

## Kuwait: Prosperity From A Sea of Oil

By G. Alan Klaum

Tucked securely into the northwestern corner of the Persian Gulf (known to the Arabs as the Arabian Gulf) is one of the world's richest countries: Kuwait.

Seventy miles wide and 80 miles long, Kuwait lies along the coastal plain of eastern Arabia between the Republic of Iraq and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Beneath its sands is a veritable sea of oil. Like the other four small Gulf states of Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, Kuwait is now living through one of the most fantastic transformations in history.

From its early days as a center for pearling and fishing and as a small market for trade, Kuwait has propelled in little more than 25 years into a

modern state with high living standards.

While Kuwait's oil revenues do not compare with those of Saudi Arabia nor its per capita income with that of Abu Dhabi, its citizens, nevertheless, are the world's richest: they simply have the most money to spend and invest at home and abroad. (In 1977 the estimated per capita figure was a staggering \$25,000!) They also have been rich longer than citizens of other Arab oil-producing nations, having received the bounty of the massive oil revenues since 1952. At the production rate of 1½ million barrels a day (as of May 1980), Kuwait's estimated oil reserves will last for more than 85 years, promising the country substantial revenues longer than most other Arab oil producers.

In 1951, following the lead of

Venezuela and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait raised its share of the oil profits to a 50-50 profit split. With revenues paid one year in arrears, it was not until the following year that the repercussions were felt. Coupled with the surge in production caused by the Mossadegh nationalization crisis and oil shutdown in Iran, the policy change tripled oil revenues in 1952 from \$18,000,000 to \$56,000,000. In 1953 they again tripled to \$168,000,000. Suddenly Kuwait had become the biggest oil producer in the Middle East and the fourth biggest in the world!

Kuwait's ruler, Sheikh Abdullah al-Salem al-Sabah, decided to systematically spread the resultant wealth throughout Kuwaiti society. While his decision partly reflected the traditional liberal-mindedness of the ruling family, it also implied the mutual dependence between the al-Sabahs and the country's leading influential merchant families, an important relationship that goes back to earlier times.

The decade of development that followed, some of it marked in the early years by extravagance, witnessed the surfacing of political undercurrents within the Emirate: internal troubles involving the younger, more radical elements; the sabotaging of Kuwait's oil facilities during the Suez crisis of 1956; and further demonstrations of support in 1959 for Nasserism, pan-Arabism, and a constitution. The powers of state, formerly entrusted to Sheikh Abdullah's hard-working and aggressive half-brother, Sheikh Fahad al-Salem, were curbed and his powers dispersed among other members of the family.

Present-day shipbuilders give sustenance to Kuwait's rich maritime history.



On June 19, 1961, Kuwait became a fully independent state, thus losing its protectorate status under Great Britain.

Today Kuwait is a land of highways and tree-lined boulevards, of fantastic villas and modern hotels. Schools, hospitals, supermarkets, parks, gardens and ultra-modern Government buildings have sprung into being where once desert sands played across the barren land. The shops are filled with expensive imported clothes, jewelry, watches and perfumes. There are 14 hospitals with a bed for every 80 Kuwaitis. Special institutions aid the blind, the crippled and

## About This Issue

Kuwait emerges as the sixth in our series on Middle East countries and the fourth written by Alan Klaum. A graduate of Columbia University and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Alan is president of Alan Klaum International, a consultant firm on the Middle East and Asia.

Photos are courtesy of the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Education in Kuwait.

Two book reviews appear on pages 14-16. *The Palestinians*, by British television journalist and commentator, Jonathan Dimpleby, receives the attention of A.M.E.U. Board member, Henry G. Fischer, Curator in Egyptology at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. And columnist-lecturer, David Nes, examines *The Elusive Peace: The Middle East in the Twentieth Century* by William R. Polk, former adviser to President Kennedy and professor at Chicago University.

The November/December issue of *The Link* will take an in-depth look at the expected policy statement on the Middle East proposed by the National Council of the Churches of Christ, and due to be voted on by N.C.C.C.'s Governing Board the beginning of November. In connection with this important statement, the N.C.C.C. has prepared a study booklet for church use, details of which are found under the Notices section, page 13.

John F. Mahoney,  
Executive Director

the aged. All health services, including any needed medical treatment abroad, is provided free to all Kuwaitis.

Public schools number 230 and private schools, 40. There is a teacher for every 10 students, and lessons are taught with the latest audiovisual aids. Education, free to all Kuwaitis, includes free university education abroad for the capable and motivated.

One of three Kuwaitis owns a car (generally an American one). Internal telephone service is free, electricity practically so. Citizens pay no taxes on income, housing, or gasoline for their cars. The state provides housing for poorer Kuwaitis. For the middle-income Kuwaiti, interest-free loans up to 25,000 dinars (roughly \$92,400 at the current rate of exchange) are available from the Government to build new homes. The loan principal is paid back at a rate of not more than 5 percent of salary within 25 or 30 years.<sup>2</sup>

The incredible benefits of this welfare state are, for the most part, the privilege of Kuwaiti citizens only. In the estimated total population mix of 1.1 million, fewer than 400,000 are Kuwaiti nationals. The rest are Palestinians, Egyptians, Iranians, Iraqis, Jordanians and Saudis. The Palestinians (about 200,000) occupy senior government advisory posts and, together with Egyptians, provide most of the teachers, doctors and engineers. Indians and Pakistanis work as clerks and mechanics, Iraqis and Iranians as manual laborers. In addition, there is a small group of American,

British and other Western businessmen and their families.<sup>3</sup>

Non-Kuwaitis do not have the right to vote, suffrage being limited to 50,000 literate Kuwaiti men over 21. They may not own shares of property and must bear the brunt of Kuwait's soaring rents. They must have a majority Kuwaiti partner if they set up business. And, except for those few who have given the state some special skill and received citizenship in return, most have little chance of ever becoming Kuwaiti citizens.

Many non-Kuwaitis do live in affluent surroundings, with the large majority somewhere in between. They are eligible for free health services, although the Government will not normally pay for them to go abroad for specialist treatment. Some receive full education, although the Government will not send them to universities abroad. The subsidies it gives to the Palestinians' own separate school system are not particularly large. And, while non-Kuwaiti civil servants are not sent abroad to study, doctors sometimes do so on paid sabbaticals.

What concerns serious Middle East observers is that inequities (and attitudes) toward the foreign majority can potentially foment the political backlash the Kuwaitis prefer to avoid.

The surface glitter of Kuwait's giant step forward is very much in evidence. It is easy to see and tabulate. What is more difficult to assess is the deeper undercurrent of social change previously set in motion.

## Kuwait's Remarkable Heritage

The Arabian Gulf, an important trading route since time immemorial, is referred to in some of the earliest written documents. Until recent times, however, few scholars or archaeologists showed much interest in the peoples who lived on its shores. The Koran, by ignoring the pagan cultures of ancient Arabia, excluded the possibility of historical research.

The advent of oil royalties prompted Emirs of the region—many of them men of education and culture—to encourage active research into the pre-Islamic

cultures. Scholars began to look for parallels between the field discoveries and the evidence in ancient texts. Soon it became clear that the once thriving cultural centers were closely related to, if not always directly influenced by, the great civilizations of Mesopotamia (2nd millennium B.C.)

Many names known to the ancients now have an identity and location: Dilmun, Ikaros, Bit-Iakin, Makan, Niduk-ki.

Dilmun, identified in the modern world as the island of Bahrain, figured

frequently in the religions and mystical texts of ancient Mesopotamia and in the first great epic tale in the history of mankind: the legend of Gilgamesh. Dilmun was the land of immortality, the ancestral homeland of the Sumerians, where they learned the art of writing, and the resting place of Ziusudra's ark (Mesopotamia's Noah).

Another important settlement along the Gulf was Kuwait's island of Failaka —approximately 20 miles east of the Kuwait mainland and 250 miles north of the settlement of Dilmun.

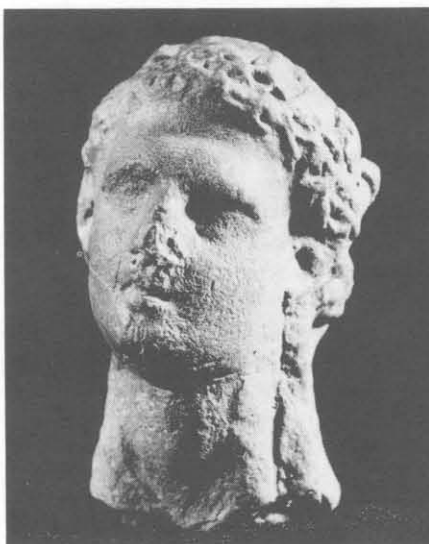
Failaka, known to the Greeks as Ikaros, was already an important port of call at the time of Dilmun. In 326 B.C., Alexander the Great, abandoning further advancement into India, sent part of his Macedonian army back to Babylon by ship. The fleet eventually reached Dilmun and the island of Failaka.<sup>4</sup>

Today, Failaka is uninhabited except for some small villages. It is on this island that the most important remains of the period have been found and preserved. One such find is a Greek inscription thanking Poseidon for saving a captain and his wife in a storm and bringing them safely to harbor.

## The Rise of Islam

With the fall of the Mesopotamian civilizations, a blurred series of foreign interventions along the Gulf occurred. By the seventh century A.D. the history of the area was marked by the influence of various religions: the paganism of the past, various Persian religions and an heretical form of Christianity called Nestorianism. With the Arab tribes divided in their religious directions, it was a propitious time for the advent of Islam. When Mohammed, the Prophet, set out on his teaching mission, the tribes had little difficulty in accepting the new religion.

During the early Islamic years, pilgrims and caravans enroute to Mecca and elsewhere paused to rest in Kazimah, a small peninsula at the head of Kuwait Bay, near the present town of Jahra. It was here that the historic "Battle of Chains," fought and won in 636 A.D. by the Arab armies, was led by a renowned warrior, Khalid ibn al-Walid, against the Persian Sassanids. The name of the battle refers to the tactic used by the Persians who fatally bound themselves with chains to form a rope of flesh and steel to prevent anyone from fleeing



Terracotta head from the Greek citadel (circa 300 B.C.) and steatite seal from the Bronze Age (circa 2500 B.C.) are two of the many Failaka Island discoveries.

before the enemy. With the destruction of the Sassanid army, the whole of Persia opened up.

From 661-750 A.D. the coastal region was under the rule of the Ummayyad Caliphate from distant Damascus. The Caliphate came closer when the Abassids (750-1258 A.D.) established their capital at Baghdad. In the 13th century eastern Arabia fell to the Bani Qaisar tribe that ruled from the island of Qism at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz. Along the northern coasts of the Gulf, Persian control once more extended itself while the Arab tribes—for whom, as for the desert Arabs, linear frontiers did not exist—continually moved along the coasts of the Gulf and in the inland regions.

By the 15th century, Bahrain controlled the entire coast from Kuwait to Qatar, but in 1475, Bahrain fell, for the second time, to the Emir of Hormuz. Before the end of the century, an invasion from Oman brought much of the Gulf coast under the control of the rulers of Muscat.

In time, Ahmed ibn Majid, one of the most famous seamen in history, would guide Vasco de Gamma's vessels across the Indian Ocean, thus paving the way for the establishment of the great Portuguese colonial empire.

## Foreign Intervention

The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 and the closing of traditional trade routes to India and the East forced

Europeans to seek other means of carrying on trade. In 1507 the famous Portuguese Admiral, Alfonso D'Albuquerque, captured Hormuz, entrance to the Arabian Gulf.

The influence of the Portuguese quickly spread throughout the Gulf, bringing a degree of prosperity through trade. The Portuguese refrained from influencing the culture, religion, local customs and beliefs. By seeking not to displease the Emir of Hormuz, they successfully concluded agreements with the various emirs of the region, using the Emir of Hormuz as intermediary. The joint influence of the Portuguese and the Emir of Hormuz extended to what is now Kuwait. By 1521, the entire Gulf coast—from Muscat to Kuwait—was under Portuguese control.

Then local uprisings began. With the domination of Portugal by Spain, Portugal's power in the East began to wane. To protect their interests, the Portuguese constructed a string of forts along the Gulf. The fortifications, however, could not all be held.

In 1602 the Portuguese lost Bahrain, signifying the beginning of the end of their presence in the region, and the start of a century of economic rivalry between the great European powers of England, Holland and France.

In 1660 the Portuguese lost Muscat, their last Gulf stronghold to the Arabs of Oman. Piracy by the Arabs of Oman had become such a formidable threat to trade and to the security of the Persian ports that the Persian Shah offered privileges to the English if they would



reduce the pirate strongholds.

The English were in no position to do so. England and Holland had been at war in 1652 and the position of the English Company in Persia and the Gulf had grown precarious. The Dutch, more popular than the English at the court of the Shah, were gaining ground. Although the Dutch took no conspicuous action against the pirates, the Persians were impressed by their evident strength and wealth.

By 1688, however, England and Holland were at peace, and it was the Dutch who were losing credit in Persia and the Gulf because of their arrogance and the aggressive measures which they had adopted.<sup>5</sup>

European economic rivalry continued through the 18th century, but new power struggles among local forces dominated Gulf history. Persia's empire began to crumble as it lost control of Oman, bringing to power the present dynasty of Muscat and Oman. Elsewhere along the Gulf, the current ruling dynasties of the Emirates were established. Piracy was rife, and Wahhabiism, with its fanatical zeal, swept across the desert to the coastal regions and beyond.

## The Impact of Wahhabiism

The founder of this zealous Sunni Moslem sect, Mohammed ibn Abdul Wahhab,

was born about 1703 at Ayaina in the province of Najd in central Arabia. Preaching a doctrine of pure monotheism, a return to the fundamental tenets of Islam as laid down in the Koran, he called on the Arabs to purify themselves, to renounce the worship of saints, to forswear all pleasure and luxury, and with rigid ascetism to serve the One True God. Abdul Wahhab told his followers that it was their religious duty to convert their fellow men with fire and sword and to plunder and destroy all those who professed to be Moslems but did not accept Wahhabiism.

Persecuted in his own city, he sought the friendship and support of the ruler of Daraiya and Riyadh, Mohammed ibn Saud—ancestor of Saudi Arabia's dynasty today. From that time on, the Saudi family became Abdul Wahhab's strongest supporters. For the next 30 years, Arabia was the scene of endless fighting between the adherents and opponents of Wahhabiism. It was not a full-scale war, but a continuous series of devastating raids and attacks.

By 1775, all Najd was under the Wahhabis. Ten years later their control had extended to al-Hasa and the Gulf coast. As a stronghold of Shiism, the coast suffered severely under the Wahhabi's religious zeal. Within 60 years the Wahhabis had established their rule from Najd across all Arabia, from the sacred cities of Mecca and Medina in the

west to the Gulf in the east, from the Indian Ocean in the south to the Lebanon mountains of Syria in the north. They raided Mesopotamia, taking Kerbala, holy city of the Shias in 1801, massacring great numbers of the inhabitants, plundering the city and desecrating the mosque containing the tomb of Husain.

The success of the Wahhabis, whose very name spread terror in neighboring countries, caused consternation in the courts of the Persian Shah and of the Ottoman Sultan in Constantinople. For many years Hejaz, with its holy cities of Mecca and Medina, as well as Iraq, had been under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Sultan. Suddenly they were in danger of being lost to the Wahhabis.

The Sultan ordered Mohammed Ali, Turkey's Viceroy in Egypt, to march into Arabia. After two years of preparation, the Egyptian expedition arrived in Hejaz. The Wahhabis were defeated, their capital taken, and the Wahhabi ruler sent in chains to Constantinople.

## The Rise of Modern Kuwait

The 18th century was a time of large-scale migrations of Arab tribes within the Arabian peninsula. In 1710, the 'Utub, a sub-tribe of the Anaiza, left their home at Ab-Aflaj in Arabia's Najd because of drought and moved to the coastal region in search of a less difficult

Open-air performance of Al-Ardha, war dance



place to live. Eventually they settled in Kuwait where they lived under the protection of the sheikh of the Bani Khalid tribe, strongest power in eastern Arabia in that period. The Bani Khalid not only occupied the fertile oases of al-Hasa, their tribal center, but also controlled trade to central Arabia from their Gulf ports at al-Qatif and al-'Uqair.

The peaceful Khalidi control of eastern Arabia gave Kuwait in its early years a chance to rise unhindered by other tribes. The 'Utub, whose various families emigrated to Kuwait in different years of the period, involved themselves in the Gulf and desert route trade and began to thrive. The lack of any real centralized power, whether Persian, Ottoman, or Arabian, allowed the small community to live relatively free from external interference.

Historical records of Britain's East India Company indicate that the al-Sabah family, the ruling dynasty today, came to Kuwait about 1716 with two other important branches of the 'Utub, the al-Khalifa and the al-Jalahima.

With the death of the Bani Khalid Emir, Sa'dun, in 1722, the struggle among his brothers for the sheikhdom allowed various tributary tribes of the Bani Khalid, including the 'Utub, to practice some form of local independence. From 1752 onward, the chances for complete independence became greater. The quarrels of the Bani Khalid ruling family weakened their control over the area at a critical time when the growing Wahhabi power in central Arabia made its impact on their territories.

Local traditions relate that about this time the inhabitants of Kuwait chose in tribal manner the first Emir of Kuwait, Sabah the First, to administer justice and the affairs of the thriving town. Sabah's authority seems to have been well established in Kuwait and its vicinity as early as 1758.

Because of its early commercial success, Kuwait had become an important port-of-call for desert caravans from Aleppo. The caravans carried goods imported from India by Kuwaiti vessels and passengers who wanted to travel from the Gulf to Aleppo in Syria via the desert.

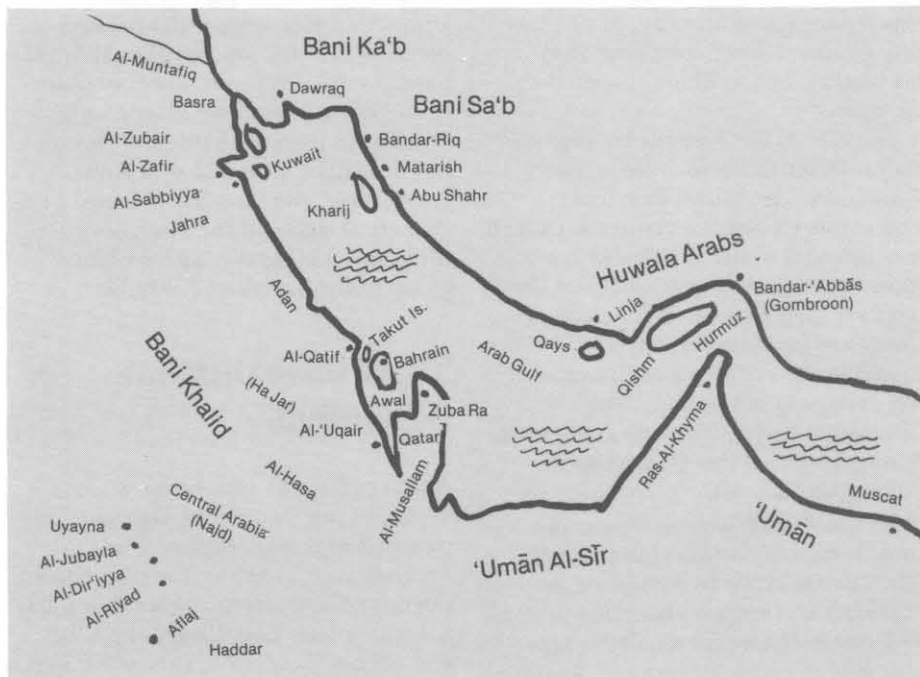
The boundaries of 'Utub suzerainty extended very likely to Jahra village, and, off the mainland, included the nearby islands of Qurain, Umm al-Naml and Failaka. While the rapid growth of Kuwait can be attributed primarily to the flourishing trade by the merchants of Kuwait and others who used that port as

a station for the desert caravans, another source of wealth was pearl fishing.

The town was not walled at the beginning apparently because the other Bedouin tribes respected Bani Khalid authority. But in 1760, eight years after the Bani Khalid had lost much of their influence, a protective wall was begun by Sabah the First. According to East India Company records, the town was completely walled as early as the 1770's. Although built of mud and heavily damaged by rain, the wall served as an adequate defense against Bedouin raids

As author H.R.P. Dickson noted, the Bedouin has no use for a man with great courage and leadership if *hadh* is lacking. The tribesman wants a lucky general in war, and still more important, he wants a lucky sheikh in peace. The whole daily round and welfare of the tribe is bound up in this word *hadh*.<sup>7</sup>

The prosperous settlement at Kuwait in the 1760's did not go unnoticed by rival Arab powers in the area. The Wahhabis in central Arabia had not yet consolidated their power, but the Bani Ka'b tribe along the northern lit-



Location of Arab tribes in the Arab Gulf in the 18th century

as recently as the early 20th century. In 1956 it was taken down.

Although the Arab sheikhs of this era were powerful men, their rule was not necessarily despotic. The Sheikh of Kuwait consulted his people occasionally, especially regarding commercial interests to ensure that justice was evenly distributed.

At his death, Sabah left five sons: Salman, Malij, Mubarak, Muhammed and Abdullah, the youngest. Abdullah, noted for his qualities of bravery, justice, wisdom and generosity, was chosen to succeed his father.

Unlike the usual dynastic succession in European monarchies, no tribal sheikh attains his position simply because his father was the sheikh before him. It does not simply pass from father to eldest son. The one chosen must come from the royal clan but must prove, among other qualities: "that he has the necessary courage; that he has powers of leadership; that he has *hadh* or luck."<sup>8</sup>

total of the Gulf, with their stronghold at Dawraq, took advantage of the weaknesses of the Persian and Ottoman Empires and, by pirating the increasing sea trade of the 'Utub, threatened the East India Company's trade destined for its factory at Basra. The initiation of a free-trade policy in Kuwait and Zubara, however, drew even more merchants and capital to trade there.

In 1773 a great plague damaged Basra's trade, giving its rival ports on the coast of the Gulf a chance to compete. The East India Company, which had given preference to Basra up to now, diverted its trade to 'Utub ports.

## Friendship with Britain

No sooner had Basra recovered from the devastating plague, which claimed two million lives, than rumors of a proposed Persian attack on the Ottoman city began to grow. The siege and oc-

cupation of Basra by the Persians (1775-1779) was to have a major impact on Kuwait's future.

In earlier days Persia's port of Abu Shahr on the Gulf had once been the greatest emporium of Gulf trade. With the shift of English trade to Basra after 1770, the preeminence of Abu Shahr declined, not, however, without Persian resistance. The time had come for Abu Shahr to regain what had been lost. Karim Khan, ruler of Persia, jealous of the increased importance of Basra and faced with discontent in his army, decided to dispatch an expedition against the city. More than fifty thousand men, commanded by his brother, Sadoe Khan, marched on Basra.

In 1775, as the Persians lay siege to Basra, direct relations arose between Kuwait and the British East India Company's representatives in the Gulf. It was agreed that the British desert mail from the Gulf to Aleppo would be dispatched from Kuwait. With enmity sharpened between the British and the Persians over the attack on Basra and the disruption of the East India Company's trade, Company goods were now unloaded at the 'Utub ports of Zubara and Kuwait.

As the Persian siege of Basra continued, Kuwait remained untouched. The caravan trade from Kuwait to Baghdad and Aleppo continued to grow, while the route across the desert kept changing to avoid the sporadic attacks by Arab tribes, acting on orders from the Persian occupiers of Basra.

The desert caravan merchants hired camels, mules and donkeys from Kuwaiti sheikhs, who guided the caravans from starting point to destination. Their authority was absolute. These sheikhs, wrote Arab historian Ahmad Abu Hakima, charged the merchants fixed amounts for services during the journey, such as payment for the camels, duties to various chiefs of the Arab tribes on the caravan route, and the hire of *rafiqs* or Arab guards. The cost of a camel was a matter of bargaining.

The number of camels conveying goods often reached the hundreds, sometimes thousands, depending on the type of caravan and the state of commerce in Aleppo, Basra, Baghdad and the other regional commercial centers. (One large caravan reportedly started with 2,000 camels, protected by 150 Arab *rafiqs*; halfway along they joined the Baghdad caravan of 3,000 more camels, bringing the total to 5,000 camels plus 1,000 men!)\*

Traveling time between Kuwait and Aleppo depended upon the size of the caravan. While large caravans went slowly (7 hours a day) and took from 45 to 70 days, small caravans accomplished it in 25 days.

The activity of the desert route had its impact on trade. Together with the seaborne cargoes, it made the 'Utub a power in the Gulf region, while helping to unite the 'Utub settlements in Zubara and Kuwait.

When Basra fell to the Persians in 1776, many inhabitants fled and sought refuge in the 'Utub state of Zubara. Under the leadership of the Bahrain governor, Persia, which had established bases on the island, launched an unsuccessful series of punitive attacks against Zubara. In the final battle the Persian forces, caught in retreat by a Kuwaiti rescue force, were soundly defeated. The Bahrain sheikh and the Persians withdrew, leaving the Bahrain island group to the victorious al-Khalifa.

## 'Utub Development (1780-1900)

At the end of the 18th century, Wahhabi rule became strongly entrenched in central Arabia. The Wahhabis' great enemy, the Bani Khalid, still controlled eastern Arabia, but internal family bickering divided the tribe and opened the door to enemy intrigue. The Wahhabis plundered towns and tribes to the north and to the south in Bani Khalid territory. Soon the towns of the al-Hasa itself, tribal center of the Bani Khalid, fell to Wahhabi forces. By 1795 the power of the Bani Khalid had ended.

The conquering Wahhabis had gained not only an outlet to the sea, but also fabulous wealth of the Khalidi territory. The farms of al-Hasa were well-known for their rich produce, while the coastal harbors for a long time supplied the Najd and inner Arabia with Indian and European goods.

Politically, Wahhabi influence in eastern Arabia had impact on other forces in the region. The British East India Company, whose interest in eastern Arabia was commercial, avoided any clash with the Wahhabis. The company cared only that its desert mail remained undisturbed.

The Ottomans, who had occupied al-Hasa before the Bani Khalid and who had religious interests in the Moslem holy cities, were alarmed by the

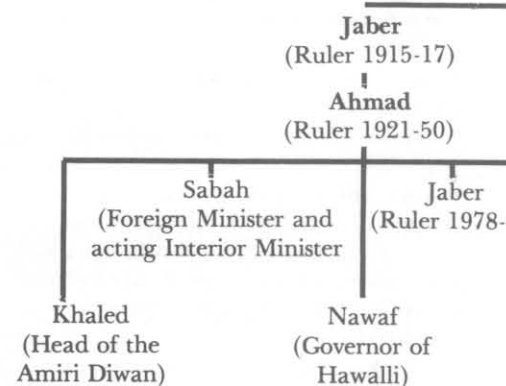
Wahhabi influence that had spread to the very borders of Basra. For the 'Utub and the other Arab forces in the area, only two choices remained: succumb to the Wahhabi teachings, or expect the same fate that befell the Bani Khalid. The 'Utub chose not to become adherents of Wahhabiism.

The 'Utub of the north had fortunately escaped Wahhabi subjugation, while the misfortunes of other Gulf ports and states only seemed to bring them benefit.

The 'Utub, throughout the second half of the 18th century, did their best to stay on good terms with all interests in the area—except for the Wahhabis. Using their geographical position to enrich themselves, they had surpassed the Bani Khalid to become the traders of eastern Arabia. In less than 16 years after the establishment of Zubara in 1766, they were able to defy all the Arab maritime forces in the Gulf. Their fleet, second only to Muscat's, made non-stop journeys from the Gulf to India.

Research reveals that the cargo carried by the Arab vessels from 'Utub ports and Muscat matched or surpassed the volume carried by European vessels, a formidable achievement of which Western historians are little aware. To many, Kuwait came into commercial existence only with the discovery of oil in the 20th century.

The 'Utub in this period felt no great threat from the European trading nations, because Arab traders monopolized the sea freight of the Gulf. With the occupation of Bahrain (1782-83), they added the richest pearl-producing area



**Note:** The new Oil Minister, Sheikh Ali al-Khalifa, is a second cousin to the new Ruler.



of the times as well as a center for substantial commercial activity. It was during these years that the foundations were laid for the present ruling houses of Kuwait (the al-Sabah) and of Bahrain (the al-Khalifa). This explains much about the continuing mutuality of interests and outlook of both ruling houses today.

In the closing years of the century, the Arabian peninsula entered a chaotic period. The 'Utub settlement at Zubara fell to Wahhabi forces, while Kuwait withstood sudden Wahhabi raids further north, but was unable to assist its Zubara cousins either by land or sea.

It is not certain why Kuwait escaped from the Wahhabi yoke—perhaps due to the superiority of 'Utub weapons or the presence in Kuwait in 1793-95 of the British factory, temporarily moved from Basra. The preoccupation of the Wahhabis with the Ottomans elsewhere in the Arabian peninsula surely diverted forces that might have been used to overwhelm the 'Utub state.

Wahhabi power at last began to wane. Other powerful tribal movements appeared, most notably the Shammar tribes of the north that had united under Mohammed ibn Rashid. Their leader was a capable, ambitious man who coveted the Wahhabi capital at Riyadh as well as the other rich villages of the Najd. The Ottoman Turks, nominally the suzerain lords of the entire region, in reality held only the rich fringes. In the interior and the inner desert they had no power

or control.

Ottoman policy was simple: to keep the tribes of the interior from attacking them and from breaking out. To do this they maintained a balance of power, setting one sheikh against another by creating rivalries, helping the weak against the strong, and supporting the defeated.

Efforts to bring the independent 'Utub more closely under their mantle only pushed Kuwait closer to the British. To secure his political power, the ruling sheikh, Mubarak, in 1899 signed an agreement with Britain pledging himself and his successors neither to cede any territory nor to receive agents or representatives of any foreign power without the British Government's consent.

It was a move to counter the forces set in motion in the area by Britain's ambitious rival, Germany. To the German Kaiser, the only road for expansion was to the East with India as the objective. But the English held all the roads to the East with the exception of one—from Turkey down through the Arab countries into the Gulf. Allied with the Sultan of Turkey, the Kaiser proclaimed himself the friend of the Caliph of Islam and protector of the Arabs. He sent out his agents and pressed eastward. As the backbone of his plan, he visualized a railway from Constantinople through Aleppo to Baghdad with its terminus at Kuwait, the door to the Gulf. The Kaiser's ambitions were known to the

British, who, already allied with the local sheikhs of the coast, were virtually in control of the Gulf. At Kuwait in 1897, the two great powers came face to face.

In his colorful yet undocumented biography of the great Ibn Saud, British author H.C. Armstrong described the confrontation with the 'Utub Sheikh, Mubarak al-Sabah (1896-1915):

Mubarak listened to both. He received the consuls, and the representatives of England, Germany, and of Russia also, for the Russians, too, wanted a hand in the Gulf...

He saw that the English, like himself, were on the defensive and not out to annex, but that if the Germans with this railway came there would be an end of Kuwait. He played for time, giving nothing, postponing with empty promises, until the Germans, tired of this, eager to press on with the railway, urged the Turks to depose Mubarak. He was their subject, they said; he had murdered his brother and seized power; they had never recognized him; there was every justification for replacing him with someone more amenable.<sup>9</sup>

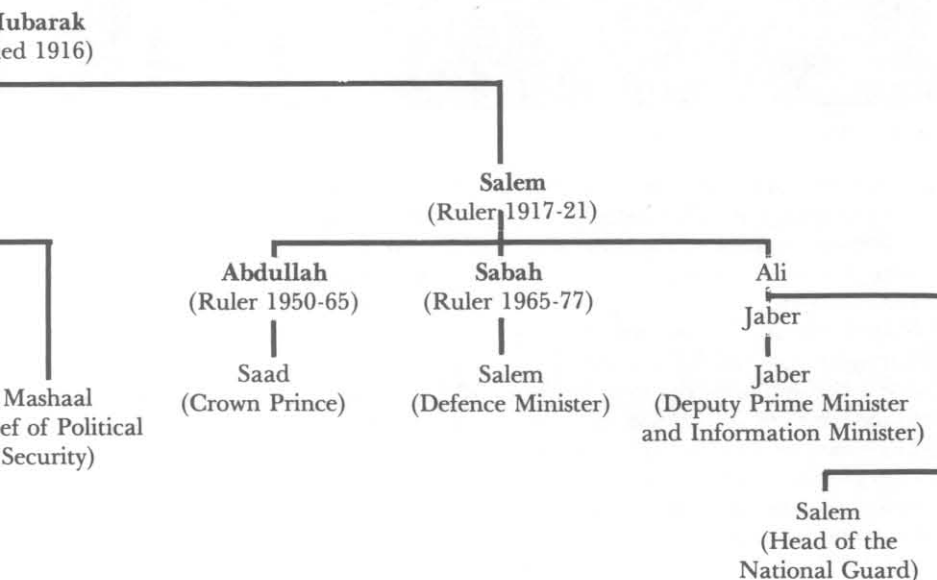
The Turks decided to rouse Ibn Rashid and his forces to attack Mubarak, offering him Kuwait as the prize.

Whether due to Mubarak's determination to counter the Ottoman and German machinations or due to his realization that without a real army he could not defend Kuwait against Ibn Rashid, the 'Utub ruler wisely cast his lot with the British.

In 1914, after the outbreak of war with the Ottomans, Britain recognized Kuwait as the independent Arab principality under British protection and agreed to an annual subsidy to support the sheikh and his heirs.

Relations with the province of Najd (eventually an integral part of the modern Saudi Arabian nation) were finally settled by the Treaty of al-Uqayr in 1922. The treaty involved the creation of two compromise neutral zones or no man's lands—one, a small, diamond-shaped piece of territory west of Kuwait; the other between Kuwait itself and Saudi Arabia along the coast to the south, the scene of clashes between rival tribes claiming pasture rights. The northern frontier of the first zone with Iraq was agreed upon in 1923.

#### The Sabah Family of Kuwait



Reprinted from Middle East International, April 1978.

# The Discovery of Oil

In the reign of Sheikh Ahmad al-Jaber (1921-1950), the foundation of the oil industry was laid. In 1936 the first well was sunk by the Kuwait Oil Company, a partnership of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (now British Petroleum) and the American company, Gulf Oil. The concession agreement was a hard bargain for the Arab ruler and his people, and one they came to resent.

The deal which Anglo-Persian had made with Gulf was something of a triumph for the British company, which did not want any more petroleum produced in the Gulf, or anywhere else in the Middle East, because each new oil source prejudiced the agreement to control the world market reached by Standard Oil of New Jersey, Royal-Dutch Shell and Anglo-Persian at Achnacarry, Scotland in September 1928. "These companies," writes Leonard Mosley in his illuminating book on the oil cartel, "would have preferred to allow Iraq and Persia, where they owned wells, to monopolize the Middle East's share of the world fuel market. The discovery of oil by Standard of California (a company outside the charmed circle) at Bahrain had been a jolt to their plans, and they also feared the effect of Saudi Arabian operations. So when Anglo-Persian forced Gulf to accept them as partners in Kuwait, the terms the British wrote into the agreement with the Americans were harsh and restrictive."<sup>10</sup> Both the Americans and British pledged that Kuwait oil would not be used to interfere with or damage the world market, and they would keep in constant consultation over where the oil was sold.

The provisions of the agreement gave Anglo-Persian a clear position of power over its United States partner. It was the British company that would provide the manpower and decide where the Kuwait wells would be drilled and how much oil should come out of them once they were in operation. With its main source of supply in Persia, it is not surprising that Anglo-Persian was in no hurry to bring Kuwait into the game.

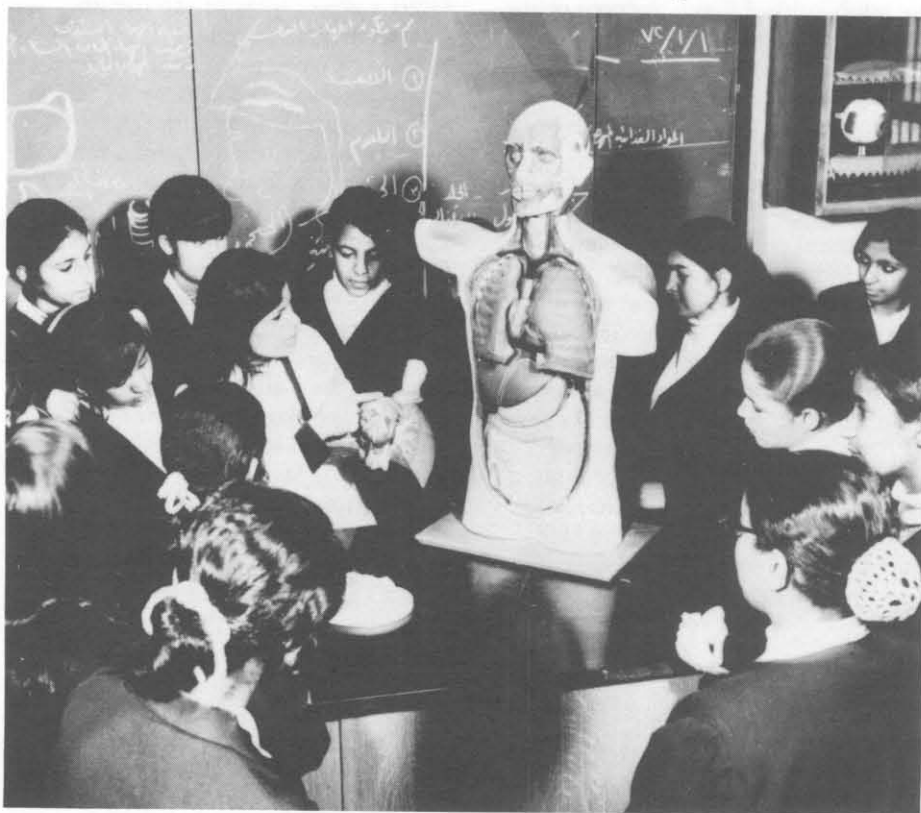
There was one obvious place in the territory to drill for oil: Burgan. For many years, wandering Bedouins had used the bitumen from an outcrop lake at Burgan to waterproof their tents. As long ago as 1913, Sheikh Mubarak had

written to the British, promising to show Burgan to a visiting Royal Navy admiral and pledging, if oil was obtainable, to make the concession for it a British one. Even Frank Holmes, Gulf Oil's negotiator, had always envisaged Burgan as the spot where he would commence drilling operations.

British geologists, however, decided otherwise, and picked a remote spot named Bahra where there was indeed

Still the Kuwait Oil Company avoided Burgan. Instead it announced that the entire Kuwait territory would be mapped and surveyed and an elaborate year-long operation began. Only at the end of it did the company announce that Burgan was the one spot most likely to produce large-scale quantities of oil.

There, on October 16, 1937, a well was finally spudded in, this time with no ceremonials. In April the drill bit



Kuwaiti girls at a secondary school

some evidence of bitumen seepage, but nothing to compare with Burgan.

Any doubts expressed about the site were demolished by self-confident company experts; and the ruler, Sheikh Ahmad, the new British political agent, Colonel A.C. Galloway, and a host of dignitaries were invited to the ceremonial spudding in of the first Bahra well in May 1936...weeks, then months, went by and no oil strike was reported, though the drill bit more and more deeply into the rock. It was 1937 before the drill was pulled out at 8,000 feet and the glum announcement was made that Bahra was dry.<sup>11</sup>

cracked through a cap of rock at 3,400 feet and plugged into a vast cavern of high-pressure gas, sand and oil.

The company's joy was strangely muted, but everyone knew they were in possession of a phenomenal oil field. The new field at Burgan, laying 14 miles into the desert from the Arabian Gulf and 28 miles south of the capital, Al-Kuwait, was a pear-shaped field, 15 miles long. No one yet realized that the country was sitting on one of the largest oil reservoirs the world has ever known. But everyone knew that Kuwait's petroleum resources from that day onward would alter the balance of oil production in the Middle East.



In the eve-of-war atmosphere of 1939, Kuwait Oil made excuses to hold back. There were more urgent priorities, it said, and the material was just not there to outfit a new oil field. While Aramco in Saudi Arabia was building Ras Tanura and already ferrying tankers to the Bahrain refinery, Kuwait, with three wells ready to go, stagnated.

It was not the best of times for Kuwait. Its pearl-fishing industry was coming to an end, as the Japanese cultured pearl industry prospered. Sheikh Ahmad, short of money and concerned about the growing restiveness in his territory, pleaded with the British-American oil company to develop the field. When Britain declared war on Germany, the pressure on the company ended: until Germany and her allies were defeated, the company told the sheikh, nothing more could be done. Until then, the oil of Kuwait would stay in the ground. It was an unpopular decision that would linger as a constant irritant in the minds of most Kuwaitis.

Kuwait's post-World War II period has been one of commercial growth and affluence. Construction of the oil port of Al-Ahmadi in 1946 was a great accomplishment for the country, "the first crown jewel" of the new era. Kuwait's

second city lies 25 south of the capital, Al-Kuwait. It is the headquarters of the Kuwait Oil Company, "whose 692 wells keep half the world's industrial complexes supplied with power."<sup>12</sup> (In November 1975, the Kuwait Government, after protracted and bitter negotiations with British Petroleum and Gulf Oil, completed its takeover of the Kuwait Oil Company. The complete takeover represented a trend in other Arab oil-producing states as well.)

Al-Ahmadi, a company town of 30,000 people, provides workers with houses, swimming pools, tennis courts, recreation grounds, theatres, movie houses, and a first-class hospital. There is no discrimination against the 300 British, 44 Americans, 280 Indians, 160 Pakistanis and 1,600 non-Kuwaiti Arabs.

Al-Ahmadi is a green town. Families are encouraged to cultivate their gardens, and massive amounts of desalinated water spray the grass and flowers in the backyard of company houses. "In March and April they are a sight to see," British author Mosley writes, "green oases in which riots of colorful flowers bloom, only to die in the onslaught of heat the beginning of May."

## Independence and Kuwait's Political Institutions

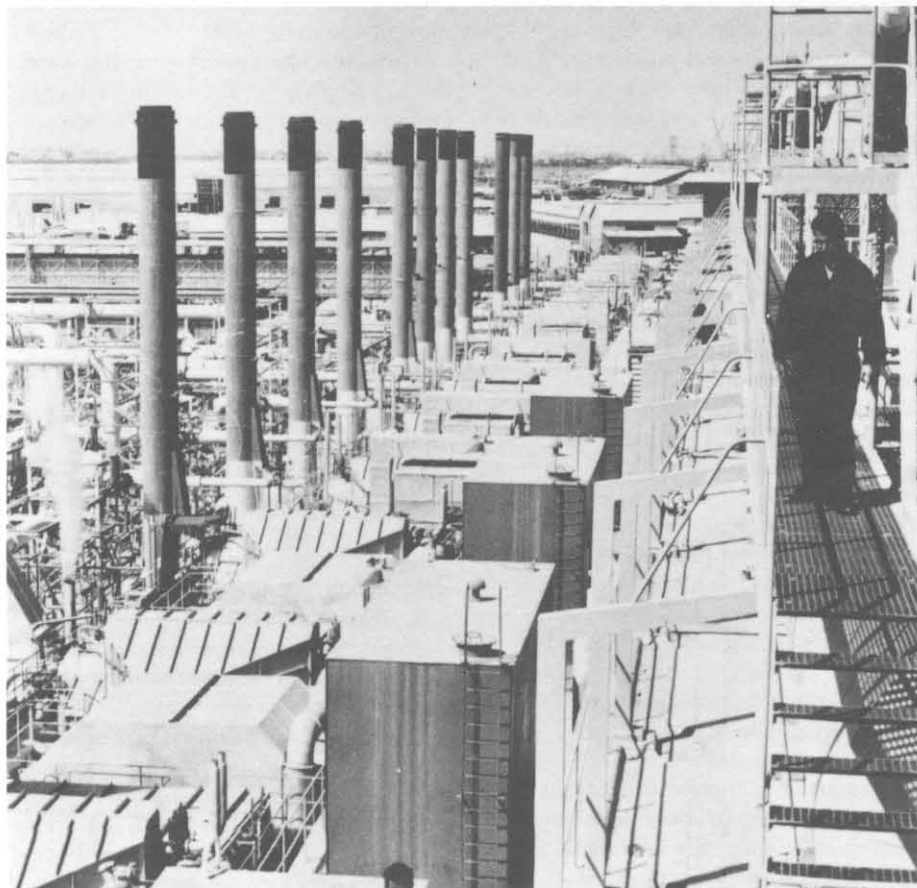
By 1955 Britain began to prepare Kuwait for independence. On June 19, 1961 after cancellation of the 1899 Treaty, Kuwait became the first British protectorate in the Gulf region to attain independence. Soon after, neighboring Iraq under General Kaseem declared its intention to annex the new state, basing its claim on both geography (Kuwait being the natural continuation of Mesopotamia) and history (Kuwait had been part of the Ottoman Empire). Because Iraq's military strength was immeasurably superior to Kuwait's, the Emir appealed to Britain and the Arab League for help which was duly sent. Iraq was forced to draw back, and, after the assassination of Kasseem in 1963, renounced its claims, recognized the Emirate, and established diplomatic relations.

With independence, the first Emir, Abdullah al-Salem, sought to give the country more structured and democratic institutions. A Constituent Assembly was set up, and in 1962 a constitution promulgated under which Kuwait termed itself an independent and fully sovereign Arab state belonging to the "Arab Nation." With the changeover from absolute to constitutional monarchy, the people are recognized as sovereign and the source of all power. The Emir, whose person is considered inviolable, is chosen only from among descendants of Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah and cannot be removed from his post.

Under the 1962 Constitution, power clearly divides among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the Government. The Prime Minister, appointed by the Emir, heads a 17-member Cabinet, all of whom are responsible to the Emir.

The Cabinet initiates Government policy. If approved by a two-thirds majority of the 50-member National Assembly, the measure is signed into law by the ruler. If passage is only by simple majority, the Emir may delay promulgation until the National Assembly meets again. The 50 representatives, elected by adult male suffrage (Kuwaiti-born or naturalized for 10 years), have power of approval over the Emir's choice of a successor and can force the resignation of a Cabinet minister by a no-confidence vote. Because the Assembly meets for eight months each year (beginning in October), the Emir may legislate by decree while the Assembly is not in

Inside view of a water distillation plant



session. Such decrees are subject to acceptance or repeal by the Assembly.

Islamic law, the basis of Kuwait's modern judicial system, directly applies in cases involving personal status. In other cases (civil, commercial, criminal), civil codes apply. Kuwait has a well-developed judicial system, including lower courts, higher courts that hear appeals, and a Supreme Court of Appeals, established a few years ago to hear appeals on questions of law.

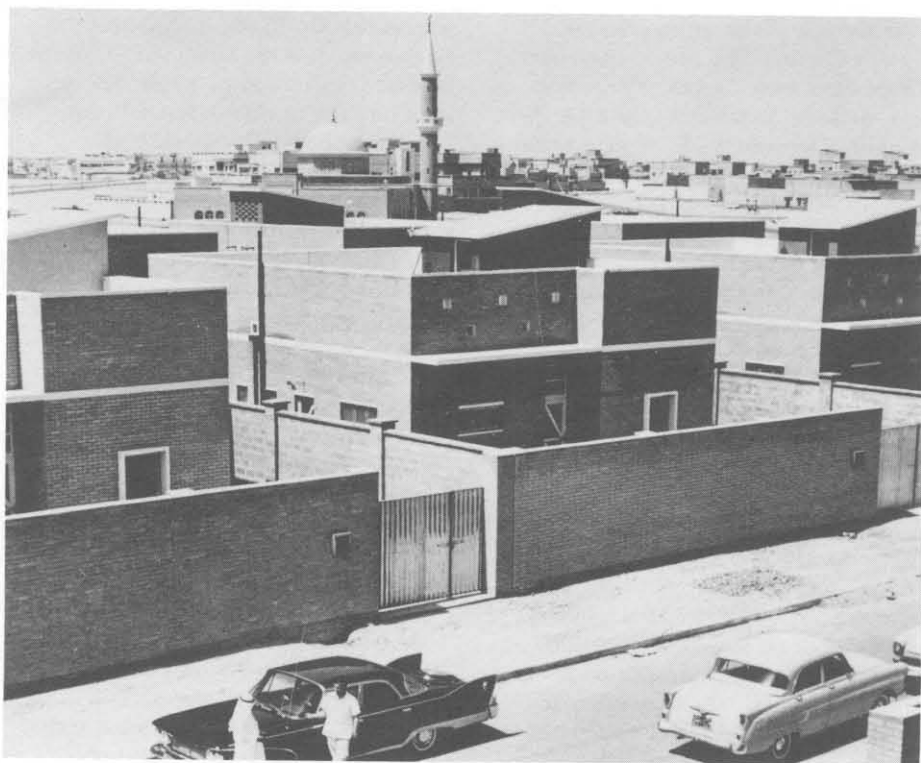
In the absence of political parties, there are broad bands of political opinion representing diverse social and economic groups. Until the summer of 1976, the system appeared able to tolerate and withstand dissent and criticism from all sides, including the large and politically active Palestinian minority. Under the Constitution's civil rights provisions, Kuwaiti citizens were guaranteed the right of assembly and free speech. The press, consequently, reported freely on political affairs and, in the process, questioned official Government policy.

But when the Government announced a pro-Syrian stand in the Lebanese Civil War, some newspapers and National Assembly members, including Palestinians, launched protests. Further dissent by the Palestinians took various forms, including the alleged bombing of a Syrian airlines office in Kuwait. The situation came to a head in late August.

The Prime Minister and Crown Prince, Jaber al-Ahmad, handed in his resignation, as did his cabinet. The National Assembly was dissolved and the articles of the Constitution giving freedom of the press and requiring elections to be held were suspended. The Government shut down anti-nationalist newspapers. Under the decree, several newspapers, including *Al Watan* and *Al Risala*, ceased publication for three months.

The Emir subsequently reappointed the Crown Prince as Prime Minister and instructed him to form a new government. Crown Prince Jaber announced that a committee would be established to revise the Constitution. The suspension was to last until August 1980.

To some observers, the restrictive measures seemed only to reflect Government efforts to control the Palestinian population. The Government's argument was that the Assembly's legislators had become unruly and held up crucial measures indefinitely. Although some popular sentiment initially favored the suspension, pressures for a resumption of parliamentary life have risen, exacerbating



Some units of low-income housing program

bated by the revolutionary fervor of Iran's Islamic regime across the Gulf.

In February of this year Kuwait announced plans to lift its four-year freeze on parliamentary activity by the end of 1980 with the election of a new National Assembly. Informed Arabs in Kuwait, among them university professors, economists and politicians, according to *New York Times* reporter Youssef M. Ibrahim, question the degree of liberalization proposed and wonder whether it is too little and too late. Abdallah al-Nubary, a member of the last two Assemblies and a former chairman of the Assembly's Economic Committee, told the newsman that he was worried that the legislature rules would be significantly altered. "What we hear is that the Government plans to increase the number of appointed deputies and decrease those who are elected," Mr. Nubary said. "They also are planning to limit the jurisdiction of the parliament in making new legislation, institute a screening process in nominations and narrow the scope of campaigning." He and others argue that the Constitution should not be altered before the election; it is the job of an elected parliament and cannot be done arbitrarily by a Government-appointed committee.<sup>13</sup>

The issue of enfranchisement is itself the source of deep political discontent. Presently only male citizens over 21 may vote in the Assembly elections, but

various restrictions actually limit the electorate to about one-fourth of the population. The conservative "establishment" has been accused periodically of withholding or delaying citizenship from those who are eligible in order to keep younger, more progressive elements from winning too many seats.

Then, too, the Palestinians who have lived in Kuwait for some time have their own grievance. Many are well-educated and intellectually sophisticated and feel they have helped build the society to its present state of efficiency. They are resentful that they have been excluded from the economic-political benefits of citizenship. As for women, the new Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Sheikh Saad, has asked the Constitutional committee to grant the vote to Kuwaiti women, a belated response to the growing power of women in the country.

People in the Gulf are beginning to talk. They are asking questions about the national interest and who decides what it is, the policies the rulers are implementing, the distribution of oil wealth, which is considered inadequate. The question of human rights and dignity has finally caught up. The exclusivity of ruling is coming under fire from many segments of society, and it is ignited by the revolution in Iran. Tokenism, will not do in the 80's when it might have worked in the 70's.<sup>14</sup>

## The New Ruler and His Cabinet

In early 1978 Kuwait, with typical discretion and lack of publicity, reordered its ruling hierarchy and formed a new administration within two months of the death of the late Emir, Sheikh Sabah al-Salem. The accession of his cousin, 49-year-old Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad, brought the rulership back to the Jaber branch of the family.

The rapidity with which the new Emir allocated senior posts among leading members of the ruling family surprised most observers, who viewed it as an indication of his incisiveness and authority. From all indications, he promises to be a very strong ruler.

Formulation of Kuwait's policy since 1961 was principally the work of Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad. He took charge of the State's finances in 1959 as well as other negotiations with the former concessionary owners of the Kuwait Oil Company. The British and American companies found him an uncompromising bargainer. As Prime Minister, he continued to direct petroleum policy, at the same time keeping a firm grip on the State's internal economic development and playing an important role in formulating Kuwait's basic foreign policy since independence in 1961. Well-established guidelines of foreign policy include a middle course in pursuing

Arab unity and support for "the recognition of the legitimate rights" of the Palestinians.

The position of Crown Prince and the Prime Ministership have remained associated, both going to the popular 52-year-old Sheikh Saad al-Abdullah of the Salem branch of the family. As Minister of Interior, Sheikh Saad has had a reputation for being tough with trouble-makers, indigenous and expatriate alike. He enjoys significant tribal backing, still considered an important factor in Kuwait's politics, as do the Emir and the Deputy Prime Minister and Information Minister, Sheikh Jaber al-Ali. Saad is the son of a former ruler, Sheikh Abdullah al-Salem (1951-1965), while the Emir is the son of another ruler, Sheikh Ahmad al-Jaber (1921-1950).

Most of the important portfolios in the Cabinet are held by members of the al-Sabah family. But ability is a prerequisite for them, and the governing body maintains a balance between the more traditional and the modern technocratic elements in the State.

## Development of the Economy

The backbone of the economy in Kuwait is oil and gas. The oil industry divides into three sectors: production, refining

and petrochemicals. The Kuwait Oil Company is the producer with refining carried out by the Kuwait National Petroleum Company. The third State-owned company is the Petrochemicals Industries Company.

The Kuwait Oil Company is the country's largest oil producer; offshore production is by the Arabian Oil Company (Japan); joint exploration ventures have been set up with Kuwait Shell Petroleum Development Company and a Spanish company, Hispanoil.

The total annual production reaches 600 million barrels. Refinery production averages 121 million barrels, while the production of liquified gas is about 21 million barrels.

Predictably industry in Kuwait is overwhelmingly dominated by oil-based projects. Natural gas liquids, refined petroleum products, and fertilizers account for more than twice the output of all other industries combined. The Government has tried with some success to promote other forms of industry, but a combination of factors have both limited their development in the past and will restrict development in the future:

1. The Kuwaitis seem anxious to limit the growth of the expatriate communities, who, ironically, make up the industrial labor force.
2. Kuwait's domestic market is so small that industry with substantial economies of scale are unviable unless they can also export.
3. In competing on the export market, such companies would suffer because most raw and intermediate materials must be imported and Kuwait's labor costs are high.

Aware of the problems, Kuwait's planners continue to encourage industrial development to move forward. At Shuwaikh, north of the capital, and at Shuaiba, south of Al-Ahmadi, two large industrial estates have been set up with power stations and the world's largest seawater distillation plants.

At Shuaiba, ten large enterprises manufacture a variety of products for domestic need and export: fertilizers, sulphuric acid, liquid ammonia and ammonium sulphate; refined petroleum products; drilling mud; boilers and heat exchangers; cement; industrial and medical gases; sulphur and many other manufactures. In addition, the United Fisheries of Kuwait occupies an area of nearly 10,000 of the estate's 8.4 million square meters with harbor installations for its fleet of more than 150 vessels.

Sheikh Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah lays foundation stone of Al-Sabahia Town in 1966.





The industrial complex at Shuwaikh supports no less than 450 different enterprises from metal-pipe factories to macaroni mills.

In less than 30 years Kuwait has become self-sufficient in water for industrial use and domestic consumption. By the end of 1980 distillation plants are expected to double present capacity, and there will be ample supplies of both fresh and brackish water to meet all requirements.

Kuwait has reemerged as one of the world's maritime nations. The Kuwait Oil Tanker Company operates a fleet of 11 ships of more than 2,000,000 dead-weight tons. The United Arab Shipping Company operates a fleet of 47 dry-cargo carriers, with an overall dead-weight of 1,000,000 tons. Port facilities are being rapidly extended at both Shuwaikh, the general cargo port, and at Shuaiba where oil and gas by-products are the main cargoes.<sup>15</sup>

A wide pattern of high-speed highways link the capital with the oilfield region and the borders. Road construction is underway in both urban areas and the countryside—very much a necessity in view of the incredible growth of vehicles in the country. Estimates indicate about 3,000,000 cars use Kuwait's modern highways!

With all its surplus capital, Kuwait has become a significant force in the world's financial markets. Its financial institutions have been oriented towards the management abroad of the country's own vast capital surplus so that Kuwaitis may retain the maximum profits from their own money. This is true not only of the Government-established institutions but also of private institutions. The enormous wealth has helped transform the country's commercial banks—National, Commercial, Alahli, Gulf, the Bank of Kuwait and the Middle East and Burgan—into some of the biggest financial institutions in the Arab world.

These commercial banks until recently held their liquid assets almost entirely abroad and together formed in 1966 the United Bank of Kuwait, a London money-market operation, so-to-speak, to manage part of these assets.

Also prominent in the management of Kuwait's assets abroad and used extensively by the Government as channels for its surplus funds are the "three K's": the Kuwait International Investment Company, entirely private-owned; the Kuwait Investment Company, 50 percent Government-owned; and the Kuwait Foreign Trading Contracting and Investment Company, 80 percent



Students of the Industrial College at grinding machines

Government-owned.

All three draw their resources from institutional loans and deposits. All have been substantial participants in the Eurobond market, Kuwait Investment Company having been the first Arab financial institution ever to co-manage an international bond issue. It is also a major direct investor overseas, notably in American real estate. Kuwait Foreign Trading and Contracting Company, on the other hand, has developed a Third World orientation with many capital contributions and loans to projects in the developing countries.

The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (with assets exceeding \$1.5 billion) is still another institution that channels funds for development projects to Third World countries. Fund projects must have direct development impact on the recipient country's economy and a high priority rating in the country's own plans. The Fund's United States-educated director-general, Abdlatif al-Hamad, has been critical of the Western countries for not spending a greater percentage of their Gross National Product to help poorer countries develop. While he recognizes that high oil prices have contributed to the developing countries' plight, he insists that assistance for the poor cannot come from the oil-rich countries alone. (On an average, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates give around 3 percent of their GNP in aid, while the United States gives 0.26 percent. The best of the Western countries is Sweden with 0.82 percent.)

Kuwait's planners, intelligent and farsighted, are also pragmatic and realistic. They would like to see a greater degree of cooperation between the states of the Gulf and a breaking down of barriers, culminating in the creation of a common market in the region. For industrial projects, such cooperation will be

necessary in some cases to take advantage of economies of scale, in others to avoid gluts.

A regional common market would aid Kuwait's development as a services center. Its planners would also like Kuwait to play a big role in infrastructure projects. They are, for example, massively expanding electrical power production, and there is talk of an eventual joint grid with Saudi Arabia and even Iraq. They are enthusiastic about developing transportation, mercantile and financial services. They would like to encourage Kuwaiti companies to be active in other parts of the Gulf so that Kuwait can develop not merely as an entrepot but as an exporter of commercial skills and venture capital to the rest of the area.<sup>16</sup>

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# Book Views

## The Palestinians

By Jonathan Dimbleby; photographs by Donald McCullin  
Quartet Books, London, Melbourne, New York, 1979, 256 pp., \$25.00.

According to its introduction, *The Palestinians* focuses primarily on those who are in exile in Lebanon, because "they are the spearhead of the Palestinian Resistance to which the overwhelming majority of Palestinians, in the diaspora and under occupation, owe their allegiance." After describing a typical camp of refugees who, like many of those in Lebanon, come from Galilee, Dimbleby recounts the progressive stages of their dispossession: the British Mandate that encouraged the development of "a Jewish National Home"; the brutal repression, in 1936-38, of Arab resistance to this scheme, in consequence of which the Zionist proteges of the British were armed for the next two phases—Jewish terrorism against their sponsor, now weakened by World War II, and then against the native Arab population, as the British prepared to depart. Next he traces the equally bitter story of Palestinian resistance in exile: its success in Jordan, leading to the bloody expulsion of Fatah by Hussein's army in 1970; its renewed success in Lebanon from 1970 to 1976, when the Syrians turned against them, exposing them not only to the brutal siege of Tell el-Zattar, but to a particularly virulent form of internal dissent in consequence of that massacre.

Much of this sad story is told by the Palestinians whom Dimbleby interviewed, but he has skillfully supplemented their testimony by documentation from other sources—particularly Walid Khalidi's encyclopedic volume *From Haven to Conquest*. Dimbleby's conclusions are limited to those of a conscientious reporter. He is appalled by the history of the Palestinian tragedy and its perpetuation; he is dismayed, as an Englishman, by his country's responsibility for it; and he is appalled by the degree to which it has been misrepresented and ignored. The reader cannot fail to draw some other conclusions for himself—above all, that the Zionists have burdened the Palestinians with many of the problems of their own past. If it is true that history repeats itself, there is nothing more inevitable in such repetition than the hurt that man inflicts on his fellows. Like the Jews, under similar conditions, "inevitably they turned in

upon themselves, upon their memories. They shunned contact with outsiders and were themselves shunned in return." Their only moral sustenance is the memory of their homeland. In the words of Ibrahim Ghannam: "I feel that my life stopped at the age of 17, because that is how old I was when I left, and I only live when I dream of those days." Or in those of an elder of Galilee: "I am 85 years old. I left Palestine in 1948 when I was 55. But I am no older now than I was then. My life ceased at that moment." It is extraordinary how recurrent those phrases are, in the mouths of the young as well as the old. Thus an old man from Haifa says that since he left his country he feels "dead, alive, upside down" and adds: "I am waiting to die but I want to die in Palestine." And the words of Salah Tamani, a P.L.O. leader who fled from his native Jaffa as a child, are almost identical: "I am here yet I am not here. I want my body to be buried in Palestine."

The theme that emerges is a passionate and inextinguishable attachment to the land that has been lost: "Our motive is love, love for our country, not hatred for our enemy." How is it, then, that even the most moderate of the Zionist apologists generally argue that the Palestinians are so infused with hatred that any concessions made to them would be suicidal? Leaving aside the fact that this proposition has never been tested, and that the Israelis are even now continuing to fuel the Palestinians' resentment by plundering those remnants of their land that might still be offered as a most minimal concession, this point still requires explanation. And the explanation is very simple. If the Palestinians (or their Arab neighbors) feel they are talking to a hostile Westerner, they do indeed express hatred, but the hatred melts away once they realize that the Westerner has some understanding and sympathy, as in the case of Jonathan Dimbleby.

Even so, it may still be difficult for us Americans, accustomed as we are to a highly mobile society, to comprehend the Palestinians' yearning for the place where they were born. One really has to have lived in that part of the world to realize how real it is. I, for one, can attest to it.

The only significant omission in Dimbleby's account is that he fails to point out that the very same General Assembly that agreed, under United States pressure, to vote Israel into existence, also resolved, the same year,

that the Palestinian refugees should be allowed to return. Their words (par. 11 of Resolution 194 [III]) have been reaffirmed annually, and it was for this reason that the United Nations assumed responsibility for the refugees. While the work of U.N.R.W.A. was "rehabilitation," and regarded with suspicion by the Palestinians as a means of inducing them to give up their claim, U.N.R.W.A. has always been careful to allay such fears, and to reaffirm their right to return.

The author's anglicisms may provide occasional difficulty for his American readers, but the only one that requires explanation is "kaffir," which is not easily recognized as the Arabic term of *quffiyah* ("headcloth"). The lucidity and elegance of his style more than compensate for such problems.

There is, to be sure, a more serious weakness in the book. The text is extensively interlarded by photographs, many of which dramatically illuminate what is said. Far too many of them are repetitive, however, emphasizing the dreariness of the camps. McCullin likes to exploit photographic distortion and his technique is sometimes extremely effective, as in a nightmarish glimpse of the fleeing inhabitants of Karantina (pp. 256-7). In many other cases, however, the skewed effect obtained by the use of a wide-angle lens becomes obtrusive and oppressively monotonous. As a photographic essay, this aspect of the book is less successful than U.N.R.W.A.'s *Twice in a Lifetime*, distributed by A.M.E.U. some years ago, or by the P.L.O.'s *The Struggle Goes On*.

Reviewed by Henry G. Fischer

## The Elusive Peace: The Middle East in the Twentieth Century

By William R. Polk  
Croom Helm, London, 1979, 184 pp., \$15.95

*The Elusive Peace* provides the reader with virtually everything he or she should know about the Middle East—its history, attitudes, problems and recent developments—to understand its strategic importance and what is going on there today. Its author, an adviser to President Kennedy, became a professor at Chicago University.

Organized into three parts, historical background, post-World War II events and the future, Polk necessarily uses a broad brush, but remains accurate, objective and thorough in the space available. Certainly, he demolishes many



of the myths which unfortunately conditioned the views of most Americans.

Of significant value is the point that Arab perceptions stem largely from Islamic tradition and the colonial experience, and are almost exclusively Middle East-oriented. In contrast, Israeli notions largely derive from their Eastern European roots, most vividly the Russian pogroms of the 19th century and the Nazi horrors of the 20th. Then, too, most European Jews, especially those who founded Zionism and still constitute Israel's leadership, are not of Semitic origin, but descendants of the Khazars

converted to Judaism in the 9th century. Likewise, the Arab's emotional identity with the land versus the mobility and largely urban-commercial background of the European Jew helps explain divergent philosophies of life.

The almost simultaneous rise of Arab and Jewish nationalism, and their inevitable clash in Palestine, are adequately covered and logically lead into an account of the conflicting British commitments to Arab and Jew during World War I and the subsequent dilemma posed by the Balfour Declaration and its implementation under the

Palestine Mandate.

The section on "Capacity," or economic development, does much to explain Arab attraction towards statism, while the Jewish emphasis has been upon individual activity, initiative and adherence to the work ethic. The Arab military humiliation of 1948, and obvious technological inferiority and economic backwardness, explain much of Middle East political instability and the emergence of frustration of military leaders as exemplified by the Nasser revolution.

(Continued on page 16)

## Books To Order

### New Selections

Jonathan Dimbleby, *The Palestinians*, Quartet Books, 256 pp. \$25.00. Explores the crisis of a people without a land, demonstrating that the "Palestinian problem" is not an abstract issue but an urgent human tragedy. Fully illustrated with moving, dramatic, often harrowing photographs by Donald McCullin. Our price, \$17.50.

William R. Polk, *The Elusive Peace: The Middle East in the Twentieth Century*, Croom Helm, 184 pp. \$15.95. Good introductory book on the history of the Middle East; corrects many of the prevailing Western myths. Our price, \$11.75.

Uri Avnery, *Israel Without Zionists: A Plea for Peace in the Middle East*, Macmillan Publishing, 278 pp. \$1.95 (paperback). A remarkable description of Israeli politics, as presented by a member of Israel's Knesset and the sole representative of a party that believes in the transformation of the Jewish state into a pluralistic and secular one that is able to achieve reconciliation with the Arabs. Our price, \$1.70.

Robert B. Betts, *Christians in the Arab East*, rev. 1978, John Knox, 318 pp. \$12.00. A comprehensive study of the Arabic-speaking Christians and the role they have played in the Middle East from the time of the Islamic conquest up to present-day developments. Valuable demographic statistics and a comprehensive bibliography included. Our price, \$7.75.

John H. Davis, *The Evasive Peace*, revised 1976, Dillon/Liederbach Inc. 136 pp. \$5.95. Factual background to present Arab-Israeli dilemma, with a

prescription for peace in the Middle East. Our price, \$3.60.

Simha Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians*, Croom Helm (London). 361 pp. \$24.95. Spells out Zionist views on Palestinians prior to 1948 by outlining assumptions shared by most Zionists. In spite of differences within the Zionist movement, these assumptions continue in the present. Our price, \$15.50.

A.C. Forrest, *The Unholy Land*, Devin-Adair Co. 178 pp. \$3.95 (paperback). The author's personal, informed and uncompromising stand against what he considers to be imbalanced and distorted news coverage of the human tragedy brought about by the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. Our price, \$3.60.

Stephen D. Isaacs, *Jews and American Politics*, Doubleday & Co. 302 pp. An investigation into the role Jews play in American politics. It explodes many myths on this subject and shows how Jews have recognized and exerted the power they have. Our price, \$3.85.

Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel*, Monthly Review Press. 314 pp. \$12.50. Expanded version of Jiryis' original authoritative account of the deprivation of Arabs living in Israel. Our price, \$7.85.

Alfred Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection: What Price Peace?*, Dodd, Mead & Co. 800 pp. \$20.00. Covers the Arab-Israeli conflict from the time of Herzl to Camp David. It treats the subject from every angle. It is well-documented; the research involved is monumental. Contains much information of which Americans are mostly unaware. One authority has said that it should be read by every responsible citizen in the West. Our price, \$12.75.

Cathy Mellett, *Perspectives on the State of Israel*, High Butte Books, 132 pp. \$5.95 (paperback). Statements of many different opinions on the creation of the State of

Israel. Helpful for study groups and seminars. Our price, \$2.80.

Anthony Pearson, *Conspiracy of Silence: The Attack on the U.S.S. Liberty*, Horizon Press. 179 pp. \$9.95. An account of the Israeli attack on the Liberty during the June 1967 Middle East War and the ensuing lack of publicity and information. The author believes it was not an accident, as the Israelis claimed, and gives reasonably certain conclusions as to why the attack took place and the reasons for the cover-up. Our price, \$6.85.

Ephraim Sevela, *Farewell, Israel*, Gateway Editions. 295 pp. \$12.95. The author's disenchantment with Israel, which he had thought would be the fulfillment of his dreams, is emotionally expressed in his treatment of what he calls Israel's "racism" and the disintegration of the world's Jewish communities. Our price, \$8.10.

Raymonda H. Tawil, *My Home, My Prison*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 265 pp. \$12.95. Autobiography of a Palestinian woman whose description of life under Israeli occupation mirrors the changing moods on the West Bank. Our price, \$8.50.

Evan M. Wilson, *Decision on Palestine*, Hoover Press, 244 pp. \$14.95. Well-documented analysis of the six years leading up to the creation of Israel. Based on author's personal experience and on information only recently made available by the United Nations and governments involved. Our price, \$10.00.

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Turning to the Cold War, Polk scans United States policy and its attempt to construct a Northern Tier, and Arab "positive neutralism"—playing one Great Power against the other. A relevant point is the frequency with which an Arab recipient of largesse turned on the benefactor, exemplified by Egypt's expulsion of the Russians in 1972. On the other hand, the Cold War was very advantageous to Israel in its ever-closer ties with the United States, especially in the intelligence field.

In running through the Arab-Israeli "Hot Wars," Polk's account suffers perhaps from brevity. In the case of the June 1967 hostilities, he accepts the conventional Israeli contention that Nasser's objective was its destruction, and, hence, the "pre-emptive strikes were purely defensive—designed to assure survival." That Nasser had neither the military capability, nor intention of launching an offensive, is not suggested even though admitted by several Israeli military leaders today. Neither does Polk explore Zionist territorial objectives as possibly contributing to Israel's 1967 military operations and subsequent occupation and colonization of the West Bank area. Intentions here are obviously very relevant to the prospects for the success of the Camp David Framework for Peace.

American Middle East diplomacy, as successor to British imperialism in the area, is described as being preoccupied at first with satisfying the terrible legacy of the Holocaust, by giving the European Jews their own state in Palestine and then, in the Dulles period, with the containment of Soviet expansion. The various efforts to diffuse the Palestinian refugee problem by economic gimmickry revealed extraordinary political naivete, exemplified by the assumption that the basic conflict was between states and not peoples.

Considerable space is devoted to Lebanon, its civil war and the role of the Palestinians, Syrians and Israelis in a very complex and ever-shifting situation. Polk would seem to attribute Palestinian efforts to gain control in Jordan in 1970 and in Lebanon in 1975, as triggered by the Egyptian "cease-fire" and Sinai disengagement agreements of those years—a rather tenuous connection and one which especially downplays the very real conflicts emerging in Lebanon.

From a focus mainly on trends and events, Polk digresses briefly and provides biographic sketches of Begin and Sadat, leaders of such totally different backgrounds, perceptions and objectives as to constitute today's international

"odd couple" of the political scene. And yet, for both, the original enemy was the British—Begin using terrorism to get them out of Palestine and Sadat seeking to use the Germans to get them out of Egypt. Finally, Sadat, realizing after the 1973 War, that Israel could never be defeated militarily, launched his "stunning gamble," invited himself to Jerusalem and is now well on the way towards freeing Egypt of its most recent "foreign occupation."

In his assessment of Camp David, Polk rightfully recognizes the danger in eliminating the Soviet Union from the peace process and in avoiding any direct Palestinian involvement. A Soviet-Palestinian radical Arab "rejectionist front" is the inevitable result. Lack of agreement and consequent ambiguity on the powers and responsibilities of the self-governing authority, and on the concept and meaning of full autonomy for the West Bank, are correctly seen as future stumbling blocks. Curiously, however, Polk does not deal with fundamental and historic Israeli intentions vis-a-vis the West Bank as evident today in their far-reaching settlement program, nor does he speculate on the probability of increasing Palestinian "resistance" in this area.

The final selection consists largely of a factual description of the resources, geography and climate of the area, including a few interesting and revealing comparative statistics on oil production, pricing, etc. He points to the increasing mobility of labor throughout the Middle East as tending to homogenize its population. While portraying Israel as essentially a technologically advanced industrialized European state, he recognizes the weakness inherent in its almost total dependence on outside financial support and the demographic problem posed by its Arab population.

Polk concludes by posing three critical questions: Is an Arab-Israeli peaceful settlement possible? Will adequate oil supplies continue to be available to the West? What will be the impact of oil revenues on the world financial structure? His speculative answers depend on assumptions regarding Israeli flexibility, Western conservation and Arab restraint, which are problematical at best.

Although this is not a book for the research analyst, nor for the graduate student in Middle East studies, it is certainly one of the better texts for those wishing to improve on a superficial knowledge.

Reviewed by David Nes

*The Link* aims at maintaining contacts among Americans who believe that friendship with the people of the Middle East is essential to world peace, who would contribute to this goal by spreading understanding of the history, values, religions, culture and economic conditions of the Middle East, and who would—in this context—press for greater fairness, consistency and integrity in United States policy toward that area.

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