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Caught Between Arabism and Self-Interest

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Even before Iraq invaded Kuwait five years ago, this small Arabic country was vulnerable to outside forces.

As the early center for much of the transit trade from India, Africa and China to Europe, and because of its fresh water wells and natural harbor, Kuwait was coveted. The Wahhabies and the Turks were among early invaders who had to be fought off.

The discovery of oil at Burgan in 1938 made Kuwait a major world producer, with recoverable reserves sufficient to take the country well into the next century. Only Saudi Arabia, Russia and Iraq have more oil. The discovery also enabled Kuwait to have one of the highest per capita GNPs in the world (estimated at \$9,700 in 1989) and to develop a much envied social welfare

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system and an opulent lifestyle.

Although the majority of jobs in the public sector were reserved for Kuwaitis, they comprised only one-fourth of the total work force. Non-nationals from neighboring Arab states and abroad were welcomed into Kuwait in substantial numbers to provide both unskilled labor and the professional expertise necessary to run the country and to teach in the schools and higher institutions.

At the time of the last official census in 1989, the population numbered about 2,200,000, of which Kuwaitis comprised just under 28 percent. Non-Kuwaitis, mainly Palestinians, Saudis, Egyptians, Iraqis, Pakistanis, and Indians, shared the same welfare benefits as Kuwaiti citizens.

When Saddam Hussein's tanks and troops rolled over the border of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, Kuwaitis were caught by surprise. The brutal, seven-month occupation which followed proved even more traumatizing.

Many Kuwaitis were displaced, tortured or murdered. Hundreds are still missing, some believed to be prisoners in Iraq. The Iraqis dismantled Kuwait's infrastructure, including the education system. Schools were looted and the University of Kuwait's engineering, allied health and medical faculties were plundered of sophisticated equipment. All education was suspended. Nearly 1.4 million non-nationals and about 372,000 Kuwaitis fled the country.

The invasion forced Kuwait to align itself with the West against some other Arabs. Ever since, the government has been trying to balance the apparently contradicting goals of Arab nationalism and Kuwaiti interests.

Kuwait remains preoccupied with its own security and the preservation of its own sovereignty.

A large contingency of 4,000 education ministry employees—including 2,400 Palestinians, 800 Jordanians, 400 Iraqis and other Arabs who worked for Iraq during the occupation—were expelled after the war. Except in isolated cases, Jordanians and Palestinians are still kept out of the country. Kuwait then turned to recruitment of teachers from Egypt, Syria and Morocco, which had supported them in the war effort.

Disillusionment and division remain. When students read in their textbooks about the Iraqis or the Palestinian cause, their reaction now is "This is not our problem. We helped other people in the past, and the result was when the invasion happened, they turned their backs on us and not only thought, but hoped, that the occupation would remain forever, and some were happy for that." So the first reaction of students when they read about Arab causes in textbooks is to say, "We don't care. Don't bother us."

Although the post-occupation population is in a constant state of flux and unknown, the government has stated that it wishes to maintain a population ceiling of 1.2 million. This policy has proven hard to enforce. The government has tried to curtail the number of non-nationals living in the country by restricting the number of work permits issued, but Kuwaitis still rely on non-nationals to provide unskilled labor.

All expatriates now must be sponsored by a Kuwaiti national or company. Unemployment among non-nationals is not allowed, except for their dependents. For each dependent allowed into Kuwait, a sum of KD100 (about \$300) per year must be paid to the government. Workers for the government whose annual income is below KD350 (about \$1,100) or below KD450 (about \$1,400) for the private sector cannot bring in any dependents. No non-national may own property.

After the liberation of Kuwait, the goals and objectives of education changed. These changes were not formalized by government policy, but seemed to be shaped by the people,

who had no intention of returning to old policies.

As a result of the occupation, it became clear there was a need for Kuwaitis who are scientifically trained and are efficient in using their hands to rebuild the country. Immediately after the reopening of higher education, non-university institutions accepted more students than ever before, indicating a popularity which was not present before the invasion. Also, there were changes in the policies in employing such graduates, which encouraged many young people to enter these institutions.

There also has been a change in the value system concerning the type of work one would consider after graduating. Graduates of applied education colleges will now accept skilled labor jobs, instead of sitting in offices.

The government, although still heavily subsidizing Kuwaitis with inexpensive housing, price supports for food (80 percent for rice) and gasoline (priced at 50 percent below market rates), free health care, and education, is now reviewing and reevaluating these policies.

Since the invasion, Kuwait does not provide free education to non-nationals, except in limited cases. This has resulted in a large number of private foreign schools, which are now also popular among many Kuwaiti families who wish to prepare their children for further study overseas.

The government spent about KD321 million (about \$965 million) on education in 1993-94, slightly more than in 1989-90. All schooling for Kuwaitis is free and compulsory between the ages of 6 and 14. No child under age 15 can be employed, so they must stay in school until this age. Because Kuwait's population is Islamic, all schools impose segregation of the sexes after kindergarten.

Before the Gulf War, most teachers were non-nationals. The number of Kuwaiti teachers, particularly female Kuwaiti teachers, now has increased. Out of a total of 33,761 teachers in 1994-95, only 11,680 were non-Kuwaitis, according to the Ministry of Education.

Both academic and vocational education are offered. (Statistics for religious schools are included by the government under vocational education.) The levels of education are divided into primary, intermediate and secondary schools, each four years in length. The third and fourth years of secondary level schools are divided into science and arts specializations.

Prior to Iraqi occupation, in 1989-90 the number of students enrolled in education in Kuwait totaled 373,718. After liberation in 1991-92, the number fell to 245,800, and currently has risen to 274,665 for the 1994-95 school year, never returning to pre-occupation levels.

Before the invasion there were 587 schools. After liberation, that number fell to 448, and currently is 532. In 1988 Kuwait had 29 schools and institutes of special education enrolling 1,888 students. The number of schools and institutes of special education increased to 34, enrolling 1,555 students, by 1994-95.

There were four religious schools enrolling 872 students in 1988. That number increased to five by 1994-95, enrolling 1,381 students. The new demand for vocational and religious education is also reflected in the increasing number of teachers in these sectors. According to the Ministry of Planning, the number of teachers in vocational schools nearly doubled from 224 in 1987-88 to 468 in 1994-95. The number of teachers in religious schools increased from 124 in 1987-88 to 215 in 1994-95.

Because the number of students in general education has never risen to pre-invasion levels, the number of teachers, except at kindergarten level, has also remained lower. Statistics below are from the Ministry of Planning.

Teachers in General Education

Level	1989-90	1990-91	1993-94
Kindergarten	2,304	2,178	2,311
Primary	7,102	5,830	6,180
Intermediate	9,188	6,401	7,030
Secondary	9,393	6,131	7,330

In 1989-90, only 34 percent of teachers at the intermediate level were Kuwaiti, and only 19.6 percent at secondary level. In 1993-94, 48 percent of teachers at intermediate level are Kuwaiti, and the figure had risen to 31 percent at secondary level.

Private education, whether foreign (English, American, Indian, etc.) or Arabic has expanded in recent years, with many Kuwaiti families now preferring to send their children to private schools in order to prepare them for study abroad.

All private schools are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and closely follow the curriculum prescribed for government schools. All private schools must offer some Arabic language instruction, as well as Arabic as a second language.

In 1988 there were more than 118,000 students enrolled in 111 private schools, which were Arabic, Indian, Pakistani, American, English, Japanese, French, German, etc.

The 45 Arabic private schools predominated with 81,000 students, while all other foreign private schools enrolled 37,000 male and female students.

After liberation, the number of private schools increased to 206 in 1991-92 and to 251 in 1993-94. However, the number of students fell in 1991-92 to 74,784, and then increased to 101,824 in 1994-95, still not attaining pre-occupation levels.

The decrease can be explained by the fact that many of the students formerly in private schools were children of employees, expatriates, etc., who have left Kuwait.

Although other Arabs and non-Arabs have replaced many who left, the government's new policies and laws restrict the number of family members who can enter Kuwait with each worker.

The number of students enrolled in private schools remains much less than before occupation at every level, excepting Arabic secondary schools, where enrollments have more than doubled.

The government has leased 38 school buildings to private educators.

Enrollments in Arabic Private Schools

Level	1989-90	1990-91	1993-94
Kindergarten	10,838	1,020	4,810
Primary	53,970	6,787	31,440
Intermediate	26,304	5,068	21,657
Secondary	7,459	3,745	13,609

Enrollments in Non-Arabic Foreign Private Schools

Level	1989-90	1990-91	1993-94
Kindergarten	5,814	1,160	3,854
Primary	16,003	2,483	11,133
Intermediate	12,351	1,428	7,481
Secondary	7,063	808	3,869

Teachers in Private Schools (Arabic)

Level	1989-90	1990-91	1993-94
Kindergarten	388	38	200
Primary	2,449	273	1,447
Intermediate	1,374	220	1,153
Secondary	565	215	918

(Non-Arabic)

Level	1989-90	1990-91	1993-94
Kindergarten	249	59	214
Primary	779	139	590
Intermediate	610	100	484
Secondary	487	90	425

The number of non-Kuwaiti teachers in private schools has decreased from 16,260 in 1989-90 to 10,118 in 1993-94. Over 73 percent of the Kuwaiti teachers in 1993-94 were female.

In non-university higher education, according to the Ministry of Planning, there were 11,636 students registered in Applied Educational Colleges in 1988-89. In that year, about 1,700 graduated.

In 1991-92, the most recent enrollment figures available, there was a total of 10,726 Kuwaiti students and 652 non-Kuwaiti students enrolled in this sector, with women outnumbering men. The non-university institutions listed below are under the jurisdiction

of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET):

The College of Health Sciences, founded in 1974 as the Kuwait Health Science Institution and renamed in 1986, offers two-year programs in paramedical training requiring 68 credits for graduation.

The College of Technological Studies offers five semesters of study in applied sciences technology, electronic engineering technology, and civil engineering technology, requiring 84 credits for graduation.

The College of Business Studies, formerly known as the Business Institute from 1975-1986, prepares graduates to work in financial, administrative and commercial fields. It is a two-year college requiring completion of a minimum 68 credits.

The College of Basic Education, known as the Teachers' Institute from 1972, was changed to a four-year institution and renamed in 1986; 130 credits are required for graduation. The college prepares teachers of both sexes for the primary level, and female teachers for kindergarten, intermediate and secondary levels. Both sexes are trained in library science.

There are also institutes offering post-secondary vocational training. These include the two-year Telecommunication & Air Navigation Institute, Electricity and Water Training Institute, the two-year Industrial Training Institute (Shwaikh), the three-year Industrial Training Institute (Shabah Al-Salem) and the Nursing Institute (three years for students who have completed the first secondary year, and four years for those who have not). Special Training Courses offer one or two years of training for qualifications as Assistant Technicians or Technicians in various fields. There is also a Professional Development Center for teachers and Continuing Education Programs for all residents above age 18 offering courses in mechanics, word processing, sewing, etc..

University education is the most popular and prestigious. **Kuwait University**, the only university, has ten colleges, including: Arts; Commerce, Economics and Political

Science; Education; Engineering and Petroleum; Law; Islamic Law and Islamic Studies; Medicine; Allied Health Sciences and Nursing; and Graduate studies.

Founded in 1966, Kuwait University was regarded as having good academic standards soon after its inception. In the years before the Gulf War, there were reputed individual incidents of malpractice in admission policy,



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teaching, and in grading of examinations. In 1990, the university hired a new rector who tightened standards, leaving 500 of the available places vacant rather than enrolling unqualified students.

The government had been thinking about opening another university even before the war, but no one can predict when this university will be instituted.

In October 1991, Kuwait University resumed instruction with a reduced enrollment and ravaged facilities. Many of its non-national faculty had left the country. According to the University, the number of students admitted in 1992-93 rose to 5,532 from the 1989-90 figure of 4,130. The total number of students registered at the university in 1992-93 rose slightly to 22,569 from the

1989-90 figure of 22,272.

At university level, there are more women (7.21 percent of the age group 20-24) than men (4.40 percent of the same age group). In 1992-93, women constituted over 69 percent of the total university enrollment, while male enrollment was just over 30 percent.

Kuwaiti students studying abroad under the sponsorship of the government numbered 1,549 in 1987-88. In 1994-95, 2,429 students are studying abroad. Many upper division students completed their studies abroad when Kuwait University had great difficulty in resuming its programs.

Illiteracy is more prevalent among females than males in almost every age group, but there are more educated women than men in the 15-19-year-old group. In this age group, 7.63 percent of men have a secondary certificate as compared to 11.31 percent of women.

Summary

Just one year after the Iraqi invasion, education was back on track with the government's decision to offer two years of education to make up for the lost year. Schools reopened in August 1991 with lengthened class periods and elimination of such subjects as music and physical education. Because all educational records had been computerized and copies saved, it was much easier to make the education system operable.

Since the Gulf War, Kuwait has linked itself more closely to the West, particularly the U.S. and the U.K., in economic and military terms. Some radical Kuwaitis accuse Kuwait of having become, in effect, another state of the U.S..

It would be an understatement to say that this has been a difficult decade for Kuwait. Despite the massive costs of rebuilding and repairing what was destroyed and damaged during the Iraqi occupation, great progress has been made in a comparatively short time. What will take longer is the rebuilding of the character and spirit of those who remain demoralized by the recent trauma.