

# American Foreign Policy Council

## KUWAIT

### QUICK FACTS

Population: 2,695,316

Area: 17,818 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Kuwaiti 45%,  
other Arab 35%, South Asian 9%,  
Iranian 4%, other 7%

Religions: Muslim 85% (Sunni  
70%, Shi'a 30%), other (includes  
Christian, Hindu, Parsi) 15%

Government Type: Constitutional  
Emirate

GDP (official exchange rate):  
\$173.4 billion



Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated August 2013)

*Kuwaiti soldiers, civilians, and U.S. forces have all been the targets of sporadic attacks by radical religious elements in recent years. However, the phenomenon of global jihad is less prevalent in Kuwait than in many of its Gulf neighbors. Rather, al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups use Kuwaiti soil for logistical activities, such as the recruitment of fighters for arenas of jihad (Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and so on), and as a hub through which funds, operatives and equipment are transferred to other countries. While counterterrorism measures have been successful in preventing fatal attacks in Kuwait itself, efforts against facilitation networks serving the global jihad have so far been lacking.*

*In the political arena, Kuwait preserves a delicate balance: permitting Islamists a presence in the nation's parliament but vesting in the Emir power to dissolve parliament, a power that he exercises whenever Islamist ideas and criticism cross*

*political red-lines. Kuwait's Islamists, for their part, have exhibited a subtle approach, working to gradually expand the role of sharia law within the day-to-day life of Kuwaitis while remaining loyal to the country's constitution.*

## ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

While not a primary target for al-Qaeda and its allies, Kuwait does have a place on the global *jihadi* agenda for two main reasons. First, its long-standing relationship with the United States, especially since the first Gulf War, symbolizes to a great extent the “imperialist presence” that Washington allegedly represents on the Arabian Peninsula. Even with cutbacks following the 2011 withdrawal of troops from Iraq, Kuwait currently hosts an extensive American military presence (encompassing some 16 active and 6 inactive bases, and tens of thousands of soldiers) on its soil,<sup>1</sup> which serves as a natural target for al-Qaeda and individual extremists driven by Salafi *jihadist* ideology. The Kuwaiti regime is considered by Islamists to be a target as well, perceived to be pro-U.S. and to an extent “apostate” (not adhering completely to the Islamic, or *sharia*, law). Second, and perhaps more important, Kuwait serves as a transit country for money, equipment and operatives into countries in which “Holy War” is being waged—mainly Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also Syria since 2012.

There is little known about the organized Islamist presence in Kuwait. However, Kuwaiti security forces occasionally respond to terror attacks and expose plots inside the small Gulf country. Terror attacks, arrests and interrogations in Iraq and Afghanistan have also yielded indications that such a presence exists, albeit in small numbers. The number of core Kuwaiti *jihadi* militants is estimated to be in the tens, with a few hundred indirect supporters in outer circles.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Qaeda is believed to operate in Kuwait in a clandestine manner. Geographically, al-Qaeda's activity in Kuwait is supposedly subordinate to “al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula” (AQAP), the official al-Qaeda franchise in the region. AQAP is mainly based in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and there is little known regarding its actual operational control over *jihadist* activity in Kuwait. Nonetheless, AQAP's agenda strongly suggests that the organization's reach includes the entire Gulf region. Given the rise in attention garnered by AQAP since 2009, especially in Yemen, it is likely that the organization will be slower to expand its reach to the smaller countries under its supposed authority, including Kuwait.

AQAP's focus on Saudi Arabia and Yemen has opened the door for other actors to take part in planning attacks against Western targets in Kuwait. Such players are often elements with historical ties to core al-Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan, who for years have been operating independently, carrying out sporadic attacks in the country. In this regard, one should remember that the most senior operational figures of al-Qaeda have Kuwaiti connections. "Bojinka plot" conspirators Abd al Karim Murad, Ramzi Yousef, and above all Khalid Sheikh Mohamed (who would later mastermind the September 11 attacks) were all Kuwaiti residents, and their large families still live in the country. Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, a Kuwait-born Pakistani national, was Osama bin Laden's courier and confidante and was killed with him in the Navy SEAL raid on the Abbottabad compound in May 2011.<sup>3</sup> In the years since September 11th, although there have been few and relatively infrequent terror incidents in Kuwait, most of those that have occurred are generally attributed to al-Qaeda (though not always proven to be so).

- In October 2002, one U.S. Marine was killed and a second wounded after two Kuwaiti Muslim extremists opened fire on soldiers in Faylaka Island, about 10 miles off the coast of Kuwait City.<sup>4</sup> Both attackers, one of whom had allegedly pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden, were killed during the altercation. In an audiotape that surfaced the next month, bin Laden praised the attack as the work of "zealous sons of Islam in defense of their religion."<sup>5</sup> Khalid Sheikh Mohamed, al-Qaeda's former chief of external operations, claimed full responsibility for the attack in his military court hearing.<sup>6</sup>
- In January 2003, two civilian contractors working for the U.S. military in Kuwait were attacked in an ambush a few miles from "Camp Doha," a U.S. military base. One was killed and the other injured.<sup>7</sup>
- In a series of raids conducted in early 2005, Kuwaiti authorities arrested about 30 operatives belonging to a global *jihadi* cell in the country. Amongst those arrested were many nationalities: Kuwaiti, Saudi, Jordanian, and Yemeni. While it is likely these activists were at least al-Qaeda affiliated, several other names were associated with the group, among them "The Brigades of the Two Shrines [Mecca and Medina] in Kuwait," "Sharia Falcons Squadrons" and "Peninsula Lion Brigades." The arrests followed other incidents during the same period in which Kuwaiti army officers plotted to attack American targets after they were allegedly inspired by anti-U.S. propaganda.<sup>8</sup>

- In August 2009, Kuwaiti authorities arrested six members of a terrorist network linked to al-Qaeda, who were planning to attack the “Camp Arifjan” U.S. military base. At the time, the heavily-protected camp housed 15,000 U.S. soldiers and was used as a logistics base for troops serving in Iraq. The six arrested operatives were of Kuwaiti origin and had also planned to attack the headquarters of Kuwait’s internal security agency.<sup>9</sup>

Aside from the aforementioned attacks directed against Western and government targets, the Kuwaiti arena is used for the benefit of other *jihadi* theaters.

First and foremost, Kuwait is an important transit point for the transfer of funds, equipment and operatives from the Gulf countries to Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> This route, only sparsely monitored by Kuwaiti authorities, is a significant pipeline that feeds insurgent and terror groups in the Afghan-Pakistan arenas. Through a network of smugglers and document forgers, Kuwait is used to support these organizations financially and militarily. Operatives of Kuwaiti origin consequently have grown into significant actors within the core al-Qaeda organization in Pakistan, playing both logistical and operational roles.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Kuwait was a source of fighters and suicide bombers used by the al-Qaeda franchise in Iraq (al-Qaeda in Iraq or AQI).<sup>12</sup> Kuwaiti youth were recruited and sent to Iraq, usually through Syria, to perform their “*jihadi* duty” by fighting Coalition forces. According to one local AQI commander in Iraq, dozens of Kuwaiti nationals were operating in his area of command as of 2008.<sup>13</sup> Although the participation of Kuwaiti nationals in the Iraqi insurgency fell alongside the winding down and 2011 withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, the escalation of the civil war in Syria in 2012-13 offered Kuwaitis (along with other foreign nationals) a new platform to engage in jihadist activity, incidentally also boosting the Sunni-led opposition in Iraq to Prime Minister Maliki.<sup>14</sup>

One of the greatest threats to Kuwait’s national security stems from veteran *jihadists* of Kuwaiti nationality who have completed their “duty” in Afghanistan or Iraq, and wish to put to use the lessons they learned against targets in their homeland. These experienced fighters, who have widespread contacts with other militants and the necessary know-how in guerilla fighting and the construction of bombs, can significantly increase the threat to Western and Kuwait government targets in the country. According to some reports, there have been past attempts to use Kuwaiti veterans in attacks, and senior

al-Qaeda officials in Pakistan are known to have entrusted Kuwaiti recruits with secret missions to be conducted in Kuwait.<sup>15</sup> However, so long as more attractive *jihad* arenas exist (such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria etc.), the phenomenon of experienced Kuwaiti *jihadists* launching attacks on Kuwaiti soil will remain limited.

Terrorism finance is another critical issue in Kuwait. While the source of the problem mainly lies in neighboring Saudi Arabia, there are also several terror supporters known to be operating in Kuwait, providing global *jihadists* in the Middle East and Asia with the funds necessary to carry out their terror activities. As official awareness to this phenomenon has grown, more effort has been put into interdicting and stopping illegal financial transfers. Similar initiatives have also been implemented by the UN Security Council's Sanctions Committee, designed to freeze financial assets and restrict the travel and arms trade of such operatives. The committee's effectiveness, however, is questionable.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the efficiency and comprehensiveness of Kuwait's own counterterror efforts are hampered by the fact that it has no specific legal framework criminalizing terrorist financing and other terrorist-related activities.<sup>17</sup> Thus the prosecution of any such crimes must take place through alternative statutes.

Since 2012, credible reports suggest that Kuwait-based actors play a pivotal role in the channeling of funds to rebel groups fighting the Assad regime in Syria. An in-depth investigation by *The National* newspaper in Abu Dhabi found that Kuwait "has emerged as a central fund-raising hub for direct financial support to insurgents" fighting in Syria, compounding the tens of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid raised by private or individual means.<sup>18</sup> Kuwait also hosted a UN donor conference on Syria on January 30, 2013. This resulted in pledges totaling more than \$1.5 billion, of which \$300 million was promised by the Kuwaiti government.<sup>19</sup> In addition to these official and unofficial funding channels, prominent Sunni Islamist politicians and clerics have openly campaigned to arm rebel fighters in Syria. A conservative Islamist former MP, Waleed al-Tabtabaie, posted photographs of himself on Twitter wearing combat gear in Syria.<sup>20</sup>

The final element of Islamist activity in Kuwait lies in the role of fundamentalist religious scholars. Such figures play a critical role in the education and indoctrination of Kuwaiti Salafis—especially those that join the armed *jihadist* struggle.<sup>21</sup> The most famous among them is Hamid al-Ali, a Salafi cleric known for his considerable following. Al-Ali, previously a professor of Islamic studies at Kuwait University, has been officially designated by the U.S. government as a global terrorism financier and supporter. His views—at

times radical and supportive of al-Qaeda (for instance, issuing *fatwas* approving of crashing planes into buildings as a form of attack) and at others more aligned with the moderate approach imposed upon him by the regime—reach many young Muslims through the sermons and articles he publishes online. Another important radical religious figure is Suleiman Abu Gheith, a former high school religion teacher in Kuwait City who became a leading figure within al-Qaeda. After joining the group in 2000, Abu Gheith was a member of the al-Qaeda quasi-legislative and consulting committee (*Majles al Shura*). He headed the organization’s media committee responsible for propaganda and was one of Osama bin Laden’s top aides. Abu Gheith departed for Iran as part of a group of al-Qaeda senior leaders in 2003. Ten years later, in March 2013, he was seized by U.S. special forces in Jordan and extradited to the U.S., where he appeared in a federal court in New York and pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy to kill Americans ahead of his expected trial in 2014.<sup>22 23</sup>

In its fight against radicalization and as a part of the global effort against al-Qaeda, the Kuwaiti regime is implementing policies to control and prevent radical Islamists from engaging in terrorism—although, as previously discussed, not always doing so sufficiently. In addition to outright arrests and the targeting of Islamist financial flows, the Kuwaiti government has also initiated a number of other counterterrorism measures, including a wide-scale educational program aimed at countering the influence of unchecked radicalism. In addition, Kuwaiti *imams* are sporadically taken to court by the government, which accuses them of “activities contrary to the function of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the mosque.”<sup>24</sup>

## ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Approximately 85 percent of Kuwait’s total population of 3.4 million is Muslim, but Kuwaiti citizens (which comprise only 1 million of that total) are nearly all Muslims. While the national census does not distinguish between Sunni and Shi’ite, approximately 70-75 percent of citizens, including the ruling family, belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. The remainder, with the exception of about 100-200 Christians and a few Baha’is, are Shi’ites.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the sectarian violence in neighboring Iraq, Kuwait manages to maintain a relatively stable sectarian environment, although tensions have risen sharply since 2012 as hard-line Sunni and Shi’ite politicians have publicly favored differing sides in the Syrian civil war. Generally speaking, Shi’ites in Kuwait are less organized politically than the Sunnis. Their most notable point of contention is their desire to redress longstanding inequalities

and obtain an apology for accusations that they constitute a “fifth column,” (an allegation that surfaced during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, but which abated as Shi’ites demonstrated their loyalty during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990).

The general level of public support in Kuwait for Islamist activity and radicalism is hard to determine. Electoral preferences provide only limited insight, as over two-thirds of Kuwait’s population consists of non-citizens who lack the right to vote, and organised political parties are banned. As in many other Arab countries, September 11th and the subsequent U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq ignited and exposed latent feelings of suspicion and hatred in certain quarters towards the West and the U.S. in particular, irrespective of the relatively fruitful cooperation at the government level. Nevertheless, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was less controversial in Kuwait than elsewhere in the Arab world due to the legacy of Kuwaiti suffering at the hands of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship.

Kuwait manages a delicate balance with regard to Islamic devotion. The society remains traditionally Muslim in many ways, although there are no *mut-awwa* (religious police) as in Saudi Arabia, nor are the five daily prayer times strictly observed. The Kuwaiti public, however, generally supports Islamic traditions; alcohol, gambling, mixed dancing, and other such “Western symbols” are relatively rare. More extreme anti-Western voices are largely censored out of the country’s otherwise fairly free press. However, they are still easily available to the public on the Internet or in pan-Arabian media.

A 2007 Pew poll suggested that there is a significant fringe element inside Kuwait that actively supports or sympathizes with more extremist views and activities. According to the survey, 20 percent of Kuwaitis believed that suicide bombings “in defense of Islam” were sometimes justified, and 13 percent expressed “some confidence” in Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda’s founder and general chief.<sup>26</sup> More recently, despite comparative polling evidence, the conflict in Syria has brought extremist voices closer to the surface in support of jihadist groups. Even though these views are a minority in Kuwait, they persist under the protective umbrella of some Islamist spokesmen, among them the aforementioned Sheikh Hamid al-Ali.

## ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Kuwait is a constitutional hereditary emirate.<sup>27</sup> The Emir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber Al-Sabah is the head of state, and has the power to appoint the prime minister, dissolve the parliament and even suspend certain parts of the constitution, as occurred between 1976 and 1981 and between 1986 and

1992. Kuwait's constitution, which was approved in 1962, states that "the religion of the state is Islam and the *Sharia* shall be a main source of legislation." Thus, though driven by Islamic belief, the government is less strict in the enforcement of Islamic law. *Sharia*, according to the constitution, is a "guideline" rather than the formal state law. Notably, the first action of the Islamist-dominated parliament elected in February 2012 was to call for an amendment to the constitution to make *sharia* 'the' rather than 'a' source of legislation.<sup>28</sup>

The ruling elite has put considerable effort into maintaining order, and is committed to achieving the right balance between emphasizing the importance of Islam to its citizens and ensuring stability by blunting the rise of extremism. The Kuwaiti government exercises direct control over Sunni religious institutions and appoints Sunni *imams*, monitors their Friday sermons, and pays the salaries of mosque staff. It also finances the building of new Sunni mosques.<sup>29</sup>

The overall number of mosques in Kuwait exceeds 1,100. Only six of them are Shi'ite, while the rest are Sunni.<sup>30</sup> There are no official reports delineating the number of mosques open to a radical interpretation of Islam, but several hints can be found on Kuwaiti Internet websites which suggest the number is derived from the external involvement and financial support of radical elements (mainly from Saudi Arabia).<sup>31</sup>

As no formal political parties are permitted in Kuwait, the 50 seats in the Kuwaiti parliament are occupied by quasi-political societies of Bedouins, merchants, moderate Sunni and Shi'ite activists, secular liberals, and nationalists. Parliament members either conform to these unofficial national and religiously affiliated blocs or sit as independents.

The Islamist bloc, which functions as a *de facto* political party, is the most influential group in the Kuwaiti Parliament. It consists mainly of Sunni Salafis and *Hadas* (Kuwaiti Islamic Constitutional Movement) members. Its principal long-term goal is to impose *sharia* law in Kuwait. However, the Islamist bloc operates conservatively in the short-term, attempting to wield influence within parliament in order to pass legislation that conforms to Islamic law. The bloc is composed of devoted Islamists, but not necessarily extremists. To highlight that distinction, they joined hands with Shi'ite Islamists and others to condemn both the September 11th attacks and the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan.

Any initiative pursued by the Islamists in parliament can be easily blocked, as the Emir's approval is required for all constitutional amendments. For



instance, the Islamists have long called for an amendment to Article 2 of the constitution, which states that *sharia* is “a main source of legislation,” and to have the article rephrased to read that *sharia* is “the source of legislation.” The amendment passed in parliament, only to be vetoed by the Emir in 2006. It was reattempted, again without success, in 2012.<sup>32</sup> A similar change requested by the Islamist bloc relates to Article 79, which states that: “No law may be promulgated unless it has been passed by the National Assembly and sanctioned by the Emir.” To this the Islamists sought to add “and according to the *Sharia* [sic].”<sup>33</sup> This measure was also rejected by the Emir in May 2012.<sup>34</sup>

The number of parliament seats in the Islamist bloc typically fluctuates between 15 and 24 members. Elections have become a common occurrence in recent years, as the parliament was dissolved by the Kuwaiti Emir four times in seven years, most recently due to protests over election laws and allegations of fraud. In addition to the Emir’s dissolutions, the Constitutional Court has stepped in to annul the last two parliaments owing to technical irregularities in the conduct of the February and December 2012 elections.<sup>35</sup> In the May 2009 elections, Sunni Islamists won only 13 seats (a sharp decrease compared to their rise in power over the previous decade), while Shi’ite Islamists won six seats and independents, mostly associated with the government, won 21—a significant portion of the total 50 seats of the parliament.<sup>36</sup>

The 2009 elections were more significant for the election of four women MPs for the first time in the country’s history.<sup>37</sup> Prior to that year, men had filled the seats of Kuwait’s parliament exclusively for nearly five decades, and it was only in 2005 that the country granted women the right to vote and run for office.<sup>38</sup> This phenomenon, along with the loss of seats by Islamists, was taken in 2009 to signify a more moderate and liberal approach emerging in already relatively modernized Kuwait, and although no women were elected in the February 2012 election, three subsequently won seats in the December 2012 parliament and two in the July 2013 vote. To further exemplify the trend, Kuwait’s highest court judged in 2009 that female MPs are not obliged to wear headscarves, striking yet another blow to Muslim fundamentalists.<sup>39</sup> Though the majority of Kuwaiti women do wear the *hijab*, it is not compulsory according to the country’s law, as it is in the ultra-conservative neighboring Saudi Arabia.

However, relations between the government and the parliament elected in 2009 deteriorated sharply after the start of the Arab Spring in early 2011. Youth movements associated with the Kuwaiti branch of the Muslim Brotherhood as well as with liberal blocs called for the resignation of the unpopu-

lar Prime Minister, Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, a nephew of the Emir. In autumn 2011, popular mobilization intersected with the disclosure of a large political corruption scandal, which implicated 16 of the 50 MPs in having allegedly received government payments in return for votes. The resulting anger culminated in the November 2011 storming of the National Assembly building by demonstrators and the subsequent resignation of the Prime Minister a fortnight later.<sup>40</sup>

During 2012, Kuwait witnessed two controversial elections that left the country – and its society – deeply polarized. Elections in February 2012 resulted in an opposition landslide as conservative tribal and Islamist MPs won 35 out of the 50 seats. At least 21 MPs were Sunni Islamists, including four MPs each from the Islamic Salafi Alliance and the ICM. A further five pro-government Sunni politicians and seven Shi'ites were elected, reinforcing the strongly Islamist character of the parliament. During a turbulent four-month tenure before its annulment by the Constitutional Court in June 2012, Islamist MPs called for the introduction of the death penalty for blasphemy, a move that was particularly significant in the context of the attempt earlier that year to make *sharia* the sole basis of the constitution.<sup>41</sup>

Sunni Islamists then joined with tribal groups to boycott the December 2012 election. This occurred in protest of a decree issued by the Emir in October amending the electoral law to reduce the number of votes each Kuwaiti could cast from four to one. A series of mass public demonstrations – the largest in Kuwait's history – were organized by the opposition, which argued that only elected parliamentarians and not the Emir could change the electoral law, while the boycott movement was joined by liberal societies in an unlikely alignment of interests. An informal Opposition Coalition formed, consisting of the ICM, the Popular Action Bloc, trade unions, and student groups, which then proceeded to demand an elected government and an end to Al-Sabah control of the executive. Musallim al-Barrak emerged as the charismatic figurehead of the opposition; of Sunni tribal origin, his views are populist rather than ideological or Islamist in nature.<sup>42</sup>

With the opposition boycotting, the December vote resulted in the emergence of a new political class. An unprecedented seventeen Shi'ite MPs – more than double their usual number - were elected, spread across four ideological groupings. In response, the Islamist and tribal opposition migrated away from the parliamentary chamber toward street politics. This constituted a destabilizing development that signaled a worrying loss of faith in Kuwait's existing political system. Most of the Islamist groups, including the ICM, also boycotted the subsequent election in July 2013, although the Islamic Salafi Alliance broke ranks and gained two parliamentary seats.

Throughout all this, the most prominent Islamic movement in Kuwait remains Al-Haraka al-Dostooriya al-Islamiya, or *Hadas*, also known as the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM).<sup>43</sup> The ICM was established in 1991, following the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi control in the first Gulf War. The ICM serves as the political front of the Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait, though in recent years the ICM has grown away from its parent organization. The ICM broke ties with the international Muslim Brotherhood after the latter backed the Iraqi invasion in 1990 and failed to provide sufficient support for the liberation of Kuwait.<sup>44</sup> Neither the ICM nor the Muslim Brotherhood retains any legal status. Instead, the movement's main legally recognized manifestation is the Social Reform Society, a charitable nongovernmental organization.

The ICM traditionally holds only between two and six seats, yet their influence within the Islamist bloc is significant. It is the most popular and powerful and also by far the best funded and most highly organized entity of the Islamist movements. The ICM, through the clandestine activity of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood and through the Social Reform Society, is involved in various social, charitable, educational and economic activities. It recruits its members from mosques and university campuses, adding many doctors and other highly-educated academics to its ranks.<sup>45</sup>

The ICM formally seeks the implementation of *sharia* law and the protection of a fairly conservative vision of Kuwaiti traditions and values. In addition to leading and supporting the amendments mentioned above, the movement has occasionally introduced legislation that aims to implement various *sharia* provisions, such as a law mandating payment of *zakat*, a religious tax. It is, however, interested in operating within the Kuwaiti constitutional order rather than overturning it.<sup>46</sup> Relative to other national and trans-national affiliates of the Muslim Brotherhood, the ICM maintains a mild position toward the United States (though not toward Israel) and it has not criticized the security relationship between Kuwait and Washington, DC.<sup>47</sup>

If able to unite with other Islamists, the ICM's electoral power could help the movement achieve its goal of expanding the role of Islamic law in the day-to-day life of Kuwaitis. Kuwaiti political history, however, is reason enough for skepticism on that score, as the opposition has never been able to maintain a united front for long, and the Kuwaiti government has tools at its disposal to easily disperse and even exclude dissenters.<sup>48</sup>

The ICM's gradual success is attributed largely to its discretion in picking its battles with the government and the ruling family. The ICM has strived

to position itself simultaneously as an opposition movement and as a party accepting gradualism and the limitations of the Kuwaiti political system.<sup>49</sup> However, many of the occasions on which the Emir dissolved the parliament were precipitated by political disputes with the ICM. Moreover, ties between the ICM and the Kuwaiti government soured after Kuwait extended financial and political support to the military-led interim regime in Egypt that overthrew the democratically-elected Muslim Brotherhood-led government of Mohammed Mursi in July 2013.<sup>50</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that, regardless of its relative success, the ICM suffers criticism on multiple fronts. Some critique it for being insufficiently dedicated to the cause of political opposition. A different line of criticism claims the ICM is masking its true, radical sentiments.<sup>51</sup>

The Salafis are another important Islamist factor in the Kuwaiti political system. Since its founding in the early 1960s, the Salafi movement in Kuwait has focused on *dawa* (“religious call,” or proselytization) and has been active in charities, heritage, relief work, and building schools, universities, mosques, orphanages, and hospitals. In parliament, the movement is represented by two main groups: the Islamic Salafi Grouping (*al-Tajamu al-Islami al-Salafi*) and the Salafi Movement (*al-Haraka al-Salafiyya*), an offshoot of the former. Both signify a more extreme - yet far less organized - opposition to the regime. Many other Salafi MPs are independent Islamists. A growth in their numbers, and especially the establishment of a wide and organized political movement for the Salafis to work from, might serve as a prelude for the country’s movement down a more fundamentalist path in the future.

## ENDNOTES

[1] See, for example, “Kuwait Facilities,” [globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/kuwait.htm), n.d., <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/kuwait.htm>.

[2] No comprehensive and reliable database for jihadists in Kuwait. The figures provided represent best assessments by the author, based on material relating to arrests and plots that has appeared in the open source.

[3] Mark Memmott, “Bin Laden’s Courier, Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, Had Several Responsibilities,” *National Public Radio (NPR)*, May 4, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2011/05/06/135994650/bin-ladens-cour...>

[4] Andrew Buncombe, “American Marine On Maneuvers In Kuwait Is Killed By Terrorist Attack,” *Independent* (London), October 9, 2002, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/american-marine-on-m...>

[5] “Al-Jazirah: Usama Bin Ladin Hails Recent Operations In Bali,” *Al-Jazirah* (Doha), November 12, 2002. See full coverage of Bin Laden’s statements, as transcribed by FBIS, at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ubl-fbis.pdf>.

[6] Verbatim transcript of combatant status review tribunal hearing for ISN 10024, March 10, 2007, 18, [http://www.defense.gov/news/transcript\\_isn10024.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/transcript_isn10024.pdf).

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[8] Stephen Ulph, “Terrorism Accelerates in Kuwait,” *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Focus* 2, iss. 3, February 2, 2005, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=27494&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=238&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=27494&tx_ttnews[backPid]=238&no_cache=1).

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[10] “Walking the Talk: Forum Members Travel to Afghanistan and Iraq (Part 1),” *Jihadica.org*, June 30, 2008, <http://www.jihadica.com/walking-the-talk-forum-members-travel-to-afghani...> “Walking the Talk: Forum Members Travel to Afghanistan and Iraq (Part 2),” *Jihadica.org*, July 2, 2008, <http://www.jihadica.com/walking-the-talk-forum-members-travel-to-afghani...> “Walking the Talk: Forum Members Travel to Afghanistan and Iraq (Part 3),” *Jihadica.org*, July 6, 2008, <http://www.jihadica.com/walking-the-talk-forum-members-travel-to-afghani...> “Walking the Talk: Forum Members Travel to Afghanistan and Iraq (Part 3),” *Jihadica.org*, July 8, 2008, <http://www.jihadica.com/walking-the-talk-forum-members-travel-to-afghani...>

- [11] For example, Abu Obeida Tawari al-Obeidi and Abu Adel al-Kuwaiti, who were killed in Waziristan in early 2009. "Terrorism: Three Al-Qaeda Leaders Killed in US Attack," *AKI* (Rome), February 5, 2009, <http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Security/?id=1.0.1845929971>.
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