

**Observation no: 184**

**Country-year: Kuwait 1989**

**1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?**

No.

**2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?**

No.

**3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?**

No.

Amir Jaber al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah had no military experience, though as the Emir of Kuwait from 1977 – 2006 he served concurrently as the Supreme Commander of the Military of Kuwait (much as the U.S. President is also the Commander-in-Chief).<sup>1</sup>

Prime Minister Saad al-Abdullah al-Salem al-Sabah had a background in security (he served as President of the Police and Public Service Department, Minister of Interior and Minister of Defense before rising to Crown Prince and eventually becoming Prime Minister) but was not a military officer.<sup>2</sup>

**4. Is the military officer corps largely closed to those who do not share the leader's ethnic or sectarian background?**

Yes.

While the policy is not written down, it is well-known that the military officer corps of Kuwait is closed to Shiites, a sectarian minority in the country.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, major security posts have been monopolized by members of the ruling family or closely related tribal groups.<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Defense has always been led by a member of the ruling family.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "BBC News: Middle East: Obituary: Sheikh Jaber, Emir of Kuwait," *BBC News Middle East*, January 15, 2006, accessed May 20, 2014, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/1556774.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1556774.stm)

<sup>2</sup> "THE LATE AMIR SHEIKH SAAD AL-ADBULLAH [sic] AL-SALEM AL-SABAH THE FOURTEENTH RULER OF KUWAIT ( 15 JAN. 2006 – 29 JAN. 2006," *Al-Diwan Al-Amiri: State of Kuwait*, accessed May 20, 2014, <http://www.da.gov.kw/eng/picsandevents/amir14.php>.

<sup>3</sup> Lori Plotkin Boghardt, *Kuwait Amid War, Peace, and Revolution: 1979-1991 and New Challenges*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 32.

<sup>4</sup> Madeleine Wells, email interview, Washington, DC, May 20, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

**5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?**

No.

**6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?**

No.

Political parties are technically banned in Kuwait, although citizens form voting blocs that function similarly to parties.<sup>6</sup> That said, membership in the royal family is more important to military officer corps entry than political affiliation, as membership connotes being pro-regime.<sup>7</sup>

**7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?**

No.

**8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?**

No. The military was not *directly* used to repress internal dissent in the last five years. That said, some of the internal terrorist attacks which resulted in the deportation of thousands of Shiite Kuwaitis and other foreigners inevitably involved the security forces for purposes of detention and expulsion.<sup>8</sup> By 1987 some 26,898 people were deported for alleged security reasons.<sup>9</sup>

**9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?**

No.

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<sup>6</sup> Nathan J. Brown, "Pushing toward Party Politics? Kuwait's Islamic Constitutional Movement," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Carnegie Papers Middle East Series, Number 79, January, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Madeleine Wells, email interview, Washington, DC, May 20, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Madeleine Wells, email interview, Washington, DC, May 20, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Abdul-Reda Assiri, *Kuwait's Foreign Politics: A City-State in World Politics*, Boulder, Colorado, 1990), 69.

**10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?**

Yes. The Amiri Guard is responsible for the safety of the Amir. It was deployed during the Iraq invasion in 1990 in the Battle of Dasman.<sup>10</sup>

**11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?**

No. By institutional design, the military is clearly subordinate to civilians and the royal family,<sup>11</sup> so this would be unnecessary.

**12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?**

Yes.

There are no precise figures, but it is rumored that Kuwaiti Shiites were purged from sensitive security positions following domestic terrorist incidents following the Iranian Revolution and during the Iran-Iraq war, particularly attacks in 1983 and 1985.<sup>12</sup> In 1985, for example, a Shiite army officer recruited to foreigners distributing leaflets calling for the ousting of the Amir.<sup>13</sup> The officer was sentenced to 10 years of prison in 1986. The incident coincided with a protest by national police college cadets. Fear about un-loyalty within the security forces led to *de facto* restrictions into the armed forces and officer corps.

**13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?**

Yes.

There is absolute civilian control over the security apparatus and the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense, established in 1963, is managed by civilians only. On November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1987, the Supreme Council of Defense (SCD) was established.<sup>14</sup> The SCD is responsible for all defense issues, and is composed of a number of civilian cabinet ministers.

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<sup>10</sup> Major Robert A. Nelson, "The Battle of the Bridges: Kuwait's 35th Brigade on the 2d of August 1990," *Armor*, Sept.-Oct, 1995, accessed May 20, 2014, <http://www.benning.army.mil/armor/armormagazine/content/Issues/1995/ArmorSeptemberOctober1995web.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Zafer M. Alajmi, *Kuwait's Quest For Security: Self Defense, Past, Present and Future*, Historical Society of Kuwait, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Madeleine Wells, email interview, Washington, DC, May 20, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>14</sup> For more information, see, Alajmi, 212-213; Ghanim Al-Najjar, "Challenges of Security Sector Governance in Kuwait," Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), 2004;

