

Kuwait

Australia and Kuwait

- 3.1 Australia has a strong standing in Kuwait, with strong defence links in recent years building upon a history of steadily expanding trade and diplomatic relations.
- 3.2 In 1990, Australia's prompt condemnation of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and commitment of military forces to the Gulf War was much appreciated at the time and is warmly remembered by many Kuwaitis. Australia is also highly regarded for its commitment of forces:
- to enforce the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) mandate to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction following the end of the Gulf War;
 - to support for the Multinational Interception Force enforcing United Nations economic sanctions against Iraq; and
 - to assist in the defence of Kuwait.
- 3.3 In recent years, Australia and Kuwait have also established reciprocal military education and training links. Kuwaiti military personnel now attend some courses of instruction in Australia and in 1999 an Australian attended the Kuwait Joint Command and Staff College.
- 3.4 The defence relationship complements growing trade and diplomatic links between the two nations. During 2001, Australian exports to Kuwait rose by 51% to \$A485.4 million dollars. Australia's principal exports to Kuwait are motor vehicles, wheat, live animals and dairy products. It is noteworthy also that the Kuwait Liaison Office based in Canberra was upgraded to an embassy in January 2002 and that Kuwait's first

Ambassador, His Excellency Mr Nasir Ibrahim Al-Mazian, presented his credentials to the Governor General on 31 January 2002.¹

Official calls in Kuwait City

- 3.5 On arrival in Kuwait City, the delegation's first day was dedicated to series of official calls on key figures in the Kuwaiti Government and Armed forces. A brief record of the main issues raised at each meeting appears below.

Chief of Staff, Kuwait Armed Forces

- 3.6 On Monday 22 July the Leader and Deputy Leader of the delegation, Senator Ferguson and Mr Brereton, visited Lieutenant General Ali Mohammed Al-Mu'min, Chief of Staff, Kuwait Armed Forces. Senator Ferguson and Mr Brereton were accompanied by Brigadier Gary Bornholt, the Australian National Commander, and Colonel Roger Tiller, the Defence Attaché to the Australian Embassy in Saudi Arabia.
- 3.7 The discussion centred on the defence of Kuwait and the ongoing threat posed by Iraq, touching, in particular, on the following points:
- the military forces maintained by Iraq within relatively close proximity to the Iraq-Kuwait border;
 - the threat posed by Iraq, as it continued to develop chemical and biological weapons and the ability to deploy such weapons by means of long-range missiles;
 - the capability of the Kuwait Armed Forces; and
 - the deep concern felt by all Kuwaitis about the fate of the more than 600 civilian and military personnel captured by retreating Iraqi forces at the end of the Gulf War.

Speaker of the Parliament of Kuwait

- 3.8 All members of the delegation, accompanied by Brigadier Bornholt, Colonel Tiller and the Australian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, His Excellency Mr Bob Tyson (who is also accredited to Kuwait), next called on the Speaker of the Kuwait Parliament, His Excellency Jassem Al-Medej.

1 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Background Brief- Australian parliamentary delegation Kuwait, Afghanistan, Dubai, Kyrgyzstan, July – August 2002

- 3.9 During the call the Speaker stressed the importance of inter-parliamentary relations and contact. He stated that this was a key means by which nations could bridge cultural barriers and begin to understand one another. The Speaker believed Australia had an important role to play in the region and that visits by parliamentary delegations could influence debate and thinking.
- 3.10 The Speaker also addressed the issue of Iraq, remarking that:
- Iraqi opposition groups and the Iraqi people need ongoing support from the international community;
 - the regime of Saddam Hussein remains a threat to Kuwait, illustrating the point by noting that Saddam continues to refer to Kuwait as Iraq's '19th Province';
 - the possibility of United States-led military action against Iraq was of vital concern and presented a political challenge for the Kuwaiti Government as it sought to balance various considerations - national security, Kuwait's position in the Arab community and domestic public opinion.
- 3.11 The Speaker also raised the issue of the 600 Kuwaiti nationals captured at the end of the Gulf War and still thought to be held hostage in Iraq. He argued that this is a human problem, not a political issue, stressing the long-term impact on Kuwaiti families burdened with the disappearance of loved ones over ten years ago.

Minister for Foreign Affairs of State

- 3.12 The Kuwait Minister for Foreign Affairs of State, His Excellency Mr Mohamed Al Sabar, opened his remarks by thanking Australia for its support during the Gulf War and the period of the Iraqi invasion. He noted the growing links between the Australian Defence Force and the Kuwait Armed Forces, particularly in the area of personnel exchanges and training.
- 3.13 On Iraq, the Minister noted that:
- Iraq is openly defying the will of the international community, citing Iraq's refusal to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Arab League; and
 - the continuing development of weapons of mass destruction, especially those using chemical and biological agents, posed a direct threat to the region, specifically to Kuwait.

- 3.14 The Foreign Minister also mentioned that ten Kuwaiti nationals were being held in US custody at Guantanamo Bay, in Cuba, following their detention during Coalition operations in Afghanistan. Although the extent to which these captives were involved with either Al Qaida or Taliban forces is unclear, the Minister believed that the captives should be brought to trial. He stressed that, should the captives be found guilty of criminal or terrorist acts, the Kuwaiti Government would have no hesitation in taking appropriate action against them.

Visit to Camp Doha

- 3.15 On the second day of its program, the delegation visited Australian troops deployed in Kuwait. Australian forces deployed to Kuwait are primarily based at the large US military complex at Camp Doha, north of Kuwait City. This is one of number of US bases established in Kuwait during and after the Gulf War. While Camp Doha is primarily a US Army base, it has hosted other Coalition force elements since the end of the Gulf War. Australian troops who deployed to Kuwait in 1998 were staged in Camp Doha. Australian liaison officers have been based at Camp Doha for over ten years.
- 3.16 The major ADF elements based at Camp Doha are a small Army logistic support element and the Australian National Command Headquarters.

Brigadier Gary Bornholt, the Australian National Commander, welcoming the delegation to Camp Doha.

Australian National Command Element

- 3.17 The delegation was welcomed to Camp Doha by the senior Australian officer in the Middle East, Brigadier Gary Bornholt. Brigadier Bornholt began his briefing by describing the role played by Camp Doha as a base for the forward deployed Coalition forces ready to counter any direct attack from Iraq. The Coalition force based in Camp Doha has been constantly maintained since the close of the Gulf War. Brigadier Bornholt emphasised the ADF's long-term contribution to the defence of Kuwait.
- 3.18 Brigadier Bornholt also provided some background to the development of Australia's commitment, remarking that, in the early stages of building the Coalition, US Central Command (the US military component responsible for the current operations) had little appreciation of the capability that the ADF could bring to the Coalition. A key factor in establishing the ADF's credibility was the close professional relationship that existed between the ADF and US Pacific Command, a relationship developed and sustained over many years of having conducted joint military exercises and personnel exchanges.
- 3.19 Brigadier Bornholt is of the view that the ADF's reputation is now securely established and key Australian commanders participating in the Coalition Against Terrorism are fully integrated into the Coalition and US command structures.
- 3.20 In a practical sense, this means that he, as Australia's National Commander, has direct access to senior US and Coalition contingent commanders in the Middle East, Afghanistan and the United States, providing him with accurate and up-to-date situational awareness. This combined with the trust established through personal interaction is of critical importance in helping ensure that Australian troops are prudently employed.
- 3.21 At an operational level, Brigadier Bornholt reported that not only have the deployed Australian personnel made an impression with their reliability and competence, but that the Australian approach to war-fighting doctrine and tactics has influenced Coalition operations way beyond expectations, given the relative scale of our physical force commitment.
- 3.22 At this initial briefing Brigadier Bornholt also discussed the command and control arrangements for the Australian forces deployed to the International Coalition Against Terrorism. The issue was raised on a number of other occasions during the delegation and the main elements of the arrangements are outlined in Chapter 7.

Helicopter Tour of Kuwait

- 3.23 While at Camp Doha the delegation also had the opportunity to visit the US helicopter flight-line: inspecting the newly operational US Air National Guard AH-64 Apache Attack Helicopter and undertaking a terrain familiarisation flight of Kuwait on-board US Army Blackhawk helicopters. The key observations from this air tour of Kuwait were as follows:
- the temperature during the terrain flight was in excess of 50° Celsius. The extreme heat at this time of year and the barren, shadeless terrain create an oppressive environment, especially for those Coalition forces deployed in armoured vehicles in the desert; and
 - flying over ‘the Boneyards’ was a moving experience. This is an area inside Kuwait, but close to the Iraqi border, in which enormous quantities of Iraqi vehicles and equipment destroyed during the Gulf War have been stockpiled. The area is regarded as sacred due to the presence of human remains. It is also contaminated by the presence of expended depleted uranium rounds.
- 3.24 The delegation greatly appreciated the opportunity to undertake the terrain flight and are grateful for the support and flight-line briefings provided by the US helicopter commanders and crew.

Australian troops at Camp Doha

- 3.25 During the day, the delegation met with the Australians deployed to Camp Doha on two occasions: following the terrain flight, when discussions were held with the Australian Army logistic element based at Camp Doha; and later that evening, for a barbeque at the Australian National Command Headquarters.

Warren Snowdon MP and Graham Edwards MP with some of the
ADF personnel at Camp Doha

Bruce Scott MP with some of the ADF personnel at Camp Doha

- 3.26 On both occasions, the delegation was struck by the good humour displayed by all with whom they met. Accommodation and working conditions at Camp Doha are basic and the climatic conditions are testing, yet the deployed personnel are clearly committed to their tasks and proud of their role in the War on Terrorism.
- 3.27 The delegation was pleased to note that mail services between Camp Doha and Australia were said to be generally reliable and that there was a high degree of satisfaction with the availability of telephone, Internet and e-mail services. On the whole, morale seemed to be very high. There was also a sense, quite naturally, that people were looking forward to returning home at the completion of their tour of duty.

Conclusions and observations

- 3.28 The principal observations and conclusions following the visit to Kuwait were as follows:
- The Kuwait-Australia relationship continues to develop at a measured pace, with agricultural and other trade links being enhanced by a growing defence relationship. The Kuwaiti Government retains a strong interest in developing closer links with Australian defence training, education and equipment suppliers. It is especially notable that Kuwait has extended tremendous hospitality and friendship to Australian troops deployed in Kuwait since the close of the Gulf War.
 - The Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein remains the most significant security concern for the Kuwaiti Government. The Government judges that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capability and the existence of delivery systems, such as surface-to-surface missiles, pose genuine security threats to the Gulf region. Concern about the continued detention of Kuwaiti prisoners of war held by Iraq since the end of the Gulf War is a powerful sentiment within Kuwait and is unlikely to be resolved without the unconditional return of all detainees.
 - The Australian forces deployed to Kuwait are fully integrated with other Coalition forces based in Kuwait. Australian commanders have ready access to intelligence and operational information and to key Coalition force leaders. It is apparent that the ADF has developed particularly close ties with the United States Armed Forces. Common language, similar doctrine, cultural familiarity and long-established links between the two forces have enabled this strong relationship.

- Australian interests have been very well served by the decision to appoint an Australian National Commander and to deploy the commander and his staff to a location where there is immediate access to information and key Coalition force leaders. The importance of being able to establish personal ties and build trust between Coalition partners and commanders is critically important, particularly for a small country like Australia. Without such ties it would be difficult to be properly engaged in the war effort and to protect Australia's interests and the welfare of its serving personnel.
- The climatic conditions in Kuwait during mid-summer, and the tasks assigned those Coalition forces deployed to Kuwait, ensure that daily working life is testing and arduous.
- The ADF personnel deployed to Kuwait have a clear sense of purpose, a strong commitment to their duties, and high morale.