

## **Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations: Kuwait**

### **Kuwaiti Arabs in Kuwait**

#### **Summary of Key Points**

- Kuwaiti Arabs comprise 45 percent (approximately 950,000) of the population in Kuwait. “Arab” is a name originally given to the nomadic inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. It is now largely a cultural/linguistic designation, embracing various national, regional, and religious groups in several different countries.
- Kuwaiti Arabs tend to be dark-haired with brown eyes, and olive or dark skin. However, no single set of racial or physical characteristics defines Kuwaiti Arabs. Due to centuries of migration and contact with other groups, Kuwaitis can exhibit Persian, Turkish, Indian, African, and South Asian features.
- Kuwaiti Arabs are predominantly Muslim. They are divided between Sunni (approximately 70 percent) and Shia (approximately 30 percent). The Sunni-Shia division has caused fewer problems in Kuwait than in neighboring states. For the most part, it has not undermined a sense of shared Kuwaiti Arab identity.
- Kuwait is essentially a city-state. The majority of people live in Kuwait City, which has grown from a small sea-town into a modern, cosmopolitan city. There are smaller communities inland and to the south along the Gulf coast.
- Kuwaiti Arabs trace their lineage to the Bani Utub tribe, which settled Kuwait in 1716. The journey to Kuwait established a strong sense of community and gave Kuwaitis the origins of a national identity.
- Although Kuwaiti identity remains influenced by their nomadic heritage, Kuwaitis have been essentially settled for nearly 300 years. A center for maritime and desert trade, Kuwait was linked to the Arabian Peninsula, the Gulf, and India.
- Kuwaiti Arabs speak Arabic. Most Kuwaitis also speak English. The Arabic language embodies an entire culture that links Kuwaiti and Islamic identity.
- Kuwait is not a colonial society created in the wake of European conquest. Its long history of cultural and political autonomy has produced a distinct national identity. However, divisions cut across Kuwaiti society, including those along class, tribal, religious, and gender lines.

## FOUO

- Since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century, members of the Al Sabah family have ruled Kuwait. Until the oil boom of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, Kuwait's merchant elite wielded substantial political power and influence. Although the ruling family has assumed the identity of royalty, the consultative nature of politics in pre-oil Kuwait continues to inform Kuwaiti perceptions of authority and power.
- Kuwaiti history and identity can be divided into pre-oil and post-oil periods. Since the discovery of oil in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, Kuwait has experienced a radical but relatively smooth transition from poverty to prosperity. The visible and material effects of the oil boom on Kuwait have included: the rapid improvement of living standards, massive infrastructure development, generous welfare-state provisions, a huge influx of immigrant labor (skilled and unskilled), and the adoption of a Western, consumer-oriented lifestyle.
- Since late 1950s, Arab and Asian foreign workers have outnumbered Kuwaitis. Economically dependent on foreign labor, Kuwait has constructed a complex set of policies for the control and exclusion of migrants. The native Kuwaiti has almost complete authority over the foreign worker. Kuwaitis contrast their affluence, leisure, and power to foreign workers' economic need, labor, and dependence.
- Kuwaiti citizenship—which is limited to Kuwaiti Arabs meeting certain conditions, and is strictly regulated—implies belonging to an elite society and enjoying privileges not accorded to foreign workers. As a result, Kuwait is a society strictly stratified in terms of ethnicity and class.
- The 1990 Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait had profound consequences for Kuwait. Nearly 60 percent of the population fled. Following the war, the government restricted the immigration of nationals of those countries that collaborated with or supported Iraq—such as the Palestinians and Jordanians—while giving preference to the nationals of those states that supported Kuwait.
- Kuwaitis had long unified against external danger, and the Iraqi invasion and occupation strengthened Kuwaiti national identity. Similarly, the Battle of Jahrah in 1920 established Kuwait's independence from Saudi Arabia and reinforced the city-state's national identity.
- Kuwaitis tend to be highly educated, have traveled extensively abroad, and have a Western-oriented lifestyle. At the same time, Kuwaiti society and culture remains conservative, valuing local tribal and Islamic traditions.
- Concerns over cultural survival have grown with the increasingly cultural diversity of the population. In their attempts to shield themselves from alien influence and protect their national privileges, Kuwaitis have maintained and refined those characteristics that serve as marks of national identity.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## **Ethnic Group**

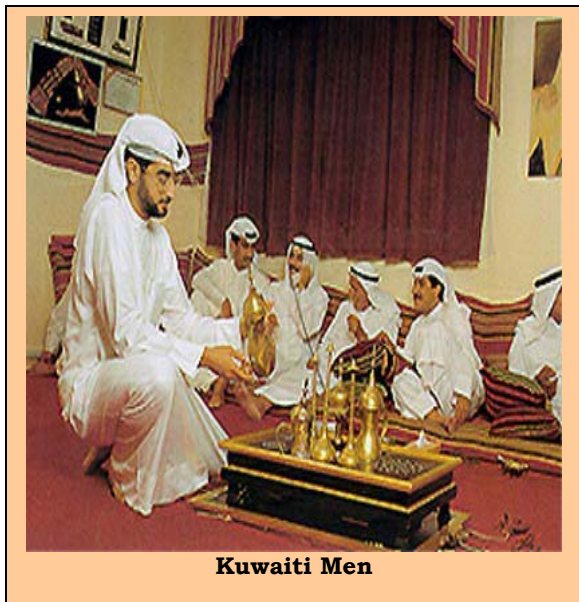
Kuwaiti Arabs comprise 45 percent (approximately 950,000) of the population in Kuwait. "Arab" is a name originally given to the nomadic inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. It is now largely a cultural/linguistic designation, embracing various national, regional, and religious groups in several different countries.

### *Physical Description*

Kuwaiti Arabs tend to be dark-haired with brown eyes, and olive or dark skin. However, no single set of racial or physical characteristics defines Kuwaiti Arabs. Because of centuries of migration and contact with other groups, Kuwaitis can exhibit Persian, Turkish, Indian, African, and South Asian features.

## Cultural History

Unlike many of its neighbors, Kuwait was not established by foreign powers in the wake of World War I. It has a long history of cultural and political autonomy. This history deeply influences current Kuwaiti identity.



**Kuwaiti Men**

### *The Settlement of Kuwait*

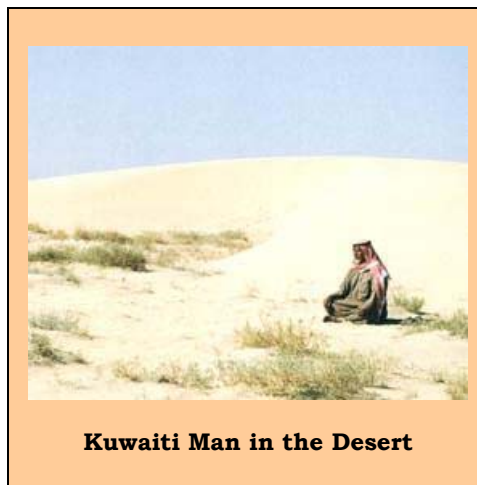
In the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, a protracted drought caused several families of the Adnani tribe of the Anaza to leave their home territory of Najd in northern Arabia for the coastal areas along the Gulf. After travelling a roundabout route through Qatar, they settled in a tiny fishing village known as Qorain in 1716, later named Kuwait. Kuwait, a diminutive of the Arabic word *ku*, means small castle or fort.

The clans that migrated to Kuwait came to be known collectively as the Bani Utub. The name *Utub* comes from the Arabic word for wander (*atab*). The journey to Kuwait established a strong sense of community and identity among the migrating clans. By the time they arrived in

Kuwait, these families thought of themselves as members of a new tribe. The migration, in other words, gave Kuwaitis the origins of a national identity in a unifying founding story. It also allowed the Bani Utub to develop new skills, such as boatbuilding and sailing.

When they arrived in Kuwait, the Bani Utub found a small settlement of the Bani Khalid tribe. The Bani Khalid was one of the largest and most powerful of the tribes that ruled eastern Arabia from the 17<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Its territory ran from Kuwait in the north to Al Hasa in the south, and was bordered by Najd to the west.

The Bani Utub and the Bani Khalid maintained good relations, and stability ensured by the Bani Khalid contributed to Kuwait's rapid rise as a trading town. Kuwait has one of the best natural harbors in the Gulf. It also benefited from the caravan trade to Aleppo and Baghdad, the Shatt al-Arab trade, and the smuggling trade into the Ottoman territories (which Basra's high tariffs encouraged). Trade included horses, spices, coffee, wood, dates, and pearls (Kuwait was located within an easy sail of the pearl banks that lay along the Gulf coast). The Bani Utub quickly gave up their pastoral way of life and became fisherman, sailors, and traders.



**Kuwaiti Man in the Desert**

## FOUO

As the nomads settled and abandoned grazing for ship-building and trade, they developed new political, economic, and social arrangements. Tribal traditions were retained, but they were placed within a more complex occupational and social hierarchy. Trade—the most profitable and prestigious activity—became tightly and hierarchically organized by the original Bani Utub families, who formed the elite stratum of society.

By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century, the al-Sabah family had become the leading political family in Kuwait. Initially, they shared power in a semi-formal division of labor with two other families: the al-Khalifah and the al-Jalahimah. The al-Khalifa family took responsibility for trading and commerce; the al-Jahalma was in charge of maritime affairs, including the important ship-building and pearling industries. In the 1760s, however, the al-Khalifa left for Qatar and then Bahrain (where they continue to rule). Soon after, most of the al-Jalahimah left as well. At the time, such departures were a common and accepted way of settling political or commercial disputes in the Gulf.

Originally, al-Sabah rule was based more on political and diplomatic skill than on military skill or hereditary claims. Never absolute rulers, the al-Sabah governed in consultation with the other elite Bani Utub families, who had become leading merchants. This sense of shared communal responsibility and privilege among a few close-knit families remains a distinctive feature of Kuwaiti society and culture.

Kuwaitis maintained good relations with the nomadic tribes, such as the Ajman, who lived in the desert near Kuwait. The nomadic tribes that inhabited the areas around Kuwait earned their livelihood from herding animals, trade, raiding, and collecting tribute. Kuwait partly depended on the nomads for goods, trade, and contact with other regions. At the same time, close contact with the world beyond the Arabian Peninsula gave Kuwaiti society a more cosmopolitan flavor.

### *Kuwait in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Kuwait grew rapidly into a center for maritime and desert trade. The trade network was dense and extensive, and Kuwaitis were known throughout the Gulf for their merchant fleet. Overall, trade and commerce linked Kuwait to the Arabian Peninsula, the Gulf, and India.

Despite the expansive trade, Kuwait's settled population grew slowly during this period. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Kuwait's population was approximately 35,000. The largest percentage of the population were Arab, including Kuwaitis (i.e. the original settlers plus the local tribes), and tribes from the lower Gulf and southern Iraq. There were also approximately 4,000 assimilated slaves and ex-slaves of African origin. The most numerous non-Arab group consisted of Persians. With the exception of a tiny Jewish population from the Basra area, Kuwait was uniformly Muslim. The Kuwaitis and most of the Arabs were Sunni; the Persians were Shia.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, Kuwait maintained its autonomy from its Arabian and Ottoman neighbors through careful diplomacy and manipulation of the local balance of

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## FOUO

power. Its al-Sabah leaders skillfully navigated the maze of alliances between rival tribes and imperial powers. Kuwait played only a peripheral role in the inter-tribal disputes recurring in Najd and southern Iraq, acting only to defend itself against threats from factions of the Muntafiq, Dhafir, and Bani Hajir tribes.

Despite its autonomy, Kuwait was officially part of the Ottoman Empire, linked administratively and economically through Basra in southern Iraq. Its boats, for example, flew the Ottoman flag. The al-Sabah family's date plantations in southern Iraq strengthened the perception of a Kuwaiti tie to the Ottoman Empire, as did Kuwaiti participation in Ottoman political and military affairs. However, Ottoman administrators largely neglected the city-state, allowing it to act more or less independently.

Beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, however, the Ottomans sought to increase their control over Kuwait (and the rest of the region). In 1871, Midhat Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Baghdad, launched a maritime expedition down the Arabian coast to reassert Ottoman authority. Sheikh Abdullah II of Kuwait lent his support to this effort. In recognition of his help, Istanbul gave him the title of sub-governor, which carried with it the implication that his sheikhdom fell under Ottoman jurisdiction. In 1875, the Ottomans established a new administrative structure for southern Iraq, and placed Kuwait in the Basra vilayet. However, Ottoman administration was not introduced into Kuwait. There was never an Ottoman garrison in town, and Kuwaiti subjects paid no Ottoman taxes and were not conscripted into the Ottoman army. Overall, there was little change in the city-state's day-to-day affairs, and Kuwaitis lived comfortably and autonomously under Ottoman rule.



**Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah**

In May 1896, Mubarak al-Sabah (the Great), the founder of modern Kuwait, murdered his two brothers and proclaimed himself ruler of Kuwait. Mubarak's accession is the only violent transfer of power in Kuwait's history. It met with little opposition in Kuwait, but did prompt concern among Kuwait's neighbors, especially the Ottomans and their Arabian allies, the al-Rashid tribe. Their opposition promoted Mubarak to strengthen his ties with the al-Rashid's opponents, the Saudi Wahhabi forces, who were given refuge by Mubarak after they were defeated by the al-Rashid in 1892. As a result, Ibn Saud, who would later unify Saudi Arabia under his leadership, spent some of his youth in Kuwait.

Concerned about growing Ottoman hostility to his rule, Mubarak approached the British for protection. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Britain had gained a position in the Gulf through its treaties with the various sheikhdoms along the coast. British interest in the region stemmed from their control over India. Kuwait formed a natural highway to the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. In 1899, Kuwait and Britain signed a secret agreement that

## FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003

## FOUO

promised Kuwait British support in exchange for British control of Kuwait's foreign policy. Mubarak also pledged not to cede, sell, or lease any of his territory without British permission. This treaty established a relationship that would last beyond Kuwait's formal independence in 1961. Mubarak initiated the relationship with Britain and the British did not interfere in Kuwait's internal affairs. As a result, Kuwaitis tend to view their association with Britain positively and don't appear to harbor the anti-colonialist sentiments prevalent throughout the Middle East.

The 1899 agreement with Britain secured Kuwaiti independence from regional powers. It also enhanced Mubarak's internal political position in that he gained British support for his heirs and successors. This amounted to a subtle amendment to the tribal code, where al-Sabah leaders were selected, at least theoretically, on merit. Mubarak's own line became legitimated by his British sponsors. Mubarak also increasingly centralized power in his hands. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Kuwait's al-Sabah Sheikh had been primarily a first-among-equals tribal leader, responsive to and in part selected by the other leading families. Mubarak's centralization of power marked an important change, one that would continue in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as the al-Sabah transitioned from ruling family into royal family.

The agreement with Britain also gave Mubarak greater freedom of action in the region. Mubarak solidified his alliance with the Saudis, and sent expeditions against the al-Rashid forces. A defeat in 1901, however, effectively ended Mubarak's dream of becoming the undisputed Arabian leader. In fact, Mubarak survived this adventure only because of the British military presence around Kuwait. In 1902, Ibn Saud's forces recaptured Riyadh, and from then on Saudi power in Arabia grew steadily.

### *Kuwait in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

In the decade following the establishment of the Anglo-Kuwaiti alliance—which remained secret until 1912—Kuwait lived a delicate triple existence as a nominal Ottoman subject, a British-protected state, and an independent, autonomous actor. During this period, Kuwait became an internationally recognized, separate entity, one step removed from independent statehood. This status contributed to the formation of Kuwaiti national identity.

Through 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, much of the sense of community among Kuwaitis derived from the need to maintain their autonomy against external dangers, especially those posed by neighboring Arabian tribes. In the spring of 1920, Kuwait's survival was threatened by Saudi-Wahhabi forces. In order to guard against Saudi attacks, Kuwaitis built a great wall—the gates of which are preserved—around the town. This four-month project involved the labor of Kuwait's entire adult male population. The wall and the collective effort that went into it occupy a central place in Kuwaiti memory and remains a symbol of a determined and united Kuwaiti community. It also produced a nucleus of nationally aware citizens, encompassing those who had taken part, as well as their descendants.

In October 1920, Saudi forces attacked Kuwaitis at Jahrah, a desert village not far from Kuwait town. The Kuwaiti army spent the night under siege until a relief force drove the Saudis to withdraw. British forces finally settled the matter in Kuwait's favor, and the Battle

FOUO

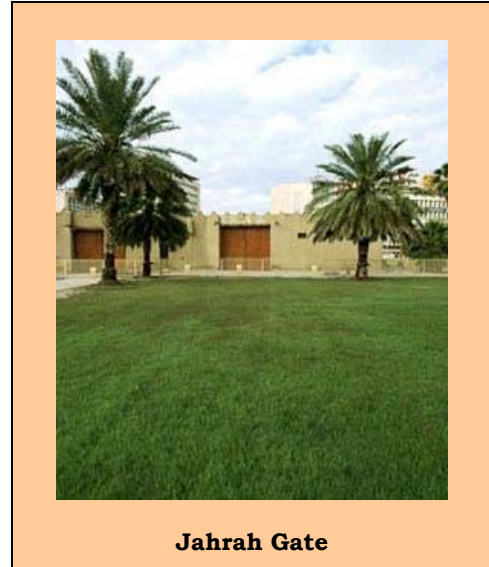
Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## FOUO

of Jahrah was declared a Kuwaiti victory. Unable to take Kuwait by force, Ibn Saud established and enforced a tight economic blockade of Kuwait, which lasted from 1923 to 1937. The battle of Jahrah established Kuwait's independence from Saudi Arabia and reinforced the city-state's national identity. Prior to the 1990 Iraqi invasion, 1920 was the most significant year in Kuwait's history.

Although united against external enemies, Kuwait remained a highly stratified society. Among the city-dwellers, asymmetric power relations separated the mainly Sunni merchant elite and the predominantly Shia laborers. Likewise, the hierarchal structure of the tribal world clearly distinguished the noble, camel-breeding tribes from the sheep-breeding ones. Yet these groups all lived in economic symbiosis based on a complementary division of labor: Shia served as crew for the predominantly Sunni merchants and captains; tribesmen from lesser tribes provided the townspeople with agricultural and fishing products, but they also worked as shepherds for noble tribes and as pearl divers for the merchants. Noble tribes and the merchants exchanged food and clothing for tobacco, coffee, weapons, and other manufactured goods.



Between its founding in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century and the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, Kuwaiti society remained virtually unchanged. It was characterized by family and tribal cohesion, a social and class hierarchy, and a general understanding of individual and collective rights and duties in the community.

### *Kuwait during the Oil Boom*

Because of World War II, the first shipment of oil did not leave Kuwait until 1946. To work in the oil industry and to carry out the modernization projects financed by the new oil revenues, the Kuwaitis needed an expertise that the sailors, merchants, and Bedouins of the region could not provide. Accordingly, Kuwait opened its doors to foreign workers. Initially, Indians and Persians staffed the oil sector and Arabs staffed the social sector, working as teachers, doctors, etc. (Initially, few Arabs from outside the peninsula were eager to migrate to Kuwait, despite the prospect of high wages. The British-owned Kuwait Oil Company therefore turned to India and Pakistan for many of its first oil workers.)

In the 1950s, Kuwait's population more than doubled; by 1957 non-Kuwaitis comprised nearly 45 percent of the population. Iranians and Iraqis formed the two largest groups, followed by Palestinians (mostly refugees from the 1948 Arab-Israeli War) and Jordanians. These migrant workers were of crucial significance to Kuwait's development in this period. They helped create its new infrastructure and staffed and ran its institutions.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003



## FOUO

In June 1961, Kuwait and Britain signed an agreement giving Kuwait formal independence. During the 1960s, the influx of migrant workers from the Middle East region increased substantially. Kuwait's rapid growth made it attractive to neighboring Arab populations. Kuwait's oil revenues had reached a level that enabled the government to create a generous welfare system for citizens, and, to a lesser extent, foreign workers. As the foreign community grew, however, the government enacted stricter citizenship and migration laws.

In 1948, the "originally Kuwaiti" members of the population were defined as the ruling family, permanent residents since 1899, children of Kuwaiti men, and children of Arab or Muslim fathers born in Kuwait. Arabic speakers who had lived and worked in Kuwait for 10 years were eligible for naturalization. According to the Nationality Law of 1959, a true Kuwaiti was descended from the men who had settled Kuwait before and up to 1920. Citizenship, therefore, belonged only to the children of these men. Naturalization was possible, but it has become more restricted over the years. Kuwaiti women, like naturalized citizens, are not quite as Kuwaiti as the original male citizens. This distinction is manifest in several ways: women do not have political rights, and Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaiti men lose some of their social rights and privileges.

*Bidun jinsiyyah* (stateless people) occupy a third level of citizenship. They consist primarily of nomads who did not register with the authorities when the 1959 Nationality Law came into effect. The *bidun* also include Iraqis, Syrians, and Jordanians who destroyed their identification papers in order to obtain some of the benefits—like free health care and education—of the Kuwaiti *bidun*. Until 1989, 200,000 *bidun* were counted as Kuwaiti in the national census. The national army and police force was composed largely of *bidun*.

In the 1950s, Kuwait permitted relatively free migration, although the government maintained close control over entry, residence, departure, and employment. In 1965, the government assumed even tighter control over entry, exit, and conditions of employment. A 1966 amendment to the original 1959 Nationality Law required at least 20 years of residency, fluency in Arabic, and adherence to Islam. In addition, the law limited the annual number of naturalized persons to 50. Increasingly, state benefits and services were available exclusively to Kuwaitis. So too were political rights. Until 1994, naturalized citizens could not vote or run for office until 30 years after naturalization. Since 1994, this restriction has been modified. Naturalized citizens can vote 20 years after naturalization, and their sons can vote and run for office without waiting. Construction of new residential areas segregated Kuwaitis and foreign workers. These exclusionary policies reinforced Kuwaitis' sense of identity.

As the presence of Palestinians, Iraqis, Egyptians, and other Arabs grew during the 1960s, Kuwait was drawn into wider Arab political and social issues. Kuwait increasingly became a Middle Eastern state, turning its back on its Indian Ocean past. Arab migrants brought with them their political ideologies, such as Arab nationalism, many of which potentially threatened Kuwait's hereditary emirate and conservative culture. Since Arab migrants were employed in key areas (education, business, state bureaucracy), these political ideas had the potential to spread rapidly. As a result, during the second half of the 1960s the Kuwaiti

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## FOUO

government became increasingly uneasy about the presence of Arab migrant workers. It responded by using social policies and nationality laws to create a rift between expatriate Arabs and Kuwaitis. In general, the government encouraged a distinct Kuwaiti identity and discouraged Arab nationalism by separating Kuwaitis from expatriate Arabs. It also began turning to Asian workers as a more politically reliable alternative labor source.

As Kuwait's oil revenues increased substantially in the 1970s, the country continued to be a magnet for workers from the Middle East and South Asia. Kuwait opened its doors to new migrants, including a second wave of Palestinian refugees following the 1967 war, and Lebanese fleeing the civil war in their country. However, because of turbulent Middle Eastern politics, the government felt the need to restrict Arab labor immigration. In its place, the regime increasingly relied on migrant workers from Asia: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Arab and Asians fulfilled different functions in Kuwaiti society and performed different jobs. Three over-arching categorical dichotomies—Kuwaiti–non-Kuwaiti; Arab–non-Arab; and Muslim–non-Muslim—developed, as did a clear hierarchy based on ethnicity, religion, and gender. Muslims, Arabs, and men were privileged over non-Muslims, Asians, and women. Thus, the domestic sector—the lowest rung on the occupational and social ladder—consisted almost entirely of non-Muslim, Asian women. Overall, ethnicity and the type of work performed classified individuals and groups in clearly defined categories.

Between 1975 and 1985, Kuwait's foreign population increased 256 percent, while the native Kuwaiti population increased by 194 percent (through the naturalization of nomadic tribesmen and a high birthrate). By 1988, Kuwait had a population of more than 2 million, compared to slightly more than 200,000 in 1957, the last year Kuwaitis were a majority in their own country.

Due to the small size of its native population, Kuwait did not have the state institutions necessary to administer and control the substantial foreign community. The state solved this problem through the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, which delegated to citizens the daily administration of immigrants. In most cases, the granting of entrance visas and residency permits depends on the granting of a work contract by a Kuwaiti employer. This system also serves to maintain the stability of the labor market. Once in Kuwait, laborers are not free to move from one job to another or to offer their services to the highest-paying employer. By controlling labor movement within the country and by threatening deportation, the native Kuwaiti has considerable authority over the foreign worker. The system segments the population into Kuwaitis, who have power, and non-Kuwaitis, who don't.

From the 1950s through the 1980s, the flow of migrant workers to Kuwait was continuous. Foreign workers contributed significantly to the building and development of modern



FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

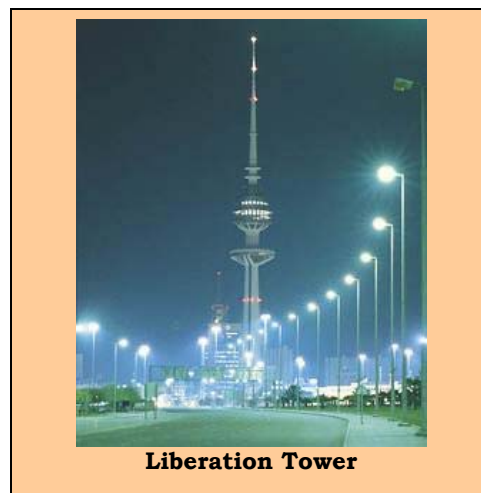
-10-

Kuwait. The migratory flux itself constituted a constant feature of social and cultural life. Periodically, the government decided to promote greater stability and continuity in the labor market. It therefore enacted measures to reduce turnover, such as longer work requirements, and restricted the entry of dependents. During periods of regional tension, security concerns assumed prominence in Kuwait's migration policies. In the 1980s, because of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and Iran-Iraq War, the government cracked down on illegal residents and increased surveillance of legal ones. Despite these measures, concern over population imbalance and its consequences for Kuwaiti culture remained constant prior to the 1990 Iraqi invasion.

*The Iraqi Invasion and Occupation of Kuwait and Its Aftermath*

The 1990 Iraqi invasion and occupation fundamentally transformed Kuwaiti society and culture. In the course of the Iraqi occupation, nearly 60 percent of the Kuwaiti population (approximately 1.3 million people) fled, including roughly half (125,000) of the Palestinian and Jordanian populations. (A second wave of Jordanian and Palestinian emigration occurred in April and May 1991, in response to Kuwaiti reactions toward perceived Iraqi collaborators.) Members of the ruling family settled in Saudi Arabia, organizing a government in exile.

Kuwaitis had long unified against external danger, and the Iraqi invasion and occupation strengthened Kuwaiti national identity. For those who remained in Kuwait (some 200,000-300,000 people), the common experience of brutal Iraqi occupation erased ethnic, religious, and class divisions. The invading Iraqis did not distinguish between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis or Sunni and Shia Kuwaitis.



**Liberation Tower**

Kuwaitis organized a resistance movement around a pre-existing system of cooperatives to provide food, security, and essential services. These cooperatives, which dated back to the 1960s, were organized around neighborhoods and run by elected boards. Each served a specific residential area, supplying basic commodities at subsidized prices and dealing with local community issues. Iraq moved quickly to eliminate this opposition, executing those belonging or suspected of belonging to the resistance. As a result of its brutality, the Iraqi occupation created an important psychological division between those who had stayed in Kuwait and those who had fled, including the royal family.

February 16, 1991 is a national holiday, commemorating the 1991 restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty. The Gulf War also marked a turning point in Kuwaiti politics. It changed the Kuwaiti attitude toward the state and the individual. Specifically, the war increased the population's desire for democratic reform, and led to the resumption of the parliamentary process. However, the government still determined the parameters of political debate and action, as well as the range of individual liberties.

## FOUO

Most significantly, the population dislocations caused by the Iraqi invasion and occupation had far-reaching consequences. They accomplished what decades of tinkering with migration policies had not: they radically reduced the size of Kuwait's migrant population and changed the country's overall ethnic composition. After the war, the government made it official policy to diversify the foreign population, and to weigh nationality and ethnicity when admitting immigrant workers. Kuwaitis believed that many Arab workers were unreliable and that many had welcomed the Iraqi invasion. Kuwait's determination to control immigration remained salient even as Kuwaitis faced the enormous task of reconstruction.

Specifically, the government instituted policies restricting the nationals of those countries that collaborated with or supported Iraq—Palestinian, Jordanian, Sudanese, Yemeni, and Iraqi—while giving preference to the nationals of those states that supported Kuwait. Because of the exclusion of many Arabs, Asian migrants have dominated the labor market since the war. The influx of Asian workers has transformed Kuwaiti society and culture in several important ways, including the growing use of English as a common language. English is a natural choice given Kuwait's connection to Great Britain and the nationalities of the new migrants from the Indian subcontinent and the Philippines.

Following the liberation, the government also attempted to clarify the ambiguous status of the *bidun*. Because of fears about Iraqi infiltration, the government declared *bidun* to be "illegal residents." The government began investigating each case on an individual basis, naturalizing those who could prove ties to Kuwaiti relatives through DNA evidence.

A minority in their country, Kuwaitis continue to attempt to control and manage migration without undermining economic development. Concerns over cultural survival have grown with the increasing cultural diversity of the population. Periodic tinkering with migration policies—sharpened by fluctuations in oil revenues and continuing security concerns—reflects Kuwait's long-standing ambivalence toward its foreign community. On the one hand, Kuwaitis realize that these workers are necessary for economic growth. On the other, they view the segregation of workers and citizens as the key to social stability and cultural survival. Along these lines, the state's policies of exclusion ranged from formal categorization and legislation to informal practices, including the manipulation of cultural values and symbols. In any case, the hierarchical structure of Kuwaiti society remains, although these positions are not static; they depend on both common cultural features and the closeness of social interaction. The asymmetrical power relationship between Kuwaitis and migrants remains firmly in place as well: the social and political rights of the foreign majority are sharply restricted. Most Kuwaitis continue to feel that fair exchange characterizes their relations with the migrant communities: money in exchange for work for a set period of time.

As the foreign population has increased, so has Kuwaitis' awareness of their cultural identity and social position. Kuwaitis, in short, need the foreign workers to create their identity and position. In their attempts to shield themselves from alien influence and protect their national privileges, Kuwaitis have maintained and refined those characteristics that could serve as markers of national identity.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## Religious Identity of Ethnic Group and Influence on Culture

The Kuwaiti Arab population is predominantly Muslim. It is divided between Sunni (70 percent) and Shia (30 percent).

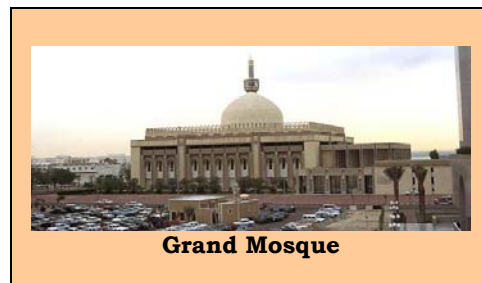
Islam is more of a unifying than an excluding factor in Kuwait. As a mark of identity, religious affiliation is less important than citizenship and ethnic origin. However, there is a close association between Islamic values and Kuwaiti cultural identity. Kuwait City contains more than 800 mosques. The largest and most renowned is the Grand Mosque (Al-Masjid Al-Kabeer) also known as the Grand State Mosque.

The power and authority of Islamists and Islamist groups have risen since the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait, a result of the prominence of the Islamists in the resistance. Religious symbolism started to become more conspicuous in official state rhetoric in the early 1970s, and some Islamists and Islamist associations began to attract support from the Kuwaiti government. In recent years, the Sunni government has consciously attempted to link Kuwaiti identity to Islam through pronouncements and displays of public piety, state funding of mosques and Islamic institutions, state support of religion in the schools, and an emir-appointed committee on the Islamization of law. The regime's religious allies enjoy political power and access to favors that boost their ability to attract followers. The Islamist agenda is also attractive to many young Kuwaiti men because its initiatives—including the restrictions on women working—would improve young men's chances of success in the job market. Most Kuwaiti Islamists are of recent Bedouin origin. Collectively, they are the least socially assimilated and economically advantaged segment of the citizenry.

Kuwaitis are becoming increasingly concerned about radical Islam. In October 2002, the emir ordered a review of school texts for radical Islamist references and cautioned mosque leaders to moderate their sermons.

Kuwait's Shia community is diverse, including Arab Shia who emigrated from Bahrain and Saudi Arabia's eastern Hasa province; Arab Shia who had emigrated to Persia, settled, and later returned; and Persian Shia who maintain family, cultural, and economic ties to Iran.

Kuwait's Shia community has a developed sense of identity because of shared beliefs and practices. In addition, economic and social self-segregation, as well as Sunni discrimination, has produced a sense of Shia identity. In the 1980s, public expressions of Shia identity became much more pronounced. The 1979 Iranian Revolution produced a renewed sense of identity among Shia and a new fear of the Shia community among Kuwait's Sunni population. Although the bulk of Kuwait's Shia remained loyal to Kuwait, Sunni leaders introduced discriminatory measures that alienated many Shia. In addition, restrictions were placed on Shia communal and religious practices. In 1986, the government deported thousands of Shia of Iranian origin. These actions left Kuwait's Shia feeling increasingly excluded from the national community. As a result, the tension between Sunnis



**Grand Mosque**

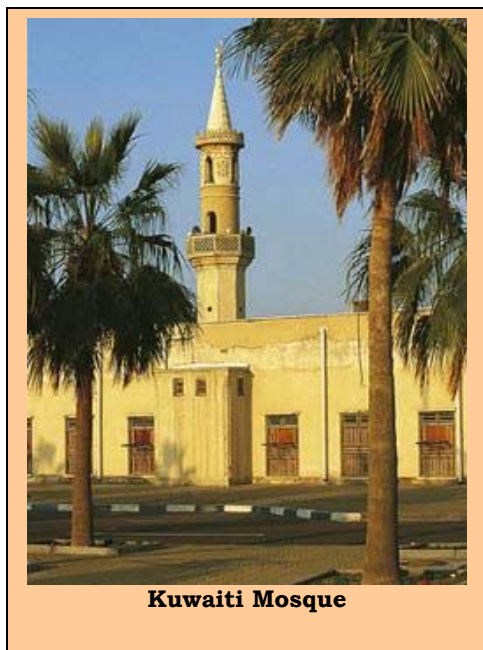
and Shia, which had erupted occasionally in the past, grew. Following Kuwait's liberation, the loyalty of Kuwait's Shia population during the Iraqi invasion and occupation led the government to lift these discriminatory measures. To a great extent, Kuwait has succeeded in accommodating its Shia population.

Kuwait has long had a small Arab Christian community and a small foreign Christian community. Traditionally, Kuwaiti attitudes toward Christians were of sympathetic tolerance, concretely expressed by the presence in downtown Kuwait of a large Catholic church donated by the emir. The Catholic Church enjoys a special status in the emirate; it is allowed to run several schools attended by non-Kuwaiti Christian children.

### Differences between Sunni and Shia Islam

In the mid-7<sup>th</sup> Century, soon after the death of Muhammad, Shia Muslims and Sunni Muslims split over who should be his rightful spiritual and secular successor (known as the caliph). In terms of doctrine and belief, Shia and Sunni Muslims are similar. Both follow the Five Pillars of Islam: profession of faith; praying five times a day; almsgiving to the poor and the mosque (house of worship); fasting during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan; and pilgrimage to Mecca (the *hajj*). However, there are important differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

The Imamate is the central aspect of Shia Islam and what principally distinguishes it from orthodox or Sunni Islam. The Shia believe in the succession of infallible Imams or religious leaders, all whom were members of Muhammad's family, and who interpreted the law and doctrine. Ali—Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law—was the first Shia Imam. He was followed by 11 successors, who passed the Imamate down to their sons in hereditary fashion. The most important Shia Imam was Ali's son Husayn, whose martyrdom at Karbala in Iraq in 680 A.D. marks the beginnings of Shia Islam as a religion. The Shia believe that the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam remains "in hiding," and is awaiting the right time for a return.



**Kuwaiti Mosque**

Other differences between the two sects include the role and power of the *ulema* (religious scholars or clergy), and religious hierarchy. The Shia religious structure is more hierarchical than the Sunni. In addition, they exert more influence over their flock than the Sunni clergy. Over time, the Shia have developed several rituals that are distinct from Sunni practices. For example, the Shia from all over the world visit the shrines of martyred imams, several of which are across the border in Iraq.

The rites and rituals of Ashura, which commemorate the death of Husayn, are among the oldest and most revered religious traditions for Shia Arabs. These rituals take the form of representations

## FOUO

and reenactments of the Battle of Karbala, which took place in 680 A.D. between Husayn and his followers and the army of Umayyad caliph Yazid bin Mu'awiya.

Both Shia and Sunni Islam have developed several sects or schools. Among the Kuwaiti Shia, the Twelver or Ithna-Ashari sect is the largest. Sunni Arabs in Kuwait follow the Hanafi school, known for its liberal religious orientation that elevates belief over practice and is tolerant of differences within Muslim communities.

In general, the political marginalization of the Shia has translated into a lack of economic and social opportunities in comparison with those available to their Sunni counterparts. Sunnism is associated with the status quo. Shiism is associated with the rejection of the status quo, often accompanied by a determination to change it.

### Islam and Arabism

Islam is closely tied to Arab culture. Islam and Arabism have functioned in the Muslim Middle East as the preeminent political paradigms for more than 1,300 years. Despite Islam's emphasis on community, an Arab versus non-Arab distinction insinuated itself soon after Islam's founding. Arabs assert special rights and privileges in Islam for several reasons: the birthplace of Islam and its holiest sites are in the Arab countries, Arabic is the language in which God's message was revealed and transmitted, and Arabs were the first to receive this message and were entrusted to carry it to other populations.

In the years after Muhammad's death, a successorship or caliphate—the earthly embodiment of a united political and religious realm—was established to guide the Islamic community. The reign of the first four caliphs—known as the righteous caliphs—is revered by Sunni Muslims. Shia Muslims only recognize Ali, the fourth caliph. Notably, each of the first four caliphs was a member of Muhammad's tribe and therefore Arab. When the last of the righteous caliphs died—only 28 years after the tenure of the first began—the Islamic empire had spread to Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, and had moved east into Iraq and central Iran. By 850 A.D., it had spread across North Africa and north into Europe. It was then under control of the Abbasid caliphate based in Baghdad, and significantly, the last Arab caliphate. Thereafter, non-Arabs (principally Persians and Turks) assumed control of subsequent Islamic empires, to the indignation of the Arabs. By World War I, the Islamic Empire had been controlled by non-Arabs for centuries. Since the end of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924, most Arabs have abstained from discussion about reconstitution of the caliphate. Those who do are the radical Islamists, mostly Sunni Arab. No Shia Arabs bring up the issue of the caliphate.

There is a close association between Arab nationalism and Sunni Islam. Islamic heritage and achievement serve as an essential component of pan-Arabism. In addition, Arab Sunni Islam's reliance on genealogy tends to affirm the Sunni community's perception of primacy. Sunnis regard themselves as descendants of and heirs to the Arab Muslim rule of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-15-

## Role of Islam in Government and Politics

Islam has long served as a source of legitimacy for Kuwaiti rulers. The government associated itself more closely with Islam beginning in the late 1970s for several reasons. Among them was the rapidly growing strength of the Islamist movement and its affiliation with the political opposition. Another was that popular adherence to Islamic values and principles suited the interests of the regime. Islamists called for discipline, the preservation of traditional family forms, and obedience to authority, values that reinforced the authority of the ruling family. Patriarchal appeals from religious Kuwaitis gather support from the ruling family, whose legitimacy is rooted in traditionalized images of tribal patriarchy.

The popularity of the Islamist movement was enhanced by a social liberalism in the 1960s that many Kuwaitis saw as responsible for generating a host of social problems. Western values and the growing involvement of women in the workforce, for example, were cited as the primary causes of the erosion of family ties and the weakening of national unity. Since the 1970s, the ruling family has used Islam as a mechanism of social control and a means to subject the population to its authority. Although explicitly religious appeals to citizens to support the regime are not common, religion continues to be a dominant form of Kuwaiti political discourse.

### *The Islamist Political Movement in Kuwait*

Although the Islamist movement was active in Kuwait prior to the Gulf War, it gained most of its power and influence in its aftermath. It benefited from Kuwait's difficulties in recovering from the invasion, and the contradictory pressures it has since been subjected to by the United States and Saudi Arabia as it tries to reform and modernize its sociopolitical institutions. The Islamist agenda in Kuwait calls for *sharia* rule, ending the process of Westernization, and gender segregation in public places. On several occasions the Islamists have openly challenged the government and the royal family.

Immediately after the Gulf War, the government formed an alliance with the Islamists to counter its more liberal critics. There are three major Islamist groupings in Kuwait. The Sunni Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) has its roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, and is considered to be Kuwait's most significant Islamist movement. The ICM officially emerged in March 1991 following Kuwait's liberation. It is not an extremist movement and does not demand the establishment of an Islamic state. Rather, it seeks to Islamicize Kuwait by such measures as expanding the Islamic curriculum in schools and segregating the university.

The Islamic Population Alliance (IPA) is the official political instrument of Kuwait's *salafiyah* group. This Sunni group, whose name means "return to the path of the forefathers," began in the 1970s when many Arab Muslims turned to Islam as a new focus of their identity and as a means of solving their problems. The IPA is more literal in its interpretation of the Koran and calls for the establishment of an Islamic state.



## FOUO

The Islamic National Alliance (INA) is a Shia group. It is usually in agreement with other Islamist movements and denies any connection with Iran. Nevertheless, it does display sympathy for other Shia movements throughout the world.

In recent years, Islamist groups, especially the ICM, have expanded their membership by including Kuwait's tribal population. As a result, those members of Parliament who belong to the Islamist groups, or sympathize with them, account for almost half of the 50 members of Kuwait's National Assembly. Difficulties in dealing with the Islamists led to the dissolution of the National Assembly in May 1999.

Despite their increasing numbers, Islamists have not been able to impose their social and political agenda on Kuwait. There are several reasons for their failure. There are significant divisions among the Islamist groups, both between Sunni and Shia, and within the Sunni organizations. Although the three main groups tend to agree on fundamental issues such as ending the process of Westernization, they disagree on the appropriate means to achieve their goals. In addition, the IPA has resorted to violence on occasion, putting them at odds with the ICM and the INA. The appeal of the Islamist message also remains limited because rather than focusing on issues such as security and the economy, it focuses on imposing an Islamic dress code and ending coeducation. Overall, the ambivalence of many Kuwaitis regarding the Islamist agenda, plus the government's opposition, has limited its influence. Nevertheless, Islamism remains a substantial current in Kuwaiti society.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003

## Language

Kuwaiti Arabs speak Arabic. The Arabic language—a Semitic tongue that is spoken by 200 million people—exists in three forms: the Classical Arabic of the Koran; Modern Standard Arabic, used in books, newspapers, television, and radio; and the spoken language, which in Kuwait is Gulf Arabic. Gulf Arabic is also spoken in Iraq, Bahrain, Iran, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

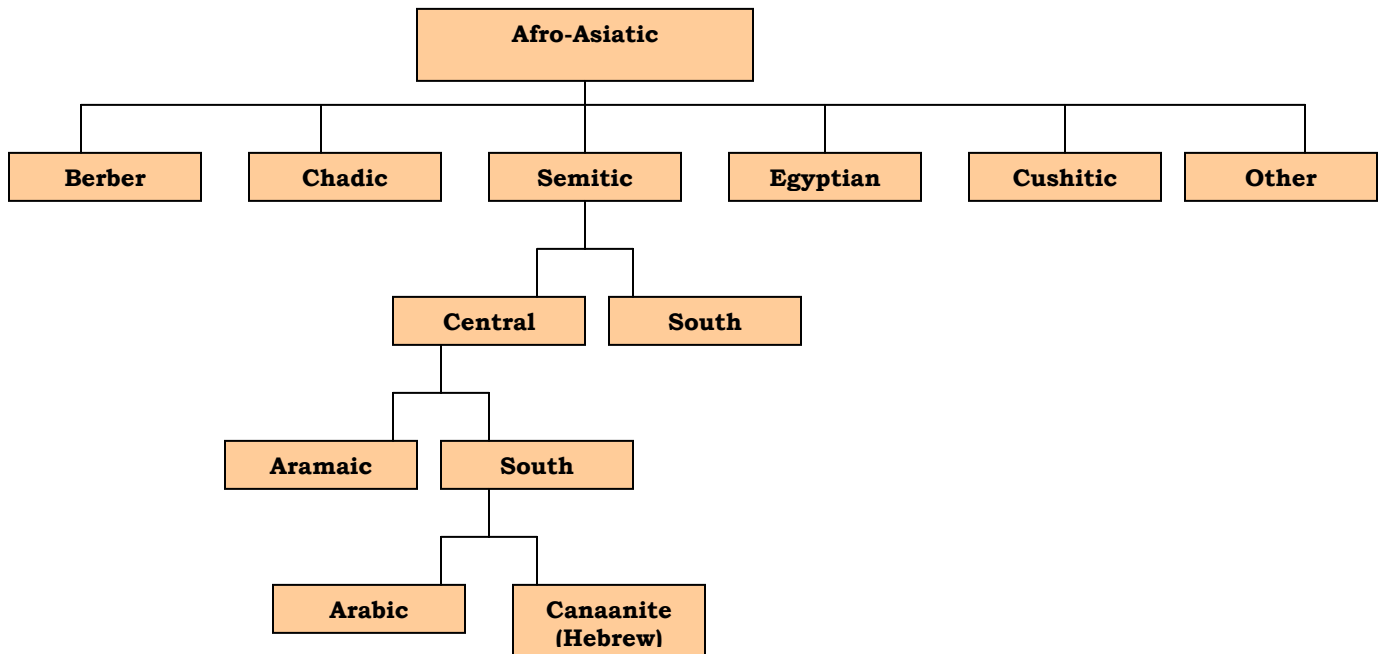
Because of Kuwait’s trade-based economy, Kuwaiti Arabic is infused with Persian, Urdu, Hindi, and African words and phrases.

Ajmi is a dialect of social prestige among Kuwaiti Bedouin. It distinguishes Bedouin of a high social status from other Bedouin of their own and other tribes. Because of their ties to nomadic culture and heritage, the urban residents of Kuwait also believe the Ajman dialect to be prestigious.

Language is a major facet of Kuwaiti Arab identity. The Arabic language embodies an entire culture. Within a century of Islam’s revelation, Arabic replaced Aramaic as the language of the region. In many regions, populations were being Arabized faster than they were becoming Muslim.

Many Kuwaiti Arabs also speak English. The English comes in three varieties: British, American, and Indian. Indian English is widely used by workers from the Indian subcontinent.

**The Afro-Asiatic Language Tree: Arabic is found under the Semitic branch.**



## Societal Framework

### Role of Tribes in Society

Instead of asserting their separateness and privacy as independent individuals, Kuwaiti Arabs tend to interact as members of a group—family, clan, tribe, etc. As a result, Kuwaiti Arabs are subjected to immense family and community pressures. Conformity is related to and reinforced by a reverence for tradition. Loyalty to the group is highly valued, and responsibility is generally considered to fall upon the group in its entirety rather than on any particular individual. The extended family (or kin group) is the fundamental unit of political and social action. Related kin groups may be allies or enemies depending upon the existing economic and political conditions.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the more significant nomadic tribes in the region of Kuwait included the Bani Khalid. These groups lacked kinship or solidarity and often feuded with one another, in addition to raiding settled areas. Religion also divided the tribes. The Ajman were Wahhabi, for example; others such as the Bani Khalid were Hanafi. The internal cohesion of the tribes varied as well. Ajamni clans, for instance, intermingled freely, while the Bani Hajir had sharp internal divisions.

In general, each strong tribe was a miniature mobile state, with its patriarchal leadership usually held by a warrior household, its own military force, its customary law, its non-literate culture, its territoriality, and its mode of subsistence economy (i.e. pastoralism, commerce, and conquest). Exacting tribute was as important for tribes' livelihood as animal breeding or the spoils of war.

The original settlers of Kuwait—the Bani Utub—were composed of nomadic tribal families, and tribal values continue to play an important role in Kuwait. However, after they reached Kuwait, the Bani Utub gave up their nomadic lifestyle, becoming merchants, sailors, and fishermen. The minor tribes in the region were protected by and clients to Kuwaiti rulers. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, they served as liaisons to other tribes and often served as armed soldiers for the al-Sabah family. Through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, Kuwait permitted and facilitated the survival of the nomadic lifestyle, leaving its borders open to their migration. In addition, the boundary between settled Kuwaiti and nomads was porous, due to intermarriage.



**Street Scene in Kuwait City**

Through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, Kuwait had a substantial population of *bidun jinsiyyah* (stateless people). *Bidun* were largely nomadic tribal families with Iraqi or Saudi roots; most Kuwaitis did not consider them true Kuwaitis. In 1961, however, facing a growing population imbalance and the threat of Iraqi territorial expansion, the government granted *bidun* citizenship in large numbers, offering social services, housing, and other benefits in

## FOUO

return for military service. Very few settled Kuwaitis were interested in the police or the army. In contrast, their culture and traditions predisposed the Bedouin to join the armed forces.

The process of granting citizenship was selective and uneven. In general, Kuwaitis viewed and treated Bedouin in the same way as the foreign population. In the 1980s, the Bedouin lost access to health and education services. Gradually it became more difficult for them to get jobs. Many Kuwaitis suspected that refugees from Iraq were entering Kuwait by pretending to be Bedouin. Security concerns coupled with the economic downturn caused by falling oil prices, prompted the crackdown on Bedouin prior to the 1990 Iraqi invasion. The invasion also affected Kuwaitis perceptions of the Bedouin, as their behavior during the invasion and occupation was mixed. Many served Kuwait loyally, but others, including those with Iraqi relatives, joined the occupation. As the war ended, hundreds of Bedouin languished on the border between Iraq and Kuwait denied entry by a government worried about their allegiances and determined to reduce the number of non-nationals.

The government took the opportunity provided by Bedouin settlement to strengthen tribal identification for political purposes while simultaneously weakening the tribes' internal social and political cohesion. It settled the Bedouin away from grazing land; to weaken clan ties it mixed tribal and clan affiliation in housing. It distributed land titles individually not collectively, with no relation to tribal patterns. New marriage laws encouraged the formation of nuclear families. Because the state increased its points of contact with the individual tribesmen, the tribal sheikhs' role declined. At the same time, a process of political re-tribalization occurred. The state encouraged tribes to run National Assembly candidates, whom they selected through tribal primaries. In exchange for economic benefits and social services, Bedouin provided voting loyalty for the ruling family.

Recently settled Bedouin mobilize politically around tribal affiliation, and tribes have been particularly adept at using electoral processes in Kuwait to advance their interests. Some Kuwaiti tribes conduct primaries to pick legislative candidates whom the entire tribe supports in the general election, thereby maximizing their electoral power. The election of a member of a particular tribe increases the prestige of the tribe and this supports the continuation of tribal social organization. The ruling family has rewarded the tribes with government positions. Tribal leaders therefore tend to be intermediaries in patron-client relationships between the ruler and people. Overall, tribes have readily adjusted to, and taken advantage of, Kuwaiti political culture.

The growing involvement of the recently settled Bedouin in Kuwaiti politics has contributed to its "desertization": the dilution of urban cosmopolitanism through the importation of tribe members and their values into the mainstream of Kuwaiti life. Desertization progressed rapidly in the 1980s because of the incorporation of large numbers of tribesmen as full, first-category citizens of Kuwait with both economic and social rights, and full political rights. In parliament, tribalists and Islamists—categories with significant overlap—join together to promote traditional, hierarchical values.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-20-

Tribal values—such as hospitality, loyalty, manliness, courage, and gallantry—remain important in Kuwaiti culture. Naturally restrictive, tribal identity has asserted itself in response to the influx of non-tribal foreign workers. Tribalism provides the symbolic framework for interpreting and incorporating new groups. Tribal identification in general, as well as identification with specific tribes, remain important to Kuwaitis, and the tribe remains the source of socially dominant symbols and institutions. Finally, tribal institutions such as the *divaniyyah* (a regular weekly meeting of men who are relatives and friends to discuss business and politics and obtain or grant favors) provide important social links between the individual and the state.

### Tribal Structure and Organization

The basic units of Arab tribal social structure are organized in a series of concentric circles, from the innermost (the extended family) to the outermost (the tribe). According to the Prophet Muhammad, God divided the world into nations and tribes. Medieval Muslim genealogists used Muhammad's genealogy as the primary model in defining Arab tribal structure.

Historically, the extended family had its own herd and was the center of daily activities. The sub-tribe is composed of a number of extended families (or clans) tracing themselves back to one patrilineal father. The sub-tribe traditionally comprised the main defense unit. The tribe consists of four to six sub-tribes tracing itself to a real or fictional ancestor. The tribe's activities are mainly political, consisting of managing relations with other tribes and governments. At this level, the tribe is led by a sheik and advised by a council. Some tribes join together for defensive purposes to form confederations under a paramount sheikh.

Arab tribal nomenclature varies historically and geographically. Tribal names often refer to an ancestor, region, or occupation. The *qabila* (tribe) is usually the larger unit, whose affiliated sub-tribes are linked by a common lineage or descent. This descent is more often claimed than literally true. As these sub-tribes lived apart, the unity of the tribe was very loose and informal in military or political terms. The *ashira* (sub-tribe) is the second level of organization. It has more unity because of its sheikh (or his house) and the territorial proximity of the various clans (*fakhidh*) of which it is composed. Tribes claim territory as their own through inheritance, conquest, right of customary use, or delegation from state authority, and are prepared to defend it by force. The *fakhidh*—each of which has its own chief and its own name and specific territory generally corresponding to a village—is formed, in turn, from smaller patrilineal groups, extended families called *hamoula*, which constitute the real kinship group. The size of the *hamoula* is variable, numbering dozens or hundreds of individuals. It is directly related to its power and wealth. The word means “carry away” in Arabic and evokes the mutual aid that men of the same *hamoula* are supposed to bring one another. Each *hamoula* is divided into small households or *bayt*. In general, the first two levels are military and political units. The last three are economic, camping, and housing units. Leadership was reserved for the strongest *hamoula* of the strongest *fakhidh* in each clan, while the strongest clan provided leadership for the tribe.

FOUO

Politically, the tribal units are grouped into hierarchies of chiefs and notables. The authority of the leaders stems from both personal influence and largesse as well as from nobility of lineage. Leadership often turns out to be a function of the success of the leader in defending the tribal lands and managing and resolving intra-tribal conflicts.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-22-

## Modern Nation State

Kuwait is unusual among its neighbors in that it has a long history as an autonomous nation and, as a result, a well-established national identity. It emerged as a result of the shared experience of migration and common effort to build a new society in Kuwait. However, Western notions of nationality and citizenship are relatively new to the people of Kuwait. Tribal ties especially crossed borders, mostly to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the lower Gulf. As an actual social structure, tribes have lost some of their previous significance; as a referent for social identity and loyalty, however, they still played a critical role through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Until independence in 1961, the term “Kuwaitis” was used to refer exclusively to the inhabitants of the town of Kuwait. Bedouin nomads were known by the names of their tribes and clans.



Urban Kuwaitis identify with a territorialized community, previously the town and today the state, rather than with a particular leader. As a result, they share a cultural understanding of citizenship very similar to Westerners. In contrast, recently settled Kuwaiti tribesmen understand nationality and citizenship in the sense of allegiance to a leader (in this case, Kuwait’s ruling family). They are subjects of the ruler, personally tied to him by bonds of status and obligation. This leader-follower bond requires a leader to reward his followers materially and reaffirm his worthiness to retain their allegiance.

This tribal conception of citizenship is carried to the national level, as united family with the emir as the father of his people. This concept resonates with individual family histories as well as with idealized images of old style tribal families of the Arabian Peninsula. This image incorporates nomadic tribal values, such as the subordination of women and young men, and emphasizes that primary loyalty is to the ruling family. The state’s efforts to establish a sense of national identity are expressed by its vigorous propagation of the concept of the united family as the dominant national symbol. This concept resonates with images of traditional Kuwaiti families whose members lived closely together under the patriarch. Kuwait’s children are taught to regard the emir as a father figure.

Kuwaitis have largely adhered to the principle that anyone who was not a member of one of the original Bani Utub families has no legitimate claim to Kuwaiti identity. State policies aimed at restricting the number and kinds of persons eligible to be citizens are related to tribal interpretations of community and who belongs to this community. In 1948, the government defined as “original” Kuwaiti members of the ruling family, those permanently residing in Kuwait since 1899, children of Kuwaiti men, and children of Arab or Muslim fathers born in Kuwait. Naturalization was possible for people who had lived in Kuwait for 10 years, were employed, and spoke Arabic. Citizenship could be revoked as a penalty for various crimes. In 1959, the New Nationality Law widened the category of original Kuwaiti to include the descendants of those residing in the country since 1920, but dropped the category concerning children of Arab or Muslim fathers born in Kuwait. Only children of

## FOUO

Kuwait fathers could be citizens. Thus, Kuwaiti women married to foreign men bear non-Kuwaiti children. Naturalization was still possible, but it was severely limited (a 1960 amendment restricted the annual number of nationalization cases to 50). In 1965, in an attempt to bolster the Kuwaiti portion of the population, the government expanded its program for mass naturalization of Bedouin who could trace their attachment to Kuwait through tribal lines.

The presence of so many foreigners and the Kuwaiti fear of cultural and social inundation have been significant factors in consolidating a strong sense of identity among Kuwaitis. As a result, Kuwaiti laws and customs draw a sharp distinction between those who belong to the national community and those who do not.

Kuwait's small size has given it a stronger national identity and makes it internally more cohesive, but also more vulnerable to its larger neighbors. Since its founding in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, a sense of external threats has bound Kuwaitis together. Especially important in the development of Kuwaiti identity were the construction of a wall around Kuwait and the Battle of Jahrah against the Saudis, both in 1920. The 1990 Iraqi invasion and occupation reinforced this sense of identity and common purpose. It also deepened the rift between Kuwaitis and foreigners, especially those who supported Iraq, and created a rift between those Kuwaitis who fled the country and those who remained and endured the occupation.

Although in recent years Kuwaiti citizenship has come to be associated with material privilege, Kuwaiti national identity has a strong cultural foundation. However, Kuwaitis have never fully reconciled the sea/desert and settled/nomadic dichotomy in their national identity. Instead, most of their efforts have gone toward defining themselves against the foreign population. Although Kuwaitis close ranks against outsiders, this solidarity masks divisions over access to power, status, and wealth.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003



## Role of State vs. Role of Tribe/Ethnic Group

Kuwaitis are part of the larger Arab culture in the Middle East. Kuwait also has a specific Gulf Arab identity, which it shares with Arabs from Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. Carried and shaped by traders, this identity mixes the Islamic and Arab cultures with elements of African, Indian, and Persian cultures.

There has always been a pattern of migration and exchange on the Arabian Peninsula. Because of the environmental conditions, people have been compelled to migrate regularly in search of work. For the most part, however, they retained their ethnic identity during their travels. Kuwaitis therefore have a specifically Kuwaiti identity, and foreigners do not become Kuwaitis, even after they become integral parts of the local community.

Kuwaiti Arabs are synonymous with the Kuwaiti state. The state is a major instrument of identity in Kuwait. Citizenship gives Kuwaitis social privileges and material benefits; however, political rights have been granted to Kuwaitis only sporadically since independence. In addition, only male citizens 21 years old are eligible to vote. Before the Iraqi invasion, the percentage of men with full political rights was less than 5 percent of the population. In 1995, Kuwait granted the Kuwait-born sons of naturalized citizens the right to vote. The same rights were not granted the fathers, however. The National Assembly has accordingly served to reinforce Kuwaiti national identity because membership and suffrage are limited to male Kuwaitis.

In addition, Kuwait's extensive welfare state has discouraged Kuwaitis from seeking other forms of identification. Kuwait's leaders have used guaranteed employment and generous social benefits, ranging from free health care and education to subsidized food, electricity, and housing to build a Kuwaiti identity. The state is a massive employer, hiring the majority of working Kuwaitis. Non-Kuwaitis do not enjoy the same employment rights, making Kuwaitis feel distinct and privileged. The state's allocation of social services drives home the same point. By offering these services preferentially (if not exclusively) to Kuwaitis, the government reinforces a sense of shared identity and social integration. Kuwaitis are acutely aware that they enjoy these rights because of their status as Kuwaitis. The state further reinforces this message by enacting laws that make it very hard to become a Kuwaiti. Overall, Kuwait's welfare policies help maintain the boundary between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, and reinforce feelings of loyalty toward the state.

These identities have been nurtured by social institutions like the family. The importance of family is enhanced by Kuwait's small size, which allows leaders accessibility through family networks. The *divaniyyab*—a regular weekly meeting of men who are relatives and friends to discuss business and politics and obtain or grant favors—links Kuwaitis with the state.

Education is also an instrument of socialization, but its effect has been hampered by the shortage of Kuwaiti teachers. Instead, Kuwaitis have turned to foreign Arabs to staff their schools. Because of the predominance of foreign teachers, Kuwaiti children are socialized at home to project ethnic and national superiority. This feeling of superiority is an important part of Kuwaiti national identity.

FOUO

In relation to non-Kuwaitis, Kuwaitis have a clear perception of group identity, manifested in their dress and emphasized by the daily practice of dominance, despite being the minority. What gives citizenship its significance in Kuwait is the presence of the disproportionately large foreign population. Kuwait's economy, laws, and customs emphasize the distinction between citizens and foreigners.

## Centers of Authority

### *The Al-Sabah Family*

The principal center of authority in Kuwait is the ruling al-Sabah family, which has governed Kuwait since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century. Over the past two-and-a-half centuries, the al-Sabah have survived tribal warfare in the Arabian Peninsula, Ottoman pressure, the arrival and departure of Britain, the challenges of independence, pan-Arabism, and radical Islam.

Until the 1930s, the al-Sabah shared power and authority with an oligarchy dominated by the Bani Utub merchant elite. The merchants' power came from three primary sources. First, because labor in Kuwait was organized on the basis of profit-sharing and loans rather than wages, a system of patronage and clientage developed between the boat owners and those who worked for them. As a result, hundreds of men were often under the leadership of families other than the sheikhs and were a significant factor in local politics. Second, merchants



**Painting of Al Sabah Rulers**

controlled the revenue on which the ruling family relied. Third, mobile merchants could threaten secession, which would reduce the sheikhs' economic and military power substantially. In 1909, for example, Kuwaiti

merchants rebelled against the imposition of taxes and price controls by relocating briefly to Bahrain. Sheikh Mubarak canceled the taxes and the merchants returned. Overall, economic dependence made the al-Sabah accountable; hence the long-standing tradition of political consultation between the sheikhs and the merchants. This consultation produced

remarkable political cohesion among Kuwaitis, and accounts for the country's stability.

In the 1930s the decline of the pearling industry, which had been a major source of wealth for Kuwait, altered the balance of power between the al-Sabah sheikhs and merchants. In 1938, in the midst of this economic crisis, oil was discovered. The first trickle of oil revenues cemented the decline of the merchants' role and the end of the power balance between merchants and ruler. The merchants, already strapped, feared correctly that they would not enjoy the same control over oil revenues that they had over the revenues generated from pearling and trade.

One important reaction to this change was the short-lived Majlis Movement of 1938. An attempt by Kuwait's merchants to organize politically and retain some of their fading power, this proto-democracy movement failed because it was unable to expand its merchant base into a unifying national movement. In particular, Kuwait's Shia minority correctly saw the Majlis Movement as an exclusively Sunni one. Indeed, the movement's leaders were

**“[T]he ideal Arab monarchy, perfectly legitimized . . . would be an Islamic theocracy governed by the ablest leaders of a tribe tracing its lineage to the Prophet.”**  
**Legitimacy in general must be earned by capable leadership, and “there are no strongly legitimized succession procedures—neither inheritance nor election—in Arab culture.”**

Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics:*

*The Search for Legitimacy,*

167.

FOUO

concerned about the growing Shia presence and tried to restrict Shia influence. In the end, many Shia felt so threatened that they attempted to leave Kuwait; in 1938, for example, more than 4,000 approached Britain with requests for citizenship.

The development of the oil industry following World War II led to a complex redistribution of power within Kuwait. Oil quickly enabled the ruling family to reverse its historical dependence on the merchants. In return for a share of the oil revenues, the merchant families gave up political influence, and thus the primary check on state power. The merchants' withdrawal from political life was accompanied by the development of new ties between the ruler and members of the ruling family through political and bureaucratic roles. Rulers manipulated newly reinforced family ties to control the state bureaucracy, centralizing decision making. This political role for the ruling family was an important break from past practice. Finally, the regime used economic entitlements and social benefits to buy popular support. The oil revenues allowed the ruler to create a welfare state, shifting the allegiance of the population from the merchants to the regime. As a result, the ruling family has become more cohesive and powerful in relation to society over the past 50 years.

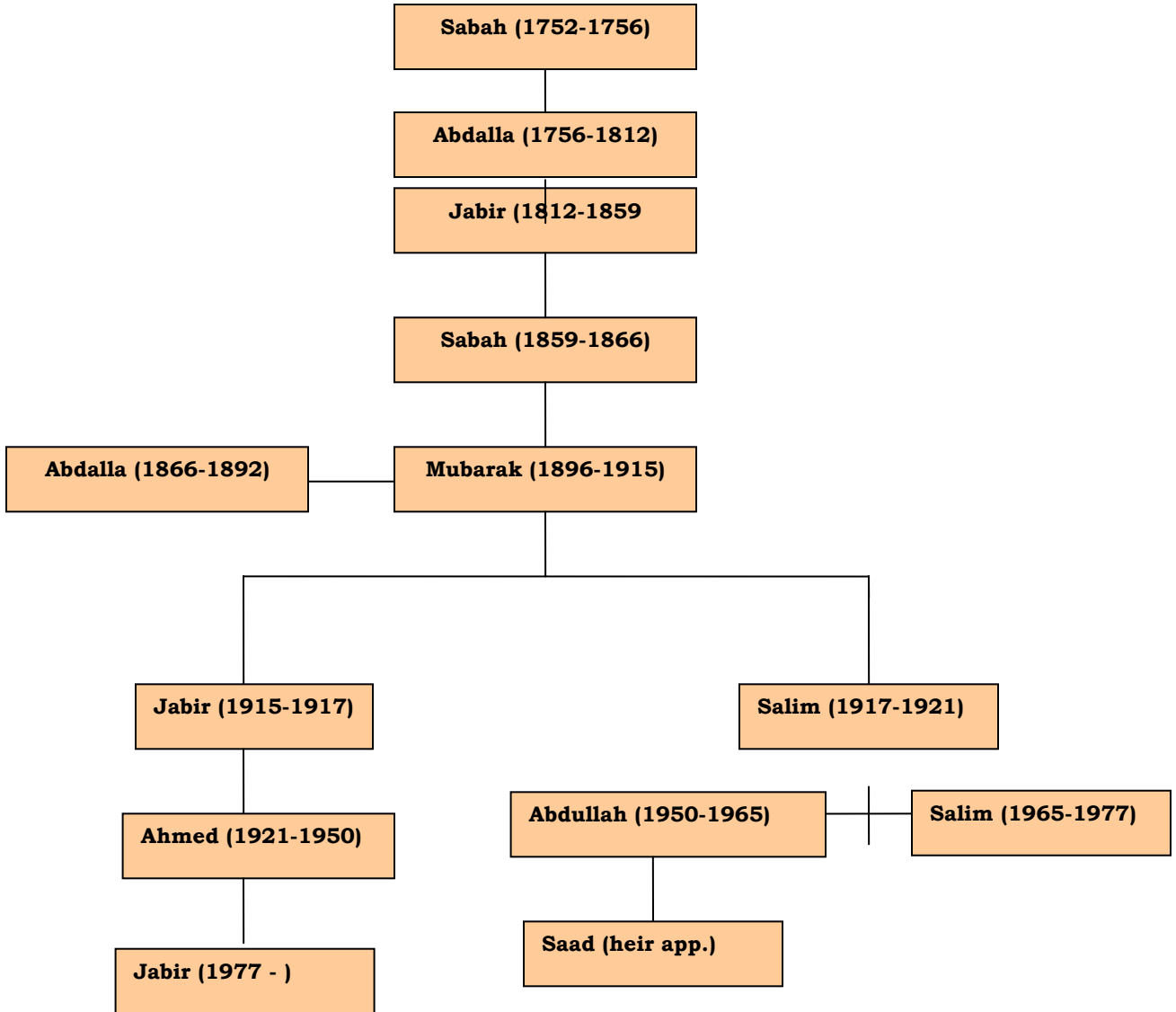
FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-28-

FOUO



The Al-Sabah Family

Kuwaiti Arabs have an ambivalent attitude toward authority. On the one hand, because Kuwaitis were traditionally mobile, they developed attitudes favoring personal independence, a refusal to tolerate excessive authority, and a readiness to move away from oppression. In addition, the extensive and regular face-to-face interactions among Kuwaitis—facilitated by the country's small size—tend to ameliorate authoritarianism both by transmitting information and by connecting the ruling family directly to the population.

On the other hand, like most Arab states Kuwait has a history of strong central government. Arab culture favors centralization of authority, which is generally related to age and gender. Arabs associate age with experience and wisdom. In general, the authority figure is normally the oldest competent male. When he dies or becomes incapacitated, his place is taken by his oldest son or one of his own brothers. Along these lines, Kuwaiti rulers have worked out a formal agreement for alternate succession between the descendants of Sheikh Mubarak's two sons (Jabir and Salim), excluding all others. Projecting a paternal image, the al-Sabah family securely occupies the top of the pyramid of authority in Kuwait.

Traditionally, political legitimacy and authority in Arab culture is also based on a symbiosis between Islam as a belief system and the tribe as a basic unit of social organization. The rulers of Kuwait have sought to legitimize their rule on the basis of both Islamic and tribal traditions. With respect to the former, Kuwait's ruling family adheres to the Islamic principles of consultation (*shura*) and consensus (*ijma*). Kuwaitis also use a process of *mubaya* (acclamation) to confirm their new ruler. *Mubaya* was the process by which Arab caliphs were elected and approved by the community.

The authority of the ruling family in Kuwait also reflects tribal traditions, emphasizing such factors as blood relationships, protection, and the regulation and distribution of resources. Arab tribal tradition also requires the sheikh to consult notables and senior members of the tribe about their affairs. Kuwaitis participated in government through the tribal institution of the *majlis*, a daily public audience with the sheikh. The large foreign-worker presence has strengthened Kuwaitis' sense of tribal solidarity. The al-Sabah family has used the non-Kuwaiti population as an instrument to legitimize the regime and its consolidation of power. By ensuring the well-being of the Kuwaiti minority, the ruling family justifies its continuation in power.

To these traditional pillars of legitimacy, Kuwait added policies of distributing material benefits to its citizens. Overall, the ruling family's authority is based on an ideology of prosperity and affluence superimposed on tribal values of sheikhly responsibility and equality. The Iraqi invasion and occupation undermined the ruling family's authority because its legitimacy is based partly on its ability to protect Kuwait.



**Younger Sheikh Jabir**

## FOUO

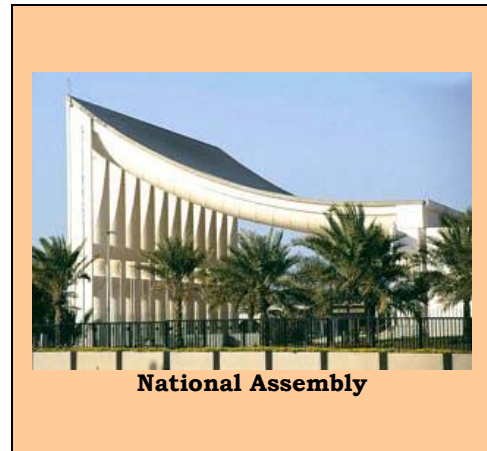
The flight of the ruling family and its exile from Kuwait during the invasion remained powerful motivators for opposition forces.

Kuwait's current emir, Sheik Jabir al Sabah, had a stroke, and his cousin and designated successor, Prime Minister Sheik Saad al Sabah, is also ill. The emir's brother, Foreign Minister Sheik Sabah al Ahmed al Sabah, has been effectively running the country.

### *The National Assembly*

The idea of popular representation is deeply rooted in Kuwait. Kuwait has a history of popular constraint and influence on the ruling family. Kuwaitis take pride in the relative openness of their political system. For example, the 1938 Majlis Movement, although brief and ineffective, was invoked at independence as proof of Kuwait's traditional democratic spirit and tradition.

Since 1961, Kuwait's National Assembly, although excluded from many of the most important decisions and occasionally disbanded, has functioned as an alternate center of authority. It is composed of groups ranging from religious activists and secular leftists to nationalists and tribesmen. The government has played a mediating role among various opposition groups, forming shifting alliances to maintain its control. Recently, it has achieved expanded powers.



Political rights in Kuwait are strictly limited. Only male citizens 21 years old are eligible to vote and hold office. Just over 100,000 Kuwaitis are eligible to vote out of a population of 2.2 million.

While Kuwait has a long history of democratic participation, this history has experienced enough suspensions and limitations that the practice of political rights has been limited for everyone, male citizens included.

### *Islamist Groups*

The Islamist opposition has been among the most significant opposition movements facing Kuwait's rulers. It includes both Sunni and Shia groups. Islamists have opposed the government both in the National Assembly and through violence.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-31-

## Rule of Law

Kuwait is notable for its stability, and its government is more transparent than that of many of its neighbors. It has been ruled continuously by the al-Sabah family since its founding in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, there have been no civil wars or coups. The ruling family governs on the basis of traditional rights and distribution of oil wealth among Kuwaiti citizens. A complex legal structure has developed, partly Islamic and partly Western, embracing commercial, labor, administrative, and criminal regulations.

The long British presence in the country left its mark in Kuwait's perception of itself as a constitutional monarchy, with an elected parliament and commitment to the rule of law. Kuwait's 1962 constitution guarantees free speech and prohibits torture and arbitrary arrest. Kuwait does not have a history of martial law or secret police. In addition, Kuwait's oil revenue has allowed the government to respect most economic and social rights, although restrictions on collective political rights exist.

By many measures, Kuwait has a healthier civil society than found elsewhere in the region. It has a lively, critical press and traditions of consultation and public debate. Private space, such as the home or the mosque, is relatively free from state intervention. Kuwaiti citizens have a voice in how they are governed, and a public platform from which they can set out their views. Kuwaiti women are not free to vote, but they can argue publicly for that right. Elections have become an accepted part of Kuwaiti political life, and Kuwaitis expect that they will be fairly conducted.

However, the ruling family maintains exclusive power over the legal system. It enjoys a constitutionally protected status and many informal privileges. Kuwait is a two-tiered society in which citizens enjoy privileges denied to the other 1.4 million residents.

Since the 1990 Iraqi invasion and occupation, crime has increased in Kuwait. There has been a rise in political violence in the form of domestic terrorism, repression of dissidents by the state, and reports of theft and embezzlement by public officials.

## Tribal Law

Kuwait's rule of law is a blend of Islamic and tribal traditions and Western democratic principles. The formerly nomadic population of Kuwait, though largely sedentary, has a well-developed system of customary tribal law.

Throughout tribal groups in the Middle East, the process of blood settlement (the payment of blood money or a revenge killing) follows a generally uniform pattern of responses, strategies, and ritual activities. The majority of conflicts are brought to a peaceful settlement because Arab tribal societies contain structural forms and principles—such as *dakbala* (entering protection)—that regulate conflict and inhibit violence.

Following a homicide, for example, the killer and his close kinsmen flee the scene and take refuge in the nearest tent or house. Each home is regarded as a *haram* (sanctuary). The



## FOUO

notion of *hurmat al-belt* (sanctity of the house) makes every dwelling a sanctuary even when it is empty of its owners. The owner is duty bound to receive any fugitive who asks for protection. Even his own enemy can demand sanctuary of him and rest assured of protection because the owner's obligation to respect the sanctity of his own home takes precedence over his right and temptation for vengeance. The *dakbal* (protector) must immediately assume the responsibility to ensure at all costs the safety of his *dakbeel* (refugee seeker or supplicant). Once the fleeing culprit has sought *dakhala* in a house in the community where the killing occurred, he and his kinsmen group are given full protection for three days, which Bedouins aptly call *al-mabrbat* (escape days), to allow the offender's group to flee their *dira* (tribal homeland).

In situations of blood conflict, the killer and members of his kin group are expelled from their tribal homeland and forced to seek refuge with a distant tribe until the settlement is reached. The ritual practice of the *rita'a*—a payment that permits each household of the killer's kinsmen to stay within their tribal community—limits conflict and its potential spread across a wider social field. The custom of *jali* (exile) away from one's tribal homeland has several functions. First, it secures immediate protection for the expelled family within the territory of their protector. Second, *jali* saves the victim's group from dishonor because the killer and his group are not within practical reach. Throughout the period of exile, which may extend for months or years, members of the killer's group are relegated to a marginal sociopolitical position within the tribal community offering them protection.

After a period of time in exile, the killer's group contacts the eminent men of their own and neighboring tribes to start the mediation process. The majority of homicide cases are settled through the mediation of tribal chiefs. The goal of the mediation is not to take the life of one particular person but to bring satisfaction to the members of the injured group and save face by redressing a wounded honor.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003

## Customs

### Greeting

Arabs often greet each other with a number of ritual phrases and fixed responses. Elaborate greetings and enquiries about health and well-being often take up large amounts of time, but are important in establishing friendly relations. Asking about the female member of a person's family, however, is considered offensive. These elaborate greetings originate from Bedouin tradition where the nomadic lifestyle led to frequent encounters with strangers. There were several groups of Bedouins and they relied on the hospitality and protection of other Bedouins to protect them from enemy tribes. Arabs will often shake hands every time they meet and every time they depart. Kuwaiti Arabs will rise when shaking hands as well as when an esteemed person enters a room. Handshakes are generally long in length and may involve grasping the elbow. Handshakes, though regarded as important, usually do not possess the same firmness as those of Americans.

Upon entering a room full of people, Arabs will greet those present—especially the elderly—before sitting down. Eye contact is important to Arabs and signals respect to the person greeted. Arabs find public displays of affection between the opposite sex offensive.

Arabs typically stand very close when greeting and talking; the concept of personal space in the Western sense is foreign. Arabs will stand close enough so that they can breathe on and smell the person that they are speaking with. Hugging and embracing between men is common in the Arab world. Touching noses together three times when greeting is a Bedouin gesture of friendship and respect. Two men kissing each other quickly on the lips when greeting is also an expression of friendship.

### Gestures/Hand Signs

Arabs, like most people, use gestures and body movements to communicate. It has been said that “to tie an Arab's hands while he is speaking is tantamount to tying his tongue.” However, Arab gestures differ a great deal from American ones.

Arabs may make the following gestures/hand signs:

- Placing the right hand or its forefinger on the tip of the nose, on the right lower eyelid, on top of the head, or on the mustache or beard means “It's in front of me,” “I see it,” or “It's my obligation.”
- Placing the palm of the right hand on the chest immediately after shaking hands with another man shows respect or thanks.
- Touching the tips of the right fingertips to the forehead while bowing the head slightly also connotes respect.
- Holding the fingers in a pear shaped configuration, with the tips pointing up at waist level, and moving the hand slightly up and down signals “Be patient” or “Be careful.”
- Flicking the right thumbnail on front teeth can mean “I have no money.”

## FOUO

- Biting the right forefinger, which has been placed sideways in the mouth, is an expression of regret.
- The “OK” sign, if shaken at another person, symbolizes the evil eye.
- Hitting the right fist into the open palm of the left hand indicates obscenity or contempt.
- Placing the tips of the left fingers and thumb together, then placing the tip of the right forefinger directly on the left fingertips indicates an obscenity or insult directed at one’s birth or parentage; specifically, it means “You have five fathers.”
- Placing the palm of the right hand on the chest, bowing the head a little and closing one’s eyes means “Thank you” (in the name of Allah).
- A quick snap of the head upwards with an accompanying click of the tongue signals “No” or “Perhaps.”
- Flipping the hand near the mouth and simultaneously making a clicking sound with the tongue and teeth indicates “Don’t worry.”
- Holding the right hand in front of the face with the back facing forward and then flipping the hand so that the palm is up means that the person asked for is not present.
- Placing a half closed hand in front of the stomach, and then turning it slightly connotes that the person to whom the gesture is made is a liar.
- Touching the tip of the right forefinger on the tongue and then placing it on the tip of the nose, means “Hurry up.”
- Pointing a finger or writing utensil at anyone is considered threatening and is reserved for animals.

### Visiting

Arabs are, in general, hospitable and generous. Their hospitality is often expressed with food. Giving a warm reception to strangers stems from the culture of the desert, where traveling nomads depended on the graciousness and generosity of others to survive. Arabs continue this custom of showing courtesy and consideration to strangers. Demonstrating friendliness, generosity and hospitality are considered expressions of personal honor. When Arabs are visiting your installation or office, they will expect the same level of generosity and attention.

Privacy is important in Arab culture. It is considered rude to look into someone’s house and can be equated with trespassing. When visiting a house, it is customary to take a position next to the door to prevent being able to see inside the home. Do not enter the home unless invited by the host. It is expected that guests will remove their shoes before entering the home; this shows respect for the host. Arabs in villages or the countryside are less likely to have couches or chairs; instead they will have pillows on the floor or ground to sit against. When sitting, it is considered insulting to point the soles of one’s feet in the direction of anyone; sit cross-legged if possible. It is also considered to be offensive to put one’s feet on any furniture. In an Arabian house, the typical gathering place is called a *divaniyyah*, which is for male visitors only. Females generally have separate rooms to meet; meetings involving the opposite sex are generally forbidden.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## FOUO

Arab culture stresses the importance of honoring and pampering guests. If a guest praises something that an Arab possesses, he may insist that the guest take it. It is assumed that the guest will refuse this offer. This pattern could manifest itself over and over, as at least one offer and refusal is typically expected. Arabs will expect the same offer of generosity if they praise something that belongs to another. As a general rule, praise is directed at items of personal belonging. Coffee or tea is typically offered upon entering a home or office. It is considered rude to refuse, but just as rude to drink more than three cups. The server will keep refilling the cup unless the guest shakes the cup from side to side to indicate that they are finished.

The host will try his best to ensure that his guests are comfortable and will also serve food in excessive quantities to ensure that every guest will be fully satisfied. Hosts are typically the last to begin eating, and will pretend to continue eating if they finish first.

### Negotiations

Arab culture places a premium on politeness and socially correct behavior. Preserving honor is paramount. When faced with criticism, Arabs will try to protect their status and avoid incurring negative judgments by others. This concept can manifest itself in creative descriptions of facts or in the dismissal of conclusions, in order to protect one's reputation. This cultural trait will generally take precedence over the accurate transmission of information.

The desire to avoid shame and maintain respect can also contribute to the tendency to compartmentalize information. One common manifestation of this behavior comes in the form of saying "yes" when one really means "no." Arabs try to take the personalization out of contentious conversations, which can lead to vagueness and efforts to not speak in absolutes. Fear of shame also leads to secrecy and compartmentalization of knowledge. It is also considered disrespectful to contradict or disagree with a person of a superior rank or age.

### Conflict Resolution

In Arab society, community affiliation is given priority over individual rights. Consequently, familial and status considerations factor significantly into the processes and outcomes of conflict resolution. This emphasis on community helps explain the dominance of informal over contractual commitments and the use of mediation to solve conflicts. Many disputes are resolved informally outside of the official courts. There are several overarching principles that tend to guide conflict resolution.

First, are the four Koranic influences that govern interaction between parties during conflict resolution.

- *Civility and respect:* Most actions are condoned so long as they are civilized and show respect to others, especially those of a higher status.
- *Tolerance:* Be considerate of others. Tolerance of differences are important.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## FOUO

- *Humility*: It is offensive to speak loudly or harshly to others or to contradict or disagree with superiors.
- *Moderation*: A high value is placed on moderation and deliberation. Avoid becoming angry, accusing or arrogant.

Second, the protection and recognition of the status of individuals is paramount. Disrespect of elders or superiors can jeopardize negotiations.

There are two accepted methods to resolve conflicts, mediation or deliberation in council. Both methods are typically time-consuming. However, Arabs do not feel as pressed as Western cultures to finish tasks quickly. Unless the matter is urgent, there will be a casual approach to solving it.

Rituals play an important role in tribal conflict resolution. The *sulb* (settlement) ritual recognizes that injuries between individuals and groups will fester and grow if not acknowledged and repaired. Given the severity of life in the desert, competing tribes realized that *sulb* is a better alternative to endless cycles of vengeance. Following a conflict, tribes take stock of losses in human and material terms. The tribe with the fewest losses compensates the tribe that suffered most. Stringent conditions are set to settle the conflict definitively. The most important of these conditions is that the parties pledge to forget everything that happened and initiate new and friendly relations.

There are two types of *sulb*: total and partial. The former ends all conflict between the two parties; the latter ends conflict according to conditions agreed upon during the settlement process. The mediator of a *sulb* is a *Wasit*, who is perceived as someone having all the answers and solutions. He therefore has a great deal of power and responsibility.

A *sulb* works as follows: after a murder or crime, the family of the victim, in an attempt to prevent blood revenge, calls on a delegation of mediators consisting of village elders or notables (usually called *muslihs* or *jaha*). As soon as mediators are called in, a *hodna* (truce) is declared. The mediators initiate a fact-finding process. The role of the mediators is not to punish the offending party but to preserve the honor of both families involved. A blood price (*diyya*) is then paid to the family of the victim. This *diyya*, or an exchange of goods, substitutes for the death. The process ends with a public ceremony of reconciliation (*musalaha*) performed in the village square. The families of both the victim and the guilty party exchange greetings and accept apologies. The family of the offending party visits the home of the victim to drink a cup of bitter coffee and the ritual concludes with a meal hosted by the family of the offender. The ritual varies at times. In all cases it takes place within a communal, not in a one-on-one, environment.

Arabs often hold a conference to study, deliberate and address problems of a grave or complex nature. Conferences are announced in advance and the issues are declared. When no resolution can be achieved, the mediators announce and hold another conference.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## Business Style

In business meetings formal courtesies are expected. Cards—which should be printed in both English and Arabic—are regularly exchanged. Meetings may not always be on a one-to-one basis and it is often difficult to confine conversation to the business at hand. Many topics may be discussed in order to assess the character of potential business partners. There is a strong preference within Arab culture for business transactions to be based on personal contacts.

In keeping with the Arab customs of studying and deliberating, business discussions and deals are often prolonged. Unlike the high-pressure and quick-moving Western business culture, Arab business moves at a slower pace. It is also common to avoid saying “no” outright to a proposed business deal. Frequently, an Arab businessman will indicate that he wants to deliberate about the deal in order to allow the salesman to avoid shame.

## Sense of Time and Space

Past and present are flexible concepts in Arab society, with one shading over into the other. In general, time is much less rigidly scheduled than in Western culture. However, it is considered rude to be late to an appointment as is looking at one’s watch or acting pressed for time. Additionally, Arabs believe that future plans may interfere with the will of God. Commitments a week or more into the future are less common than in Western culture.

Olfaction functions as a distance-setting mechanism. Standing close enough to smell someone’s breath and body odor is a sign that one wants to relate and interact with them. To stand back and away from someone indicates a desire not to interact with them and may offend the individual. Additionally, Arabs feel very comfortable when surrounded by people in open spaces, but can feel uncomfortable or threatened when enclosed within walls in small physical spaces.

Arabs also have a non-Western view of property and boundaries. Traditionally the Arabs do not subscribe to the concept of trespassing. Arabs have conformed to the Western imposition of country boundaries, but do not place the same boundary restrictions within their country as it relates to city, town, village, property, and yard.

## Hygiene

Personal hygiene is extremely important to Arabs for both spiritual and practical reasons. Because meals are frequently eaten by hand, it is typical to wash the hands before and after eating. Formal washing of the face, hands, and forearms, called *wudhu*, and general cleanliness of the body and clothing is required before daily prayers or fasting. *Ghusl* is a formal head-to-toe washing that is recommended following contact with substances considered unclean, including alcohol, pigs, dogs, or non-believers.

## Gifts

Small gifts and candies are considered appropriate gifts for those invited to Arab homes. It is customary that gifts are not opened in front of people. Unlike Westerners, Arabs do not feel it necessary to bring gifts when visiting someone's home. It is the responsibility of the host to provide for a guest in Arab culture.

## Cultural Do's and Don'ts

- It is insulting to ask about a Muslim's wife or another female family member.
- Don't stare at women on the street or initiate conversation with them.
- If meeting a female, do not attempt to shake her hand unless she extends it. In addition, never greet a woman with an embrace or kiss.
- Avoid pointing a finger at an Arab or beckoning with a finger.
- Use the right hand to eat, touch, and present gifts; the left is generally regarded as unclean.
- Avoid putting feet on tables or furniture.
- Refrain from leaning against walls, slouching in chairs, and keeping hands in pockets.
- Do not show the soles of the feet, as they are the lowest and dirtiest part of the body.

## Lifestyle

### Role of Family

In Kuwait, the family, rather than the person, is the basic unit of society. Kuwaitis envision their state as a family.

Kuwaiti families are large, but are not extended in the strict sense. It is rare for three or more generations to live together in the same household. However, relatives generally remain closely tied in a web of intimate relationships. This is facilitated by the proximity of residence; despite urbanization and modernization, many Kuwaitis have relatives living close by. Family provides assistance with illness, childcare, financial need, employment, and other problems.



**Kuwaiti Family at the Beach**

Kuwaiti Arab families are patriarchal and hierarchal (with respect to gender and age). The father possesses complete authority and responsibility. He expects respect and unquestioning compliance, and shows little tolerance of dissent. Fathers generally remain aloof from the task of raising children in their early years. The Kuwaiti Arab family is the society in miniature: the same patriarchal and hierarchical relations and values also prevail at work and in religious, political, and social associations.

Kuwaiti Arab men and women value their family affiliations and their roles as generators of new families. Young people in Arab society are not considered to be adults until they have completed the rites of passage of marriage and parenthood. This is particularly emphasized in Kuwait given that Kuwaitis make up a minority of the state's population. The family adds to the population, and helps ensure the survival of Kuwait's culture and traditions. Although rising educational levels among Kuwaiti women and their increased participation in the workforce have reduced fertility rates somewhat, Kuwaitis have large families, averaging more than six children. Government policies support high fertility by subsidizing the cost of children.

### Role of Women

Through the 1950s, Kuwaiti women lived under constraining physical and social conditions: they were secluded, veiled, and largely illiterate. Since the oil boom, gender roles in Kuwait have undergone significant changes. Kuwaiti women are educated and employed as a result of modernizing policies instituted during the era of rising national oil income. The government has supported a degree of equality between the sexes, and Kuwaiti women have access to state services such as housing, healthcare, and education. Educated Kuwaiti women are active in public and private life. Unlike women in Saudi Arabia, for example, urban Kuwaiti women are allowed to drive, contributing significantly to their independence.



## FOUO

(Attitudes toward cars reflect Kuwaitis' generally positive approach to modernity, especially to technology.) Oil revenue has raised household incomes, enabling Kuwaiti families to hire nannies and servants to perform many of the tasks traditionally carried out by women. In the Kuwaiti social pecking order, Kuwaiti women are above foreigners of all ethnicities but below Kuwaiti men.

Although Kuwaiti women are free to pursue education and take jobs, their participation in the labor force remains low, and restricted by social norms. Working mothers are often accused of neglecting their children. These allegations resonate with efforts to Islamicize the state; the forces promoting the restriction of Kuwaiti women from public life are overwhelmingly religious. Supported by religious ideology and teachings, the prevailing standards of morality in Kuwait stress values and norms associated with traditional ideas of femininity, motherhood, and sexuality. At the heart of the role of women is the belief that a family's honor is tied to a woman's modesty and faithfulness.

Kuwaitis expect women to acquiesce to their husbands' wishes and favor motherhood and the raising of children. A women's place in the family is intimately tied to her role as wife and mother. The motherhood role is especially important because of the need to bring up children as "real" Kuwaitis. In this sense, Kuwaiti women's status needs to be understood within the ethnic composition of the population, and in the context of relations between Kuwaitis and the foreign community. The size of the Kuwaiti population relative to the foreign population encourages Kuwaitis to maintain a high level of fertility.

Men's and women's roles are considered complementary and integrative, not equal in Kuwaiti Arab society. The majority of women occupy the private domain of the household, where their primary role is to make a comfortable home and bear and nurture children. Wives are expected to obey and serve their husbands and to defer to them, especially in public. Behind the scenes, women exercise more power than is immediately apparent. In addition, Kuwaiti women hold a superior position to the foreign workers, in their capacity as employers.

### Role of Men

Men are privileged in Kuwaiti Arab society, wielding all authority. Masculine values and virtues—dating from the nomadic past—include personal bravery, a willingness to bear hardships and to come to the aid of family and friends no matter what the circumstances, and fathering children (preferably sons). Traditionally, a man's overarching responsibility has been to lead, protect, and provide for his family.

### Dating and Marriage

Kuwaitis tend to marry at a young age. Although divorces are not common, there are no social barriers to remarriage for widows or divorcees. A desire for children, especially boys, lies at the heart of the various social institutions and customs that facilitate marriage. Payments and subsidies to parents also encourage a high level of child bearing. As a result, parents have few worries about the costs of bearing and raising children.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-41-

Traditionally, Kuwaiti Arab marriages have been a family and communal affair more than an individual one. Kuwaiti parents have long played a primary role in their children's decision to marry. Marriage has been a mechanism for the reinforcement of family ties and interests. Kuwaiti Arabs still practice arranged marriage and endogamy (marriage within the same lineage, village, or community). Most common is the parallel cousin marriage: marriage between a man and his father's brothers' daughter. Endogamous marriages—which are the product of a long historical experience of economic scarcity, harsh environmental conditions, and competition for limited resources—stem from a desire to enhance and strengthen group solidarity. It is a strategy for retaining an individual's loyalty and commitment, as well as their wealth, within the family circle. Endogamy is more an ideological preference than an actual practice in modern Kuwait.

In the past few decades, there has been a considerable shift from the traditional pattern of arranged marriages. Kuwaitis' degree of freedom to choose spouses varies according to education, socioeconomic status, age, and gender. Men have more freedom than women, as do the educated and more affluent. The role of parents tends to be one of consultation. However, families still strongly prefer their children marry individuals whose social and religious backgrounds and kinships networks are familiar to them.

Intermarriage between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis remains limited. Kuwaitis who do marry non-Kuwaitis favor fellow Arabs. Although polygamy is legal in Kuwait, it is rare. Monogamy is the norm.

### Role of Children

The hierarchical structure of the Arab family requires children to obey their elders and meet their expectations. Reflecting nomadic tradition, sons are especially welcome in Kuwaiti Arab families because they are the carriers of the family tradition, and because their economic contribution is usually greater than that of daughters.

Sons are usually taught to be protectors of their sisters and to help the father with his duties inside and outside the house, while daughters are taught to defer to their brothers, and to help the mother to take care of household chores. During adolescence, there traditionally is a separation of sexes. Boys have greater freedom than girls and begin to be drawn into the social circles of their fathers during this time. Traditional child-rearing practices in Kuwait place few demands and behavioral constraints on boys but many on their sisters.



**Kuwaiti Boy**



**Kuwaiti Girls**

The cornerstone of educating a child in Arab families is teaching him or her complete obedience to authority. Arab families also teach their children to attach tremendous

FOUO

importance to blood ties and bonds of loyalty. They are taught that their identity comes from belonging to a particular primary group such as their family and kinship network. Group affiliation is important and acceptance is achieved by conforming to accepted behavioral norms. Arab children are taught to feel shame as an excruciating punishment and to avoid it in any way possible. Indeed, there is no real prohibition against distortion or fabrication to avoid shame. Arab children are generally raised to believe this is an acceptable behavior by which they can avoid shame.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-43-

## Clothing

### Headwear

Arab men often wear a three-piece head cover. The bottom piece of this head covering is a white cap that is sometimes filled with holes. This cap, called *keffiyya*, is used to hold the hair in place. On top of it is a square cloth called a *ghutra*. On top of it is the *agal*, which is a thick black cord woven into two rings surrounding the top of the head to hold everything else in place. For male children, wearing the head covering is a sign of entering manhood. Inside the house, the head covering is not needed, though when a man has guests in his house he often wears it as a sign of respect. A checked *ghutra* is a symbol of a region.



**3-Piece Headcovering**

When this headwear is forcibly removed, one's honor is tainted and blood has to be shed to remove the shame. But if the *agal* is removed voluntarily, the wearer is signifying allegiance.

Arab women typically wear a scarf-like cover called a *Hejab* that covers the hair but not the face.



**Conservative Full Head Covering.**

### Garments



**Kuwaiti men, one wearing Western dress, and the other in a dishdashah with keffiyya.**

Traditional Kuwaiti male attire consists of a long-sleeved, one piece dress—called a *dishdashah* or *thobe*—that covers the whole body. This garment allows the air to circulate, which helps cool the body. During summer, it is usually made of cotton; in winter, it is made from heavier fabric such as wool, and comes in darker colors. Traditional Kuwaiti female attire consists of the *abaya*, a long-sleeved, coat-like over-garment that covers one from neck to ankles. Beneath a robe, a woman may be wearing a traditional dress or casual Western clothes.

Not all Kuwaitis dress in the traditional manner. Urban, educated Kuwaitis from the merchant class often dress in the Western fashion. The quality and style of the clothes is directly related to the status one has within Kuwaiti society. In keeping with the values of appearance and

FOUO

prestige, it is common to see workers dress up to go to work and change when they get to their jobs.

Dress is a major mark of identity in Kuwait. Only Kuwaitis (and other Gulf Arabs) wear the *dishdashah* and *abaya*. Foreign workers wear either their native clothing or Western-style dress. (Among male foreigners, the use of non-European style clothes is associated with low-paid, unskilled labor.)

Both the *dishdashah* and the *abaya* symbolize a lifestyle of idleness and luxury. Although the *abaya* and the headscarf are part of the Islamic tradition and related to female modesty, they are less a symbol of piety than of ethnic identity. Both are more common among Kuwaiti women from modest social origins who did not have the means to signal their ethnic status through material riches. The use of the *abaya* has increased in tandem with the growing demographic imbalance. It presents a statement about a female's dignity and status, and the social deference they expected.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003

-45-

## Diet

### Type

The Kuwaiti diet is characterized by a high intake of grains (especially rice), vegetables (especially broad beans, cucumbers, green salad and tomatoes), and fruits (particularly apples, bananas, dates, watermelon, mangoes and oranges). The major dairy products are yogurt, feta cheese, and whole and skim milk. One of the most common Kuwaiti dishes is *machbous*, saffron rice topped with either chicken or lamb, served with a tomato paste sauce.

Because of their long association with the sea, Kuwaitis have developed a taste for a wide variety of seafood. They have also been in contact with travelers and merchants who introduced them to new foods and spices. As a result, Kuwaiti cuisine reflects Indian, Chinese, Persian, and Arabian influences. In recent years, Western influences—such as fast food and carbonated beverages—have become apparent as well.

Because of religious restrictions, Kuwaiti Arabs do not eat pork. Many Arabs prefer to buy meat from *halal* butchers, i.e. butchers who sell meat only from animals that have been slaughtered according to Koranic ritual.

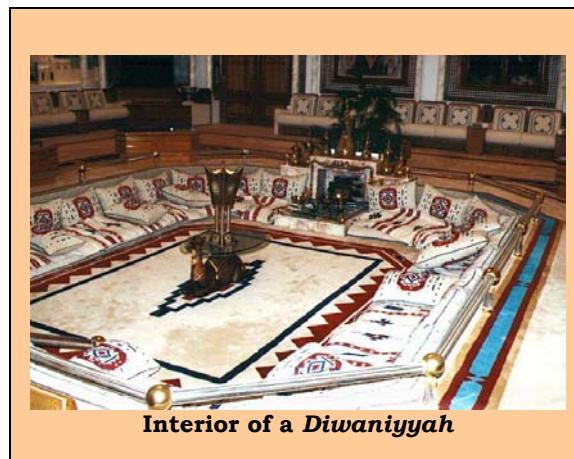
### Alcohol/Drugs

Because Islamic law prohibits alcohol, alcohol products are forbidden in Kuwait. Among Kuwaitis, alcohol consumption depends on the degree of an individual's religious faith.

## Dwellings

In Kuwait City there are several types of structures for dwelling, including houses, apartments, and hotels, all of which vary in size.

Usually, Arab houses are constructed to maximize privacy. Walls are big and solid, while entrances and windows are positioned to prevent occupants from invading the privacy of their neighbors and vice-versa. There is considerable European flavor, resulting from many years of British control and influence. This can be seen in architecture and establishments. There is usually a correlation between the size and grandeur of a person's house and their social position within the community, as property is one of the primary indicators of status within the Kuwaiti society.



**Interior of a *Diwaniyyah***

The typical Kuwaiti house has a main hall. Wealthier families establish a second hall or specify one room for the *diwaniyyah*. This room or hall is separated or secluded. It is a common area to receive guests and meet neighbors to discuss current events and exchange views.



**Kuwaiti House**

The main doors of the *diwaniyyah* are open all day long to receive guests. It contains comfortable furniture for guests, such as cushions arranged in a specific way to be used as armrests. The floor is covered with woven Persian carpets. Sometimes the *diwaniyyah* includes a guest room for guests staying for one or more nights in the country.

Kuwaitis view their home as a sanctuary that outsiders never enter unless explicitly invited. Houses and plots are distributed to Kuwaitis on the basis of seniority of application. This policy has led to the mixing of populations in terms of tribal, religious, and social affiliations.

## Attitudes toward the United States

Kuwait has had a close relationship with the United States since the 1950s. The Kuwait Oil Company was half owned by a U.S. firm, and Kuwaitis have invested heavily in U.S. property and industry. As British power in the region faded, Kuwait turned increasingly to the United States. The relationship deepened during the Iran-Iraq War. Initially, Kuwait had reservations about the U.S. presence in the Gulf and was an outspoken critic of military cooperation with the United States. In 1987, the United States agreed to a Kuwaiti request to re-flag Kuwaiti tankers and place them under U.S. Naval protection.

In general, Kuwaitis are visibly pro-American because of the successful U.S.-led campaign to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991. Since the Persian Gulf War, Kuwaitis have regarded a large and visible U.S. military presence as the state's best protection against the Iraqi threat. Kuwait did sign a 1999 defense agreement with the United States, in which the United States agreed to protect Kuwait from Iraqi aggression. Kuwait has cooperated closely with the United States on the war on terrorism and in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

However, the strong public support that existed for the United States following the Gulf War has dissipated slightly in recent years. Criticism of the American presence is limited to some nationalist intellectual circles and Islamic movements. A small minority, these Kuwaitis argue that the U.S. role is aimed not at protecting the Gulf states, but at securing economic and cultural influence in the region. This issue is increasingly discussed in *dimaniyyas*, the evening gatherings of male Kuwaitis in private homes. Resentment of U.S. influence in Kuwait also comes from critics of Kuwaiti arms purchases during a period of depressed oil prices and government expenditure cutbacks.

Other occasional tension in the Kuwaiti-American relationship stems from U.S. support for Israel, which is unpopular domestically among Kuwaitis. Critics of the United States argue that one of the goals of American policy in the Gulf is to serve Israel's interests.



## Attitudes toward Other Ethnic Groups

**Other Arabs:** Because of cultural and linguistic familiarity, Kuwaitis tend not to consider Arabs (especially those from the Gulf states) to be foreigners. Rather, they are perceived as merely non-Kuwaiti. As a rule, Arab workers are better paid and employed than non-Arabs, and enjoy a higher social status. More often than not, the Arab migrant reconstitutes his social and cultural universe by settling with an already established community of relatives and acquaintances from his home village or region. In addition, linguistic and cultural commonality play a role in Arabs' comfort level in Kuwait, as do their privileged position in the labor market. In the private sphere, however, Kuwaitis and other Arabs do not generally mix. The relationship is characterized by cultural closeness and social distance.

Initially, few Arabs from outside the peninsula were eager to migrate to Kuwait, despite the prospect of high wages. Palestinians made refugees by the 1948 Arab-Israel War were the exception. However, Kuwait's rapid growth made it increasingly attractive to neighboring Arab populations. Palestinians, Iraqis, Egyptians, and Arabs from the other Gulf sheikhdoms staffed Kuwait's social sector, working as teachers, doctors, and engineers. As Kuwait's oil revenues increased substantially in the 1970s, Kuwait opened its doors to new Arab migrants, including a second wave of Palestinian refugees following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and Lebanese fleeing the civil war in their country.

In the private sector, the prospective Arab worker usually finds an employer through personal contacts either with Kuwaitis or with fellow countrymen already in the emirate. In the public sector, recruitment takes place through bilateral agreements between a Kuwaiti institution and its Arab counterpart. Such agreements provide Kuwait with an annual quota of experts for a limited contract period. Arab women come to Kuwait primarily as dependants. As a result, men and women in the Arab population are mostly related through marriage.

As Kuwait's foreign Arab population increased, the country was drawn into wider Arab political and social issues. Arab workers brought with them their political ideologies, such as Arab nationalism. These political ideologies were potentially threatening to Kuwait's hereditary emirate and conservative culture. Since Arab migrants were employed in key areas (education, business, state bureaucracy), these political ideas had the potential to spread rapidly. As a result, the Kuwaiti government became increasingly uneasy about the vocal presence of Arab expatriates and their effect on Kuwait's internal politics and culture. It responded by using social policies and nationality laws to create a rift between foreign Arabs and Kuwaitis. In addition, because of turbulent Middle Eastern politics from the 1960s to the 1980s, the government felt the need to restrict the immigration of Arab laborers, relying on Asians instead.

Until the 1990 Iraqi invasion, Palestinian Arabs were the most prominent and well-established foreign Arab community. (Kuwait was the third largest home for Palestinian refugees after Jordan and Lebanon). The close ties between Kuwaitis and Palestinians are related to the coincidence in timing between the existence of Palestinian refugees resulting from the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the beginning of the Kuwaiti oil industry. Kuwait

## FOUO

welcomed Palestinians because of the skills they provided. They were allowed an unusual degree of freedom in social and political organization. In addition, Kuwait was financially and diplomatically supportive of the Palestinian national movement. It gave the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) regular and substantial financial support. Kuwaiti leaders regularly spoke for Palestinians in international organizations.

During the 1991 Iraqi invasion, nearly half of the Palestinian population fled Kuwait. Following the Persian Gulf War, Kuwait dramatically reduced its Palestinian population. Palestinian support for Iraq led to a sense of betrayal among Kuwaitis. Those Palestinians who fled in the wake of the Iraqi invasion were not allowed back into the country. Kuwaiti vigilante groups went after suspected Palestinian collaborators. Overall, the Palestinian community's status has changed, from the most privileged to the least privileged foreign workers.

**Asians:** Since World War II, there has been a substantial Asian population in Kuwait. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the British-owned Kuwait Oil Company turned to India and Pakistan for many of its first oil workers. In the 1960s, Kuwait responded to turbulent Middle Eastern politics by restricting Arab labor immigration. In its place, the regime turned to migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the Philippines. In general, Asians occupied the bottom of a hierarchy based on ethnicity, religion, and gender. For example, the domestic sector—the lowest rung on the occupational ladder—consisted almost entirely of non-Muslim, Asian women.

Asians in Kuwait were seldom recruited directly by their employers. The majority passed through intermediate recruitment agencies because Asians lacked personal networks in Kuwait. As a result, the migration process was more costly for the Asians. Less than 20 percent of Asian workers stayed in Kuwait for 10 years; nearly half stayed for less than 3 years. There were differences along gender lines as well. Men and women in the Asian population generally were not related through marriage. Though Asian workers were often married, they were usually not accompanied by their spouses and did not live in Kuwait as family units. This influenced both the duration of their stay and Kuwaiti perceptions of their moral and sexual behavior.

Following the Gulf War, the Kuwaiti government instituted policies restricting the nationals of those countries that collaborated with or supported Iraq—Palestinian, Jordanian, Sudanese, Yemeni, and Iraqi—while giving preference to the nationals of those states that supported Kuwait. Because of the exclusion of many Arabs, Asian migrants have dominated the labor market since the war. This influx of Asian workers has transformed Kuwaiti society and culture in several important ways, including the growing use of English as a common language. English is a natural choice given Kuwait's connection to Great Britain, and given the nationalities of the new migrants from the Indian subcontinent and the Philippines. Kuwaitis have responded to the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of the population with concerns for cultural survival.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-50-

## Attitudes toward Neighboring States

**Iraq:** Kuwaitis and Iraqis have longstanding cultural, familial, and economic ties. However, Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations have been marred by border disputes. Beginning in the 1930s, Iraqis claimed that Kuwait was part of Iraq, tracing their claim back to the Ottoman period. Kuwait's history as an autonomous state belies this argument. The Ottoman Empire exercised no direct control over Kuwait. Nevertheless, when Kuwait became independent in 1961, Iraq revived its earlier claims, but was deterred by British opposition. Tensions over the border continued through the 1970s, especially because an oil field is located in the border region.

Relations between the two countries appeared to be improving throughout the 1980s. During the Iran-Iraq War, driven by its fear of Tehran, Kuwait supplied Iraq with billions in direct support as well as logistical and diplomatic aid. The 1990 Iraqi invasion therefore caught Kuwait by surprise. The subsequent Iraqi occupation was brutal. Iraqi forces engaged in torture and summary execution of those it suspected of involvement in the resistance movement. Iraqi troops looted Kuwait, taking things of value back to Iraq and destroying what remained. As a result, Kuwaitis detest most Iraqis.

**Iran:** Kuwait has had long-standing trade links to Persia. Geographical proximity and cultural similarity have not eroded the Kuwaiti Arabs' suspicion of Iran. This can be explained by Iran's size and large population (relative to Kuwait) and the presence of a substantial Shia community in Kuwait. Following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Kuwait viewed Iran as a major threat, due to its ideological and material support for Kuwaiti Shia dissidents, as well as some actual attacks on Kuwaitis during the war with Iraq. As a result, Kuwait supported Iraq during the eight-year war. Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Iran demanded immediate and full Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. Although Iran did not take part in the international coalition that liberated Kuwait, the Iranian position was widely appreciated by Kuwaitis. In addition, Tehran has been increasingly seen as a responsible diplomatic and economic partner and as a counterweight to Iraq. Kuwait emphasizes its friendly relations with the Iranian government. Iran's rejection of an American military presence in Kuwait has produced some tension.

**The Gulf States:** Kuwaitis have close cultural, economic, and familial connections to the other Gulf sheikhdoms: Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. Bahrain's ruling family is part of the Bani Utub, the tribe that originally settled Kuwait. Tension developed in the 1990s because Qatar and the UAE proved more willing to accept the reintegration of Iraq into the regional system than Kuwait.

The desert created a cultural gap between the residents of the Arabian Peninsula and the rest of the Arab community. Only with the advent of commercial aviation and the building of the desert highway did the physical barriers break down. Beginning in the 1960s, Kuwaitis looked to their Arab neighbors instead of their previous overseas associations. However, they largely avoided turbulent Arab politics. After the Gulf War, Kuwait had poor relations with those countries that supported Iraq, including Jordan, Sudan, and Yemen. These relations have since improved.

FOUO

**Saudi Arabia:** Kuwait has an ambiguous relationship with Saudi Arabia. Before the states' borders were drawn in 1922, Kuwait resisted several incursions from Saudi Wahhabi tribes. The Saudis continued to harass Kuwait militarily through the 1920s, and imposed an economic blockade from 1923 to 1938. Over the past several decades, the Saudi-Kuwaiti relationship has improved and there is significant economic cooperation between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. However, relations between the countries have been hampered by different approaches to Gulf security, by Kuwait's democratic reforms, which the royal family in Saudi Arabia finds threatening, and by Saudi Arabia's support for Wahabbism, a form of Islam that Kuwait finds threatening.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003

-52-

## **Attitudes toward Regional Powers**

**Turkey:** Kuwaitis regard Turkey with ambivalence. Through World War I, Kuwait was officially part of the Ottoman Empire, linked administratively and economically through Basra in southern Iraq. Its boats, for example, flew the Ottoman flag. The al-Sabah family's date plantations in southern Iraq strengthened the perception of a Kuwaiti tie to the Ottoman Empire, as did Kuwaiti participation in Ottoman political and military affairs. However, Ottoman administrators largely neglected the city-state, allowing it to act more or less independently. There was never an Ottoman garrison in town, and Kuwaiti subjects paid no Ottoman taxes and were not conscripted into the Ottoman army. Overall, there was little change in the city-state's day-to-day affairs, and Kuwaitis lived comfortably and autonomously under Ottoman rule.

**Israel:** Kuwaitis are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and sentiment against Israel has grown over the past several years.

## Cultural Economy

### *Pre-Oil Kuwait*

Because Kuwait has no agriculture to speak of, subsistence has historically depended on trade. Since they settled in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Kuwaitis have oriented themselves less to their original tribal ranges in Arabia than to the Gulf coast and the Indian Ocean. Kuwaitis' network of trade partners included other Arabs, Persians, Indians, and Africans. Basra, Karachi, Aden, Mombassa, and Zanzibar were points through which Kuwaiti society connected with the other participants in the sea-trade network.

Kuwait's traders and merchants were long-settled, Sunni, linked together by marriage, and claimed descent from the original Bani Utub families. Through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, they were the richest, most influential members of Kuwaiti society. They exported pearls, dates, clothing, camels, and horses, and imported spices, coffee, textiles, and metals. Pearl diving was especially important to Kuwait's cultural economy prior to the discovery of oil. The pearling season began in mid-May and lasted for about four months. Diving for pearls was a relatively skilled and labor-intensive occupation. In addition to divers, there were "pullers" whose job was to let the divers down to the seabed and to help pull them up when they had completed a dive. Bedouins came from the desert interior to work on the pearling boats, and other immigrant laborers came from Persia and East Africa.

The pearling industry was highly structured and hierarchical. It rested on a system of profit-sharing and debts that bound the divers to their captains and the captains to the boat-owning merchants. At the start of each pearling season, the merchant or the captain gave the diver a loan to support his family. Because divers rarely if ever made enough money to repay the loan, they had to pledge to work for the captain or merchant the following season. As a result, there were perpetual debts and significant continuity in employment.



**Pearling Boat**

Despite its hardships, Kuwaitis view this system with pride as a symbol of the solidarity that characterizes their community. The wealthier members of society had responsibilities to those who worked for them; their status in society depended in part on how they treated people. The result was greater cooperation between the owners and the laborers. The debt system was also a system of patronage and clientage. Because of this, each town contained a large number of patron-client groups, bound closely together in mutual dependence. This system continues to color the way Kuwaitis view the employer-employee relationship. For example, the current *kafala* system similarly emphasizes the laborer's lack of choice and the employer's paternalistic role.

Other economic activities based on the sea—such as boat building—emerged alongside pearling and trading. Fishing became a small but significant industry, feeding the local population and providing a small surplus for export. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century these

industries allowed Kuwait to prosper. Its population grew steadily and rapidly in the last few decades of the century through both natural increase and immigration from eastern and central Arabia, Qatar, and Persia. Kuwaiti merchants cooperated as a community during this period. Losses were averaged out and merchants would help one another alleviate debt. These mercantile values of reliability and reputation continue to operate in Kuwait's business sector. Business is conducted on the strength of family relations, and a family's honor depends on adherence to financial and moral responsibility.

The settled merchant community was attached to the town of Kuwait. It was their source of livelihood. In addition to traders, shopkeepers and artisans formed a small service sector in Kuwait city, catering to local and Bedouin needs. However, through the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the settled community of Kuwait lived in constant fear of Bedouin raids. To supplement income from pastoralism, nomadic and semi-nomadic Arab tribes raided caravans, other tribes, and settled communities. Although nomads and townspeople were economically interdependent, the raid was at the core of the Bedouin economic structure. Acts of piracy extended the Bedouin practice of raiding to the Gulf waters.

During the pre-oil period, Kuwait remained a hierarchical society. As the tribal elite became ship owners and pearl merchants, Kuwait moved away from the more egalitarian structures, values, and norms of a tribal desert economy to the less egalitarian structures, values, and norms of a settled market economy. The structure of both the trade and pearling industries encouraged concentration of wealth.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Kuwait's merchants had become a homogeneous and unified socio-economic elite. Their political power, which flowed from their economic strength, was institutionalized in a series of informal and semi-formal mechanisms—such as the *majlis*—that granted them access to the ruling family.

A series of crises in the 1920s and 1930s—including the Saudi embargo of Kuwait from 1923-1937, competition from the Japanese cultured pearl industry, and the worldwide depression—radically changed Kuwait's economic structure just before the discovery of oil in 1938.



**Pearl Diver**

#### *Post-Oil Kuwait*

Since Kuwait became an oil-dominated state, pearl diving, fishing, and trade have become peripheral to Kuwait's economy. Pastoral nomadism—a social and economic system based on raising livestock and migration in search of food, water, and grazing land—has similarly become increasingly rare in Kuwait as a viable mode of subsistence. In addition to oil production, its decline is due to the advent of nation-states with closed borders and rapid and dramatic urbanization. Nonetheless, nomadic people and their traditions have left a very deep imprint on Kuwaiti culture, society, and politics.

## FOUO

Since oil was first shipped in 1946, Kuwait has experienced a radical but relatively smooth transition from pearls to petroleum, poverty to prosperity. The visible and material effects of the oil boom on Kuwait include the rapid transformation of living standards, massive infrastructure development, generous welfare-state provisions, a huge influx of immigrant labor (skilled and unskilled), and the adoption of a Western, consumer-oriented lifestyle.

The discovery and production of oil completely and immediately transformed the Kuwaiti cultural economy. Distributive and developmental policies substantially increased the size, power, and reach of the state. Oil revenues freed Kuwait's rulers from the need to tax the population, and consequently from their historical dependence on the merchant elite. The merchant families renounced formal political influence for a share of the oil revenues. To ensure political acquiescence, the state preserved a private sector for the merchants, which was facilitated by direct aid, grants of land and money, and monopoly concessions. This arrangement was institutionalized through protective nationality and commercial laws that restricted property and business ownership rights to citizens. The primary beneficiaries of these laws were the established trading families. The government also made a tacit promise to keep members of the ruling family out of commercial businesses.

The arrangement with the merchants was not the only policy the Kuwaiti rulers enacted to maintain stability in the oil era. The al-Sabah family also formed new and independent ties with the population. Oil gave the regime the ability to develop new alliances through distributive policies. Kuwaiti citizens were given social and economic benefits—such as free education, health care, a variety of subsidized goods and services, including housing, and guaranteed employment. Strict nationality and commercial laws were instituted to remind Kuwait citizens of their advantages, and that their prosperity was a direct result of the state. Kuwaiti affluence, leisure, and power stood in increasing contrast to foreign economic need, dependence, and labor. As a result, the dichotomy between Kuwaiti leisure and privilege and non-Kuwaiti labor became central to Kuwaiti identity.

Ninety-one percent of all Kuwaiti workers are employed in the public sector. In recent years, government policy has encouraged Kuwaitis to seek employment in the private sector. However, the Kuwaitization of the labor force will require a significant change in societal attitudes toward technical and manual work. The reliance on foreign labor created negative attitudes among Kuwaitis toward these work practices. The type of work, sector of employment, and social interactions at work determine the social status of the worker and his family. In addition, the Kuwaitization of the private sector likely means the erosion of the government's traditional commitment to guaranteeing every Kuwaiti a job.

Until the 1990s, most Kuwaiti women did not participate in the labor market. Over the past decade, participation rates have increased. However, there is a concern among Kuwaitis that increased participation by women will increase the demand for domestic servants, all of whom are foreigners. Kuwaitis view an increase in the number of domestic servants as undesirable because of the already high number of foreign workers in Kuwait and because of a perceived adverse impact on Kuwaiti children.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-56-



FOUO

Apart from oil and oil-related products, contemporary Kuwait produces little. Kuwaitis import practically everything they consume. Although a substantial amount of goods come from the Middle East, Kuwait's main trading partners are the United States, Europe, and Japan. As a result, Kuwait has a strikingly Western outlook expressed in its modern infrastructure, patterns of consumption, and views of technology. In many ways, pagers, mobile phones, email, the internet, and other modern communication devices symbolize a facet of what it means to be Kuwaiti—modern, technologically savvy, globally linked, and wealthy.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

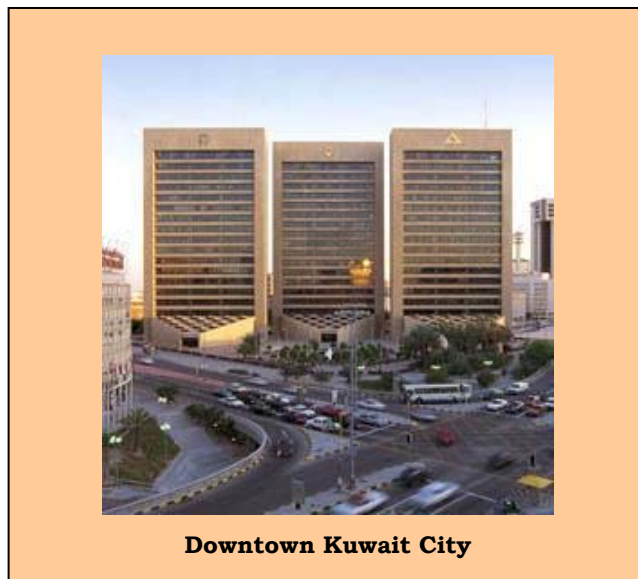
April 2003

-57-

## Cultural Geography

Unlike neighboring states, Kuwait has had a well-defined territorial nucleus since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. However, its borders have remained unsettled. At the 1922 Uqair Conference, the British determined the borders of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait. However, both Iraq and Saudi Arabia continue to contest those borders.

The geographical pattern of residence in Kuwait reflects the ethnic diversity of the population. Kuwait City, where the vast majority of the Kuwaiti Arab population lives, has residential areas identified as Kuwaiti, mixed, and rural. The Kuwaiti areas are inhabited by wealthy Kuwaitis. Mixed areas are inhabited by less wealthy Kuwaitis and foreigners of all nationalities. Rural areas are populated by settled nomads and unskilled migrant workers. Some areas are identified with one particular foreign group. Overall, residential patterns followed class rather than ethnic lines. The central and eastern parts of Kuwait are considered wealthier than the western parts.



**Downtown Kuwait City**

### Urban vs. Rural Culture



**Shepherd with Sheep Outside of Kuwait City**

Kuwaitis have been mostly settled since the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there was constant coming and going between the desert and Kuwait City. There was also social and economic interaction between the two: the Bedouin provided labor for the leading merchants and traded goods in town. In addition, most of the settled families traced their origins to nomadic tribes and share many values with the Bedouin. Nevertheless, there was a clear social and cultural dichotomy between long-

settled Kuwaitis and nomadic tribesmen. Overall, the nomadic element, though not insignificant, has played a relatively minor role in the evolution of state and society.

Kuwait is an urban society centered on a coastal city. Citizens who live in Kuwait City have more economic and political opportunities and advantages than those living outside of the city.

FOUO

The Arabic word for city, *medina*, connotes the center of political or economic power. In general, Islamic cities are marked by a series of specific buildings and institutions such as the Friday mosque and public bath. There is a strict separation between markets and places of production and residential areas.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-59-

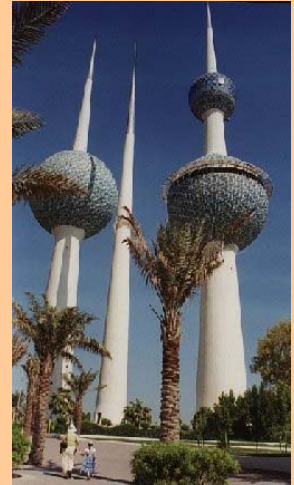
## Culture of Major Urban Areas

**Kuwait City:** With approximately 1.4 million inhabitants (nearly 75 percent of Kuwait's population), Kuwait City dominates the country culturally, politically, and economically.

The city has developed from a nomadic port town to a booming modern metropolis. Since the 1950s, the city's area has doubled and a network of residential and commercial communities has been built. Residential areas are identified as Kuwaiti, mixed, and rural. The Kuwaiti areas are inhabited by wealthy Kuwaitis. Mixed areas are inhabited by less wealthy Kuwaitis and expatriates of all nationalities. Rural areas are populated by settled nomads and unskilled migrant workers. Some areas are identified with one particular expatriate group. Overall, residential patterns followed class rather than ethnic lines.



**Kuwaiti Waterfront**



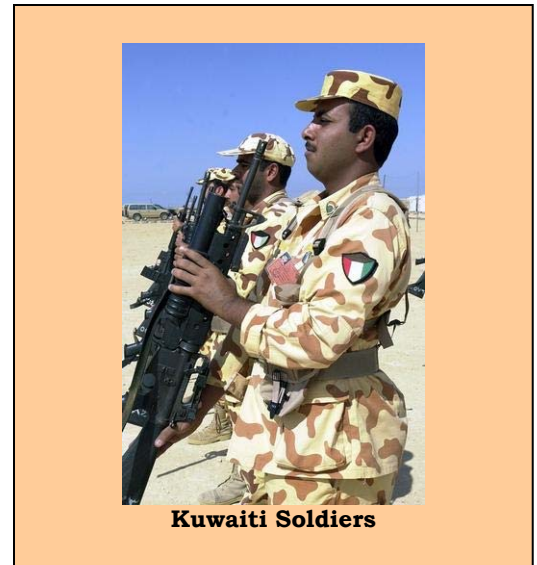
**Kuwaiti Towers**

The walls surrounding old Kuwait City—built in 1760, 1811, and 1920—were torn down as a result of development and expansion. However, the old city gates from the 1921 effort still stand as a monument to Kuwait's past.

## Cultural Style of Warfare

While many city-states of earlier times were founded on and strongly identified with a martial tradition, Kuwait was known for its prominent role as a port of trade. The social split between Bedouin and town-dweller that has characterized Kuwait's culture from the beginning reinforced the city's commercial orientation.

Kuwait's small territory and population have required it to seek help from the outside to defend itself. For much of its history, Kuwait relied on citizen armies and allied Bedouin tribes for protection. These forces were controlled by the sheikhs of the towns and those of the Bedouin sections. The ruling family's men-at-arms were employed mainly for internal security and for garrisoning the towers from which the towns and villages were defended.



Beginning in 1899, Great Britain guaranteed the security of Kuwait. Kuwaiti forces during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century consisted of the emir's royal guard plus a small domestic police force or constabulary under the British administration. British protection was particularly important in deterring Saudi encroachment and later in blocking Iraqi territorial claims. By the time Kuwait became independent in June 1961, the British had converted the 600-man constabulary into a combined arms brigade of 2,500 men. The British also trained small air and naval forces.

Kuwait has a conscription system that obligates young men to serve for two years beginning at the age of eighteen. Educational deferments are granted, and university graduates serve for only one year. In practice, exemptions are liberally granted, and most young Kuwaitis are able to avoid military duty. Lower ranks in the army and security forces are occupied predominantly by *bidun* who had taken reasonably well to military life but were poorly prepared to absorb modern training and servicing modern equipment. In spite of reports that many *bidun* fought well against the Iraqis, many were expelled from the army in 1991 for alleged collaboration.

Kuwait's rulers have consistently seen the state's military weakness as a fundamental situation that they cannot alter. As a result, they continue to rely on the protection of outside powers. Their choice of security strategies has conflicted with an equally strong desire to maximize their autonomy. Throughout its history, Kuwait has occasionally been forced to surrender a portion of autonomy to ensure survival.

Kuwait's oil wealth provides another pillar of the state's security strategy. Oil revenue has enabled Kuwait's rulers to buy off external enemies and mobilize an international constituency of supporters by creating foreign aid dependencies. Since independence, Kuwait has invested heavily in neighboring countries as well as in the West. This strategy

has produced mixed results. Kuwait's aid to the PLO, coupled with its aid to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, amounted to billions of dollars. Yet, the 1990 Iraqi invasion was supported by the Palestinians.

## Conventional Warfare

Cultural factors have made it difficult for Arab militaries to adopt Western war-fighting doctrine. Western warfare has emphasized offensive action and shock effect, whereas Arab warfare has emphasized standoff, attrition, deception, and surprise. Martial traditions also influence which military units are most prestigious. Fighter squadrons and commando units, for example, perform raid-like missions, which have a high profile in Arab-Islamic history.

Arab militaries have not been overwhelmingly effective in the modern era. According to several observers, Arab culture encourages patterns of behavior that are not conducive to modern military operations. Arab officers (especially junior officers) are hesitant to exercise independent judgment, frequently lack extensive technical training, and are prone to selectively transmit information in order to avoid the loss of face. These types of Arab cultural behavior patterns cause Arab militaries to have weak information flows. Arab military personnel often cannot take full advantage of their weaponry and equipment and have difficulty maintaining it.

In training, Arab armed forces taught their soldiers that there was only one right answer to a military problem and only one right way to handle a situation. This approach was employed in battle regardless of other factors such as terrain, mission, forces available, or the enemy's strength or disposition. Arab training exercises tend to be scripted and unrealistic. Training manuals are treated as cookbooks to be followed to the letter regardless of the specifics of the situation.

## Unconventional/Tribal Warfare

Arab warfare stems directly from nomadic traditions and experiences. Historically, nomadic tribes alternated between accommodating central authority and defying it. In the first case, they were employed as frontier defense forces or as auxiliary light cavalry. In the second case, they posed a threat to settled populations by attacking small isolated garrisons and raiding poorly defended towns. Although the nomadic population of Kuwait has dramatically decreased in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the image of the nomadic warrior has remained powerful. Because the extended family is the fundamental unit of political and social action, a kin group has traditionally looked first to its own fighting men, not to the state's armed forces, to ensure its protection and promotion of its interests. In general, the resort to arms for the sake of tribe and clan remains a higher ideal than military service to the state.

The conduct of a struggle is as important as its outcome. To show honor during a military operation is praised regardless of the outcome.

Historically, sedentary and nomadic units were traditionally skeptical of outside groups, fearing competition for scarce resources. Protection of territory and allegiance to the social

unit were primary reactions against intrusion. It was common to engage in military forays to usurp and plunder resources belonging to a weaker tribe or neighbor.

The glory of the raid—whether against another nomadic tribe, settled enemy, or caravan—is a key aspect of Bedouin tribal warfare. In many cases, the raids were carried out with minimal violence. However, they could become a flash point for a larger tribal conflict. Tribes commemorated their raids through poetry and song. Although it varied greatly as to numbers involved and distances traveled, raiding followed certain norms. Raiding tribes traveled light, avoided detection, moved quickly, minimized bloodshed, and took camels only—no captives or other spoils. When raiding led to a larger conflict, the objective usually was not to force submission, but to restore the balance of honor or the balance of livestock. Tribal warfare tended to become more intense and bloody when central authorities tried to impose political control on a rural population.

Participation in a raid was considered a dramatic test of courage, skill, and dedication to the goals of the tribal group. The resort to combat usually bestowed honor on both sides. For Arab tribes, honor is the dominant value. In the collective sense, honor means defense of the tribe, the group, or the society as a whole against its challengers. Lost honor, according to tribal tradition, must be retrieved by violence. A man's failure to fulfill his duty as a fighter results in shame.

### Koranic Treatment of Warfare versus Actual Practice

Muslims reside either in the House of Peace (territory under Islamic leadership) or the House of War (its converse). Emerging Islamic doctrine sanctioned the use of force to achieve a "righteous society." Islam possesses an elaborate body of rules about the collective duty of the believers to wage holy war (*jihad*) for the sake of Allah against infidels or those who refuse to accept Islam. From this concept of *jihad*, Muslims have created volumes on topics as diverse as types of defensive and offensive war, conduct of diplomatic relation, conditions of and parameters for peace, division of spoils, treatment of prisoners, and martyrdom. Islamic scholars have differentiated three situations: war against non-Muslims (*jihad*), war between Muslims (*fitna*), and war as a condition of the human experience (*harb*). *Jihad* was permissible, if not obligatory; *fitna* was objectionable. Nevertheless, Muslim Arabs often engaged in conflict with one another. In these cases, one side usually declared the other to be apostates from true Islam.

The Koran also deals with the concept of *shahadat* (martyrdom). Some verses imply that those who become *shahid* (martyr) do not really die and receive rewards in the afterlife. At the same time there is also in the interpretation of Islamic warfare concepts of proportionality, redress, limitations on combat, and the need to exhaust other methods before resorting to violence. In this way, it is similar to the Western concept of just war.

Injunctions regarding *jihad* and the House of War have been tempered over the centuries since it is impractical to be constantly waging war. Nevertheless, it remains a potent force, whether fighting other Muslims or against foreign powers. It assures Muslims that God stands by them. Overall, the use of the term *jihad* has served to validate the political conduct

FOUO

of hostilities, since the resurrection of the Islamic state cannot occur without *jihad*. The ultimate aim of *jihad* is the establishment of the Islamic state, for short of that Muslims will always be oppressed by the infidel.

Evidence indicates that Muslim concepts of warfare have very little, if any, effect on how Kuwaitis think about war or engage in combat.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-64-



## **Influence of Diaspora**

Nearly half of the Kuwaiti population fled during the 1990 Iraqi invasion and occupation. Most temporarily resettled in the neighboring Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia, where the ruling family set up a government in exile. Since Kuwait's liberation, nearly all have returned.

Young Kuwaitis are often educated in the West, especially in the United States and Great Britain. In 2000, approximately 3,000 Kuwaiti students were pursuing post-secondary degrees in the United States. In order to assist Kuwaitis studying abroad, Kuwait's government offers tuition and room and board assistance, as well as a monthly stipend.

Typically, the summer heat drives large numbers of Kuwaitis abroad to Europe and the United States.

## Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations: Kuwait

### Other Arabs in Kuwait

#### Summary of Key Points

- There are approximately 600,000 non-Kuwaiti Arabs in Kuwait. Of these about half are Egyptian. Syrians, Lebanese, and Jordanians make up the rest. Kuwait does not provide population numbers by nationality. Included in the 600,000 are an estimated 113,000 *bidun jinsiyah* (stateless people), recently settled nomads with Iraqi, Syrian, or Saudi roots.
- In general, Arab migrants to Kuwait are males between the ages of 20 and 45 with an urban background. Those who have families tend to leave them at home, where they send most of their earnings.
- Arab workers in Kuwait are predominantly Sunni Muslim and speak Arabic. In Kuwait, religious affiliation is less important than citizenship and ethnic origin as a marker of identity.
- Most Arab workers live in and around Kuwait City. They are largely segregated from the Kuwaiti population, and live with fellow countrymen.
- Arab workers began to arrive en masse in Kuwait following the discovery and production of oil in the 1950s. Kuwait's rapid growth, plus common bonds of language, culture, and religion, made it attractive to neighboring Arab populations. These Arab migrant workers were of crucial significance to Kuwait's development.
- As Kuwait's expatriate Arab population increased, it was drawn into wider Arab political and social issues, some of which were potentially threatening to Kuwait's hereditary emirate and conservative culture.
- Increasingly uneasy about the presence of Arab expatriates in the 1960s, the government used social policies and nationality laws to create a rift between expatriate Arabs and Kuwaitis. In addition, the government restricted the immigration of Arab laborers, relying on South Asians instead.
- During the 1990 Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait, the majority of the Arab worker population fled to their respective countries of origin. Following the war, the government restricted the immigration of nationals of those countries that collaborated with or supported Iraq—such as the Palestinians and Jordanians—while giving preference to the nationals of those states that supported Kuwait.

## FOUO

- Since the Persian Gulf War, Palestinian and Jordanian workers have not returned to Kuwait in significant numbers. Their place has been taken by Egyptians.
- Arab workers' relationships with Kuwait are contractual, based on the exchange of labor for wages. Full social, political, and economic rights and benefits are not available to Arab workers. Kuwait has constructed a complex set of migrant policies. As a result, the native Kuwaiti has almost complete authority over the expatriate worker.
- Arab workers are aware of and accept their subordinate status in Kuwait. However, their cultural closeness with Kuwaitis places them above other migrant worker groups such as South Asians in Kuwait's ethnic hierarchy.
- Arab workers tend not assimilate into Kuwaiti society, and remain focused on their respective homelands. Kuwait policies, which draw a sharp distinction between those who belong to the national community and those who do not, reinforce this tendency.
- Non-Kuwaiti Arabs are defined by their transient status. Individuals are not looking for a long-term improvement in their situation. These workers come to Kuwait with clear material goals. As a result, they pursue pragmatic strategies of accommodation and adjustment while in the emirate.
- Most Arab workers in Kuwait rely on kinship ties for support. Among Arab migrants, "family nesting" or "chain migration"—where initial migrants provide the connections and the money to enable relatives to migrate—is common.
- Economic incentives largely drive Arab immigration to Kuwait. Because Arab migrants intend to return to their homelands eventually, they demand little in the way of social and economic recognition or power.
- It is difficult for the Arab migrant communities in Kuwait to develop formal group identity because of the high rate of personnel turnover, the strict legal and social constraints imposed on them by the government, and because they come to Kuwait with individual, not collective, goals.

FOUO

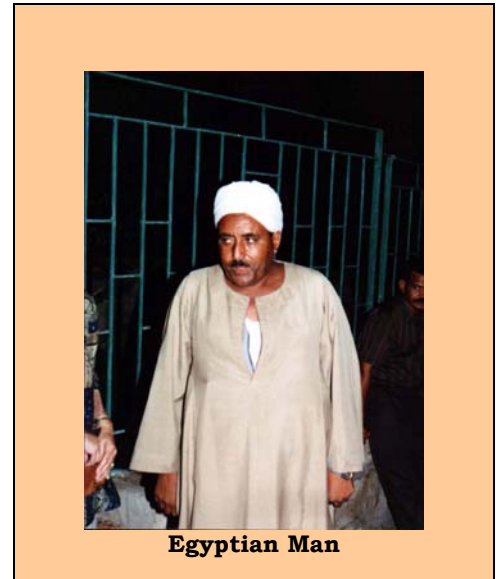
Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003

## Cultural History

Non-Kuwaiti Arabs have lived in and around Kuwait since its founding in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Nomadic Arab tribesmen regularly camped near Kuwait, earning their livelihood by herding animals, trade, raiding, and collecting tribute. Kuwaitis partly depended on these nomads for goods, trade, and contact with other regions.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while Kuwait grew rapidly into a center of desert and maritime trade, its settled population increased gradually. In addition to Kuwaitis (i.e. the original settlers), the population of the region consisted of Arab tribesmen from the lower Gulf and southern Iraq.

Kuwait's Arab expatriate population did not reach significant proportions until the development of the oil industry in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. To work in the oil industry and to carry out the modernization projects financed by the new oil revenues, the Kuwaitis needed an expertise that the local population could not provide. Beginning in the 1950s, tens of thousands of Arab workers and their dependents migrated to Kuwait. Although some of these non-Kuwaiti Arabs have lived in Kuwait for decades, their identity continues to be defined by their transient and subordinate status. Although culturally close to Kuwaitis, Arab workers, for the most part, do not assimilate into Kuwaiti society. Even those born in Kuwait tend not to develop a sense of Kuwaiti identity. Kuwait policies, which clearly distinguish between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, reinforce this tendency.



In general, Arab workers' relationship with Kuwaitis is characterized by social and economic distance. Because full social, political, and economic rights and benefits are not available to foreign workers, an asymmetrical power relationship between Kuwaitis and migrants exists. Arab workers for the most part accept this subordinate status. Being transient, individual expatriate Arabs are not looking for a long-term improvement in their situation. These workers come to Kuwait with clear material goals, and construe their situation in personal, not collective, terms. As a result, they pursue pragmatic strategies of accommodation and adjustment while in the emirate. In addition, because most migrant workers come from states without strong traditions of political and civil rights, they are predisposed to accept their subordinate situation in Kuwait as normal.

Most Arab workers in Kuwait rely on kin or friendship ties for support. More often than not, the Arab migrant reconstitutes his social and cultural universe by settling with an already established community of relatives and acquaintances from his home village or region. Among Arab migrants, "family nesting" or "chain migration"—where initial migrants provide the connections and the money that enable family members to migrate—is widespread. Not all Arab migrant workers rely on such kinship-oriented strategies. Construction and industrial workers, for example, arrive on temporary contracts for specific

## FOUO

projects. Members of this category are single males who arrive in large numbers and live in isolated work camps.

### *Non-Kuwaiti Arabs, 1950-1990*

Initially, few Arabs from outside the peninsula were eager to migrate to Kuwait, despite the prospect of high wages. In the 1950s, a series of reciprocal agreements were concluded between Kuwait and other Arab states that eliminated the need for visas. This opened the door for Arab expatriates, although the Kuwaiti government maintained close control over entry, residence, departure, and employment of these workers. The initial Arab immigrants—most of whom were single men—paved the way for a continuous movement of family, acquaintances, and countrymen to Kuwait as its bureaucracy and economy expanded.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Kuwait's rapid growth, plus common bonds of language, culture, and religion, made it attractive to neighboring Arab populations. Kuwait's oil revenues enabled the government to create a generous welfare system for citizens, and, to a lesser extent, foreign workers. For example, Kuwait used incentives such as free education and subsidized housing to attract highly skilled Arab workers. These Arab migrant workers were of crucial significance to Kuwait's development in this period. They helped create its new infrastructure and staffed and ran its institutions.

As the Arab expatriate community increased, the government enacted stricter citizenship and migration laws. Increasingly, state benefits and services were available exclusively to Kuwaitis. Foreign workers were also denied political and civic rights. These policies discouraged Arab workers from having a stake in Kuwait's economic, social, and political system. Kuwaitis exercised considerable authority over expatriate workers because they controlled labor movement within the country and could threaten deportation. From the beginning, the state segmented the population into Kuwaitis, who possess power, and non-Kuwaitis, who do not.

Kuwait developed a complex ethnic and religious hierarchy during this period, distinguishing among Kuwaiti–non-Kuwaiti, Arab–non-Arab, and Muslim–non-Muslim people. Overall, ethnicity and the type of work performed classified individuals and groups in clearly defined categories. As non-Kuwaitis, Arab workers shared a subordinate status and the discriminatory economic and social practices that this status generated.

Arab expatriates are acutely aware of their inferior status relative to Kuwaitis. Arab migrants uphold the Kuwaiti–non-Kuwaiti stratification through their docile and deferential attitudes toward citizens. Kuwait's economy, laws, and customs emphasize the distinction between



## FOUO

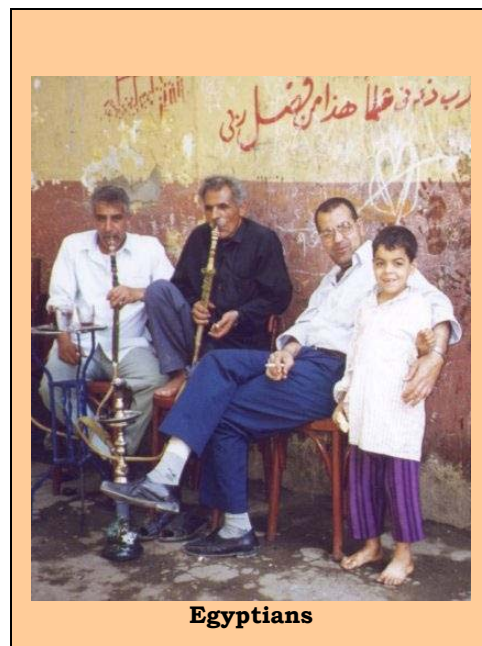
Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## FOUO

citizens and foreigners. However, their cultural closeness with Kuwaitis placed them above other migrant worker groups such as South Asians. Expatriate Arabs adopt the same exclusionary attitude towards those—such as South Asian workers—that they consider to be socially inferior. The configuration of the labor market and the actual ethnic division of labor in the public and private spheres reinforces these perceptions.

From the 1950s through 1990, Palestinians/Jordanians formed the largest and most influential Arab expatriate community in Kuwait. (Estimates of the numbers of Palestinians in Kuwait during this period do not distinguish between Palestinians and Jordanians.) The development of Kuwait's oil industry coincided with the Palestinian dispersal as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. For Palestinians, work in Kuwait was preferable to living in refugee camps in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. While most Arab states were unenthusiastic in welcoming Palestinians, Kuwait opened its doors to Palestinians because of the skills they provided. Educated Palestinians—bureaucrats, doctors, engineers, accountants, businessmen, and teachers—immigrated to Kuwait. As oil revenues grew, work opportunities for this group multiplied, especially in the bureaucracy and civil service. Eventually, Kuwait became the third largest home for diaspora Palestinians after Jordan and Lebanon.



**Egyptians**

During the 1950s and 1960s, Palestinians in Kuwait were the most privileged of the Arab expatriate workers. They were allowed an unusual degree of freedom in social and political organization. In addition, Kuwait was financially and diplomatically supportive of the Palestinian national movement. It gave the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) substantial financial support. Kuwaiti leaders regularly spoke for Palestinians in international bodies. As a result, Palestinians in Kuwait maintained a sense of Palestinian identity and a strong attachment to the Palestinian national movement.

As the presence of Arab expatriate workers increased, Kuwait was drawn into wider Arab political and social issues. Kuwait increasingly became a Middle Eastern state, turning its back on its Indian Ocean past. Arab migrants brought with them their political ideologies, such as Arab nationalism, many of which potentially threatened Kuwait's hereditary emirate and conservative culture. Since Arab migrants were employed in key areas (education, business, state bureaucracy), these political ideas had the potential to spread rapidly.

Kuwaiti authorities especially feared these potentially disruptive ideologies in the 1960s, a period of turbulence in the Middle East. In addition, the 1967 Six-Day War, which resulted in the Israeli conquest of the West Bank, triggered the migration of thousands of Palestinian families to Kuwait. After the 1967 war, moreover, many Palestinian men already in Kuwait sent for their families from the newly occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. The number of

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## FOUO

Palestinian women and children thus increased dramatically, transforming the nature of the community in Kuwait into one dominated by families.

As Kuwait's oil revenues increased substantially in the 1970s, the country continued to be a magnet for workers from the Middle East, including Egyptians and Lebanese fleeing the civil war in their country. In 1965 only about 11,000 Egyptians worked in Kuwait. By 1975, following the Egyptian government's relaxation of stringent controls on emigration, that number had increased to 61,000.

Many Egyptian migrants to Kuwait during this period were highly educated professionals—doctors, teachers, and engineers. In addition, the construction and maintenance of vast infrastructure projects in Kuwait required skilled technicians, semi-skilled machine operators, and unskilled laborers. Large numbers of Egyptians also found work in the broader social services, including the wholesale and retail trades, occupations that placed a premium on Arabic as the native tongue. Compared to other Arabs, Kuwaitis increasingly preferred Egyptians because they were believed to pose less of a political threat. By the mid-1980s, an estimated 168,000 Egyptians were working in Kuwait. Egyptian migration was motivated largely by economic incentives. It also stemmed from feelings of cultural superiority prevalent among urban, educated Egyptians.

Kuwait's unease with the large presence of Arab workers produced social policies and nationality laws designed to create a rift between expatriate Arabs and Kuwaitis and to discourage Arab nationalism. Continued turbulence in Middle Eastern politics caused the Kuwaiti government increasingly to restrict the immigration of Arab labor. In its place, Kuwait began to rely on migrant workers from Asia—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the Philippines—that it considered more politically reliable. In addition, the presence of non-Arab workers accentuated the difference between citizen and non-citizen along racial and cultural lines.



**Street Scene in Kuwait City**

During the 1980s, the Lebanese civil war, the Islamic revolution in Iran, and the Iran-Iraq war made Kuwaitis fear that regional ethnic and religious tensions would reverberate inside Kuwait. Kuwait experienced some internal violence during this period. In response, it expelled members of groups it perceived to be potentially subversive such as Lebanese Shia and discriminated against others, such as Palestinians. Palestinians still maintained significant positions in Kuwait, but they were gradually losing their privileged place in Kuwaiti society. For their part, the nearly 400,000 Palestinians in Kuwait (compared to 600,000 native Kuwaitis) increasingly resented their outsider status and permanent subordinate position. Although Palestinians shared these feelings with other migrant workers, they were different in the sense that most Palestinians had lived in Kuwait for decades and didn't have a state to which they could return.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

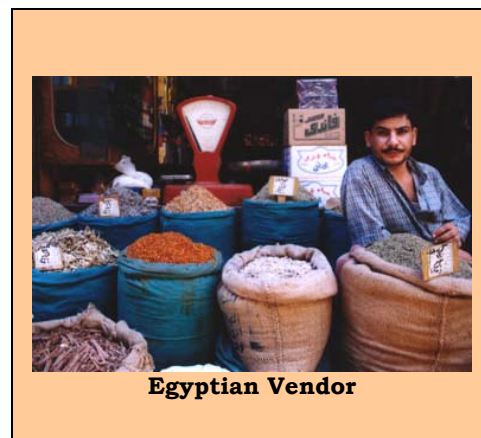
*Non-Kuwaiti Arabs since the 1991 Persian Gulf War*

During the course of the 1990-91 Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait, hundreds of thousands of Kuwaitis and foreign workers fled the country, including nearly half of the Palestinian population and most of the Egyptian workers. Because of perceived Palestinian support for Iraq—a perception reinforced by the PLO's and Jordan's support of Iraqi actions—Palestinians were not allowed back in the country following its liberation. (Kuwait also prevented the return of nationals from countries that collaborated with or supported Iraq, such as Sudan and Yemen.) In addition, Kuwaiti authorities instituted widespread restrictions on the remaining Palestinian community and Kuwaiti vigilante groups went after suspected Palestinian collaborators. These actions caused another wave of Palestinian emigration. Since the Persian Gulf War, Palestinian and Jordanian workers have not returned to Kuwait in significant numbers. In 2001, Kuwait and Jordan signed an agreement allowing the transfer of workers between the two nations for the first time since 1990. There are approximately 30,000 Jordanian/Palestinian workers in Kuwait.

Since Kuwait's liberation, Egyptian workers largely have filled the gap left by the departure of the Palestinians. Kuwait's receptiveness to Egyptian workers reflected Egypt's support of Kuwait during the Persian Gulf War. In general, Arab expatriate communities in Kuwait came to be categorized in accordance with the positions of their respective governments during the conflict.

Labor migration to Kuwait has been undergoing significant changes following the end of the oil boom in the mid-1980s, and in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War with its drain on the Kuwaiti economy. Many workers are now being sent home at the end of their contracts. Low oil prices and a generally weak economy have meant a freeze on many construction and development projects. This climate has also led authorities to crack down on illegal migrants, many of whom were tolerated in the boom years of the 1970s.

In recent years, many Egyptians seeking jobs in Kuwait have fallen victim to fraud by their sponsors and employers. Many are unskilled workers, who were forced to sell their lands and property in rural Egypt to pay agents who promised to find them jobs, only to discover either that there were no jobs or that working conditions were unbearable. These conditions were responsible for riots by Egyptian workers in October 1999. The incident took place in the Khaitan region, near Kuwait City, where 60,000 Egyptian workers live in crowded living quarters. The region is virtually a shanty-town of migrant workers from different countries.



**Egyptian Vendor**

The only reason Arabs come to Kuwait is to work. Expatriate Arabs who are not working are workers' dependents. Arab workers in Kuwait continue to be governed by the *kafala*



## FOUO

(sponsorship) system, which delegates to citizens the daily administration of migrant workers. In most cases, visas and residency permits are granted to those with a work contract by a Kuwaiti employer. This system also serves to maintain the stability of the labor market. Once in Kuwait, laborers are not free to move from one job to another or to offer their services to the highest-paying employer. Expatriate workers had to leave Kuwait upon termination of their employment contract. By controlling labor movement within the country and by threatening deportation, the Kuwaitis exercise considerable authority over the expatriate workers.

Although Arab workers in Kuwait are better off than their Asian counterparts, they live in a relatively insecure environment. The reasons for their insecurity include: the absence of clearly defined rights, dependence on the goodwill of individual Kuwaiti sponsors, formal and informal means of discrimination, and the fear of returning home as failures for not having met material expectations. Overall, this combination of insecurity and clear material goals leads migrant workers to live austere and frugal lifestyles, sharing apartments with fellow countrymen, and sending the bulk of their earnings home.

### *The Bidun*

In addition to non-Kuwaiti Arab workers, there is another non-Kuwaiti Arab group—the *bidun jinsyyah* (stateless people). *Bidun* are recently settled nomads with Iraqi, Syrian, or Saudi roots. In 1961, facing the threat of Iraqi territorial expansion, Kuwait granted thousands of *bidun* citizenship in return for military service. Very few settled Kuwaitis were interested in the army, but the *bidun*'s culture and traditions predisposed them to join the armed forces.

Until 1989, Kuwait counted 200,000 *bidun* nationals in the census for political purposes. However, beginning in the mid-1980s, Kuwaitis began to see the *bidun* as an economic liability and potential security threat. Many Kuwaitis suspected that the *bidun* population included Iraqis, Syrians, and Jordanians who destroyed their identification papers in order to enjoy some of the benefits—like free health care and education—of the Kuwaiti *bidun*. These concerns, coupled with the economic downturn caused by falling oil prices, prompted a crackdown on *bidun*. The Kuwaiti government eliminated them from the census rolls, discontinued their access to government jobs and free education, and sought to deport them.

During the Iraqi invasion and occupation, some *bidun* supported or collaborated with the Iraqis. These actions led the Kuwaitis to accuse the whole group of betrayal, and declare them illegal residents. As the war ended, hundreds of *bidun* languished on the border between Iraq and Kuwait denied entry by a government worried about their allegiances and determined to reduce the number of non-nationals. In addition, the government suspected that, following the war, thousands of *bidun* were concealing their true Saudi, Iraqi, or Syrian origin to gain entry into Kuwait. Since 1991, Kuwait has reduced the number of *bidun* by more than half, down from a pre-war population of 250,000 to an estimated 113,000 in 2001.

Recently, Kuwaiti authorities have begun investigating *bidun* on an individual basis, naturalizing those who could prove through DNA evidence ties to Kuwaiti relatives. A

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

FOUO

2000 law allows a maximum of 2,000 *bidun* to be naturalized each year. However, *bidun* in two categories—wives of citizens and sons of female citizens married to *biduns*—have been permitted to apply for citizenship beyond this limit. *Bidun* who admit to being citizens of other countries are able to obtain residency permits and other official papers.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

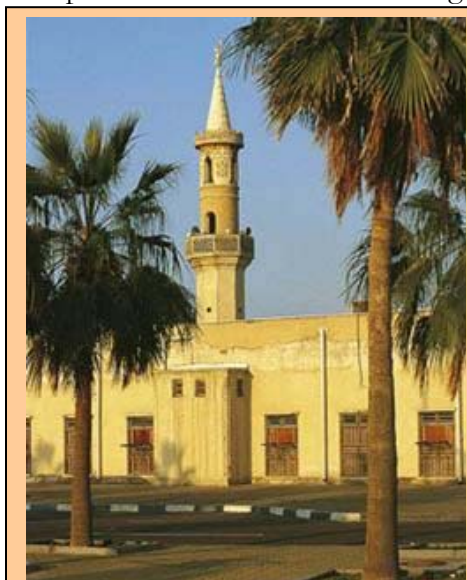
-9-

## Religious Identity of Ethnic Group and Influence on Culture

Kuwait's Arab worker population is predominantly Sunni Muslim. In Kuwait, religious affiliation is less important than citizenship and ethnic origin as a marker of identity. However, Kuwait's Shia Arab worker community has a developed sense of identity because of shared beliefs and practices. In addition, economic and social self-segregation, as well as Sunni discrimination, has produced a sense of Shia identity.

### *Differences between Sunni and Shia Islam*

In the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century, soon after the death of Muhammad, Shia Muslims and Sunni Muslims split over who should be his rightful spiritual and secular successor (known as the caliph).



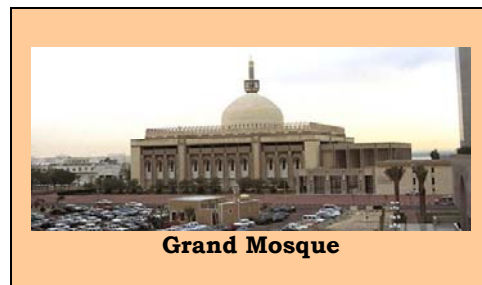
**Kuwaiti Mosque**

In terms of doctrine and belief Shia and Sunni Muslims are similar. Both follow the Five Pillars of Islam: profession of faith; praying five times a day; almsgiving to the poor and the mosque (house of worship); fasting during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan; and pilgrimage to Mecca (the *hajj*). However, there are significant differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

The Imamate is the central aspect of Shia Islam and what principally distinguishes it from orthodox or Sunni Islam. The Shia believe in the succession of infallible Imams or religious leaders all of whom were members of Muhammad's family and who interpreted the law and doctrine. Ali—Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law—was the first Shia Imam. He was followed by 11 successors, who passed the Imamate down to their sons in hereditary fashion. The most important Shia Imam was Ali's son Husayn, whose

martyrdom at Karbala in Iraq in 680 A.D. marks the beginnings of Shia Islam as a religion. The Shia believe that the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam remains "hidden," and is awaiting the right time for a return.

Other differences between the two sects include the role and power of the *ulema* (religious scholars or clergy) and religious hierarchy. The Shia religious structure is more hierarchical than the Sunni. In addition, they exert more influence over their flock than the Sunni clergy. Over time, the Shia have developed several rituals that are distinct from Sunni practices. For example, the Shia from all over the world visit the shrines of martyred imams, several of which are across the border in Iraq.



**Grand Mosque**

The rites and rituals of Ashura, which commemorate the death of Husayn, are among the oldest and most revered religious traditions for Shia Arabs. These rituals take the form of

## FOUO

representations and reenactments of the Battle of Karbala, which took place in 680 between Husayn and his followers and the army of Umayyad caliph Yazid bin Mu'awiya.

Both Shia and Sunni Islam have developed several sects or schools. Among the Arab Shia, the Twelver or Ithna-Ashari sect is the largest. Sunni Arab workers in Kuwait follow all four of the schools.

In general, the political marginalization of the Shia has translated into a lack of economic and social opportunities in comparison with those available to their Sunni counterparts. Sunnism is associated with the status quo. Shiism is associated with the rejection of the status quo, often accompanied by a determination to change it.

### *Islam and Arabism*

Islam is closely tied to Arab culture. Islam and Arabism have functioned in the Muslim Middle East as the preeminent political paradigms for more than 1,300 years. Despite Islam's emphasis on community, an Arab versus non-Arab distinction insinuated itself soon after Islam's founding. Arabs assert special rights and privileges in Islam for several reasons: the birthplace of Islam and its holiest sites are in the Arab countries; Arabic is the language in which God's message was revealed and transmitted; and Arabs were the first to receive this message and entrusted to carry it to other populations.

In the years after Muhammad's death, a "successorship" or caliphate—the earthly embodiment of a united political and religious realm—was established to guide the Islamic community. The reign of the first four caliphs—known as the righteous caliphs—is revered by Sunni Muslims. Shia Muslims only recognize Ali, the fourth caliph. Notably, each of the first four caliphs was a member of Muhammad's tribe and therefore Arab. When the last of the righteous caliphs died—only 28 years after the tenure of the first began—the Islamic empire had spread to Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, and had moved east into Iraq and central Iran. By 850, it had spread across North Africa and north into Europe. It was then under control of the Abbasid caliphate based in Baghdad, and significantly, the last Arab caliphate. Thereafter, non-Arabs (principally Persians and Turks) assumed control of subsequent Islamic empires, to the indignation of the Arabs. By World War I, the Islamic Empire had been controlled by non-Arabs for centuries. Since the end of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924, most Arabs have abstained from discussion about reconstitution of the caliphate. Those who do are the radical Islamists, mostly Sunni Arab. No Shia Arabs bring up the issue of the caliphate.

There is a close association between Arab nationalism and Sunni Islam. Islamic heritage and achievement serve as an essential component of pan-Arabism. In addition, Arab Sunni Islam's reliance on genealogy tends to affirm the Sunni community's perception of primacy. Sunnis regard themselves as descendants of and heirs to the Arab Muslim rule of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-11-

## Role of Islam in Government and Politics

Muhammad was a religious prophet and political leader. Accordingly, the Islamic political tradition favors a single ruler who embodies the government. In Sunni Islam this ruler is the “caliph” or successor. The first four caliphs—all relatives and followers of Muhammad—solidified the religious, social, and political institutions of Islam. Sunni Muslims recognize the first four caliphs. Shia recognize only the heirs of Ali—the fourth caliph—as legitimate authorities, and they gave these successors the title Imam, or spiritual leader of Islam, to differentiate them from the Sunni caliphs. During the Ottoman period, the caliphate in Istanbul became the symbol of Sunni Muslim unity. Since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following World War I, there has been no caliphate.

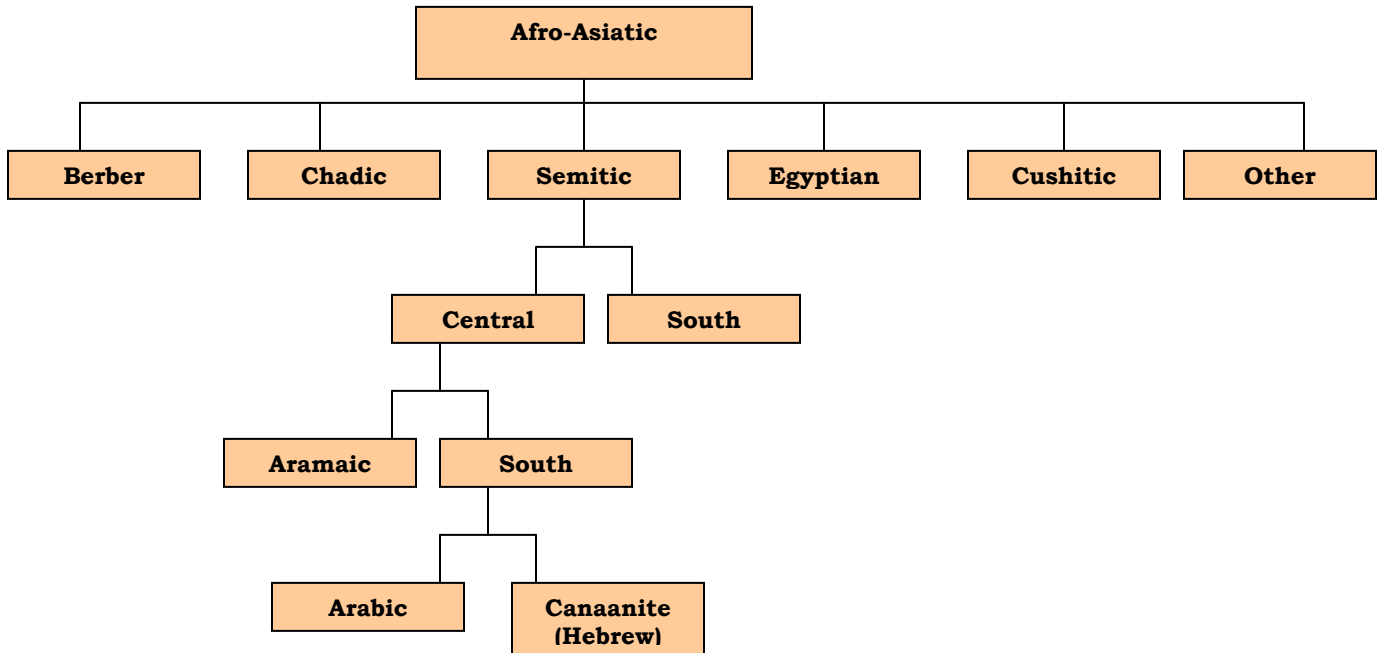
The idea of the nation-state has no historical antecedents in the political culture of Islam. The traditional term for a state in Muslim political culture is *Dawla*. Not a political concept, the term is best described as a wielding of power. Other terms used by Muslims to denote a state are *Saltana* and *Mamlaka*. Like *Dawla*, neither term has a territorial connotation. Because Muslims believe that sovereignty is the exclusive preserve of God, the Islamic notions of the caliphate have no territorial limits. Rather, they are directly related to the concept of rule by a person or dynasty. Since World War II, the religious bond among members of the Islamic community—the *Umma*—has been often overshadowed by nationalist affiliation, but it has not been completely abandoned or replaced. Groups of fundamentalist Muslims still seek the fusion of religion and state to attain the Islamic ideal of a just and righteous society where the word of God is law.

## Language

Arab workers in Kuwait speak Arabic. The Arabic language—a Semitic tongue that is spoken by about 200 million people—exists in three forms: the Classical Arabic of the Koran; Modern Standard Arabic, used in books, newspapers, television, and radio; and the spoken language, which in Kuwait is Gulf Arabic. Other dialects used by Arab workers in Kuwait include Egyptian Spoken Arabic and South Levantine Spoken Arabic.

Language is a major facet of Arab identity. The Arabic language embodies an entire culture. Within a century of Islam’s revelation, Arabic replaced Aramaic as the language of the region. In many regions, populations were being Arabized faster than they were becoming Muslim.

**The Afro-Asiatic Language Tree: Arabic is found under the Semitic branch.**



## Societal Framework

Instead of asserting their separateness and privacy as independent individuals, Arabs tend to interact as members of a group—family, clan, tribe, etc. As a result, Arabs are subjected to immense family and community pressures. The importance of conformity is related to and reinforced by a reverence for tradition. Loyalty to the group is highly valued, and responsibility is generally considered to fall upon the group in its entirety rather than on any particular individual. Because of the primacy of the group, obligations of group members to one another are wide, varied, and powerful. The extended family (or kin group) is the fundamental unit of political and social action. Related kin groups may be allies or enemies depending upon the existing economic and political conditions.

Arab expatriate workers in Kuwait tend to socialize much the same way as they did in their home countries, informally through their familial and collegial networks. There are no formal Arab community associations (prior to 1990, the Palestinians gathering under the umbrella of the PLO were the exception). Arab families use their homes as venues for social gatherings. Single Arab men met at coffeehouses scattered throughout expatriate neighborhoods. During their time in Kuwait, Arab workers gradually increase the density of their social networks.

Because Arab migrants intend to return to their homelands eventually, they demand little in the way of social recognition or power. When migrants return home, they provide symbolic reinforcement for the migration strategy. As a result, networks between origin and destination communities are established. These networks simultaneously encourage continued migration by the “success” of returned migrants, and increase the likelihood for subsequent migrants to delay their return home because a social community has been established.

### *Role of Tribes in Society*

Arab workers in Kuwait—including those with tribal backgrounds—are far removed from their tribal roots.

As a recently settled population, the *bidun* retain their tribal ties and customs. Beginning in the 1960s, the government took the opportunity provided by *bidun* settlement to strengthen tribal identification for political purposes while simultaneously weakening the tribes’ internal social and political cohesion. It settled the *bidun* away from grazing land; to weaken clan ties it mixed tribal and clan affiliation in housing. Kuwait authorities distributed land titles individually not collectively, with no relation to tribal patterns. New marriage laws encouraged the formation of nuclear families. Because the state increased its points of contact with the individual tribesmen, the tribal sheikhs’ role declined. At the same time, a process of political re-tribalization occurred. The state encouraged tribes to run National Assembly candidates, whom they selected through tribal primaries. In exchange for economic benefits and social services, *bidun* provided voting loyalty for the ruling family.

FOUO

Recently settled *bidun* with political rights mobilize politically around tribal affiliation, and tribes have been particularly adept at using electoral processes in Kuwait to advance their interests. The election of a tribesman increases the prestige of the tribe and this supports the continuation of tribal social organization. Tribal leaders tend to be intermediaries in patron-client relationships between the Kuwaiti government and people.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-15-



## **Modern Nation State**

Since most Arab expatriates will eventually return to their country of origin, the workers largely remain attached to their respective homelands, not to the Kuwaiti state. Kuwaiti law and custom draw a sharp distinction between those who belong to the national community and those who do not. It is very difficult for Arab workers to obtain Kuwaiti citizenship.

Arab workers' relationship with Kuwait is contractual, based on the exchange of labor for wages. Kuwaiti policies discourage any non-contractual ties as running counter to the principle of migrant transience. Migrant workers accept this exchange, tend not to assimilate, and only reluctantly (if at all) develop a sense of belonging in Kuwait.

Arab migrant workers in Kuwait remain connected to their homelands in various ways. In most cases, for example, the costs of migration are met by borrowing from an extended kinship group. Migrants also entrust the care of their families to relatives back home, spend their holidays there if possible, and send most of their earnings home. Overall, migrants devote their energies and finances to issues at home rather than those in Kuwait.

## **Role of State vs. Role of Tribe/Ethnic Group**

There has always been a pattern of migration and exchange in Kuwait. Because of the environmental conditions, people were compelled to migrate regularly in search of work. For the most part, however, they retained their ethnic identity during their travels. Foreigners did not become Kuwaitis, even after they had become integral parts of the local community.

Both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti Arabs are part of the larger Arab culture in the Middle East. Despite many elements of a common culture, Kuwaiti state policies clearly and explicitly distinguish between Kuwaitis and other Arabs. Arab expatriates lack economic, political, and civil rights. By denying social and economic benefits to foreign workers, the government prevents social integration and reinforces a sense of separate identity for both groups. Arab migrants are acutely aware that they do not enjoy rights and benefits because of their status as non-Kuwaitis.

It is difficult for the Arab migrant communities in Kuwait to develop formal group identity because of the high rate of personnel turnover, the strict legal and social constraints imposed on them by the government, and because they come to Kuwait with individual, not collective, goals.

## Centers of Authority

Arab workers in Kuwait are subject to the authority of the Kuwaiti state, which is represented by the ruling al-Sabah family. Because they are non-permanent residents whose financial goals are best served by remaining employed, Arab workers do not challenge Kuwaiti authority.

Arab workers tend not to challenge Kuwaiti authorities for deeper cultural reasons as well. The states from which most of the Arab workers come have histories of strong central government. Arab culture favors centralization of authority, which is generally related to age and gender. Arabs associate age with experience and wisdom. In general, the authority figure is usually the oldest competent male. When he dies or becomes incapacitated, his place is taken by his oldest son or one of his own brothers.

**“[T]he ideal Arab monarchy, perfectly legitimized . . . would be an Islamic theocracy governed by the ablest leaders of a tribe tracing its lineage to the Prophet.” Legitimacy in general must be earned by capable leadership, and “there are no strongly legitimized succession procedures—neither inheritance nor election—in Arab culture.”**

Michael Hudson, Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy,  
167.

FOUO

## **Rule of Law**

Despite occasional flare-ups like the 1999 Egyptian worker riot, Kuwait has a stable Arab workforce. Arab workers generally accept their subordinate status and adhere to the rule of law in Kuwait. Most Arab workers are unwilling to engage in activity that would jeopardize their jobs, and by extension, their residence in Kuwait.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-19-

## Customs

### *Greeting*

Arabs often greet each other with a number of ritual phrases and fixed responses. Elaborate greetings and inquiries about health and well-being often take up large amounts of time, but are important in establishing friendly relations. Asking about the female member of a person's family, however, is considered offensive. These elaborate greetings originate from Bedouin tradition where the nomadic lifestyle led to frequent encounters with strangers. There were several groups of Bedouins and they relied on the hospitality and protection of other Bedouins to protect them from enemy tribes. Arabs will often shake hands every time they meet and every time they depart. Kuwaiti Arabs will rise when shaking hands as well as when an esteemed person enters a room. Handshakes are generally long in length and may involve grasping the elbow. Handshakes, though regarded as important, usually do not possess the same firmness as those of Americans.

Upon entering a room full of people, Arabs will greet those present—especially the elderly—before sitting down. Eye contact is important to Arabs and signals respect to the person greeted. Arabs find public displays of affection between the opposite sex offensive.

Arabs typically stand very close when greeting and talking; the concept of personal space in the Western sense is foreign. Arabs will stand close enough so that they can breathe on and smell the person that they are speaking with. Hugging and embracing between men is common in the Arab world. Touching noses together three times when greeting is a Bedouin gesture of friendship and respect. Two men kissing each other quickly on the lips when greeting is also an expression of friendship.

### *Gestures/Hand Signs*

Arabs, like most people, use gestures and body movements to communicate. It has been said that "To tie an Arab's hands while he is speaking is tantamount to tying his tongue." However, Arab gestures differ a great deal from American ones.

Arabs may make the following gestures/hand signs:

- Placing the right hand or its forefinger on the tip of the nose, on the right lower eyelid, on top of the head, or on the mustache or beard means "it's in front of me," "I see it," or "it's my obligation."
- Placing the palm of the right hand on the chest immediately after shaking hands with another man shows respect or thanks.
- Touching the tips of the right fingertips to the forehead while bowing the head slightly also connotes respect.
- Holding the fingers in a pear shaped configuration with the tips pointing up at about waist level and moving the hand slightly up and down signals "be patient" or "be careful."
- Flicking the right thumbnail on front teeth can mean "I have no money."

## FOUO

- Biting the right forefinger, which has been placed sideways in the mouth, is an expression of regret.
- The “OK” sign, if shaken at another person, symbolizes the evil eye.
- Hitting the right fist into the open palm of the left hand indicates obscenity or contempt.
- Placing the palm of the right hand on the chest, bowing the head a little and closing one’s eyes means “thank you” (in the name of Allah).
- A quick snap of the head upwards with an accompanying click of the tongue signals: “No” or “perhaps.”
- Flipping the hand near the mouth and simultaneously making a clicking sound with the tongue and teeth indicates “don’t worry.”
- Holding the right hand in front of the face with the back facing forward and then flipping the hand so that the palm is up means that the person asked for is not present.
- Placing a half closed hand in front of the stomach, and then turning it slightly connotes that the person to whom the gesture is made is a liar.
- Touching the tip of the right forefinger on the tongue and then placing it on the tip of the nose, means “hurry up.”
- Avoid pointing your finger or writing utensil at anyone, as this is considered threatening and reserved for animals.

### *Visiting*

Arabs are, in general, hospitable and generous. Their hospitality is often expressed with food. Giving a warm reception to strangers stems from the culture of the desert, where traveling nomads depended on the graciousness and generosity of others to survive. Arabs continue this custom of showing courtesy and consideration to strangers. Demonstrating friendliness, generosity and hospitality are considered expressions of personal honor. When Arabs are visiting your installation or office, they will expect the same level of generosity and attention.

Privacy is important in Arab culture. It is considered rude to look into someone’s house and can be equated with trespassing. When visiting a house, it is customary to take a position next to the door to prevent being able to see inside the home. Do not enter the home unless invited by the host. It is expected that guests will remove their shoes before entering the home; this shows respect for the host. Arabs in villages or the countryside are less likely to have couches or chairs; instead they will have pillows on the floor or ground to sit against. When sitting, it is considered insulting to point the soles of one’s feet in the direction of anyone; sit cross-legged if possible. It is also considered to be offensive to put one’s feet on any furniture. In an Arabian house, the typical gathering place is called a *dimaniyyah*, which is for male visitors only. Females generally have separate rooms to meet; meetings involving the opposite sex are generally forbidden.

Arab culture stresses the importance of honoring and pampering guests. If a guest praises something that an Arab possesses, he may insist that the guest take it. It is assumed that the

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-21-

## FOUO

guest will refuse this offer. This pattern could manifest itself over and over, as at least one offer and refusal is typically expected. Arabs will expect the same offer of generosity if they praise something that belongs to another. As a general rule, praise is directed at items of personal belonging. Coffee or tea is typically offered upon entering a home or office. It is considered rude to refuse, but just as rude to drink more than three cups. The server will keep refilling the cup unless the guest shakes the cup from side to side to indicate that they are finished.

The host will try his best to ensure that his guests are comfortable and will also serve food in excessive quantities to ensure that every guest will be fully satisfied. Hosts are typically the last to begin eating, and will pretend to continue eating if they finish first.

### *Negotiations*

Arab culture places a premium on politeness and socially correct behavior. Preserving honor is paramount. When faced with criticism, Arabs will try to protect their status and avoid incurring negative judgments by others. This concept can manifest itself in creative descriptions of facts or in the dismissal of conclusions, in order to protect one's reputation. This cultural trait will generally take precedence over the accurate transmission of information.

The desire to avoid shame and maintain respect can also contribute to the tendency to compartmentalize information. One common manifestation of this behavior comes in the form of saying "yes" when one really means "no." Arabs try to take the personalization out of contentious conversations, which can lead to vagueness and efforts to not speak in absolute terms. Fear of shame also leads to secrecy and compartmentalization of knowledge. It is also considered disrespectful to contradict or disagree with a person of a superior rank or age.

### *Conflict Resolution*

In Arab society, community affiliation is given priority over individual rights. Consequently, familial and status considerations factor significantly into the processes and outcomes of conflict resolution. This emphasis on community helps explain the dominance of informal over contractual commitments and the use of mediation to solve conflicts. Many disputes are resolved informally outside of the official courts. There are several overarching principles that tend to guide conflict resolution.

First, are the four Koranic influences that govern interaction between parties during conflict resolution.

- *Civility and respect:* most actions are condoned so long as they are civilized and show respect to others, especially those of a higher status.
- *Tolerance:* Be considerate to others. Tolerance of differences is important.
- *Humility:* It is offensive to speak loudly or harshly to others, or to contradict or disagree with superiors.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## FOUO

- *Moderation*: A high value is placed on moderation and deliberation. Avoid becoming angry, accusing or arrogant.

Second, the protection and recognition of the status of individuals is paramount. Disrespect of elders or superiors can jeopardize negotiations.

There are two accepted methods to resolve conflicts, mediation or deliberation in council. Both methods are typically time-consuming. However, Arabs do not feel as pressed as Western cultures to finish tasks quickly. Unless the matter is urgent, there will be a casual approach to solving it.

Rituals play an important role in tribal conflict resolution. The *sulb* (settlement) ritual recognizes that injuries between individuals and groups will fester and grow if not acknowledged and repaired. Given the severity of life in the desert, competing tribes realized that *sulb* is a better alternative to endless cycles of vengeance. Following a conflict, tribes take stock of losses in human and material terms. The tribe with the fewest losses compensates the tribe that suffered most. Stringent conditions are set to settle the conflict definitively. The most important of these conditions is that the parties pledge to forget everything that happened and initiate new and friendly relations.

There are two types of *sulb*, total and partial. The former ends all conflict between the two parties; the latter ends conflict according to conditions agreed upon during the settlement process. The mediator of a *sulb* is a *Wasit*, who is perceived as someone having all the answers and solutions. He therefore has a great deal of power and responsibility.

A *sulb* works as follows: after a murder or crime, the family of the victim, in an attempt to prevent blood revenge, calls on a delegation of mediators consisting of village elders or notables (usually called *muslihs* or *jaha*). As soon as mediators are called in, a *hodna* (truce) is declared. The mediators initiate a fact-finding process. The role of the mediators is not to punish the offending party but to preserve the honor of both families involved. A blood price (*diya*) is then paid to the family of the victim. This *diya*, or an exchange of goods, substitutes for the exchange of death. The process ends with a public ceremony of reconciliation (*musalaba*) performed in the village square. The families of both the victim and the guilty party exchange greetings and accept apologies. The family of the offending party visits the home of the victim to drink a cup of bitter coffee and the ritual concludes with a meal hosted by the family of the offender. The ritual varies at times. In all cases it takes place within a communal, not a one-on-one, environment.

Arabs often convene a conference to study, deliberate and address problems of a grave or complex nature. Conferences are announced in advance and the issues are declared. When no resolution can be achieved, the mediators announce and convene another conference.

### *Business Style*

In business meetings formal courtesies are expected. Cards—which should be printed in both English and Arabic—are regularly exchanged. Meetings may not always be on a one-

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-23-



## FOUO

to-one basis and it is often difficult to confine conversation to the business at hand. Many topics may be discussed in order to assess the character of potential business partners. There is a strong preference within Arab culture for business transactions to be based on personal contacts.

In keeping with the Arab customs of studying and deliberating, business discussions and deals are often prolonged. Unlike the high-pressure and quick-moving Western business culture, Arab business moves at a slower pace. It is also common to avoid saying “no” outright to a proposed business deal. Frequently, Arab businessmen will indicate that they want to deliberate about the deal in order to allow the salesman to avoid shame.

### *Sense of Time and Space*

Past and present are flexible concepts in Arab society, with one shading over into the other. In general, time is much less rigidly scheduled than in Western culture. However, it is considered rude to be late to an appointment as well as looking at one’s watch or acting pressed for time. Additionally, Arabs believe that future plans may interfere with the will of God. Commitments a week or more into the future are less common than in Western culture.

Olfaction functions as a distance-setting mechanism. Standing close enough to smell someone’s breath and body odor is a sign that one wants to relate and interact with them. To stand back and away from someone indicates a desire not to interact with them and may offend the individual. Additionally, Arabs feel very comfortable when surrounded by people in open spaces, but can feel uncomfortable or threatened when enclosed within walls in small physical spaces.

Arabs do not share the Western view of property and boundaries. Traditionally the Arabs do not subscribe to the concept of trespassing. Arabs have conformed to the Western imposition of country boundaries, but do not place the same boundary restrictions within their country as it relates to city, town, village, property, and yard.

### *Hygiene*

Personal hygiene is extremely important to Arabs for both spiritual and practical reasons. Because meals are frequently eaten by hand, it is typical to wash the hands before and after eating. Formal washing of the face, hands, and forearms, called *wudhu*, and general cleanliness of the body and clothing is required before daily prayers or fasting. A formal head-to-toe washing, called *ghusi*, is required after sexual intercourse, ejaculation (for men), and menstruation (for women). *Ghusi* is also recommended following contact with other substances considered unclean, including alcohol, pigs, dogs, or non-believers.

### *Gifts*

Small gifts and candies are considered appropriate gifts for those invited to Arab homes. It is customary that gifts are not opened in front of people. Unlike Westerners, Arabs do not

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## FOUO

feel it necessary to bring gifts when visiting someone's home. It is the responsibility of the host to provide for a guest in Arab culture.

### *Cultural Do's and Don'ts*

- It is insulting to ask about a Muslim's wife or another female family member.
- Don't stare at women on the street or initiate conversation with them.
- If meeting a female, do not attempt to shake her hand unless she extends it. In addition, never greet a woman with an embrace or kiss.
- Avoid pointing a finger at an Arab or beckoning with a finger.
- Use the right hand to eat, touch, and present gifts; the left is generally regarded as unclean.
- Avoid putting feet on tables or furniture.
- Refrain from leaning against walls, slouching in chairs, and keeping hands in pockets.
- Do not show the soles of the feet, as they are considered the lowest and dirtiest part of the body.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

## Lifestyle

### *Role of Family*

In Arab culture, the family, rather than the person, is the basic unit of society. However, most Arab workers in Kuwait are single men. Those with families tend to leave them at home in the care of other relatives, and send remittances. Most married, low-income Arab migrants consider it a liability to have a family in Kuwait. When economic conditions in Kuwait deteriorate, migrants with families do not hesitate to send them home.

Arab families are patriarchal and hierarchal (with respect to gender and age). The father possesses complete authority and responsibility. He expects respect and unquestioning compliance, and shows little tolerance of dissent. Fathers generally remain aloof from the task of raising children in their early years.

Arab men and women continue to place a high value on their family affiliations and their roles as generators of new families. Young people in Arab society are not considered to be truly adult until they have completed the important rites of passage of marriage and parenthood.

### *Role of Women*

Supported by Islamic ideology and teachings, the prevailing standards of morality in Kuwait stress values and norms associated with traditional ideas of femininity, motherhood, and sexuality. At the heart of the role of women is the belief that a family's honor is tied to a woman's modesty and faithfulness.

Men's and women's roles are considered complementary and integrative, not equal in Arab society. Most Arab women occupy the private domain of the household, where their primary role is to make a comfortable home and bear and nurture children. Wives are expected to obey and serve their husbands and to defer to them, especially in public. Arab expatriate women in Kuwait are generally dependents, and tend not to participate in the labor force.

### *Role of Men*

Arab men are relatively privileged in Kuwaiti society. They are above other immigrant workers, but below Kuwaiti women in the social hierarchy. Significant masculine values and virtues—dating from the nomadic past—include personal bravery, a willingness to bear hardships and to come to the aid of family and friends no matter what the circumstances, and fathering children (preferably sons). Traditionally, a man's overarching responsibility has been to lead, protect, and provide for his family.

FOUO

*Dating and Marriage*

Intermarriage between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis remains limited. Kuwaitis who do marry non-Kuwaitis favor fellow Arabs.

*Role of Children*

Many non-Kuwaiti Arab workers do not have children in Kuwait. The hierarchical structure of the Arab family requires children to obey their elders and meet their expectations. Reflecting nomadic tradition, sons are especially welcome in Arab families because they are the carriers of the family tradition, and because their economic contribution is usually greater than that of daughters. Sons are usually taught to be protectors of their sisters and to help the father with his duties inside and outside the house, while daughters are taught to defer to their brothers, and to help the mother to take care of household chores. During adolescence, there traditionally is a separation of sexes. Boys have greater freedom than girls and begin to be drawn into the social circles of their fathers during this time.

The cornerstone of educating a child in Arab families is teaching him or her complete obedience to authority. Arab families also teach their children to attach tremendous importance to blood ties and bonds of loyalty. They are taught that their identity comes from belonging to a particular primary group such as their family and kinship network. Group affiliation is important and acceptance is achieved by conforming to accepted behavioral norms. Arab children are taught to feel shame as an excruciating punishment and to avoid it in any way possible. Indeed, there is no real prohibition against distortion or fabrication to avoid shame. Arab children generally are socialized to believe this is an acceptable/desirable behavior by which they can avoid shame.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-27-

## Clothing

Dress is a major marker of identity in Kuwait, symbolizing prestige and power. Arab workers do not wear the *dishdashbah* and *abaya*. Instead, they wear either their native clothing or western-style dress. Arab workers associate non-western style clothes with low-paid, unskilled labor, particularly with the construction sector. Overall, clothing in Kuwait conveys privilege and superiority in the Kuwaiti-expatriate interaction.

Arab men often wear a three-piece head cover. The bottom piece of this head covering is a white cap that is sometimes filled with holes. This cap, called *keffiyah*, is used to hold the hair in place. On top of it is a square cloth called a *ghutra*. On top of it is the *agal*, which is a thick



**3-Piece Headcovering**

black cord woven into two rings surrounding the top of the head to hold everything else in place. For male children, wearing the head covering is a sign of entering manhood. Inside the house, the head covering is not needed, although when a man has guests in his house he often wears it as a sign of respect.

Arab women wear western-style clothes or a long dress (*abaya*) and a scarf-like cover called *Hejab* that covers the hair but not the face. This latter outfit signals their identity as Muslim women. Although the *abaya* and the headscarf are part of the Islamic tradition and related to female modesty, they are less a symbol of piety



**Conservative Full Head Covering.**

than of ethnic identity. Their message is about female's dignity and status, and the social deference they expect. Overall, a powerful ethnic distinction is made between the image of the Arab woman and the non-Arab woman. Even though their social status is not as privileged as Kuwaiti women, the headscarf marks Arab women's identity and status.

Man Wearing Dishdasha and Headcovering



**Man Wearing Dishdasha and Headcovering**

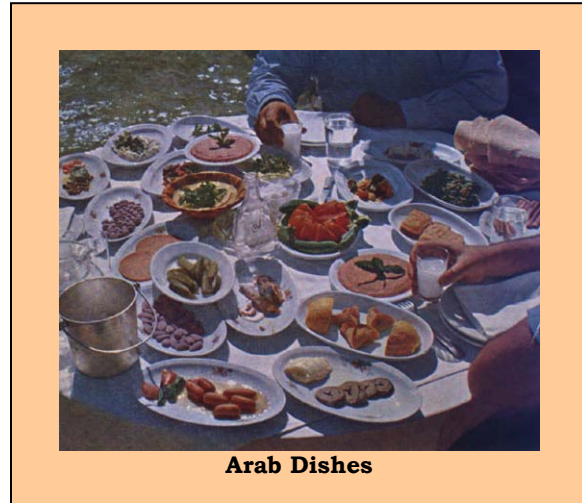
## Diet

### *Type*

Because of religious restrictions, Arabs do not eat pork. Many Arabs prefer to buy meat from *halal* butchers, i.e. butchers who sell meat only from animals that have been slaughtered according to Koranic ritual.

Arabic cuisine has its roots in tent cookery. Nomadic tribes could use only transportable foods such as rice and dates, or ambulatory stock like sheep and camels in their recipes.

Wheat, dates, rice, and olive oil are main ingredients in the Arab cuisine. Food is cooked in oil or dressed with it for serving. Lamb and mutton are popular meats. Milk from cows or goats is usually converted to *laban* (yogurt), or made into cream cheese. The choice of cooking fat often indicates the country from which the recipe originates. The Lebanese, for example, use olive oil or a clarified butter called *samneh*. Olives, nuts, raisins, salted chick peas, and toasted pumpkin seeds are popular appetizers. Specialties of Arab cuisine include *hummus* (a pureed chick pea dip flavored with lemon and garlic), *ghuzi* (roast lamb with rice and nuts), and *warak enab* (stuffed vine leaves). Desserts include sweet pastries such as *baklava*.



Many non-Kuwaiti Arabs prefer foods from their native lands. The core of the Egyptian diet is a bread called *aisb*, which looks like a darker round version of a *pita*. The Egyptian diet also includes *falafel* (fried ground peas) and *foul* (a type of bean), generally eaten for breakfast or snacks. *Falafel* sandwiches are served in flat *pita* bread. *Tabini* sauce or *hummus* is used instead of mayonnaise. Egyptians also eat *halloumi* (goat's cheese) sandwiches, and *shawarma*, the thinly sliced meat sandwiches made with *pita* bread, and *koushari*, a dish consisting of a rice base with a mixture of macaroni, lentils, and a tomato sauce topping. A typical Egyptian menu will consist of soup, a meat/chicken/or fish course, vegetable stew, rice or pasta, salad, and bread. Fruits are served as dessert. More elaborate desserts are served on special occasions.

The Syrian diet includes *mazza* (appetizers), such as *hummus* and *baba ghanouge*, a purée of eggplant with oil and lemon, which are served in little bowls and dishes. A popular dish is *bulgar*, which is made of wheat that has been boiled, dried, crushed, and rolled into little balls stuffed with minced meat, onions, nuts, and pine kernels. Meat dishes include *farouje*, roast chicken cut in two and served flat; *shish taouk*, chicken on a skewer with truffles or mushrooms; *kafita antakiye*, minced meat cooked on a skewer with parsley and lemon; and *shish kebab*, lamb cooked on a skewer with tomato, onion, and peppers. *Shawarma* consists of large pieces of meat (usually mutton) heaped one above another on a vertical spit and

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

FOUO

roasted in front of a coal fire. Syrian bread is made into large flat loaves using little yeast. It is torn off in long strips which can then be used to scoop up purées, sauces and yogurt.

Coffee is essential to hospitality in Arab culture. Arabic (or Turkish) coffee cannot be reheated successfully because it must be freshly brewed to be good.

*Alcohol/Drugs*

Islamic law prohibits alcohol. Among Arab workers in Kuwait, alcohol consumption depends on the degree of an individual's religious faith.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-30-

## **Dwellings**

Until the late 1950s, Kuwaitis and expatriate workers lived together within the walls of Kuwait City. In 1957, the walls were torn down and Kuwait built carefully planned residential districts that segregated natives and foreign workers, and laid the groundwork for legal and political distinctions between Kuwaitis and expatriates.

Housing is a pressing issue for many migrants. Many workers share a house or even a room in a house to the point of overcrowding. Selection of co-residents follows criteria of ethnicity, nationality, religion, and local origin. Poorer migrants often furnish their rooms in a squatter-like fashion: thin foam mattress, pillow, and blanket. Often residences do not meet health and hygiene standards, so workers spend minimal time in these rooms.

Because most Arab workers earn better incomes than their Asian counterparts, the houses they live in are in better condition and fewer people share them. There is usually a correlation between the size and grandeur of a person's house and their social position within the community.



## **Attitudes toward the United States**

Attitudes toward the United States among Arab workers in Kuwait are mixed. These attitudes tend to reflect the general state of relations between their homelands and the United States. In addition, they vary according to background and orientation. Those who are most attracted to Islamic fundamentalism, for example, are more likely to view the United States in an unfavorable light.

Despite close cooperation between the United States and some Arab states, such as Egypt and Jordan, serious tensions characterize American-Arab relations. Arabs view America unfavorably on a number of issues, although these views are not universally shared. There is a tendency to blame U.S.-led globalization for the region's poverty and social ills; many Arabs perceive America as a land of moral decadence hostile to Islamic beliefs and values; others resent the American military presence in the region, which evokes memories of Western colonialism; and Arabs see the United States as biased toward Israel.

At the same time, many Arabs are attracted to the democratic principles and economic opportunities represented by the United States. The United States has provided a disproportionate share of its foreign aid to Arab states. These conflicting attitudes can lead to wide variations in popular attitudes toward the United States and Americans.

## **Attitudes toward Other Ethnic Groups**

**Kuwaiti Arabs:** Arab workers in Kuwait are aware of their subordinate status and defer to Kuwaitis. In the private sphere, Kuwaitis and other Arabs do not generally mix. The relationship is characterized by cultural closeness and social distance.

**South Asians:** Since World War II, there has been a substantial South Asian population in Kuwait. Arab workers consider themselves superior to South Asian workers. Arab expatriates tend to see non-Arabs as an undistinguishable group, distinguishing only between South Asians and Westerners.

**Iranians:** Hostility between Arabs and Iranians has endured in the Gulf region for centuries. Proximity between the two cultures and peoples has not produced greater knowledge or understanding. The gap is religious and cultural, as well as military and political. At the same time, Iranians and Arabs have been united by language, religion, pilgrimage, migration, and trade. Arab workers in Kuwait tend to see themselves as superior to Iranians in Kuwait's hierarchy on the basis on ethnicity and religion.

**Westerners:** These attitudes tend to reflect the general state of relations between their homelands and the Western states. Most non-Kuwaiti Arab workers are not overly concerned with Western businessmen.

## **Attitudes toward Neighboring States and Regional Powers**

Arab workers in Kuwait maintain close ties with their respective homelands. In fact, most are more concerned with developments there than in Kuwait. Their attitudes toward other Arab states and regional powers vary according to specific circumstances. They tend to echo Arab-wide sentiments such as hostility toward Israel and ambivalence toward Turkey.

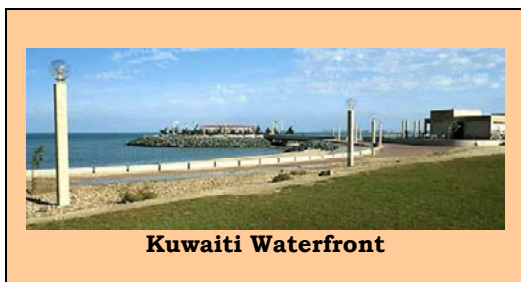
In general, non-Kuwaiti Arab workers tend to be apolitical and non-ideological as a social group. Driven by economic interest to leave their homelands in search of opportunity, they are far more concerned with continued access to employment in the emirate than with engaging in political activities targeted against other states in the region. These workers have recognized the dearth of opportunities in their own states, and there are obvious frustrations with the failed economic policies of their home governments. However, this frustration has not led to radicalism or anti-government activity. Instead, there is a sense of disenfranchisement from the politics of their home states, and a willingness to migrate in order to better address their own economic needs and the needs of their families.

## Cultural Economy

The visible and material effects of the oil boom on Kuwait include a huge influx of skilled and unskilled Arab labor. Beginning in the 1960s, Kuwaiti authorities instituted strict nationality and commercial laws to guarantee Kuwaitis advantage and privilege. Kuwaiti affluence, leisure, and power stood in increasing contrast to expatriate economic need, dependence, and labor. As a result, the dichotomy between Kuwaiti leisure and privilege and non-Kuwaiti labor became central to cultural dynamics in Kuwait.

Initially, Arab workers were recruited through bilateral government agreements and a laissez-faire immigration policy. The sheer size of the foreign workforce led Kuwait to minimize opportunities for permanent residence and maximize the rotation of foreign workers. The authorities also sought to diversify the source of labor by recruiting from Asian countries. Kuwaitis regarded Asians as a more politically compliant workforce, removed from the potentially disruptive currents of Arab nationalism and Islamism.

Push and pull factors drive Arab labor migration to Kuwait. Push factors include the need for labor-sending countries like Egypt to alleviate the depressed economic conditions by encouraging their citizens to migrate for work and to remit a significant portion of their earnings back home; unstable political conditions; high population growth; and the potential for higher earnings. Pull factors include the shortage of labor in Kuwait; its desire to achieve rapid modernization; and the persistence among Kuwaiti nationals of negative social attitudes toward manual labor and female participation in the workforce.



In terms of recruitment, labor migration from Arab countries is often an individual enterprise. In the private sector, the prospective Arab worker finds an employer through personal contacts either with Kuwaitis or with fellow countrymen already in the emirate. In the public sector, recruitment takes place through bilateral agreements between a Kuwaiti institution and its Arab counterpart. Such agreements provide Kuwait with an annual quota of experts for a limited contract period.

Arabs do not generally compete for jobs in Kuwait because all workers in Kuwait are theoretically in possession of a job when they arrive. To control expatriate labor, Kuwait instituted the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, which delegated to Kuwaiti citizens the daily administration of immigrants. In most cases, entrance visas and residency permits are granted to those who receive a work contract by a Kuwaiti employer. This system also serves to maintain the stability of the labor market. Once in Kuwait, laborers are not free to move from one job to another or to offer their services to the highest-paying employer. By controlling labor movement within the country and by threatening deportation, the native Kuwaiti has considerable authority over the expatriate worker.

FOUO

There is no minimum wage law in Kuwait and employers are free to pay the lowest wage the employee will accept. The major determinants of a foreign workers wages include nationality, education, and work experience in Kuwait, sector of employment, and Arabic language skills.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

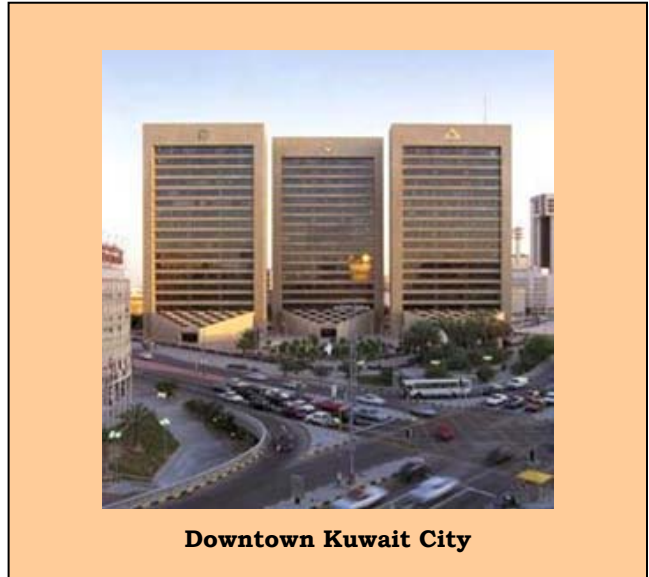
April 2003

-36-

## Cultural Geography

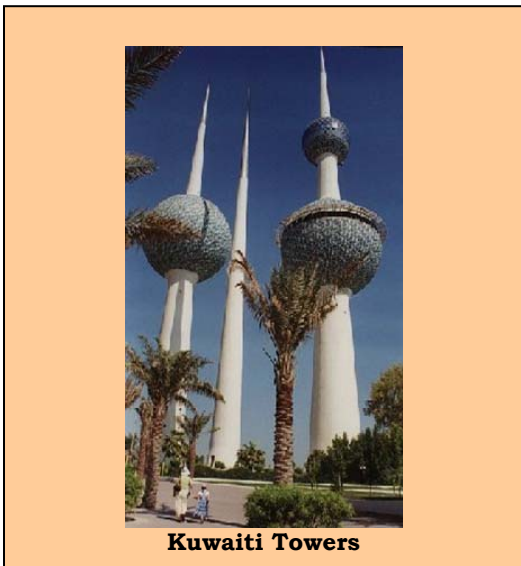
The geographical pattern of residence in Kuwait reflects the ethnic make-up of the population. Kuwaiti citizens and Arab workers tend to be segregated. In Kuwait City, the Arab expatriate population lives in mixed areas, although some areas are identified with one particular expatriate group. Overall, residential patterns follow class rather than ethnic lines. The central and eastern parts of Kuwait are considered wealthier than the western parts.

Immigrant areas tend to contain high-density apartment blocks surrounded by poorly cared for streets. Maintenance and repair is a constant problem. Non-Kuwaitis are not permitted to own land.



### *Urban vs. Rural Culture*

Kuwait is an urban society centered on a coastal city. Most Arab workers are located in and around Kuwait City. The Arabic word for city, *medina*, connotes the center of political or economic power. In general, Islamic cities are marked by a series of specific buildings and institutions such as the Friday mosque and public bath. There is a strict separation between markets and places of production and residential areas.



With approximately 1.4 million inhabitants (nearly 75 percent of Kuwait's population), Kuwait City dominates the country culturally, politically, and economically.

The city has developed from a nomadic port town to a booming modern metropolis. Since the 1950s, the city's area has doubled and a network of residential and commercial communities has been built. Residential areas are identified as "Kuwaiti," "mixed," and "rural." The Kuwaiti areas are inhabited by wealthy Kuwaitis. Mixed areas are inhabited by less wealthy Kuwaitis and expatriates of all nationalities. Rural areas are populated by settled nomads and unskilled migrant workers. Some areas are

identified with one particular expatriate group. Overall, residential patterns followed class rather than ethnic lines.

## Cultural Style of Warfare

Because they are transient and remain focused on their respective homelands, Arab workers in Kuwait have nothing for which to fight in Kuwait. Although generally speaking, their attitudes reflect the broader Arab and Muslim cultural styles of warfare, these concepts have very little effect, if any, on how Arab workers in Kuwait think about war or engage in combat. During conflict, Arab workers will most likely attempt to return to their countries of origin, as they did during the 1990 Iraqi invasion.

### *Conventional Warfare*

Cultural factors have made it difficult for Arab militaries to adopt Western warfighting doctrine. Western warfare has emphasized offensive action and shock effect, whereas Arab warfare has emphasized standoff, attrition, deception, and surprise. Martial traditions also influence which military units are most prestigious. Fighter squadrons and commando units, for example, perform raid-like missions, which have a high profile in Arab-Islamic history.

Arab militaries have not been overwhelmingly effective in the modern era. According to several observers, Arab culture encourages patterns of behavior that are not conducive to modern military operations. Arab officers (especially junior officers) are hesitant to exercise independent judgment, frequently lack extensive technical training, and are prone to selectively transmit information in order to avoid the loss of face. These types of Arab cultural behavior patterns often impair information flow within Arab militaries. Arab military personnel often cannot take full advantage of their weaponry and equipment and have difficulty maintaining it.

In training, Arab armed forces taught their soldiers that there was only one right answer to a military problem and only one right way to handle a situation. This approach was employed in battle regardless of other factors such as terrain, mission, forces available, or the enemy's strength or disposition. Arab training exercises tend to be scripted and unrealistic. Training manuals are treated as cookbooks to be followed to the letter regardless of the specifics of the situation.

### *Unconventional/Tribal Warfare*

Arab warfare stems directly from nomadic traditions and experiences. Historically, nomadic tribes alternated between accommodating central authority and defying it. In the first case, they were employed as frontier defense forces or as auxiliary light cavalry. In the second case, they posed a threat to settled populations by attacking small isolated garrisons and raiding poorly defended towns. Although the nomadic population of Kuwait has dramatically decreased in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the image of the nomadic warrior has remained powerful. Because the extended family is the fundamental unit of political and social action, a kin group traditionally has looked first to its own fighting men, not to the state's armed forces, to ensure its protection and promotion of its interests. In general, the resort to arms for the sake of tribe and clan remains a higher ideal than military service to the state.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

To an Arab, the conduct of a struggle is as important as its outcome. To show honor during a military operation is praised regardless of the outcome.

Historically, sedentary and nomadic units were skeptical of outside groups, fearing competition for scarce resources. Protection of territory and allegiance to the social unit were primary reactions against intrusion. It was common to engage in military forays to usurp and plunder resources belonging to a weaker tribe or neighbor.

The glory of the raid—whether against another nomadic tribe, settled enemy, or caravan—is a key aspect of Bedouin tribal warfare. In many cases, the raids were carried out with minimal violence. However, they could become a flash point for a larger tribal conflict. Tribes commemorated their raids through poetry and song. Although it varied greatly as to numbers involved and distances traveled, raiding followed certain norms. Raiding tribes traveled light, avoided detection, moved quickly, minimized bloodshed, and took camels only—no captives or other spoils. When raiding led to a larger conflict, the objective usually was not to force submission, but to restore the balance of honor or the balance of livestock. Tribal warfare tended to become more intense and bloody when central authorities tried to impose political control on a rural population.

Participation in a raid was considered a dramatic test of courage, skill, and dedication to the goals of the tribal group. The resort to combat usually bestowed honor on both sides. For Arab tribes, honor is the dominant value. In the collective sense, honor means defense of the tribe, the group, or the society as a whole against its challengers. Lost honor, according to tribal tradition, must be retrieved by violence. A man's failure to fulfill his duty as a fighter results in shame.

#### *Koranic Treatment of Warfare versus Actual Practice*

Muslims reside either in the House of Peace (territory under Islamic leadership) or the House of War (its converse). Emerging Islamic doctrine sanctioned the use of force to achieve a "righteous society." Islam possesses an elaborate body of rules about the collective duty of the believers to wage holy war (*jihad*) for the sake of Allah against infidels or those who refuse to accept Islam. From this concept of *jihad*, Muslims have created volumes on topics as diverse as types of defensive and offensive war, conduct of diplomatic relation, conditions of and parameters for peace, division of spoils, treatment of prisoners, and martyrdom. Islamic scholars have differentiated three situations: war against non-Muslims (*jihad*), war between Muslims (*fitna*), and war as a condition of the human experience (*harb*). *Jihad* was permissible, if not obligatory; *fitna* was objectionable. Nevertheless, Muslim Arabs often engaged in conflict with one another. In these cases, one side usually declared the other to be apostates from true Islam.

The Koran also deals with the concept of *shahadat* (martyrdom). Some verses imply that those who become *shahid* do not really die and receive rewards in the afterlife. At the same time there is also in the interpretation of Islamic warfare concepts of proportionality,



FOUO

redress, limitations on combat, and the need to exhaust other methods before resorting to violence. In this way, it is similar to the Western concept of just war.

Injunctions regarding *jihad* and the House of War have been tempered over the centuries since it is impractical to be constantly waging war. Nevertheless, it remains a potent force, whether fighting other Muslims or against foreign powers. It assures Muslims that God stands by them. Overall, the use of the term *jihad* has served to validate the political conduct of hostilities, since the resurrection of the Islamic state cannot occur without *jihad*. The ultimate aim of *jihad* is the establishment of the Islamic state, for short of that Muslims will always be oppressed by the infidel.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-40-

## **Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations: Kuwait**

### **South Asians in Kuwait**

#### **Summary of Key Points**

- There are approximately 750,000 Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan workers in Kuwait. Indians are the most populous, numbering more than 300,000. They are followed by Sri Lankans (approximately 175,000), Bangladeshis (about 150,000), and Pakistanis (about 100,000). Kuwait does not provide worker-population numbers by nationality.
- South Asian workers in Kuwait exhibit a range of physical characteristics both among and within South Asian groups. However, they tend to share similar characteristics of slight stature, dark eyes, and dark complexion. South Asian ethnicity cannot be determined by appearance.
- Most South Asian migrants to Kuwait are males between the ages of 20 and 45. Those who have families tend to leave them at home, where they send most of their earnings. Increasing numbers of South Asian females work in Kuwait as domestic servants. They serve as status symbols for Kuwaiti families.
- Kuwait's South Asian worker population is divided among Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Catholics. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are predominantly Muslim, Indians are mainly Hindu, and Sri Lankans are primarily Buddhist. In Kuwait, religious affiliation is considered less important than citizenship and ethnic origin as a marker of identity.
- South Asian workers in Kuwait speak Hindi, Bangla (Bengali), Malayalam, Urdu, Sinhalese, and English.
- Most South Asian workers live in and around Kuwait City. Except for domestic servants, who live with Kuwaiti families, they are largely segregated from the Kuwaiti population, and live with fellow countrymen.
- Indians and Pakistanis arrived in Kuwait in the late 1940s to work in the nascent oil industry. In the 1970s, South Asians came to Kuwait en masse, replacing Arab workers. Since the 1991 Gulf War, the percentage of South Asians among Kuwait's foreign worker population has continued to increase.
- During the 1990-91 Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait, the majority of the South Asian population fled to their respective countries of origin. Many made preparations to do so prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

FOUO

- South Asian workers' relationship with Kuwait is contractual, based on the exchange of labor for wages. Social, political, and economic rights and benefits are not available to South Asians. In addition, Kuwait has constructed a complex set of migrant policies, giving Kuwaitis almost complete authority over South Asians in the country.
- Kuwait's South Asian workers are below Kuwaitis and Kuwait's Arab workers in Kuwait's ethnic and occupational hierarchy. South Asian workers are aware of and accept their subordinate status in Kuwait.
- Culturally different from Kuwaitis, South Asian workers do not assimilate into Kuwaiti society, and remain focused on their respective homelands. Kuwait policies draw a sharp distinction between those who belong to the national community and those who do not, reinforcing this tendency.
- South Asian workers are defined by their transient status. Individuals are not looking for a long-term improvement in their situation. These workers come to Kuwait with clear material goals and pursue pragmatic strategies of accommodation and adjustment while in the country.
- Asian migrants do not carry ideological baggage to Kuwait and make few demands on Kuwaiti society. They tend not to interact with the Kuwaiti population and do not expect to live in Kuwait permanently. Moreover, South Asian migrants are more willing to engage in work that Kuwaitis and Arab migrants will not do.
- It is difficult for the South Asian migrant communities in Kuwait to develop formal group identity because of the high rate of personnel turnover, the strict legal and social constraints imposed on them by the government, and because they come to Kuwait with individual, not collective, goals.

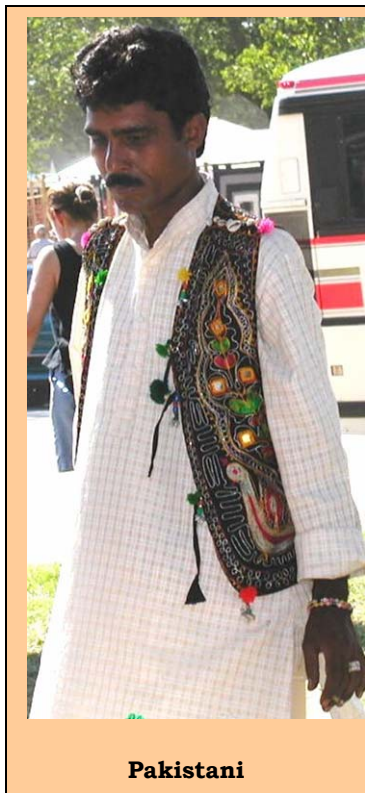
FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003

## Cultural History

South Asians have been economically linked to Kuwait since its founding in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Trade and commerce tied Kuwait to the Indian subcontinent. Indians, for example, found work in Kuwait as pearl divers; Indian merchants were active there as well. With the establishment of a British presence in Kuwait toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian influence grew (the Indian rupee became Kuwait's official currency).

Despite these ties, Kuwait's South Asian expatriate population did not reach significant proportions until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because the Kuwait Oil Company was British owned, a small number of Indians and Pakistanis came to Kuwait in the 1950s to work in the growing oil industry, and to carry out the modernization projects financed by the new oil revenues. Kuwait's oil revenues enabled the government to create a generous welfare system for citizens, and, to a lesser extent, foreign workers.



**Pakistani**

Beginning in the 1970s, tens of thousands of South Asian workers migrated to Kuwait. Because Kuwaiti authorities feared the potentially disruptive ideologies that Arab migrants brought with them, they increasingly restricted the immigration of Arab labor beginning in the late 1960s. In its place, Kuwait began to rely on migrant workers from South Asia—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

During the 1980s, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans began to come to Kuwait when the decline of the construction sector in the mid-1980s (related to the drop in oil prices) led to a shift to the service sector. There was an upsurge in the demand for domestic servants, which led to a feminization of the labor flow, especially from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. In addition to their duties, domestic servants in Kuwait serve as important status

symbols for the Kuwaiti population.

Kuwaiti authorities preferred South Asian workers during this period for several reasons. First, they considered South Asians more politically reliable and less likely to demand rights and privileges than Arab workers. Second, declining oil revenues caused both public and private employers to cut costs. This trend was reinforced by a shift in the demand for labor. Because most infrastructure projects had been completed, a new emphasis was placed on maintenance rather than construction. Given Asian workers willingness to work longer hours for lower wages and their higher level of technical skills, they were more attractive to Kuwaiti

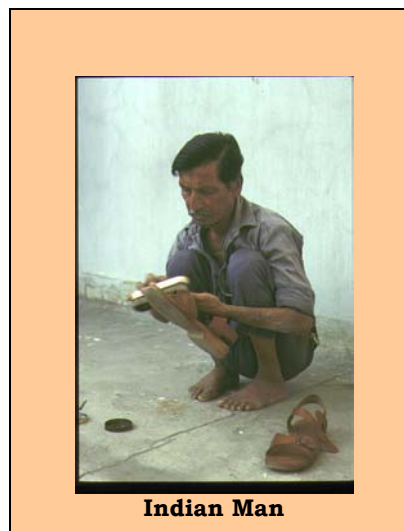


**Modern Kuwait City**

employers. Finally, Asians generally lived without their families in order to maximize their savings; accordingly they were unlikely to settle permanently.

The Kuwaiti government maintained close control over entry, residence, departure, and employment of these workers. In addition, foreign workers were denied political and civic rights. These policies discouraged South Asian workers from having a stake in Kuwait's economic, social, and political system. Kuwaitis exercised considerable authority over expatriate workers by controlling labor movement within the country and threatening these workers with deportation. From the beginning, the state segmented the population into Kuwaitis, who possess power, and non-Kuwaitis, who do not.

Kuwait developed a complex ethnic and religious hierarchy, distinguishing among Kuwaiti/non-Kuwaiti, Arab/non-Arab, and Muslim/non-Muslim people. South Asians generally occupy the bottom of a hierarchy based on ethnicity, religion, and gender. The domestic sector—the lowest rung on the social and occupational ladder—consisted almost entirely of non-Muslim, Asian women. Overall, ethnicity and the type of work performed classified individuals and groups in clearly defined categories. As non-Kuwaitis, South Asian workers shared a subordinate status and the discriminatory economic and social practices that this status generated. There is also hierarchy among South Asian laborers. Indians and Pakistanis, for example, rank above Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans.



**Indian Man**

South Asian expatriates are acutely aware of their inferior status relative to Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaiti Arabs. South Asian migrants uphold the Kuwaiti/non-Kuwaiti stratification through their docile and deferential attitudes toward citizens. Kuwait's economy, laws, and customs emphasize the distinction between citizens and foreigners. In addition, their cultural differences with Kuwait's Arab population place them below other migrant groups such as Arab workers. The configuration of the labor market and the actual ethnic division of labor in the public and private spheres reinforces these perceptions.

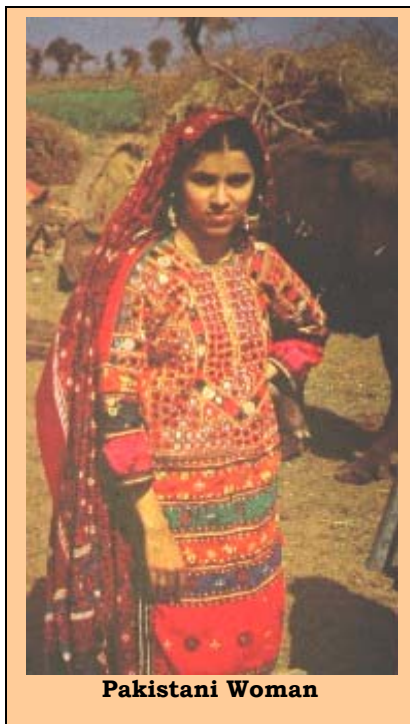


**Street Scene in Kuwait City**

*South Asian Workers since the 1991 Gulf War*

During the course of Iraq's 1990-91 invasion and occupation of Kuwait, hundreds of thousands of Kuwaitis and foreign workers fled the country. Palestinians—who had comprised the bulk of the Arab expatriate population—did not return following Kuwait's liberation. South Asian workers increasingly have filled the gap left by the departure of the Palestinians and other Arabs.

South Asian migrants have dominated the labor market since the war. They occupy jobs that require both high technical skills and fluency in English as well as low-skill jobs in the services and household sectors.

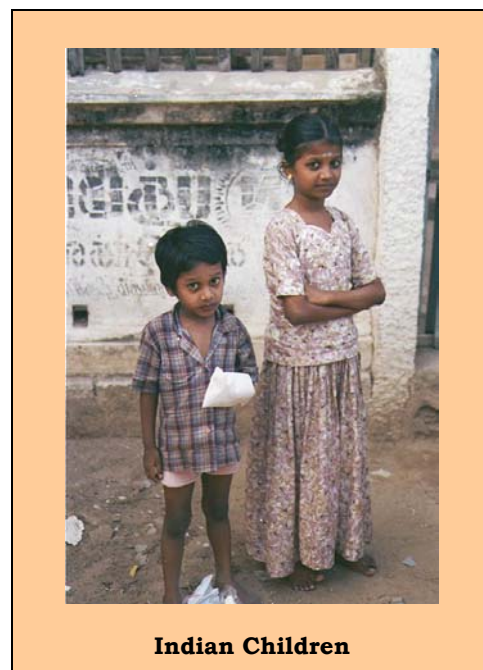


The influx of Asian workers has transformed Kuwaiti society and culture in several important ways, including the growing use of English as a common language. English is a natural choice given Kuwait's connection to Great Britain and the nationalities of the new migrants from the Indian subcontinent and the Philippines.

Labor migration to Kuwait has been undergoing significant changes following the end of the oil boom in the mid-1980s, and in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War with its drain on the Kuwaiti economy. Many workers are now being sent home at the end of their contracts. Low oil prices and a generally weak economy have meant a freeze on many construction and development projects. This climate has also led authorities to crack down on illegal migrants, many of whom were tolerated in the boom years of the 1970s.

South Asians' identity continues to be defined by their transient and subordinate status in Kuwait. Culturally different from Kuwaitis, South Asians do not assimilate into Kuwaiti society or develop a sense of Kuwaiti identity. Kuwait policies, which clearly distinguish between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, reinforce this tendency.

South Asian workers' relationships with Kuwaitis are characterized by social, cultural, and economic distance. Because social, political, and economic rights and benefits are not available to foreign workers, an asymmetrical power relationship between Kuwaitis and migrants exists. South Asian workers for the most part accept this subordinate status. Being transient, individual expatriate South Asians are not looking for a long-term improvement in their situation. These workers come to Kuwait with clear material goals, and construe their situation in personal, not collective, terms. As a result, they pursue pragmatic strategies of accommodation and adjustment while in the emirate.



The only reason South Asians are in Kuwait is to work. South Asian workers in Kuwait continue to be governed by the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, which delegates to citizens the daily administration of migrant workers. In most cases entrance visas and residency permits

are only given with proof of a work contract by a Kuwaiti employer. This system also serves to maintain the stability of the labor market. Once in Kuwait, laborers are not free to move from one job to another, or to offer their services to the highest-paying employer. Expatriate workers leave Kuwait upon termination of their employment contract.

South Asian workers in Kuwait live in a relatively insecure environment. The reasons for their insecurity include: the absence of clearly defined rights, dependence on the goodwill of individual Kuwaiti sponsors, formal and informal forms of discrimination, and the fear of deportation.

The families of many of the South Asian workers are dependent on their remittances for survival. Overall, this combination of insecurity and material needs leads migrant workers to live austere and frugal lifestyles, sharing apartments with fellow countrymen, and sending the bulk of their earnings home.



Despite their lack of rights, South Asian expatriates benefit substantially from working in Kuwait. For both skilled and unskilled workers, salaries are many times those at home (up to 10 times as much). Working conditions are generally good, with modern facilities and technologies. Living conditions are also generally good, relative to their countries of origin, with dependable electricity, water, and other amenities. Food and healthcare is subsidized by the government. Law and order are generally maintained and workers can freely, if quietly, practice their religions. In addition, Kuwait is culturally non-Western, an important consideration for those who view Western culture as threatening to their values.

Remittances are a significant source of income for the families of South Asian migrants, allowing them to pay off debts, purchase land, build homes, and send their children to school. On balance, South Asians view migration to Kuwait as a net gain.

## Religious Identity of Ethnic Group and Influence on Culture

Kuwait's South Asian worker population is divided among Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Catholics. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are predominantly Muslim, Indians are mainly Hindu, and Sri Lankans are primarily Buddhist.

In Kuwait, religious affiliation is considered less important than citizenship and ethnic origin as a marker of identity. Adherents of religions other than Islam practice their religion quietly, observing festivals and practicing rituals in private. These communities recognize that conspicuous displays of religion—in the form of temples or marriage processions—can be provocative in Kuwait.

Many Indian workers are Hindu. Indian migrants from Kerala are Moplahs, or Malayalee-speaking Sunni Muslims. Other Indians from Kerala are Christian. The Catholic Church is the largest Indian institution in Kuwait. Sri Lanka sends many Buddhist Sinhalese to Kuwait. Most Pakistani Muslims are followers of the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam.

Hinduism cannot be traced to a specific founder, and it doesn't have a holy book as a basic scriptural guide. Hindu's several sacred texts include the *Rig Veda*, *Upanishads* and the *Bhagwad Gita*. Unlike most other religions, Hinduism does not advocate the worship of one particular deity. A Hindu can may worship Shiva or Vishnu or Rama or Krishna or some other gods and goddesses, as well as spirits, trees and animals. There are festivals and ceremonies associated not only with gods and goddesses but also with the sun, moon, planets, rivers, oceans, trees and animals.

Buddhism is based on the teachings of Gautam Buddha. Buddha advocated the Middle Path, in which he offered a balanced, harmonious way of life, steering between two extremes of self-indulgence and total abstinence. Buddhism rests upon four Noble Truths: 1) suffering is universal; 2) suffering is caused by desire and yearning; 3) suffering can be prevented and overcome; and 4) eradication of desires can lead to removal of suffering. To prevent suffering one has to conquer craving and desire; this conquest leads to the attainment of *nirvana* or complete enlightenment. Other important Buddhist principles are the principle of impermanence and the law of causation. According to the principle of impermanence, everything is subject to change. According to the law of causation, nothing occurs due to pure chance, but is a product of karma. The Buddhist concepts of the indestructible soul and the cycle of rebirth emerge from these two basic philosophies.

Muslims follow the Five Pillars of Islam: profession of faith; praying five times a day; almsgiving to the poor and the mosque (house of worship); fasting during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan; and pilgrimage to Mecca (the *hajj*). The Hanafi school of Sunni Islam is known for its liberal religious orientation that elevates belief over practice and is tolerant of differences within Muslim communities. Some Muslims in Kuwait are Sufis. Because of its mystical aspects, Sufism represents a dimension of Islamic religious life that has frequently been viewed by orthodox Muslim theologians and lawyers with suspicion. Sufism began as a purely individual quest for spiritual enlightenment and closeness to God among holy men. Sufi masters acquired disciples and standardized ceremonies and methods



FOUO

of meditation were developed. Each Sufi order defines its own particular doctrines, modes of worship, and initiation rites.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-8-

## Language

South Asian workers in Kuwait speak Hindi, Urdu, Bangla (Bengali), Punjabi, Sindhi, Sinhalese, Tamil, and Malayalam, among other languages, depending on their country of origin and ethnic group. Indians speak Hindi, although migrants from the South Indian state of Kerala speak Malayalam, and Indian Muslims speak Urdu. Pakistanis speak Urdu, Punjabi, and Sindhi. Bangladeshis speak Bangla (Bengali). Sri Lankans speak Sinhalese and Tamil.

Many South Asians in Kuwait speak English.

Hindi and Urdu are essentially one language with two scripts, Devanagari and Persian-Arabic, respectively. Both are members of the Indo-European linguistic group that also includes Sinhalese and Bangla (Bengali) as well as most of the languages of Europe.

## Societal Framework

South Asian migrants, intending to return to their homelands eventually, demand little in the way of social recognition or power while in Kuwait.

South Asian social networks do exist in Kuwait. Informal social channels consisting of relatives, friends, or community members encourage migration and aid in the adjustment and sustenance of new migrants. Going through the informal network of friends and relatives lowers the costs and risks of the migration. Friends and relatives provide information, give financial help, and provide accommodation. Pakistanis and Indians are most successful in using personal networks for migration.



**Bangladeshis**

Social activities for South Asians are conducted with fellow countrymen. Activities that draw South Asians together include national events, sports (cricket), poetry, and prayer.

## **Modern Nation State**

Since most South Asian expatriates will eventually return to their country of origin, they largely remain attached to their respective homelands, not to the Kuwaiti state. Kuwaiti law and custom draw a sharp distinction between those who belong to the national community and those who do not. It is virtually impossible for South Asian workers to obtain Kuwaiti citizenship.

South Asian workers' relationship with Kuwait is purely contractual, based on the exchange of labor for wages. Kuwaiti policies view any non-contractual ties as running counter to the principle of migrant transience. Migrant workers accept this exchange, tend not to assimilate, and only reluctantly (if at all) develop a sense of belonging in Kuwait.

Factors that discourage assimilation include: cultural differences, the expatriates' inability to own property, the residential segregation of Kuwaitis and migrants, and the inability of most migrants to bring their families to Kuwait. Although South Asian migrants are an inextricable part of the economy, they are in a subordinate position, and are subject at any time to deportation.

South Asian migrant workers in Kuwait remain connected to their homelands in various ways. In most cases, for example, the costs of migration are met by borrowing from an extended kinship group. Migrants also entrust the care of their families to relatives back home, spend their holidays there if possible, and send most of their earnings home. Overall, migrants devote their energies and finances to issues at home rather than those in Kuwait.

South Asians cannot remain permanently in Kuwait. They are psychologically prepared and expect to leave. They maintain ties to their home countries and see themselves as overseas citizens of, and eventual returnees, to those states.

## **Role of State vs. Role of Tribe/Ethnic Group**

There has always been a pattern of migration and labor exchange in Kuwait. Because of the environmental conditions, people were compelled to migrate regularly in search of work. However, for the most part, they retained their ethnic identity during their travels. Foreigners did not become Kuwaitis, even after they had become integral parts of the local community.

Kuwaiti state policies clearly and explicitly distinguish between Kuwaitis and South Asian workers. South Asian workers in Kuwait lack economic, political, and civil rights and benefits. By denying social and economic benefits to foreign workers, the government prevents social integration and reinforces a sense of separate identity for both groups. South Asian migrants are acutely aware that they do not have rights and benefits because of their status as non-Kuwaitis, but they accept this status.

It is difficult for the South Asian migrant communities in Kuwait to develop formal group identity because of the high rate of personnel turnover, the strict legal and social constraints imposed on them by the government, and because they come to Kuwait with individual, not collective, goals.

FOUO

## **Centers of Authority**

South Asian workers in Kuwait are subject to the authority of the Kuwaiti state, which is represented by the ruling al-Sabah family. Because they are non-permanent residents whose financial goals are best served by remaining employed, South Asian workers do not challenge Kuwaiti authority.

South Asians traditionally are taught to respect all people in authority. Age and official position are respected sources of social status.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-13-

FOUO

## **Rule of Law**

Despite occasional incidents, Kuwait's South Asian workforce is stable. South Asian workers generally accept their subordinate status and adhere to the rule of law in Kuwait. Most South Asian workers are unwilling to engage in activity that would jeopardize their jobs, and by extension, their residence in Kuwait. The low level of crime that does exist within the South Asian communities in Kuwait is petty crime.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003

-14-

## Customs

In general, South Asians do not openly display affection, especially between opposite genders. Politeness, which includes good manners, quiet speech, a pleasant smile, gracefulness, and modest dress, is expected. In order to maintain harmony or to prevent disagreements or unpleasant interchanges, South Asians usually avoid freely expressing their feelings and thoughts to others, especially in public. It is extremely important among South Asian cultures not to make oneself the center of attraction or discuss one's accomplishments. The degree of humble behavior is expected to increase in tandem with the increase in one's achievements. It is also very important not to portray oneself as being better than others. However, other members of the community may shower praises and adoration on those who have achieved success.

### *Indians*

*Namaskar* or *Namaste* is the most popular form of greeting among Indians. Palms are placed together and raised below the face. It is a general salutation that is used to welcome somebody and to bid farewell. Other forms of greeting common among India's various communities include the Sikh *Sat-Sri-akal* and the Tamilian *Vannakkam*.

*Tilak* is a ritual mark on the forehead. Made out of a red vermilion paste, it is a sign of blessing, greeting, or auspiciousness. The *Tilak* is applied on the spot between the brows which is considered the seat of latent wisdom and mental concentration, and is very important for worship. It also indicates the point at which the spiritual eye opens. It symbolizes the quest for the "opening" of the third eye. Hindu rites and ceremonies begin by placing a few grains of rice on the *Tilak*.

A *bindi* is an auspicious mark worn by young girls and woman. Derived from the Sanskrit word for dot, it is usually a red dot made with vermilion powder, and is worn by women between their eyebrows on their forehead. Considered a symbol of Goddess Parvati, it symbolizes female energy. Traditionally a symbol of marriage as well, it has become decorative and is worn today by unmarried girls and women.

Indians offer flower garlands as a mark of respect and honor. They are often offered to welcome visitors.

### *Sri Lankans*

*Ayubowan*, which means may you live long, is the customary Sri Lankan greeting. Palms held close together against the chest denotes welcome, goodbye, respect, devotion, or loyalty. Gifts should be given or received with both hands.

### *Pakistanis*

Handshakes are the common form of greeting between two Pakistani males. Close friends and relatives may embrace. Women may greet each other with a kiss or an embrace.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003



FOUO

Pakistanis, and most Muslims, consider it impolite to point the sole of the shoe at another person. The right hand is used to pass items or gesture. The left hand is considered unclean. The entire hand is used to point or select an item; using a single finger to point is considered impolite.

Visiting is a significant part of Pakistani culture, and hospitality is the mark of good family. Guests are offered refreshments and perhaps invited to share a meal. However, because most Pakistani workers in Kuwait share small apartments, it is difficult for them to follow this custom.

### *Bangladeshi*

When greeting non-Muslims, Bangladeshis use the Indian *Namaskar* greeting. When greeting fellow Muslims, they use *Asalaam walaikhum*, which means peace be upon you.

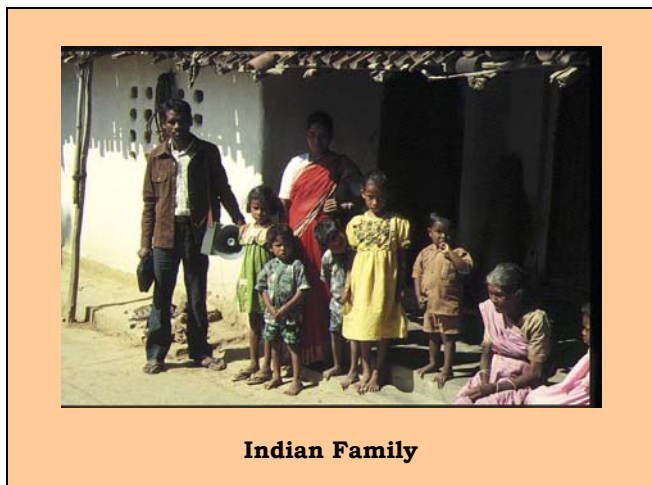
FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003

## Lifestyle

### Role of Family

Most South Asian workers do not have their families in Kuwait. Labor migration in the Gulf is primarily contract based and a majority of South Asian workers fall below the salary ceiling necessary for sponsoring family members. However, family is significant to South Asians in Kuwait. South Asian workers send the bulk of their earnings home to support their families.



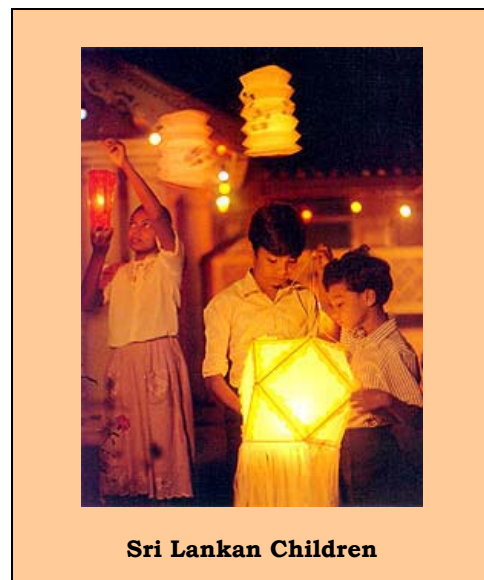
**Indian Family**

and support when they are in crisis.

The value of honoring the family is very strongly ingrained in South Asian children. Within South Asian families is a hierarchical social order. In most families, the father is considered the head of the family and the decision maker. Grandparents have a high status in the family and are respected and cared for by other family members. Families turn to senior family members for advice

### Role of Women

Supported by Islamic ideology and teachings, the prevailing standards of morality in Kuwait stress values and norms associated with traditional ideas of femininity, motherhood, and sexuality. The foreign female labor force in Kuwait is dominated by South Asians and concentrated in the two or three occupations that are considered culturally appropriate for women, such as domestic servants and hotel and business cleaners. Many South Asian families send their daughters to Kuwait reluctantly. However, given the poor economic situation of most households, female migration is often the only possibility for survival.



**Sri Lankan Children**

Maids come mainly from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. A majority are married, aged 20-39. During the initial phases of South Asian migration—following the oil embargo of 1973—females played a relatively minor role. In the 1980s, the number of South Asian female workers increased rapidly. The presence of a large number of South Asian domestic servants has social, cultural, and economic implications for Kuwait.

### Dating and Marriage

Men and women in the Asian population generally are not related through marriage. To the extent that South Asian workers are married, they are usually not accompanied by their

FOUO

spouses and do not live in Kuwait as family units. This influences both the duration of their stay and Kuwaiti perceptions of their moral and sexual behavior.

### **Role of Children**

Most South Asian workers do not have children in Kuwait. Those who have children in their country of origin send money home to support them.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-18-

## Clothing

Dress is a major marker of identity in Kuwait, symbolizing prestige and power. Only Kuwaitis wear the traditional *disbdashbah* and *abaya*. South Asian workers wear either their native clothing or western-style dress. Kuwaitis associate non-western style clothes with low-paid, unskilled labor, particularly within the construction sector. Overall, clothing in Kuwait conveys privilege and superiority in the Kuwaiti-expatriate interaction.

Unlike Arab women, Asian women tend not to wear a long dress (*abaya*) and a scarf-like cover (*hejab*) that covers the hair but not the face. This outfit signals their identity as Muslim women. Although the *abaya* and the headscarf are part of the Islamic tradition and related to female modesty, they are less a symbol of piety than of ethnic identity. The *abaya* conveys Arab female dignity, status, and aloofness. South Asian women.



**Sri Lankan Women**

unmarried girls as well.

The lack of an *abaya* among South Asian women and their wide use of western dress conveys greater openness, but also less social status within Kuwaiti society.

Many Indian women wear a pin on their nose studded with semi-precious stones. Once a symbol of purity and marriage, the nose pin is today worn by many

## Diet

South Asians in Kuwait prefer their national foods. Depending on the size of the community, these foods are generally available in Kuwait.

Many Hindus from India are vegetarian. Indian dishes include vegetable dishes, such as *palak paneer* (a cottage cheese and spinach dish made with fresh herbs and topped off with cream), potatoes stuffed with raisins, nuts and herbs, and *dhali* (a lentil-based soup). Meat dishes include lamb chops with ginger, and *biryani* (rice with saffron, meat, fish, or chicken). Indians eat several types of bread. Many dishes are cooked over a charcoal fire or in a *kadhai*, a small metal pot.

Pakistani food is similar to that of northern India, with more Turkish and Persian influences. The Pakistani diet includes baked and deep-fried breads (*roti*, *chapatti*, *puri*, *halwa* and *nan*), meat curries, *dhali*, spicy spinach, cabbage, peas, rice, and *Hunza* pie. *Biryani* is rice with meat or vegetables and spices. Chicken and lamb are the most commonly consumed meats. Muslims are prohibited from consuming pork.

Rice is the staple of the Bangladeshi diet. Fish, lentils and vegetables constitute the main dish. The Bangladeshi diet consists of more fish than either Indian or Pakistani diet. The main portion of everyday Bangladeshi cuisine is made up of several types of curries. Bangladeshis prefer *bhaat* (plain white/brown boiled rice) to the many different types of bread that are more common in both Indian and Pakistani cuisine. It is less spicy than Indian food and less rich than Pakistani food. Generally, Bangladeshis do not eat separate courses; it's all one meal. Appetizers, snacks, and finger foods are usually part of the afternoon tea.

Sri Lankans eat boiled rice with curried vegetable, fish and/or meat flavored with Sri Lankan spices. This meal is generally served for both lunch and dinner. Hoppers are a unique Sri Lankan snack, similar to a pancake, served with egg or honey and yogurt. The Portuguese, Dutch, Malays, Arabs and South Indians who visited Sri Lanka either as traders or voyagers have influenced Sri Lankan food.

## Dwellings

Until the late 1950s, Kuwaitis and expatriate workers lived together within the walls of Kuwait City. In 1957, the walls were torn down and Kuwait built carefully planned residential districts that segregated natives and foreign workers, and laid the groundwork for legal and political distinctions between Kuwaitis and expatriates.



**Indian Girl**

Housing is a pressing issue for many migrants. Many workers share a house or even a room in a house to the point of overcrowding. Selection of co-residents follows criteria of ethnicity, nationality, religion, and local origin. Construction workers live near the construction sites in barracks provided by the employers. Poorer migrants often furnish their rooms in a squatter-like fashion: thin foam mattress, pillow, and blanket. Often residences do not meet health and hygiene standards.

## **Attitudes toward the United States**

South Asian workers in Kuwait display various attitudes toward the United States. These attitudes tend to reflect the general state of relations between their homelands and the United States.

Differing objectives and outlooks have made past U.S. engagement with South Asia episodic and often strained. During the Cold War, American interest in the region rose and fell, leaving an impression in South Asia of U.S. fickleness, if not betrayal. In addition, South Asian attitudes toward the United States have been deeply colored by regional rivalries and post-colonial fears of foreign domination. Despite the misunderstandings and difficulties, many South Asians have a favorable impression of the United States. U.S.-Indian relations have been increasingly friendly in recent years. Pakistan has also had close relations with the United States, especially with respect to the war on terrorism.

## **Attitudes toward Other Ethnic Groups**

**Kuwaiti Arabs:** South Asian workers in Kuwait are aware of their subordinate status and defer to Kuwaitis. Kuwaitis and South Asians do not mix socially.

**Non-Kuwaiti Arabs:** Since World War II, there has been a substantial non-Kuwaiti Arab population in Kuwait. Asian workers are aware that they are below Arab workers in Kuwait's ethnic and occupational hierarchy. South Asians and non-Kuwaiti Arabs do not mix socially.



FOUO

## **Attitudes toward Neighboring States and Regional Powers**

South Asian workers in Kuwait maintain strong ties with their respective homelands. In fact, most are more concerned with developments there than in Kuwait. Their attitudes toward other states and regional powers vary according to specific circumstances.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-24-

## Cultural Economy

The visible and material effects of the oil boom on Kuwait include a huge influx of skilled and unskilled foreign labor. Beginning in the 1960s, Kuwaiti authorities instituted strict nationality and commercial laws to guarantee Kuwaiti advantage and privilege. Kuwaiti affluence, leisure, and power stood in increasing contrast to expatriate economic need, dependence, and labor. As a result, the dichotomy between Kuwaiti leisure and privilege and non-Kuwaiti labor became central to cultural dynamics in Kuwait.



**South Asian Workers**

South Asian immigration increased in the 1970s. Kuwaitis regarded Asians as a more politically compliant workforce, removed from the potentially disruptive currents of Arab nationalism and Islamism.

Push and pull factors drive South Asian labor migration to Kuwait. Push factors include the need for labor-sending countries to alleviate the depressed economic conditions and unemployment by encouraging their citizens to migrate for work and to remit a significant portion of their earnings back home; high population growth; and the potential for higher earnings. Pull factors include the shortage of labor in Kuwait; its desire to achieve rapid modernization; and the persistence among Kuwaiti nationals of negative social attitudes toward manual labor and female participation in the workforce.

Different types of intermediary links exist between the prospective South Asians migrants and the labor market in Kuwait. Most South Asians find employment through recruiting agencies, to which they pay a fee. Many South Asian workers have to incur huge debts to finance their migration. The benefits of working in Kuwait have created a thriving recruitment industry in the South Asian states, as well as numerous illegal activities and exploitation. A minority of South Asians come to Kuwait through informal social networks.



**Kuwaiti Waterfront**

Migration to Kuwait and other Gulf states alleviates the serious unemployment problems in South Asian countries and provides an income for a substantial number of families belonging to the poorest strata of society. Remittances are significant for the economies of the labor-sending countries. Pakistan, for example, has a policy of encouraging labor emigration and has instituted programs for training skilled and semi-skilled workers for overseas employment.

In theory, all South Asian workers in Kuwait are in possession of a job when they arrive. To control expatriate labor, Kuwait instituted the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, which delegated to Kuwaiti citizens the daily administration of immigrants. In most cases, entrance visas and residency permits are granted to those with a work contract with a Kuwaiti employer. This

FOUO

system also serves to maintain the stability of the labor market. Once in Kuwait, laborers are not free to move from one job to another or to offer their services to the highest-paying employer. By controlling labor movement within the country and by threatening deportation, the native Kuwaiti has considerable authority over the expatriate worker.

The South Asian labor force in Kuwait is diverse. South Asians are recruited for the entire spectrum of construction work: unskilled laborers, skilled craftsmen, engineers, and managers. South Asians are also employed in industry and the services, as well as by the government. Some are directly employed by Kuwaiti families as servants, cooks, and gardeners. Finally, although South Asians are not allowed to own businesses, some essentially do so by acquiring a Kuwaiti partner.

There is no minimum wage law in Kuwait and employers are free to pay the lowest wage the employee will accept. The major determinants of a foreign workers wages include nationality, education, and work experience in Kuwait, sector of employment, and language skills. While expatriate male laborers are covered by state labor codes, female domestic workers are not. Domestic servants sometimes work as much as 16-18 hour days. Employers provide board and lodging for domestic servants, who are often confined to the house when not accompanied by their Kuwaiti employer. Most employers provide clothing and some other allowances.

Because the South Asian states see migration as vital to their economies, they rarely protest any mistreatment of migrants. However, in March 2000 India briefly banned its nationals from working in Kuwait as domestic staff because of allegations of abuse and exploitation. The Philippines enacted a similar ban in the mid-1990s.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

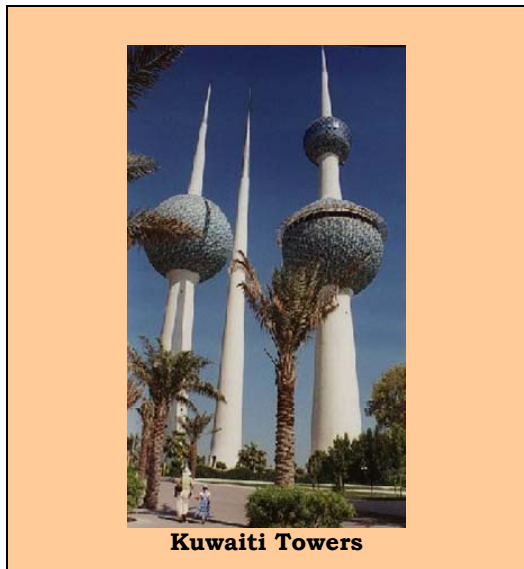
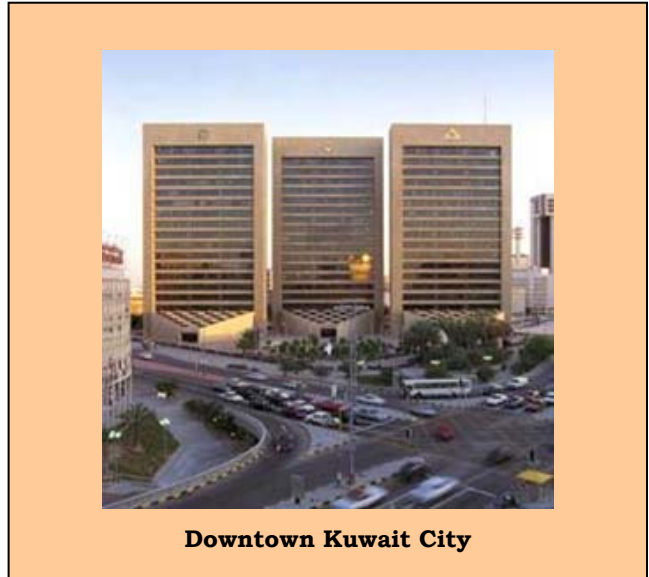
April 2003

## Cultural Geography

The geographical pattern of residence in Kuwait reflects the ethnic make-up of the population. Kuwaiti citizens and South Asian workers tend to be segregated. Kuwait City has residential areas identified as “Kuwaiti,” “mixed,” and “rural.” South Asian workers live in mixed and rural areas, depending on occupation and income. South Asian domestic servants live in Kuwaiti areas with Kuwaiti families.

Overall, residential patterns follow class rather than ethnic lines. The central and eastern parts of Kuwait are considered wealthier than the western parts.

Immigrant areas tend to contain high-density



apartment blocks surrounded by poorly cared for streets. Maintenance and repair is a constant problem. Non-Kuwaitis are not permitted to own land.

### Urban vs. Rural Culture

Contemporary Kuwait is an urban society centered on a coastal city. Most South Asian workers live in and around Kuwait City.

With approximately 1.4 million inhabitants (nearly 75 percent of Kuwait’s population), Kuwait City dominates the country culturally, politically, and economically.

## **Cultural Style of Warfare**

Because they are transient and remain focused on their respective homelands, South Asian workers in Kuwait have nothing to fight for in Kuwait. During conflict, South Asian workers will most likely attempt to return to their countries of origin, as they did during the 1990 Iraqi invasion and prepared to do in the months leading up to Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

## **Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations: Kuwait**

### **Iranians in Kuwait**

#### **Summary of Key Points**

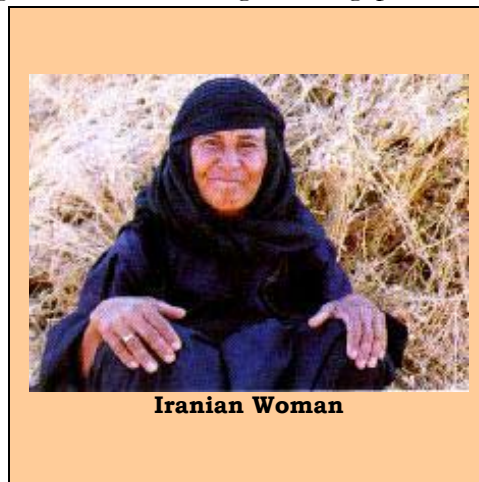
- There are approximately 45,000 Iranians working in Kuwait. Kuwait does not provide worker-population numbers by nationality. Iranian workers in Kuwait speak Farsi. Some also speak Arabic.
- Kuwait's Iranian worker population is primarily Shia Muslim. In Kuwait, religious affiliation is considered less important than citizenship and ethnic origin as a marker of identity.
- Most Iranian workers live in and around Kuwait City. They are largely segregated from the Kuwaiti population, and live with fellow countrymen.
- Despite Persian-Arab cultural animosity, Iranians have a long cultural and economic connection to Kuwait.
- Through the 1950s Iranians were one of the largest expatriate groups in Kuwait. Thousands were deported during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. The number of Iranians in Kuwait has increased as Kuwait-Iranian relations have improved in recent years.
- Like other foreign workers in Kuwait, Iranians' relationship with Kuwait is contractual, based on the exchange of labor for wages. Social, political, and economic rights and benefits are not available to Iranians, and they cannot become citizens. In addition, Kuwait has constructed a complex set of migrant policies. As a result, the native Kuwaiti has almost complete authority over the foreign worker.
- Culturally different from Kuwaitis, Iranian workers remain focused on their homeland, and do not assimilate into Kuwaiti society. Kuwait policies, which draw a sharp distinction between those who belong to the national community and those who do not, reinforce this tendency.
- Economic incentives drive Iranian immigration to Kuwait. An Iranian worker can make up to 10 times more in Kuwait than at home.
- It is difficult for the Iranian migrant communities in Kuwait to develop formal group identity because of the high rate of personnel turnover, the strict legal and social constraints imposed on them by the government, and because they come to Kuwait with individual, not collective, goals.

## Cultural History

Hostility between Arabs and Iranians (Persians, the dominant ethnic group within Iran) has been an enduring feature of the Gulf region for centuries. Proximity between the two cultures and peoples has not produced greater knowledge or understanding. The gap is religious and cultural, as well as military and political.

At the same time, Iranians and Arabs have been united by language, religion, pilgrimage, migration, and trade. Political boundaries have not corresponded to neat ethnic, religious, and linguistic divisions. There have long been communities with Iranian characteristics within Arab lands.

For centuries, Kuwait was open to Iranian influences. Iranians have been economically linked to Kuwait since its founding in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as the Gulf was a porous frontier between Arab and Iranian trade, lineages, and culture. Iranians found work in a variety of occupations in Kuwait, ranging from pearl divers to merchants.



**Iranian Woman**

During the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, internal developments in Iran—including the centralization of state power—sent many Iranians across the Gulf to Kuwait. Many of these migrants were from southern and southwestern Iran. Among these migrants were religious Shia families.

Despite this history, Kuwait's Iranian population did not reach significant proportions until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1950s, Iranians were among the largest group of expatriate workers in Kuwait. Iranians, as well as other foreign workers, came to Kuwait during the decade to work in the growing oil industry, and to carry out the modernization projects financed by the new oil revenues. Kuwait's oil revenues enabled the government to create a generous welfare system for citizens, and, to a lesser extent, foreign workers.



**Modern Kuwait City**

In addition, during this period Iran's internal development projects focused on the north and oil-rich Khuzestan. The south of the country was ignored and under-financed. As a result, many southern Iranians left for economic opportunities in Kuwait. Some of these migrants had family and social contacts from the earlier wave of immigrants.

Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, many members of the Iranian business and political elite left the country. This group, unlike the Iranians who migrated earlier, was mostly urban, educated, and secular. They left Iran for political and economic reasons—the lack of

political freedom, the nationalization of the economy, and the increasing role of Islam in every aspect of daily life. During the 1980s, dissatisfaction with the new regime's policies, coupled with the great suffering caused by the Iran-Iraq War, led to migration of thousands of Iranians abroad. In particular, young men fled Iran to avoid fighting in that conflict. Most such emigrants settled in Western Europe or the United States, although a small number made their way to Kuwait.



**Iranian Men**

Kuwait was not receptive to Iranian migrants in the 1980s because of the Iran-Iraq War. During the 8 year conflict, Kuwait was concerned about the Iranian military forces in southern Iraq near the Kuwaiti border. Kuwait provided Iraq with significant financial assistance, and Kuwait's port facilities were used for trans-shipment of supplies to Iraq. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Iran attacked Kuwaiti ships in the Gulf.

Internally, Kuwait's rulers perceived Iran's desire to spread its Shia revolution beyond its borders as a clear threat. This perception was reinforced when non-Kuwaitis waged an urban guerilla-bombing campaign in the emirate from 1983 to 1985. As a result, Iranians who lived in Kuwait suffered from discrimination and government suspicion. In 1986 the government deported thousands of Shia of Iranian origin. Overall, the war between Iran and Iraq compounded the divisions between Iranians and Kuwaitis.

Kuwaiti-Iranian relations improved throughout the 1990s. In early 2001, Kuwait and Iran signed a bilateral cooperation agreement in the areas of labor force transfer, social affairs, and vocational training. Under its terms, Iran will provide Kuwait with a specialized work force, including those with training in electronics and computers.

Kuwait has been a preferred destination for Iranian emigrants in recent years. Iranians come to Kuwait primarily for economic reasons. High unemployment rates in Iran have increased the flow of workers out of the country. (The Iranian government imposes no restrictions on its citizens leaving the republic.) Iranians in Kuwait can earn up to ten times as much in the emirate than at home. Many Iranians in Kuwait work in the hotel, retail, and services sector.



**Street Scene in Kuwait City**

In general, the Kuwaiti government maintains close control over entry, residence, departure, and employment of Iranian workers. In addition, Iranians, like other foreign workers, are denied

political and civic rights. These policies discourage Iranians from having a stake in Kuwait's economic, social, and political system. Because they control labor movement within the country and can threaten deportation, Kuwaitis exercise considerable authority over



## FOUO

expatriate workers. From the beginning, the state segmented the population into Kuwaitis, who retain power, and non-Kuwaitis, who have no power.

A complex ethnic and religious hierarchy, distinguishing among Kuwaiti/non-Kuwaiti, Arab/non-Arab, and Muslim/non-Muslim people developed in Kuwait. Iranians are relatively low on the hierarchical scale because they are non-Kuwaiti, Persian rather than Arab, and follow Shia Islam, as opposed to the Sunnism of the Kuwaiti Arabs. Overall, ethnicity and the type of work performed classify individuals and groups in clearly defined categories within Kuwait. As non-Kuwaitis, Iranian workers share a subordinate status and must live with the discriminatory economic and social practices that this status generates.

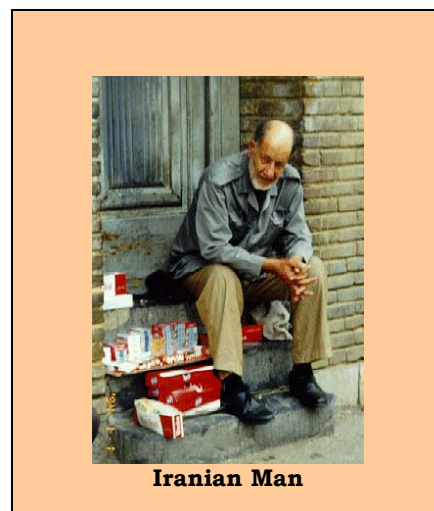
Kuwait's economy, laws, and customs emphasize the distinction between citizens and foreigners. In addition, their cultural differences with Arabs place Iranians in an inferior position relative to the non-Kuwaiti Arab population. The configuration of the labor market and the actual ethnic division of labor in the public and private spheres reinforces these perceptions.

For the most part, Iranians in Kuwait retain a strong attachment to their homeland. They send funds to build hospitals, schools, and mosques, especially in the south, a region still largely ignored by Tehran. Beyond the investment/charity bond with Iran, the Iranian community in Kuwait continues to speak Farsi. They also support other Iranian migrants who come to Kuwait, and many visit Iran on a regular basis.

Iranian identity in Kuwait is defined by their transient and subordinate status. Culturally different from Kuwaitis and other Arabs, Iranians do not assimilate into Kuwaiti society or develop a sense of Kuwaiti identity. Kuwait policies, which clearly distinguish between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, reinforce this tendency.

Iranian workers' relationship with Kuwaitis is characterized by social, cultural, and economic distance. Because social, political, and economic rights and benefits are not available to foreign workers, an asymmetrical power relationship between Kuwaitis and migrants exists. Iranian workers, being transient, are not looking for a long-term improvement in their situation. These workers construe their situation in personal, not collective, terms. As a result, they pursue pragmatic strategies of accommodation and adjustment while in Kuwait.

Iranian workers in Kuwait are governed by the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, which delegates to citizens the daily administration of migrant workers. In most cases, entrance visas and residency permits are granted to those with a work contract by a Kuwaiti employer. This system also serves to maintain the stability of the labor market. Once in Kuwait, laborers are not free to move from one job to another or to offer their services to the highest-paying employer. Expatriate workers have to leave Kuwait upon termination of their employment



FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

FOUO

contract. By controlling labor movement within the country and by threatening deportation, the Kuwaitis exercise considerable authority over the expatriate worker.

Iranian workers in Kuwait live in a relatively insecure environment. The reasons for their insecurity include: the absence of clearly defined rights, dependence on the goodwill of individual Kuwaiti sponsors, formal and informal forms of discrimination, and the fear of deportation. Overall, this combination of insecurity and material needs leads migrant workers to live austere and frugal lifestyles.

FOUO

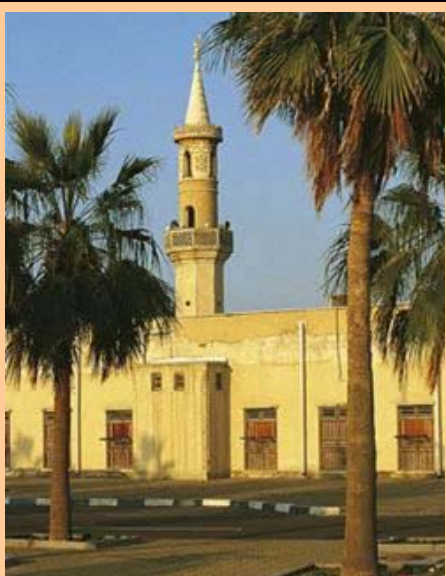
Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003

## Religious Identity of Ethnic Group and Influence on Culture

Iranian workers in Kuwait follow Shia Islam. Islam is more of a unifying than an excluding factor in Kuwait. As a marker of identity, moreover, religious affiliation is less important than citizenship and ethnic origin.

Kuwait's Shia community—both Arab and Iranian—has a developed sense of identity because of shared beliefs and practices. In addition, economic and social self-segregation, as well as Sunni discrimination, has produced a sense of Shia identity. In the 1980s, public expressions of Shia identity became much more pronounced. The 1979 Iranian Revolution produced a renewed sense of identity among Shia and a new fear of the Shia community among Kuwait's Sunni population. Although the bulk of Kuwait's Shia remained loyal to Kuwait, Sunni leaders introduced discriminatory measures that alienated many Shia. In addition, restrictions were placed on Shia communal and religious practices. The government deported thousands of Shia of Iranian origin in 1986. These actions left Kuwait's Shia feeling increasingly excluded from the national community. As a result, Sunni-Shia tensions, which had erupted occasionally in the past, intensified. Following Kuwait's liberation, the loyalty of Kuwait's Shia population during the Iraqi invasion and occupation led the government to lift these discriminatory measures. To a great extent, Kuwait has succeeded in accommodating its Shia population.

### Differences between Sunni and Shia Islam



**Kuwaiti Mosque**

In the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century, soon after the death of Muhammad, Shia Muslims and Sunni Muslims split over who should be his rightful spiritual and secular successor (known as the caliph). Shia and Sunni Muslims are similar in terms of doctrine and belief. Both follow the Five Pillars of Islam: profession of faith; praying five times a day; almsgiving to the poor and the mosque (house of worship); fasting during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan; and pilgrimage to Mecca (the *hajj*). However, there are important differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

The Imamate is the central aspect of Shia Islam and what principally distinguishes it from orthodox or Sunni Islam. The Shia believe in the succession of infallible Imams or religious leaders all of whom were members of Muhammad's family and who interpreted the law and doctrine. Ali—Muhammad's cousin and

son-in-law—was the first Shia Imam. He was followed by 11 successors, who passed the Imamate down to their sons in hereditary fashion. The most important Shia Imam was Ali's son Husayn, whose martyrdom at Karbala in Iraq in 680 A.D. marks the beginnings of Shia Islam as a religion. The Shia believe that the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam remains "hidden," and is awaiting the right time for a return.

## FOUO

Other differences between the two sects include the role and power of the *ulema* (religious scholars or clergy) and religious hierarchy. The Shia religious structure is more hierarchical than the Sunni. In addition, they exert more influence over their flock than the Sunni clergy. Over time, the Shia have developed several rituals that are distinct from Sunni practices. For example, the Shia from all over the world visit the shrines of martyred imams, several of which are across the border in southern Iraq.

The rites and rituals of Ashura, which commemorate the death of Husayn, are among the oldest and most revered religious traditions for Shia Arabs and Persians. These rituals take the form of representations and reenactments of the Battle of Karbala, which took place in 680 A.D. between Husayn and his followers and the army of Umayyad caliph Yazid bin Mu'awiya.

Both Shia and Sunni Islam have developed several sects or schools. Among the Kuwaiti Shia, the Twelver or Ithna-Ashari sect is the largest.

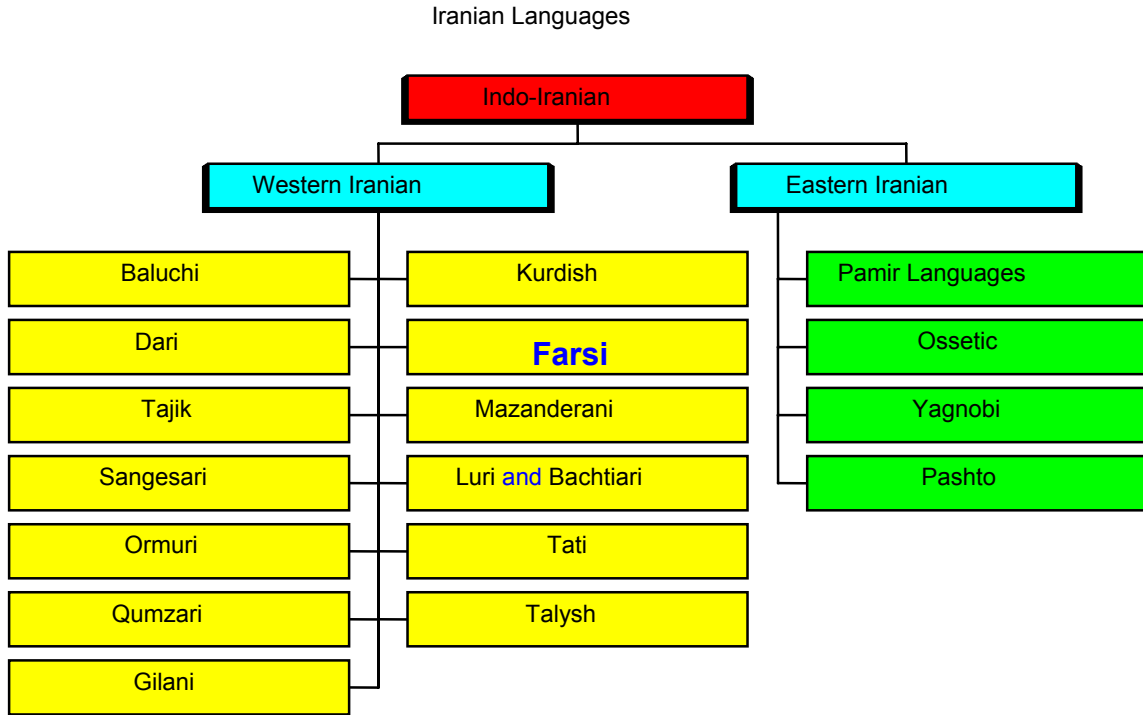
In general, the political marginalization of the Shia has translated into a lack of economic and social opportunities in comparison with those available to their Sunni counterparts. Sunni Islam is associated with the status quo. Shia Islam is associated with the rejection of the status quo, often accompanied by a determination to change it.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity  
April 2003

## Language

Iranians speak Farsi, which belongs to the Indo-Iranian family of languages, which are part of the Indo-European family. It is also spoken throughout Central Asia.



## **Societal Framework**

Because Iranian migrants intend to return to their homeland eventually, they demand little in the way of social recognition or power while in Kuwait.

Iranian social networks do exist in Kuwait. Informal social channels consisting of relatives, friends, or community members encourage migration and aid in the adjustment and sustenance of new migrants. Going through the informal network of friends and relatives lowers the costs and risks of the migration. Friends and relatives provide information, give financial help, and provide accommodation.

## **Modern Nation State**

Iranian workers largely remain attached to their respective homelands, not to the Kuwaiti state. Kuwaiti law and custom draw a sharp distinction between those who belong to the national community and those who do not. It is virtually impossible for Iranian workers to obtain Kuwaiti citizenship.

Iranian workers' relationship with Kuwait is purely contractual, based on the exchange of labor for wages. Kuwaiti policies view any non-contractual ties as running counter to the principle of migrant transience. Migrant workers accept this exchange, tend not to assimilate, and only reluctantly (if at all) develop a sense of belonging in Kuwait. Overall, migrants devote their energies and finances to issues at home rather than those in Kuwait.

Factors that discourage assimilation include: cultural differences, the expatriates' inability to own property, the residential segregation of Kuwaitis and migrants, and the inability of most migrants to bring their families to Kuwait.

## **Role of State vs. Role of Tribe/Ethnic Group**

There has always been a pattern of migration and labor exchange in Kuwait. Because of the environmental conditions, people were compelled to migrate regularly in search of work. However, for the most part, they retained their ethnic identity. Foreigners did not become Kuwaitis, even after they had become integral parts of the local community.

Kuwaiti state policies clearly and explicitly distinguish between Kuwaitis and Iranian workers. Iranian workers in Kuwait, like other expatriates, lack economic, political, and civil rights and benefits. By denying social and economic benefits to foreign workers, the government prevents social integration and reinforces a sense of separate identity for both groups.

It is difficult for the Iranian migrant communities in Kuwait to develop formal group identity because of the high rate of turnover, the strict legal and social constraints imposed on them by the government, and because they come to Kuwait with individual, not collective, goals.



FOUO

## **Centers of Authority**

Iranian workers in Kuwait are subject to the authority of the Kuwaiti state, which is represented by the ruling al-Sabah family. Because they are non-permanent residents whose financial goals are best served by remaining employed, Iranian workers tend not to challenge Kuwaiti authority.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-12-

FOUO

## **Rule of Law**

Despite occasional incidents, Kuwait's Iranian workforce is stable. Iranian workers generally adhere to the rule of law in Kuwait. Most Iranian workers are unwilling to engage in activity that would jeopardize their jobs, and by extension, their residence in Kuwait.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-13-

## Customs

Iranians may avoid shaking hands or kissing unrelated individuals from the opposite gender. Handshakes are offered to new male acquaintances. Individuals from the same gender often kiss on both cheeks, hold, embrace and hug each other whether they are related or not. Iranian women present during greetings may not be introduced at all or even offer to introduce themselves. Iranian greetings can involve lengthy inquiries about every aspect of the visitor's personal life and family. The standard salutation is *salam* (peace), very similar to the Arabic greeting. Another common greeting is *haleh tun chetoreh* (how are you?).

Hospitality is an significant part of Iranian culture. An Iranian host will feel obliged to take care of everything for guests. Hosts will often refuse to take no for an answer and insist that guests should have what they are offered. Guests are not obliged to eat everything they are offered and can politely refuse. However, because most Iranian workers in Kuwait share living quarters, it is difficult for them to provide traditional hospitality.

It is customary for Iranians to stand when older people enter the room. The best seats are allocated to the elderly, and they are offered drinks and food before anyone else. Younger people are expected to be polite and restrained.

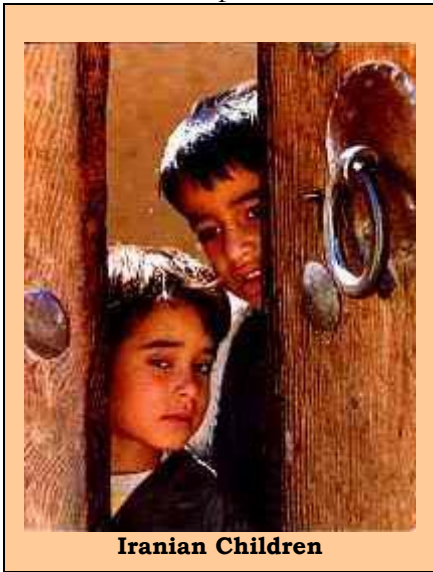
## Lifestyle

### Role of Family

Family is the primary source of security and support for most Iranians. However, most Iranian workers do not have their families in Kuwait. Labor migration in the Gulf is primarily contract based and a majority of Iranian workers fall below the salary ceiling necessary for sponsoring family members.

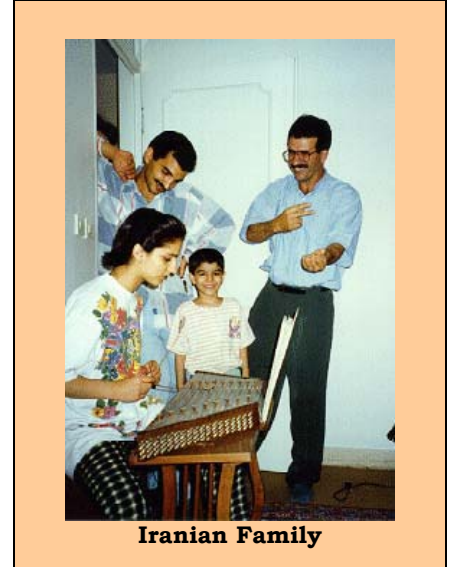
### Role of Men and Women

Supported by Islamic ideology and teachings, Iranian culture is traditional and patriarchal. Men have more rights and privileges than women.



**Iranian Children**

Centuries of gender discrimination and segregation has created well-defined and distinct roles and codes of behavior for both genders. The priority for females is marriage and childbearing. Accordingly, Iranian gender roles tend to fit the prevailing standards of morality in Kuwait, which stress values and norms associated with traditional ideas of femininity, motherhood, and sexuality.



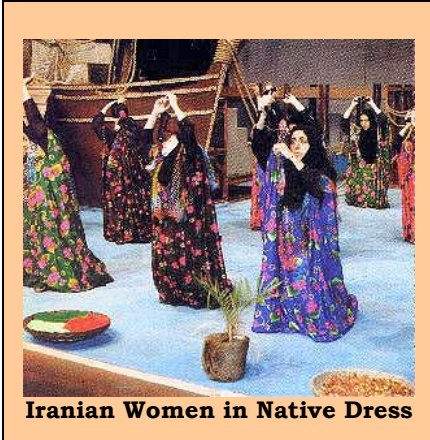
**Iranian Family**

### Role of Children

With respect to individual freedoms, dress codes and association with the opposite gender, Iranian families place more restrictions on girls than boys. However, most Iranian workers do not have children in Kuwait.

## Clothing

Dress is a major marker of identity in Kuwait, symbolizing prestige and power. Only Kuwaitis wear the traditional *dishdashab* and *abaya*. Iranians wear either their native clothing or western-style dress. Iranian females tend to dress conservatively, wearing chadors (the Iranian version of the abaya). Overall, clothing in Kuwait conveys privilege and superiority in the Kuwaiti-expatriate interaction.



**Iranian Women in Native Dress**

## Diet

The Iranian diet is based on rice, bread, fresh vegetables, herbs, and fruit. Meat, usually lamb or mutton minced or cut into small chunks, is used to add flavor, but is rarely the dominant ingredient, except in kebabs. Iranian multi-grain bread (*barbari*) is popular among both Iranians and Arabs.

Rice has special significance in Iranian culture. The type of rice served as well as the style of cooking may signify various levels of wealth as well as respect for guests. Ideally cooked Iranian rice—in contrast to Asian style—clearly separates the grains. Rice is served boiled, steamed, or in pilaf with the addition of vegetables, fruits, and nuts.

Iranians drink tea rather than coffee.

## **Dwellings**

Until the late 1950s, Kuwaitis and expatriate workers lived together within the walls of Kuwait City. In 1957, the walls were torn down and Kuwait built carefully planned residential districts that segregated natives and foreign workers, thus establishing the groundwork for legal and political distinctions between Kuwaitis and expatriates.

Housing is a pressing issue for many migrants. Many workers share a house or even a room in a house to the point of overcrowding. Selection of co-residents follows criteria of ethnicity, nationality, religion, and local origin. Construction workers live near the construction sites in barracks provided by the employers. Poorer migrants often furnish their rooms in a squatter-like fashion: thin foam mattress, pillow, and blanket. Often residences do not meet health and hygiene standards, so workers spend minimal time in these rooms.

## **Attitudes toward the United States**

The attitudes of Iranian workers in Kuwait toward the United States tend to reflect the general state of relations between their homeland and the United States.

Iranian attitudes toward the United States are complex. Many of the Islamic revolutionaries had been inspired by their Western education and yet they sought a state purged of Western influence. Since 1979, U.S.-Iranian relations have been characterized by harsh confrontation. In recent years, popular sentiment appears to be increasingly anti-clerical and more pro-American. Iran's overwhelmingly young population is generally supportive of efforts to improve relations with the United States. Even Iranians who oppose U.S. policies tend to have a positive impression of the United States. However, many Iranians, encouraged by their government, continue to perceive the American attitude toward them as essentially hostile.



## **Attitudes toward other Ethnic Groups**

A complex ethnic and religious hierarchy, distinguishing among Kuwaiti/non-Kuwaiti, Arab/non-Arab, and Muslim/non-Muslim people has developed in Kuwait. Iranians are relatively low on the hierarchical scale because they are non-Kuwaiti, Persian rather than Arab, and followed Shia Islam, as opposed to the Sunni Islam followed by the Kuwaiti Arabs. Overall, ethnicity and the type of work performed classify individuals and groups in clearly defined categories in Kuwait. As non-Kuwaitis, Iranians workers share a subordinate status along with the discriminatory economic and social practices that this status generates.

FOUO

## **Attitudes toward Neighboring States and Regional Powers**

Iranian workers in Kuwait have close ties to their homeland. In fact, most are more concerned with developments there than in Kuwait. Their attitudes toward other states and regional powers tend to vary according to Iran's relationship with them.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

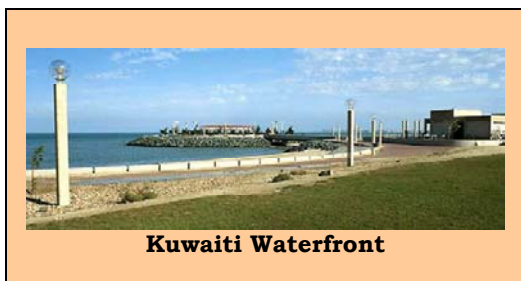
April 2003

-21-

## Cultural Economy

The visible and material effects of the oil boom on Kuwait include a huge influx of skilled and unskilled foreign labor, including Iranians. Beginning in the 1960s, Kuwaiti authorities instituted strict nationality and commercial laws to guarantee Kuwaiti advantage and privilege. Kuwaiti affluence, leisure, and power stood in increasing contrast to expatriate economic need, dependence, and labor. As a result, the dichotomy between Kuwaiti leisure and privilege and non-Kuwaiti labor became central to cultural dynamics in Kuwait.

Economic considerations drive Iranian labor migration to Kuwait. In theory, all Iranian workers in Kuwait are in possession of a job when they arrive. To control expatriate labor, Kuwait instituted the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, which delegates to Kuwaiti citizens the daily administration of immigrants. In most cases, entrance visas and residency permits are granted to those with a work contract by a Kuwaiti employer. This system also serves to maintain the stability of the labor market. Once in Kuwait, laborers are not free to move from one job to another or to offer their services to the highest-paying employer. By controlling labor movement within the country and by threatening deportation, Kuwaitis have



**Kuwaiti Waterfront**

considerable authority over the expatriate workers.

Iranians in Kuwait tend to work in the hotel, retail, and services sectors. In early 2001, Kuwait and Iran signed a bilateral cooperation agreement in the areas of labor force transfer, social affairs, and vocational training. Under its terms, Iran will provide Kuwait with a specialized work force, including those with training in electronic and computers.

There is no minimum wage law in Kuwait and employers are free to pay the lowest wage the employee will accept. The major determinants of a foreign workers wages include nationality, education, work experience in Kuwait, sector of employment, and language skills.

## Cultural Geography

The geographical pattern of residence in Kuwait reflects the ethnic make-up of the population. Kuwaiti citizens and Iranian workers tend to be segregated. Kuwait City has residential areas identified as “Kuwaiti,” “mixed,” and “rural.” Iranian workers live in mixed and rural areas, depending on occupation and income.

Overall, residential patterns follow class rather than ethnic lines. The central and eastern parts of Kuwait are considered wealthier than the western parts.



**Downtown Kuwait City**



**Kuwaiti Towers**

Immigrant areas tend to contain high-density apartment blocks surrounded by poorly cared for streets. Maintenance and repair is a constant problem. Non-Kuwaitis are not permitted to own land.

### Urban vs. Rural Culture

Contemporary Kuwait is an urban society centered on a coastal city. Most Iranian workers are located in and around Kuwait City.

With approximately 1.4 million inhabitants (nearly 75 percent of Kuwait’s population), Kuwait City dominates the country culturally, politically, and economically.

FOUO

## **Cultural Style of Warfare**

Because they are transient and remain focused on their respective homelands, Iranian workers in Kuwait have nothing worth fighting for in Kuwait. During conflict, Iranian workers will most likely avoid the fighting. Some may return home to Iran.

FOUO

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

April 2003

-24-