Ottoman Empire.

When Mubarak came to power, British influence in Kuwait was still limited, although Britain was by then the dominant regional power. Since Kuwait was not actively involved in the maritime warfare that the British called piracy, Britain felt little need to regulate its relationship with Kuwait through a series of treaties as it did with other naval powers. During most of the nineteenth century, Kuwait remained essentially nonaligned, moving toward a closer alliance with the Ottomans under Abdullah and his successor, Mohamed. In order to curtail the growing but hostile Ottoman influence, Mubarak turned to Britain.

On January 23, 1899, Britain and Kuwait signed a treaty that promised Kuwait British support in return for an exclusive relationship with Britain and British control of Kuwait's foreign policy. Mubarak also agreed not to grant foreigners concessions in his territory without British permission. This treaty put Kuwait within the British orbit and established a relationship with Britain that would last beyond independence in 1961. With the new agreement, Kuwait purchased its complete independence from the regional powers but only at the price of an ultimately deeper dependence on Britain. In the short term, Britain was able to provide some support for Mubarak against Ottoman opposition, sending gunboats as the occasion warranted. When

World War I broke out, Kuwait was a British ally. Britain took the opportunity of the war to promise Kuwait a closer relationship as a protectorate. By the time Mubarak died in 1915, he had established a strong bond with Britain. Although this bond left Kuwait dependent on Britain, it also assured Kuwait's political independence from its neighbors, and the eventual emergence of Kuwait as an independent political entity in the international system.

By the early twentieth century, Mubarak had established some international protection and was in a position to develop new state institutions and establish economic and political policies. Kuwait's economy had been growing steadily throughout the nineteenth century as part of a larger regional land and sea-trading network. With the British alliance, the economy gradually became integrated into the British trading system. This shift radically restructured Kuwait's regional position. Until the end of the nineteenth century, Kuwait was on its way to developing itself as part of a distinct regional economy. Mubarak altered the economy in other ways as well. He introduced a series of new taxes, among them taxes on pearling boats and property, that were so unpopular that they prompted a tax rebellion in 1909. That year the leading pearl buyers and merchants joined forces to oppose the taxes, moving along with their ships and staff to Bahrain in protest. In the end, their rebellion forced Mubarak to cancel some of the taxes to insure

the merchants' return. Politically, Sheik Mubarak managed to centralize power in his hands.

The centralization of power in the hands of the ruler marked an important change, one that would continue into the oil era. Mubarak was succeeded by Jabir and Salem. During Salem's rule Kuwait effectively asserted its independence from the now territorially ambitious Arabia in the Battle of Jahrah. Salem began his rule on bad footing with Ibn Saud. During his rule, the Wall of Kuwait was built to defend Kuwait against its enemies, the Ikwan. The Battle of Jahrah witnessed the defeat of the Ikwan, and Kuwait emerged victorious.

The battle of Jahrah was a turning point in the history of Kuwait. Kuwait's independence from Saudi Arabia reinforced the city-state's growing national identity. The easy rallying of support evidenced by the rapid construction of the town wall suggests that Salem enjoyed popular backing in his efforts to maintain Kuwait's autonomy. The success of his strategies in turn reinforced this sense of patriotism. Although the Kuwaiti forces fought well, the battle also indicated the recurring need for Kuwait's leaders to rely on careful diplomacy and balanced alliances in order to undermine militarily superior neighbors.

PREVIOUS DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCES

Democracy in Kuwait was an integral part of the political life since Kuwait was known as a political entity. These experiences show an innate desire among Kuwaitis to lead a kind

of family life where everybody enjoys the same rights and bears the same duties and responsibilities. Among this large family, the individual feels secure and is able to take part in political life. The individual exercises his freedom, but within the norms and traditions of his own society. No concession is given to any person who may encroach on the rights of others or usurp any of their belongings or possessions. However, modern democracy, as we know it, came into being in 1921.

The Advisory Council

This Council was established in 1921. This date marks the emergence of a real democratic experience in this Arab country. The crucial circumstances that confronted Kuwait at that time made it obligatory for the Kuwaiti ruler to seek the help and the advice of the Kuwaiti notables. Collective responsibility was considered to be the answer to what was prevailing at that time. Kuwait was subject to external attempts to conquer it and to change the regime at that time. The battle of Jahrah in 1920 was an example of such attempts. Sheik Mubarak sensed the real danger of the foreigners who were eager to conquer his country. Therefore, he had no other alternative but to do whatever he could, notwithstanding any opposition, to maintain its independence and sovereignty.

In addition to that, the Kuwaiti people felt that it was time to take part in governing their country. Some Kuwaiti notables met in the premises of Nasir Al-Badr to discuss the

current situations at that time. They came to the conclusion that the only thing they could do was to petition to the ruler to establish an advisory council. The Emir approved of the petition and appointed twelve members to be the representatives of the Kuwaiti people in this council.

The establishment of the Advisory Council was in fact a giant step in the Kuwaiti march for democracy. However, this Assembly did not last long, but it became quite clear to both the ruling family and to the people of Kuwait that their ultimate target would be the establishment of an acceptable form of democracy. Whatever reasons given for the dissolution of this Council, it remained a landmark in the Kuwaiti aspirations for the establishment of a political regime based upon democratic principles.

The Municipal Council

Sheik Youssif Bin Eissa, a very famous Kuwaiti merchant, was enthusiastic to the idea of establishing a municipality in Kuwait. The emergence of this municipality was the first actual experience of elections. The twelve members of this Council were to be elected by the voters. Chairman of this municipality was confined to the Al-Sabah family. The Ruler himself appointed the Chairman.

The Education Council

Fifty Kuwaiti celebrities were asked to conduct a kind of election among themselves to elect members for this Council.

Kuwaitis realized that no real development could be achieved without education. This Council came into existence in 1936. The Council started its activities by appointing some teachers from the Arab countries to work in Kuwait.

The First Legislative Council

The need to have such a council came from the desire of the Kuwaitis to take part in ruling themselves. The emergence of this Council was the result of the following:

- The inefficiency of the Kuwait administrative departments that were assigned with governing the country.
- The high rate of taxation imposed on the Kuwaiti nationals.
- The Kuwaitis began to think highly of democracy as a form of governing their country.
- The Kuwaitis who traveled abroad to study returned to their home country with fixed ideas about democracy.

Three hundred and twenty voters were asked to elect twenty members to this Legislative Council. Sheik Abdullah Al-Salem was appointed chairman of this Council.

The Second Legislative Council

This Council came into existence in 1939 after the dissolution of the First Legislative Council. However, this Council was dissolved before actually assuming its authorities in 1939. The reasons for dissolution of this Council can be summarized as follows:

- The Kuwaiti people were not fully aware of the real meaning of democracy. This Council was seen as a substitute to the regime of Al-Sabah family.

- The short duration of this Council eliminated the possible power that it could have assumed.

- From a religious point of view, the Shia opposed the establishment of this Council simply because it differentiated between them and the Sunni. Membership was only confined to the Sunni people.

- A considerable segment of the Kuwaiti people sensed that this Council was a contradiction to the norms and traditions prevailing at that time. Therefore, they petitioned the ruler to dissolve it.

- Some Arab countries opposed the establishment of the council since they saw it as a threat to the power of their regimes. They were against the establishment of any authority that might constitute a threat to their regimes.

The Constituent Assembly

An Amiri Decree was issued on December 30, 1961 to hold general elections for the membership of the Constituent Assembly. The Kuwaiti people were invited for the first time in their history to take part in the elections. Twenty people were elected as members of the Constituent Assembly. Eleven sheiks and three ministers were appointed as members of the Assembly. The members of this Assembly totaled thirty-four people. The

Assembly was designed to suggest a permanent constitution for the State of Kuwait. The Assembly held twenty-three sessions in about a year from the date of its formation. During their meetings the members of the Assembly managed to accomplish their mission. The Kuwaiti Constitution came into being on January 15, 1963. It was designed to prescribe the kind of political regime to be adopted in the newly born state. All the Kuwaiti people welcomed this constitution which maintained, and for the first time, the disintegration of the authorities.

THE KUWAITI CONSTITUTION

After receiving the draft Constitution to the ruler of Kuwait, Sheik Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on November 11, 1962, sanctioned the bill and it became a law since that date. Sheik Abdullah abstained from making any changes in its original version, and it was published in the official Kuwaiti Gazette on November 12, 1962. This endorsement, on the part of the Ruler of Kuwait, gave birth to a new democratic state in the Gulf Region of the Arabian Peninsula. It is worth mentioning that this Constitution was not in its essence a sudden gust in the Kuwaiti life, but a gradual change in the political life that took scores of years to materialize.

Mr. Al-Ghanem was one of the twenty members of the Constituent Assembly elected by the Kuwaiti people to be in charge of working out a Constitution to this newborn state. Sheik Abdullah, the Ruler of Kuwait signed the treaty with

Britain that granted independence to the State of Kuwait on June 19, 1961. The Emir did not lose time, so he called for general elections to elect the members of the Constituent Assembly. The first twenty candidates who got the highest votes were automatically members of the Constituent Assembly. The Emir nominated another fourteen people, who were then members of the Kuwaiti Cabinet. This Assembly started its meetings on March 17, 1962 and ended on October 27, 1962. The results of these meetings were what is known as the permanent Constitution of the State of Kuwait.

After accomplishing this task, the Chairman of this Assembly, Mr. Abdul-lateef Mohamed Thunayan Al-Ghanem, submitted the bill of the Constitution to the Emir. In the ceremony held on the occasion, Mr. Al-Ghanem addressed his Highness Sheik Abdullah who was then the ruler of Kuwait, as saying:

Your Highness, the Emir,

It is a great honor to my colleagues, members of the Constituent Assembly and to myself to submit to your Highness the Bill of the Suggested Constitution on this great day. This bill came as a response to your initiative to establish a permanent constitution to the State of Kuwait. This Constitution was made in the light of the democratic principles prevailing in our Country. We hope that this Constitution shall be the answer to the great expectations of the Kuwaiti people.

His Highness the Emir said in response to the speech of Mr. Al-Ghanem:

Dear Sons,

Praise be to our God the Almighty for whatever achievements materialized; namely the establishment of a permanent constitution to this country based on the democratic principles and meantime consistent with our norms and traditions. I do appreciate all your efforts and do approve of this Constitution. Meantime, I have to extend my sincere gratitude to you for all

your fruitful and beneficial efforts. I pray to our God the Almighty to guide us to the right path.

The Kuwaiti democracy is unique among the other democracies, if any, in the Arab World. The right to express one's ideas freely and without any fear is a characteristic of political life in Kuwait. The Kuwaiti Constitution laid the foundations for a kind of regime never experienced before in any Arab country.

HIGHLIGHTS ON THE KUWAITI CONSTITUTION

Many articles deal with the Kuwaiti Constitution. Some of these articles were for it, whereas many others were against it. However, the Kuwaiti Constitution remains an example of all Arab constitutions because it came as an answer to the aspirations of a people who chose to live in this part of the Arabian Peninsula. The people who settled Kuwait in the early eighteenth century managed to coexist and build a state of their own. The Kuwaiti Constitution, that was approved by His Highness Sheik Abdullah Al-Salem, consists of 183 clauses and is divided into five phases:

Phase One: The first six clauses deal with the Composition of the State and the regime in office.

Phase Two: Clauses Nos. 7 to 26 deal with the basic constituents of the Kuwaiti Community.

Phase Three: Clauses No.s 27 to 49 deal with the general duties and the responsibilities of the Kuwaiti people.

Phase Four: Clauses No.s 50 to 173 deal with the authorities in office.

Phase Five: Clauses Nos. 174 to 183 deal with general rules.

However, there are certain stipulations in the Kuwaiti Constitution.

- Members of the elected assembly can be appointed as ministers. The Emir can choose some of them as members of the Cabinet.

- The Constitution gave the Emir the right to appoint the ministers to office from both the members of the National Assembly and from outside it as he deems relevant.

- The appointed ministers represent the executive authority of the Government and have to attend the meetings of the National Assembly and from outside it as he deems relevant.

- Formation of any government is the sole right of the Emir. Therefore, the National Assembly cannot exercise any pressure on the formation of the Cabinet nor the shuffling of it.

- The National Assembly cannot disqualify the Government in office. The Emir himself can and may see to it.

- The Government is responsible to the Emir for the proper functioning of its duties and responsibilities.

However, the Clauses of the Constitution state quite clearly that the nation, meaning the Kuwaiti people, is the source of all authority. These clauses also state that the ruling of Kuwait is confined to the descendants of the late Sheik Mubarak Al-Sabah. The system of the regime is hereditary.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Constitution attempted to maintain balance between the Parliamentary System and the Presidency System. It is a kind of flexible disintegration of authorities. It is the right of the National Assembly to look into bills before they are made law. The members of the National Assembly are as follows:

- Fifty members elected by the people of Kuwait.
- Members of the Cabinet in office.

General elections are held once every four years to elect members for the National Assembly. However, membership is not confined to those elected. The appointed minister automatically becomes a member of it. The elections are one of the most important occasions that characterize the political life in Kuwait. Citizens often spend long hours before TV screens following the results of elections that are broadcast directly after the votes are sorted out.

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

When Kuwait became independent in June 1961, the new state faced two crises. The first was a foreign policy crisis stemming from an Iraqi claim to part of the newly independent territory, a claim that Iraq asserted within days of Kuwait's independence. The second crisis was a national crisis of identity and loyalty stemming from the ideological and practical demands of independence. The first crisis was quickly addressed. A new treaty arrangement between Kuwait and Britain provided for

British military support against threats. Britain sent forces to Kuwait, which along with Arab League forces, forestalled any imminent invasion. The second crisis - of national identity - took longer to resolve. In the post-independence period, Kuwait's rulers tried to nurture and mold the embryonic sense of patriotism that emerged at independence into a strong national identity. Three sets of political institutions involved were the ruling institution of the Al-Sabah family, the consultative institution of the National Assembly, and the sustaining institution of the bureaucracy. In large measure these institutions proved successful in consolidating the national identity in such a way as to ensure loyalty to Kuwait's leaders. Nonetheless, the post independence Kuwaiti government faced serious dissent. Although the regime generally chose cooperation over coercion, the opposition of the 1980s from the Islamics to the pro-democracy movement before and after the Iraqi invasion of 1990 has caused the government to reassess its earlier strategies.

The Ruling Institution

The most important ruling institution in Kuwait is the ruling family led by the Emir. In 1961, the Iraqi threat strengthened this institution by prompting Kuwaitis to rally around known leadership. Sheik Abdullah used the crisis to reiterate not only his personal claim to rule but that of the Al-Sabah's more generally. As leader of an independent state, Sheik

Abdullah changed his title to Emir. In November 1961, immediately following the crisis, the Emir drew up a constitution. This document declared Kuwait, a hereditary Emirate, and stipulated not only that Kuwait's leaders come from the Al-Sabah family but that they come specifically from male descendants of Mubarak the Great (a provision that has survived constitutional revisions). This clause codified what had become custom: the semiformal alteration of power since 1915 between the lines of Mubarak's two ruling sons, Jabir and Salem.

The post-independence period has seen considerable evolution in the positions of both the ruling family and the ruler. The most important changes have been the expansion of the ruling family's role in politics and the increasing formalization of that role. Although Kuwait has been ruled by members of the Al-Sabah family since the eighteenth century, the family has ruled as an institution only since the mid-twentieth century. The family's political role began to form in the period between World Wars One and Two when Sheik Ahmed began selecting his brothers and cousins as advisers and then heads of key departments such as municipality, education, and health. This practice of hiring relatives increased after independence and became formalized as the advisers became department heads and then cabinet members. The top posts in the ministries of foreign affairs, information, defense, and interior have since gone to the relatives of his heir apparent, and finally to other family members. The ruling

family has always held about one-quarter of the cabinet posts and always the most important posts. Al-Sabah ministers start younger and stay longer—an average of more than nine years compared with the general average of five and a half years. Second-tier family members fill lesser posts in the higher civil service and military and in general constitute the recruitment pool for important state posts. It is a large pool with over 1,200 members.

The ruling family is less constrained than it was before the twentieth century. Press criticism of both the Emir and the ruling family is forbidden. The constitution declares the Emir immune and inviolable, a condition that has always extended to the Al-Sabah family to some extent. The precise extent of this inviolability was an issue that the assembly tried to test before its 1986 dissolution, as delegates demanded the opportunity to question high-ranking family members over corruption and mismanagement. Many attribute the Assembly dissolution to this attack on the family. Internal disciplinary procedures limited the actions of Sheiks and offending Sheiks were exiled.

Although the family functions politically as a unified institution, it is nonetheless deeply divided. It is reported that there are four different levels of Al-Sabah membership. The most important family division is the descendants of Mubarak's sons Jabir and Salem. An early test case for this distinction was the political career of Sheik Abdullah Al-Mubarak, the

youngest son of Sheik Mubarak and later head of the police force, who aspired to leadership in the 1940s and 1950s when he served as deputy ruler. His challenge failed, ending in his exile from Kuwait in 1961, an exile from which he returned only in the late 1980s. No one else but a descendant of Salem or Jabir has put forward a credible claim. Although Abdullah's line no longer stands as a serious challenge, the historical threat still lingers. Within the ruling line, the major divisions are between the Jabir and the Salem branches. In addition to alternating the leadership, these lines have produced several ministers and top officials. Important descendants from Jabir include Sheik Sabah Ahmed the long-serving foreign affairs minister and deputy prime minister. Important descendants from Sheik Salem include heir apparent Sheik Sa'ad Al-Abdullah.

One interesting secondary branch of the family is descended from Jarrah and Muhammad, the murdered brothers of Sheik Mubarak. This part of the family, exiled after Mubarak's accession, returned to Kuwait in the 1950s after coming to an understanding with Sheik Abdullah Al-Salem, who was interested in strengthening the political role of the ruling family and expanding his Sabah allies. Many members of this branch went on to important government posts including Kuwait's ambassador to the United States, Sa'ud Nasir, a descendant of Muhammad.

The family is usually sufficiently disciplined to keep its divisions in check. Important decisions are made behind closed

doors by the Emir in consultation with an inner family circle. Dissent remains largely within the family, although it occasionally rises to the surface, as it did in 1981 when Sheik Jabir Al-Ali was dropped from the Cabinet following his unsuccessful opposition to the Assembly reopening. Succession can also bring divisions to the surface. However, succession has been regulated by the institutionalization of the successor in the roles of prime minister and crown prince prior to the succession and by the 1962 constitution, which stipulated the designation of an heir apparent within a year of the Emir's accession. Contestation thus occurs far in advance of the ruler's actual death, preventing a succession crisis during the critical period of official mourning.

Post-independence successions have been smooth. Sheik Abdullah Al-Salem, Kuwait's first post-independence ruler, named his brother Sabah heir apparent in 1962 just after independence. This particular choice, the one exception to the alternation pattern between the Jabir and Salem lines, surprised those who expected a candidate from the Jabir side. However, the leading contender from that line, Jabir Al-Ahmed, the Finance Minister and eventual successor, although popular, was still young. Sheik Sabah was a compromise, a low-profile candidate who would offend the fewest. He was a less prominent figure, having long waited under the shadow of Sheik Fahd Al-Salem and Sheik Abdullah Al-Mubarak. Yet, he was also a candidate with experience in

government, primarily as commander of the new police force, later as director of health, and then as director of foreign affairs. When Sheik Abdullah Al-Salem died in 1965, Sheik Sabah succeeded him. This choice proved to be the only deviation from the Jabir-Salem alternation pattern.

With Sabah's succession Jabir became prime minister and in May 1966, heir apparent, alternating the succession to the Jabir line. When Jabir succeeded Sabah on the latter's death in December 1977, he quickly named Sheik Sa'ad Al-Abdullah from the Salem line, crown prince and then prime minister, silencing speculation about the succession. Sheik Sa'ad's background was with the police, having had police training in England before heading the city police from 1945 on. In 1959 when Kuwait's police forces were consolidated, Sheik Sa'ad became deputy commander in chief, in 1961 chief of police, then from 1962 to 1978 interior minister, and from 1964 to 1978 defense minister as well. Sheik Sa'ad has been an active prime minister taking part in all the important political affairs as well as other social activities and education. He relied heavily on his extended family for advice and staff support. He has been less enthusiastic in relying on the National Assembly for consultation and advice.

The Consultative Institution: The National Assembly

Along with the ruling institutions, consultative institutions also emerged in the post-independence period. The

most important was the National Assembly, which carried on a lively political debate with the government from 1963 until its closure between 1976 and 1981 and then its dissolution in 1986. This institution had its origins in earlier efforts of representation, especially the Majlis Movement of 1938. The long-term catalyst to the assembly's formation was the demand for political participation that lingered after the 1938 experiment. Even after the demise of the 1938 assembly the nationalist opposition kept alive the idea of political participation in some organized forum. In the 1950s an echo of participation survived in elected advisory government departments. However, as these departments lost power to the increasingly prominent Sheiks, demands for more formal representation grew. During the 1950s the opposition petitioned the government for a parliament. Mr. Ahmed Al-Khatib, a physician and an Arab nationalist leader, spearheaded these efforts through his national Culture Club, which along with other clubs, formed the organizational network for opposition politics. Opposition leaders were particularly hopeful that Sheik Abdullah Al-Salem, who had supported the 1938 Assembly, would support this new effort.

The Iraqi territorial claim and the general crisis accompanying independence prompted Sheik Abdullah to reconsider some form of assembly. Just as the populace turned to the established leadership in a moment of political crisis, so too did the ruler turn to popular support. The Iraqi claim not only

prompted an outpouring of patriotic spirit among Kuwaitis but also concentrated that spirit in the Emir as he faced down the threat. In part, the assembly was an effort by the Emir to institutionalize that spirit and support. The 1962 constitution even held out the promise of future assembly limitation of the ruling family's power. The assembly was to approve the Emir's choice for heir apparent and in the event of family deadlock, the National Assembly has to select the heir apparent from among three Sabah's named by the Emir.

Other factors played a part in the decisions to support the Assembly. The rulers hoped to use the Assembly to develop their own allies, in particular the newly settled Bedouin, who in time came to hold a critical pro-government position in the Assembly. At various times the rulers encouraged the election of Shia, religious Sunni candidates, and nationalists, using the Assembly to court the enemies of whatever opposition group they most feared. The rulers also hoped to use the Assembly to pull Kuwaitis apart from the many expatriate Arabs who had begun to arrive in Kuwait, bringing with them dissident political ideas. If the Assembly has been an inclusive institution, it has not been all-inclusive. As elsewhere, suffrage was limited to citizens. In Kuwait that excludes the bulk of the population. Suffrage was further restricted by age, sex (men only), and citizenship status (only those in Kuwait's first category of citizens, descendants of Kuwaitis resident in 1920) could vote.

Suffrage also excluded active members of the armed forces. As a result of all this, some 100 army officers resigned their commissions to become candidates to the Assembly. Members of Al-Sabah family were denied the right to vote. Therefore, only about 57,000 Kuwaitis could vote. This number represents only less than five percent of the total residential population who totaled to about 1.5 million people.

In December 1961 elections were held for the Constituent Assembly, which then drafted a constitution, and in 1963 the first National Assembly elections were held. The Assembly held four sessions—in 1973, 1967, 1971, and 1975—before it was suspended in 1976. The Assembly reopened following the elections of 1981. However after the elections that were held in 1985, the Assembly met only twice before it was dissolved in 1986.

The elections to the first assembly in 1963 produced a highly vocal opposition, the National Bloc, led by Dr. Al-Khatib, which soon focused its criticism on the Emir's cabinet. The National Bloc objected to the inclusion of merchant ministers, arguing that a conflict of interest existed between their private and public responsibilities. So effective was the opposition that it forced the ruler to return from India to dissolve the cabinet. Following this Assembly, the Government began taking a closer interest in the opposition.

The 1967 elections, held amid credible charges of government interference and election irregularities, prompted the

resignation of seven representatives and popular calls for rescheduled elections. The next election of 1971 produced a more compliant assembly, one that included only four members of the nationalist opposition. Al-Khatib, the opposition leader, was not among them. In the 1971 elections, the opposition had focused on negotiations with the oil companies. In 1973 the Assembly rejected a government agreement with KOC on Kuwaiti participation, demanding more radical steps toward nationalization. The nationalization of the oil company that took place in 1976 was the result of that opposition.

Elections for the fourth assembly were held in 1975. This Assembly continued the traditions of opposition with far more enthusiasm than the Emir was willing to tolerate. In August 1976 the Emir dissolved the Assembly and introduced new restrictions on the press and on public meetings. Several factors contributed to this decision. The first was the volatile nature of the opposition and the number of issues, foreign and domestic, on which the Assembly opposed the Government. The Government was particularly concerned with the new ties that were developing between the domestic opposition and opposition groups in the Arab World. Fear was that this Assembly opposition would harm relations with other Arab states, among them Saudi Arabia, which had always disapproved of the legislative experiment in Kuwait. The government also guessed that the Assembly had begun to lose popular support for the positions it had taken on corruption and

Government intervention. In addition, the Assembly's volatility hindered its effectiveness. In its last months the body was paralyzed, delaying the budget and other issues in endless debate. The popular support for the positions it had taken on corruption and government intervention in the economy, on planning and price controls, and on narrowly self-serving issues, such as its move to quintuple the pensions of assembly members. Although the suspension produced some opposition, it did not meet with as much as the Assembly member might have hoped. Not until the end of the decade would they be able to rebuild the popular support that had brought them to office.

Following the suspension, the Emir promised to restore the Assembly and, to the surprise of many, he did. In 1981 the pressing need for domestic support in the face of regional threats, this time emanating from the Iranian revolution, encouraged the ruler to reactivate this popular institution. In 1979 Sheik Jabir opened talks with the former delegates, editors, and other political figures over proposed constitutional revisions, forming a committee to draft the revisions. Following the committee's work in August 1980, the Emir announced the return of parliamentary life, and in December he announced that elections would be held in February 1981.

Electoral Districts

During the elections for the Constituent Assembly, Kuwait was divided into ten electoral districts. This division remained

until 1976. In an attempt on the part of the Government to control the results of the elections, an Amiri Decree was issued in 1980 amending the electoral districts to twenty-five instead of ten.

It is well known that the elections themselves were relatively free and fair, nevertheless, redistricting new electoral laws, and more subtle government support for favored candidates slanted the results. In rewriting the rules and in monitoring the election campaigns, the Government reacted to the nationalist opposition of the past. So eager was it to prevent a nationalist revival that it encouraged the Islamist, or politically religious candidates. These candidates did well in the campaign, with five Islamist delegates forming the core of the Assembly opposition. Redistricting hurt both the progressive bloc, which took only three seats and the Shia whose representation fell from ten seats to four. It helped not only the Islamist but also the pro-government Bedouins, who took twenty-three seats.

However, the Fifth Assembly, like its predecessors, produced a vocal opposition. A dispute over constitutional revisions emerged, representing a more general dispute over legislative executive relations and power sharing. Other issues included the government position on the Iran-Iraq War, internal security, state corruption, press restrictions, Islam and politics. The religious opposition proved so determined that by the end of the

Fifth Assembly the Government began reconsidering its earlier support of the Islamists.

The Government and the National Assembly

The Government did not repeat its perceived mistake in the elections for the Sixth Assembly in 1985. This time, in order to block the Islamists, the government encouraged both more Bedouin and Nationalists candidates. The Nationalists are the natural opponents of the Islamists. It began allowing the Nationalists to gain more political space, participating in the public political rehabilitation of Al-Khatib.

The Nationalists did well in the elections. Al-Khatib won, along with three other nationalists. Two prominent Islamist deputies, Khaled Sultan and Eissa Shahin, were defeated. Yet, despite government efforts a core of Islamists remained, among them was Abdullah Al-Nafisi, a political scientist. Al-Nafisi was once an Arab Nationalist. He wrote a book in 1976 about the elections of 1976. Later Al-Nafisi adapted his progressive position to a leftist Islamist stance.

The result was two small opposition blocs: Islamists and Nationalists. Rather than neutralizing each other, the two blocs showed an unanticipated ability to coordinate oppositions. The new Assembly succeeded in backing several government bills, including some aimed at resolving the Suq al-Manakh stock market crash of 1982 that threatened to bankrupt thousands of Kuwaitis. More dangerously, the Assembly began attacking ministers,

including members of the ruling family. In 1985 its inquiries into corruption associated with the stock market prompted the resignation of Justice Minister Sheik Salman Du'aij Al-Sabah. The allegations accused him of using his position to arrange government compensation for the stock market losses of his young son, along with other charges of financial irregularity. The opposition then began questioning Oil Minister Sheik Ali Al-Khaleefa Al-Sabah over financial irregularities and oilfield security, bringing him to the verge of resignation.

Communications Minister Eissa Al-Mazidi, Finance Minister Jassem Al-Khurafi, and Education Minister Hassan Al-Ibrahim all came under attack. Finally, the Assembly members began actively calling for the resignation of the ministers of Interior and Oil, both from the ruling family. The Government decided the Assembly had gone too far. In July 1985 the Emir suspended the Assembly a second time. Both domestic and foreign factors played a role in this decision.

At home, the Assembly had criticized the Government's handling of the stock market crash. It had taken on the issue of corruption and had been reluctant to approve state bailouts for those involved in the crash, earning it the enmity of those it charged with corruption and those who would benefit from the government's proposed reforms. The growing economic crisis facing Kuwait exacerbated the situation. Oil prices, which fell to \$10 a barrel over the summer, the lowest price in years, left

everyone on edge. The Assembly had also begun to direct explicit attacks toward cabinet members, especially members of the ruling family. Finally, the dissolution decision followed a wave of political violence in 1985, including an attack on the Emir himself. The Emir pointed to the growing security concerns prompted by the Iran-Iraq War, the need for unity in the face of those concerns, and the inherently divisive nature of the Assembly. He noted the danger of the Assembly fanning secular divisions. The government, feeling regionally threatened, drew closer to its Gulf allies, especially Saudi Arabia, it came under increasing pressure to support the Saudi position that parliaments were a security threat. Although the Emir again left open the possibility of reinstating the Assembly, his commitment in 1986 was far more vague than it had been in 1976.

Even closed, the Assembly served as a powerful symbol for political opposition and as the focus for demands for political participation in the pro-democracy movement of 1989-1990 and again following the Iraqi invasion to the State of Kuwait. The Assembly always functioned with limited powers. It played no role in selecting the head of the state or the cabinet, although on one occasion it did bring down a cabinet. However, it did function as a forum for debate and as a lively source of criticism of the government on important topics ranging from the annual budget and oil policy to women's rights and the role of religion in politics. In introducing bills and debates and

questioning ministers, it placed issues on the agenda, forcing the Emir to address them.

Sustaining Institutions: The Bureaucracy

As the ruling family was consolidating its hold and as the National Assembly was waxing and waning, a third institution was developing—the Kuwaiti Bureaucracy. This bureaucracy, one of the largest per capita government machines in the world which barely existed before the oil era. It replaced a small palace administration with clerks and tax collectors, and a small number of religious administrators that handled what would eventually become government judicial and welfare functions. It also included a few interwar institutions established by the merchants and absorbed by the state, such as the Municipality and the Education Council. Because Kuwait was never formally a British colony and because its internal problems had never threatened regional security, it was never administered by the Colonial Office with Colonial troops but rather at a distance by the India Office and, after the dissolution of that office, by the Foreign Office. One consequence was that a large colonial administration never developed.

It took oil revenues for a real bureaucracy to emerge. The bureaucratic demands of the oil industry were relatively small because oil matters had been handled by foreign-owned companies. However, a small government bureaucracy did emerge as liaison to monitor the companies, to monitor some oil-related operations,

and eventually to take over the industry after nationalization. The real impetus for expanding the bureaucracy, however, came from the need to spend the vast revenues created by oil. After World War II Sheik Abdullah began spending on development projects and social services. Quickly, state machinery developed to handle these new functions. In the early 1950s the British tried to persuade Sheik Abdullah to hire British advisers to manage this bureaucracy. Abdullah's reluctance coupled with the resistance of key Sheiks, kept the British presence from overwhelming the new state. The bureaucracy was built, however inadvertently, not by the British but by the Emir, to centralize his own power, and by the feuding Sheiks: Sheik Abdullah Al-Mubarak, who developed the internal and external security system, and Sheik Fahad Al-Salem, who oversaw development spending.

With independence the bureaucracy was reorganized. Following the 1962 constitution new ministries were formed from the old departments. Rapid growth continued as Kuwaitis were hired in large numbers as a way of distributing the oil revenues nationally, and as expatriates were hired in still larger numbers to carry out the vast technical functions that the Kuwaitis, small in number and then less highly educated, could not yet assume. The new revenues following the price increase in the 1970s induced another spurt of growth. Unchecked, this bureaucracy continued to grow, surviving rulers and assemblies, carrying out the day-to-day state functions.

At the peak of the bureaucracy, beneath the Emir, was the Cabinet dominated by Sheiks. In general, cabinet ministers have been young whereas the Al-Sabah ministers were even much younger. Most of the ministers were highly educated: of the seventy-five ministers who served since 1962 nearly half of them held college degrees and several had advanced degrees. Most of those ministers holding college degrees graduated from the U.S. colleges and universities. Most of them came to the position from government, and to a lesser extent, the business community. Many ministers subsequently returned to business. The ministers were overwhelmingly Sunni; only three were Shia, and only one had tribal origins.

The Cabinet oversees the vast bureaucracy. The most important ministries and state institutions beneath the cabinet are those concerned with money. The institutions associated with the raising of revenues include not only the Oil Ministry and the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation but, of increasing importance, the Finance Ministry and the investment institutions. Because of Kuwait's great wealth, the largest state institutions are devoted to spending rather than raising money, especially the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Social Affairs. In some sense, the entire bureaucracy is devoted to distributing money, as state employment is guaranteed to all Kuwaitis.

The Government has made a significant effort to Kuwaitize the bureaucracy. By 1989 the Government staff of 144,286

included 64,203 Kuwaitis according to a Civil Service Commission study. Government efforts to increase Kuwaiti representation in management jobs, including limiting some posts to Kuwaitis and favoring Kuwaiti graduates had succeeded to the point where Kuwaitis held 66% of all the senior staff positions. As Kuwaitis constituted only 28% of the population, they were over-represented in the bureaucracy.

The bureaucracy was large but not always effective, at least in terms of implementing the ruler's plans. To understand why, it is necessary to reexamine the relationship between the oil economy and the State. The oil economy is about as close as one comes in the real world to what economists and political scientists call a rentier economy. A rentier economy is an ideal type, a model that comprises a cluster of three attributes, all of which find their fullest real-world expression in oil producing states. For a state to possess a rentier economy, the source of income, or rent, must be externally generated and involve little contact with the local economy, it must go directly to the state, and it must be very large.

In a rentier economy the revenues come from abroad, rather than from inside the economy—for example, from a foreign government or company. By this criterion the United States was never a rentier economy because its oil revenues came from within the country. Oil revenues in Kuwait, however, historically have come from foreign oil companies. The industry itself creates few

local upstream and downstream linkages. It normally employs few local workers, indeed, few workers at all, as it is a very capital-intensive industry. It is almost an economic enclave.

In a rentier economy revenues go directly to the state. A rentier economy is distinguished from most economies highly dependent on foreign trade because the income from foreign trade goes to the private owners of the commodity-producing properties and not directly to the state. This was the case in Kuwait before oil: the Sheiks collected taxes on the pearling and trading boats owned by the merchants. Oil revenues, however go directly to the state. In Kuwait, the state rather than private citizens or companies owns the land or at least subsoil rights. The fact that oil revenues go directly to the state is important because it means that money is centralized in the state. Individuals can become rich only through their relationship to the state or the state elite.

Finally, in a rentier economy rents are large. Unless rents are the only important revenues in the economy, they will not set the tone of the economy. Yemen and Egypt both have some oil, and because of that those economies exhibit rentier elements, but they are not rentier economies. In contrast, Kuwait is highly dependent on oil. For much of the postwar period the direct sale of oil accounted for over 90% of the state revenues.

A rentier economy effects in three ways the kind of state that emerges. First, a state built on a rentier economy, a

rentier state, has different functions. One of the most important functions is the distribution of revenues. This creates a large bureaucracy with new classes of citizens. As some of the strongest groups, their connection to the state allows the state to both monitor and control them more easily than it could control groups in the private sector. The state can thus rely on a degree of both affection and fear. However, that reliability is not complete. Once created by the state, these new classes can become privatized; they develop their own interests and agendas distinct from those of the rulers. They can turn on the ruler whom they may come to see as a dangerous force, one that can take away rights and privileges. More subtly they can use the State apparatus to sabotage the leaders' plans using their bureaucratic positions to further their own private interests.

A third consequence of a rentier economy is that these rentier states are much more dependent on the outside world than are other states. Oil had a dislocating effect on Kuwait's external economic relations, bringing new dependencies: on foreign markets and, later, on foreign labor and commodities. This dependence was not completely new; Kuwait was never an economically autonomous entity, and oil only deepened a pattern already apparent early in the twentieth century. Even before oil, Kuwait's economy depended on the trading patterns of others: on the movements of the Bedouins and caravans from place to place,

on the vagaries of Indian and African markets, and on the pearl-purchasing patterns of wealthy Europeans. That insecurity, however, is seriously heightened by oil. The new linkages created by oil. The new linkages created by oil left Kuwait deeply dependent on uncertain foreign sources for investment income, consumer goods, food, arms, and labor. Now, we will look at the role of women in this society.

WOMEN IN KUWAIT

Both custom and law enforce a division of labor between the sexes. The family remains the center of Kuwaiti social life, and a woman's place in the family is intimately tied up with her role as wife and mother. Kuwaiti women marry and stay married, remarrying if they have to. In 1985 only 7% of women over twenty-four had never married. By the age of forty the percentage of Kuwaitis of either sex who have never married dropped by 0.6 percent. Even unmarried women continue to live in families. According to the 1985 census only 225 Kuwaiti women live in single-member households. The importance of family life and the customary divisions of labor with the family combine to create different roles for women and men.

Despite the differences in roles between sexes, the Government has always supported a degree of equality between men and women. Women's access to state services such as housing, health care, and education is excellent, with education serving as a good example. Until early in this century girls' format

education, like boys', consisted essentially of Quranic schools. Thanks to the merchants' educational initiative, the first secondary school opened in 1951. Education has since become compulsory for both sexes to age fourteen.

Access to higher education for women has also improved, although more slowly. In 1960 the first group of Kuwaiti women sent to Cairo University on state scholarships graduated. When Kuwait University opened in 1966, women soon came to constitute a majority. As women gained access to education, their participation in the labor force became problematic.

Women have always worked, carrying out the bulk of the activities associated with childcare, food processing, and the household economy. Their lives, however, have been radically affected by the economic, social, and political changes of the last few decades. Oil has affected the household economy by raising incomes, giving many Kuwaiti households the economic ability to hire nannies and servants to perform many of the tasks historically carried out by the Kuwaiti women. This gave women more freedom, and allowed them to work outside the home.

Women in Kuwait enjoy a relatively higher independence than most women in Arabia and even in most Arab countries. The status of women is in many ways similar to that of women in the Western Hemisphere with just one exception, they do not have the right to vote. With the increase of independence, many women have assumed high positions in the bureaucracy of the State. This has created

some friction due to the fact that women can participate in government, but cannot vote. Kuwaiti women do not mind divisions between the sexes that are justified by social or religious norms. However, they do oppose the divisions between sexes that are not logically justified.

CONCLUSION

Democracy is the ideological choice made and practiced by the Kuwaiti government and people. All indications show that both the government and the people want to continue that tradition.

Unlike many countries that arrive at democracy through revolution or conflict of bloody civil wars, Kuwait made its democratic transition in a peaceful way. Therefore, the Kuwaiti government and its people avoided political and social conflict. The history of democracy is not perfect since the parliament on occasion has been dissolved and then reinstated, but since the Kuwaiti people know the meaning of democracy they will make every effort to preserve it in their homeland that has been blessed by God.

SUGGESTIONS

The woman should be given her natural right to take part in the general elections.

The military should not be denied their right to vote.

Reestablishing five electoral areas with ten representatives in each area.

Limiting the number of ministers taking part in the sessions of the National Assembly to be no more than seventeen.

The National Assembly should have the right to disqualify the Government in case it fails to perform its duties and responsibilities properly.

The Crown Prince should not be appointed as Prime Minister.

Members of the National Assembly do not have the right to be elected for more than two consecutive terms.

Members of the National Assembly should not be engaged in any form with their own businesses, directly or indirectly.

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GLOSSARY

KUT	An Arabic word meaning a fort or a castle. A town in Iraq now bears the name Kut.
Kuwait	A diminutive of the word Kut.
diwaniyyah	A separated hall from the house. This diwaniyyah serves as a place where male visitors are received and entertained. Weekly meetings are regularly held in such places.
connection	This is an expression used by people living in Kuwait to mean people who can help achieve a particular objective.
Majlis	Majlis means assembly. People who were part of the National Movement in 1938 were called al-Majlis.
Al-Sabah	It is the royal family of Kuwait.
Bani Utub	A tribe that used to settle in Najd, Saudi Arabia.
Battle of Jahra	This battle took place in a village in Kuwait called Jahra. The Ikwan, originally settling in Arabia, attempted to conquer Kuwait.
Qurain	An old name for Kuwait.
Kazmah	An old name for Kuwait.
Revenues	It is used here to mean the money received from oil sales.
Emir, Amir	The names with which the ruler of Kuwait is referred. They are Arabic synonyms for prince. The power of the Amir is similar to that of the king's power he used to enjoy in the past.

APPENDIX 1

<u>RULER</u>	<u>REIGN</u>
1. Sabah I	1752-1756
2. Abdullah I	1756-1814
3. Jabir I	1814-1859
4. Sabah II	1859-1866
5. Abdullah II	1866-1892
6. Mohamed	1892-1896
7. Mubarak	1896-1915
8. Jabir II	1915-1917
9. Salem	1917-1921
10. Ahmad	1921-1950
11. Abdullah III	1950-1965
12. Sabah III	1965-1977
13. Jabir III	1977-????

APPENDIX 2

<u>Assembly</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
1. First	Abdul-Aziz Hamad Al-Saghir 2 January 1962 - 16 February 1965
2. First	Saud al-Abdul-Razzak 2 March 1965 - 3 January 1967
3. Second	Ahmad Zaid al-Sarhan 7 February 1967 - 30 December 1970
4. Third	Ahmed Saleh al-Ghunaim 11 February 1971 - 9 February 1975
5. Fourth	Ahmed Saleh al-Ghnaim 11 February 1975 - 29 August 1976
6. Fifth	Mohamed Youssef al-Adassany 9 March 1981 - 3 March 1985
7. Sixth	Ahmed Abdul-Aziz al-Sadoun 9 March 1985 - 3 July 1986
8. Seventh	Ahmed Abdul-Aziz al-Sadoun 20 October 1992 - 5 October 1996
9. Eighth	Ahmed Abdul-Aziz al-Sadoun 7 October 1996 - present

APPENDIX 3

CHRONOLOGY

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>OCCASSION</u>
1. 1756	Sheik Sabah was elected ruler of Kuwait.
2. 1896	Sheik Mubarak comes to power
3. 1895	Sheik Mubarak signs the first treaty with Britain
4. 1920	The Battle of Jahra
5. 1938	Majlis Movement
6. 1950	Sheik Abdullah comes to power
7. 1961	Kuwait becomes an independent state
8. 1962	Promulgating the Kuwaiti Constitution
9. 1963	The First National Assembly Elections
10. 1976	National Assembly suspended
11. 1981	National Assembly suspension lifted
12. 1986	National Assembly suspended
13. 1990	Iraq invades Kuwait
14. 1991	Liberation of Kuwait
15. 1992	Democratic life resumed

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