

# **Shaikh Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah, 1895-1965**

*submitted by*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This is the first monograph-length academic study of Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah, Ruler of Kuwait between 1950 and 1965. It is based on British and US government records, interviews, and a wide range of secondary sources in Arabic and English. It traces the development of modern Kuwait from the mid-eighteenth century under the al-Sabah up to the accession of Shaikh Abdullah in 1950. It considers the succession question in Kuwait before 1950, and Abdullah's lengthy period as a candidate for succession, which enabled him to develop and expand his ideas for his country before becoming ruler.

The study also examines the way that Abdullah transformed Kuwait into the first rentier state in Eastern Arabia and analyses his impact on the development of Kuwait's administrative system. The influence of Arab nationalism and Britain on his decision-making and his relationship with Arab nationalists and the British Government, as well as his subtle handling of Kuwait's border dispute with Iraq, are also investigated in detail.

This study focuses on the six major challenges that Abdullah overcame in order to transform Kuwait into a rentier state: (1) his political victories and defeats prior to his reign that shaped his political ideas, (2) his twenty-nine-year struggle to become ruler of Kuwait, (3) how he changed the direction of Kuwait's development process by moving away from the politics of his predecessors, (4) his troubled relationship with the al-Sabah in Kuwait's government administration, (5) how he dealt with the pressure exerted by Arab nationalists and the British Government on his political decisions, and (6) how he handled Kuwait's troubled relationship with Iraq.

This thesis argues that Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah was an exceptional leader not only among the rulers of Kuwait (1752 to present), but also among the rulers of the Gulf Arab states in general. He was the first ruler to introduce a rentier state system that provided extensive welfare services for all of his country's citizens, securing his family's position in government in the process. He led Kuwait to independence in 1961 and oversaw the drafting of its constitution in 1962. He was a skilled politician and diplomat, who negotiated a delicate balance between the competing interests of the Kuwaitis, the ruling family (the al-Sabah), the Arab nationalists, the British Government, and the Iraqi government. As a result, he has enjoyed a popularity within Kuwait second only to the founder of modern Kuwait, Shaikh Mubarak al-Sabah (r.1896-1915).

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

“Justice is the basis of rulership”

— Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah

### 1.1. Introduction

From the mid-eighteenth century, when the al-Sabah rose to prominence as the ruling family of Kuwait, up to the present (2014), there have been fifteen rulers from this family, although only a few of these have attracted the attention of historians. Chronologically, the first ruler of note was Sabah I (r. 1752-66), the first al-Sabah ruler of Kuwait, who was chosen by the ‘Utub tribal confederation.<sup>1</sup> The second notable ruler was Mubarak al-Sabah (r.1896-1915), known as the founder of modern Kuwait. The third notable ruler, and the focus of this thesis, was Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah (r.1950-65), Mubarak’s grandson. Abdullah is regarded as the architect of modern Kuwait: he pioneered the welfare state<sup>2</sup> and rentier state in Eastern Arabia in the 1950s, transforming Kuwait in the process.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Utub is a tribal confederation of families that includes the al-Sabah (the ruling family of Kuwait) and the Al Khalifa (the ruling family of Bahrain), among many other families and tribes. The confederation originated from Najd in central Arabia, from where it migrated to Zubarra (on the northeast coast of Qatar) in the seventeenth century, then to Basra, then Kuwait in the early eighteenth-century, before splitting between Kuwait and Qatar in the 1760s.

<sup>2</sup> Defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “a system whereby the state undertakes to protect the health and well-being of its citizens, especially those in financial or social need, by means of grants, pensions, and other benefits. The foundations for the modern welfare state in the UK were laid by the Beveridge Report of 1942; proposals such as the establishment of a National Health Service and the National Insurance Scheme were implemented by the Labour administration in 1948.”

<sup>3</sup> A rentier state is a state that derives all or a substantial portion of its national revenue from the “rent” of indigenous resources (particularly oil) to external clients. Hossein Mahdavy first postulated this theory in 1970: Hossein

Between 1896 and 1965, an era that encompassed the rulerships of Mubarak al-Sabah and Abdullah (the seventh and eleventh rulers respectively), Kuwait faced a number of difficult challenges: the era of Ottoman over-lordship (1871-1914) which threatened Kuwait's autonomy, the struggle between Western colonial powers for supremacy in the Gulf (1890s-1914) that Kuwait found itself in the middle of, the First World War (1914-1918) on which Kuwait found itself on the front line, and the vacuum created after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the rise of Arab nationalism<sup>4</sup> that threatened to undermine the al-Sabah's position in Kuwait, and the Iraq-Kuwait Crisis of 1961 during which Kuwait risked being annexed by Iraq. Among all the rulers of Kuwait during this time — namely: Mubarak (r.1896-1915), Jabir II al-Mubarak (r.1915-17), Salim al-Mubarak (r.1917-21), Ahmad al-Jabir (r. 1921-50), and Abdullah al-Salim (r.1950-65) — it was Mubarak and Abdullah who struggled the most for the stability of Kuwait and the survival of the al-Sabah. Without their endeavours, Kuwait might not exist as an independent state today.

Despite the significance of the three most notable rulers — Sabah I, Mubarak, and Abdullah — in the history of Kuwait, only Mubarak has been studied at any length.<sup>5</sup> There are no book-length academic studies in English of the other two rulers. The scarcity of documentation is the main obstacle to compiling a study of Sabah I, but it is not clear why there

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Mahdavy, "the Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: the Case of Iran," in *Studies in Economic History of the Middle East*, ed. M. A. Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> Defined by Oxford index as a movement of "an anticolonial ethos and the glorification of origins and history in the face of Western dominance experienced by Arab countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Aims at political reunification of all Arabic-speaking states. Roots traced by some scholars to eighteenth-century reform movements or nineteenth-century anticolonial movements; others consider it a twentieth-century phenomenon based on Arabic language and culture. Manifested in the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire during World War I to protest its Turkification program, and in the short-lived United Arab Republic (merger between Egypt and Syria from 1958 to 1961). Invoked by Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War in a failed attempt to unite Arabs and Muslims against Western powers."

<sup>5</sup> Salwa Muhammad al-Ghanim, *The Reign of Mubarak Al Sabah: Shaikh of Kuwait, 1896-1915* (PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990); Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi, *Biyan al-Kuwait: Siyrat Haiyat al-Shaiykh Mubarak al-Sabah* (Lebanon: al-Mu'sasa al-'arabiya lil-nashsher, 2006); B. J. Slot, *Mubarak al-Sabah: Founder of Modern Kuwait 1896-1915* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2005).

have been no book-length studies of Abdullah in English, since both the British Library and the UK National Archives have a vast quantity of material on his reign.

There are many reasons for undertaking research on the political life of Abdullah, who remains prominent among all the other rulers of Kuwait. He is known as the architect of modern Kuwait because of his pioneering role during the 1950s and 1960s in the modernization<sup>6</sup> of Kuwait by transforming it from a tiny pre-oil proto-state into a modern welfare state. Kuwait out progressed all the Gulf Arab states during his rule, outpacing even Saudi Arabia in many respects. He led Kuwait successfully through this period of rapid change in a region characterised by tremendous domestic instability. With his strong character and political skills, Abdullah kept Kuwait politically stable and secure between 1950 until his death in 1965, despite the great stresses and strains associated with the country's rapid transformation and march toward modernity.<sup>7</sup>

For example, H. R. P. Dickson and Ahmad al-Baghdadi both report that Abdullah was one of the strongest of Kuwait's modern rulers, describing him as calm, frugal, modest man, a peacemaker, and a skilled politician who managed to transform Kuwait from a pre-modern proto-state into a modern welfare state.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, during Abdullah's reign, Kuwait witnessed an unprecedented building and expansion of its infrastructure and government institutions, coupled with the establishment of governmental welfare, health, and education services that were provided to Kuwait's entire

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<sup>6</sup> Modernization: "Adapt (something) to modern needs or habits, typically by installing modern equipment or adopting modern ideas or methods" (OED).

<sup>7</sup> Modernity: "The quality or condition of being modern, also a modern way of thinking, working, etc.; contemporariness" (OED).

<sup>8</sup> H. R. P. Dickson, *Kuwait and her Neighbours* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956); Ahmad al-Baghdadi, *Al-Shaikh 'Abd-Allah as-Salim Ensan wa-Rajol Dawlah* (Al-Kuwait: Dar Quarts lil-Nasher, 1994).

citizenry. Abdullah designed and supervised these developments as the first of their kind in the Gulf Arab states; he was regarded much in the same way that Dubai's most famous ruler, Shaikh Muhammad bin Rashid al-Maktoum (r.1958-90), is regarded today for his vision and transformation of Dubai during the 1960s-80s. Abdullah's supervision of Kuwait's development plans were founded on then uncommon belief that Kuwait's oil wealth belonged to all Kuwaitis, not just the al-Sabah; he therefore distributed this wealth to his fellow citizens through an extensive programme of national development and the provision of social services. Abdullah used Kuwait's oil wealth to good effect during a period of significant domestic instability and rapid regional change. He used Kuwait's enormous increase in oil revenues at the beginning of the 1950s to establish national legal and constitutional institutions, which were necessary for the eventual independence of Kuwait in 1961. Also, he used some of Kuwait's oil income to establish the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, which helped secure Kuwait's place in the Arab League as a newly independent state. As one of the greatest figures in Kuwait's history, a comprehensive study of his political life is long overdue.

This thesis analyses six challenges to Abdullah during his seventy-year life, from 1895 to 1965. It divides his political life into two stages: (1) before his ascendancy to power in 1950 and (2) during his rule of Kuwait, 1950-65. Chapter Two studies the influence of several events and conditions in Abdullah's early life on his political thoughts. Chapter Three examines political succession in Kuwait before 1950, including Abdullah's efforts to fulfil the traditional criteria for ascendancy. Chapter Four examines how Abdullah created a welfare, rentier state in Kuwait. Chapter Five analyses Abdullah's influence on securing his family's hold over the growing government administration. Chapter Six investigates the influence of Arab nationalists and

Britain on Abdullah's decisions, while Chapter Seven explores the effects of the prevailing political problems between Kuwait and Iraq on Abdullah's decisions.

This thesis argues that it was Abdullah as much as the oil wealth he commanded that was responsible for Kuwait's transformation into a welfare, rentier state between 1950 and 1965. It examines how Abdullah was a pioneer in his decisions and reforms, not only among the rulers of Kuwait, but also among the rulers of the Gulf Arab states in general. It discusses Abdullah's ability to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with important members of Kuwaiti society: his own family, the wealthy merchant elite, and the educated middle class. His mutually beneficial relationships also extended to the British Government and important members of the Arab League, particularly Egypt.

Throughout his political career, Abdullah focused on achieving Kuwait's full potential. He strengthened his family's rulership of Kuwait, he introduced pioneering reforms, he achieved early independence for Kuwait (ten years before the other British-protected Gulf Arab states), and he oversaw the drafting of a popular constitution. He also promoted Kuwait's solidarity with the Arab World, and maintained such strong links with Britain after Kuwait's independence that it remained Kuwait's protecting power, and came to Kuwait's help soon after independence. Abdullah changed the direction of his country's development from a relatively stagnant one inherited from his predecessors to one of a dynamic welfare, rentier state to be inherited by his successors. The pillars of the rentier state of Kuwait today owe more to him than to anyone else. Over the course of Abdullah's political career, he faced six major challenges that he endeavoured to overcome.

The first of these challenges was the formation of his political ideas up to 1950 and his ability to remain open-minded and flexible in his thinking in the face of setbacks. These ideas were shaped by several events, most notably his grandfather's seizure of power in 1896, his education, his financial difficulties, his years of self-imposed political exile between 1923-35, and the *Majlis* Movement of 1938-39. These events influenced Abdullah's ideas, personality and relationships during the 1920s-40s, preparing him for his rulership of 1950-65.

The second of these challenges was Abdullah's first attempt, in 1921, to assume the rulership of Kuwait. This was followed by a long period of dispute over the succession with Ahmad al-Jabir (r.1921-50), as well as other candidates for the succession, before he finally managed to achieve his goal of becoming ruler in 1950. Early in this period, Abdullah was forced to leave the political scene in Kuwait. Despite a political absence of twelve years (1923-35), Abdullah remained motivated by many factors, including the slow dawn of the oil era in the 1930s, to return to politics in 1935, eventually becoming *de facto* deputy ruler and heir apparent by the 1940s.

After Abdullah assumed power in 1950, he focused on overcoming a third challenge: to change the direction of Kuwait's development by moving away from the politics of his predecessors. From his first days as a ruler, Abdullah began steering Kuwait towards a welfare state system. Although he faced many administrative and political problems, he succeeded in most of his efforts in the end. He faced strong opposition to his plans for reform, as well as corruption in the process of the country's development, but overall, these and other problems did not stop him from achieving his final goal of transforming Kuwait from a pre-oil proto-state into

a modern welfare state. With the help of a younger generation of shaikhs and other elites, he managed to create the first welfare, rentier state in Eastern Arabia by the end of his reign.<sup>9</sup>

The fourth challenge that Abdullah faced was the role of the ruling family in Kuwait's expanding government administration. Since the mid-eighteenth century, the ruling family had held a prominent position in the country's administrative system with the tacit agreement between it and the people of Kuwait. However, Abdullah had to adjust this arrangement as soon as he became ruler. During the 1950s, he changed the state apparatus of Kuwait several times, a process that strengthened the role of the ruling family in Kuwait's administrative system. However, after Kuwait's independence in 1961, Abdullah had to create a more stabilised role for the ruling family in the administrative system, this time according to the regulations embodied in the new constitution in 1962. That year, Abdullah oversaw the process of delegating government powers to the ruling family and key members of Kuwaiti society. As the head of the country's Executive, he appointed the most capable and experienced members of the ruling family to the highest government posts. In this way, he stabilised and reorganised the role of the ruling family in Kuwait's government administration from one based on tradition to one based on law.

The fifth challenge Abdullah faced concerned the pressure of the struggle between Arab nationalists and the British on his political decisions. In this case, Abdullah had to deal carefully with the Arab nationalists' influence on Kuwait's domestic politics and foreign affairs because, from the mid-1950s, they formed the main front for the political opposition in Kuwait. But Abdullah was flexible in dealing with the Arab nationalists' demands for reforms in Kuwait. For example, during the Suez Crisis in 1956, he managed to contain the Arab nationalist

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<sup>9</sup> For a summary of Abdullah's achievements towards the end of his reign, see Ralph Hewins, *A Golden Dream: The Miracle of Kuwait* (London: W H Allen, 1963).

demonstrators in Kuwait City against the attack on Egypt by Britain, France, and Israel without harming either Kuwait's national security or his good relations with the British Government.

In foreign affairs, his successful policies during the Suez Crisis continued until 1959, when he had to change direction due to the Arab nationalists' demands for reform. This time, Abdullah had to deal coercively with the Arab nationalist opposition in his country while showing his commitment to joining the Arab League. Abdullah ran the country autocratically to achieve the goals of rapprochement with the Arab World during a period of great change in the country's ruling system and to ensure the national security of Kuwait's neighbouring countries (the main factors for the disturbances in the region were the Iraq coup in 1958, and the Cold War). In the end, Abdullah achieved his goal by winning Kuwait's independence from Britain in 1961, introducing a constitution in 1962, and establishing a national parliament in 1963. These events contributed to improving Kuwait's relationship with the Arab nationalists at home and abroad, thus maintaining the country's domestic stability and standing within the Arab World.

Kuwait's troubled relationship with Iraq was the final challenge that Abdullah faced. This controversial issue had occupied the minds of all Kuwaitis since the Ottoman annexation of Kuwait in 1871 and especially since the establishment of the modern state of Iraq in 1921. Abdullah had to treat the matter carefully because of several factors, most importantly the demarcation of the border. During the 1950s, the Iraqi government used the border issue as a bargaining tool for concessions from Kuwait. By the end of the decade, Iraq's efforts had accelerated to the point where it claimed that certain parts of Kuwait, and subsequently the whole of Kuwait, were an integral part of Iraq.

Iraq's increasing claims over Kuwait's territory developed into a serious threat to Kuwait's very existence in June 1961, just a few days after it had achieved independence from Britain. This threat forced Abdullah to take an unpopular measure to safeguard his country's national security by requesting British and then Arab military protection. He ultimately achieved a treaty with Iraq in 1963 that recognised Kuwait as an independent state. Although Abdullah had intended to do his best to solve the differences with Iraq during his reign, this issue later re-emerged as Kuwait's most serious foreign affairs problem after his death in 1965, when a new Iraqi government subsequently renounced the 1963 treaty. The failure of the two countries to find a permanent solution to their differences had little to do with the nature of Abdullah's decisions, it was the result of the Iraqi Baath Party's refusal to accept the 1963 treaty after it seized power in Baghdad in 1968. This stance eventually led to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 on the premise that Kuwait had historically formed part of Ottoman Iraq.

## **1.2. Theoretical framework: Rentier State Theory**

Since the late 1980s, rentier state theory has been used extensively to explain socio-political developments in oil rich states, particularly in the Gulf Arab states — known, since 1981, as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Hossein Mahdavy was the first to develop this theory in 1970, along with the term “external rent” (meaning external revenue), which he applied to the case study of Iran during the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-79).<sup>10</sup> The theory was further developed in 1987 by Hazem al-Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, who gave the theory its primary characteristics and factors and its implication for the Gulf Arab states.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mahdavy, “The Patterns and Problems.”

<sup>11</sup> Hazem al-Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani suggested four characteristics that would determine whether or not a state could be identified as rentier: (1) if rent situations predominate, (2) if the economy relies on a substantial

In theory, a rentier state is politically autonomous from the society it governs. It does not levy tax from society; instead it allocates its external income to it. This greatly reduces the need for domestic support, as society is simply bought off, relinquishing its say in how government is run in exchange for a share in the external rental income or benefits from it. The rentier state is usually ready to deploy its repressive apparatus to silence critics and those who refuse to accept, or are excluded from, the “rentier bargain”,<sup>12</sup> also known as the “grand bargain”. Many early rentierists came to the logical conclusion that the rentier state is inherently anti-democratic.<sup>13</sup> They also concluded that rentier states were fairly stable and secure, seemingly immune from disturbances elsewhere in the region during the 1950s-90s.<sup>14</sup>

In 1999, Michael Herb further developed the theory by arguing that external rent should be regarded as an “intervening variable”, since these states were later shown to have experienced political instability.<sup>15</sup> In 2002, he argued that rentierism is merely a characteristic of politics rather than a model for the entire political structure.<sup>16</sup> He came up with the factor of royal monarchies, where power is distributed among an entire ruling family, which occupies positions

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external rent - and therefore does not require a strong domestic productive sector, (3) if only a small proportion of the working population is actually involved in the generation of the rent, and (4) perhaps most importantly, if the state’s government is the principal recipient of the external rent. The information is taken from Hazem al-Beklawi and Giacomo Luciani. “The Rentier State in the Arab World”, in *the Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (London: Routledge, 1990), 87-88.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Gray, *A Theory of Late Rentierism in the Arab States of the Gulf*, Occasional Paper No. 7 (Qatar: CIRS Georgetown University, 2011), 6.

<sup>13</sup> See among others Giacomo Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework,” in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 76-77; Michael Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?,” *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001): 325-61; Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Camilla Sandbakken, “The Limits to Democracy Posed by Oil Rentier States: The Cases of Algeria, Nigeria and Libya,” *Democratization* 13, no. 1 (2006): 135-152; implied in Robert J. Barro, “Determinants of Democracy,” *Journal of Political Economy* 107, no. S6 (1999): 158-83.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Albany: State University of New York, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Michael Herb, “Does Rentierism Prevent Democracy?” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston Marriott Copley Place, Sheraton Boston & Hynes Convention Center, Boston, Massachusetts, August 28, 2002).

throughout government — monopolising government, the police, and military at all levels. This, he believes, is the reason for the resilience of the ruling families and the rentier state.<sup>17</sup>

Most recently, in 2010, there have been debates in the field of Gulf Studies about the need to update rentier state theory since the old rentier state “grand bargain” has begun to break down in many GCC states owing to declining per capita revenue and the state’s inability to guarantee (well paid) government employment and other state benefits for all citizens. Increasing levels of corruption within the ruling families is typically cited as the reason for this. The renewed debate about rentierism focuses on the theory’s underestimation of certain political dynamics. Matthew Machowski argues that the theory must include, and account for, facets of political life such as the impact of religious legitimacy,<sup>18</sup> customs of succession, coercive state apparatus, traditional allegiances, and the strong tradition of patronage.<sup>19</sup> James Hollo has used the case of Qatar, where both the state and its citizens have attempted to craft a national narrative, as evidence for the need to reframe the theory.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Islam’s political significance was not actively cultivated by any party in Kuwait before the 1970s. The question of religious legitimacy does not really apply to Abdullah’s reign therefore. Jamal Sanad and Mark Tessler argue that, in early 1970s, some young members of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood felt that Kuwait, as an Islamic state, had lost its way on the path to political development in the 1950s and 1960s, that there had been no advancements in democracy. They argued that ideologies imported from the West, such as Nationalism, Socialism, Marxism, and Capitalism, and the movements they inspired, such as Pan-Arabism and Ba’athism, were un-Islamic — that they did more harm than good in the Middle East. Instead, the Middle East must look to its own traditions, especially to Islam, to find solutions to its problems. See Jamal Sanad and Mark Tessler, “Women and Religion in a Modern Islamic Society, the Case of Kuwait,” in *Religious Resurgence and Politics in the Contemporary World*, ed. Emile Sahliyeh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 195-218.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Machowski, “Rentier State’ Theory and the Survival of the Arabian Monarchies,” *MidEast Journal*, Sunday 17 July (2010), accessed February 20, 2014, [www.matthewmachowski.com/2010/07/rentier-state-theory-and-gulf.html](http://www.matthewmachowski.com/2010/07/rentier-state-theory-and-gulf.html).

<sup>20</sup> James Hollo, “Rethinking Rentier State Theory: Qatar and the Rise of Smart Money,” *Fair Observer*, October 11, 2013, accessed February 20 (2014), <http://www.fairobserver.com/article/rethinking-rentier-state-theory-qatar-rise-smart-money>.

Rentier state theory's critique has three main weaknesses. Firstly, its focus on economics without a sufficient political context decreases its utility.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, its explanations are oversimplified.<sup>22</sup> Thirdly, it accounts for political activism in the Gulf Arab states, initially in Bahrain alone, but now in most GCC states as well.<sup>23</sup>

These three critiques have sparked the emergence of a second generation of rentierists, starting with Michael Herb in 1999. They approach rentier state theory along two different lines. The first is "specialized rentier state theory", where rentier state theory is combined with other theories such as the modernisation theory and/or specific disciplinary approaches like economics or politics. The second is "conditional rentier state theory", in which descriptive conditions, nuances, or individualized conditions are added to the theory to increase its applicability, utility, or validity".<sup>24</sup> This study follows the work of Herb and new rentierists<sup>25</sup> in its use of rentier state theory, regarding rentierism as a characteristic of politics and intervening variable rather than as a model for the entire state. It covers the political and social history of Kuwait from 1752 to 1965.

Rentierism has influenced the development of Kuwait from 1946 (the year Kuwait began receiving external rent in the form of oil revenue) up to the present. Today, oil rent accounts for more than 95% of Kuwait's revenue. This study examines the development of Kuwait and its

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Rosser, "The Political Economy of the Resource Curse: A Literature Survey," (Working Paper 268, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, April 2006): 7, [www2.ids.ac.uk/gdr/cfs/pdfs/wp268.pdf](http://www2.ids.ac.uk/gdr/cfs/pdfs/wp268.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Sean Foley, *The Arab Gulf States: Beyond Oil and Islam* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010), 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> Gray, *A Theory of Late Rentierism*, 5; Suzanne Maloney, "The Gulf's Renewed Oil Wealth: Getting it Right This Time?," *Survival* 50, no. 6 (2008): 129-50.

<sup>24</sup> Gray, *A Theory of Late Rentierism*.

<sup>25</sup> The other authors are: Marc Valari, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos-State* (London and New York, Hurst and Oxford University Press, 2009); and Toby Craig Jones, *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 2011).

institutions during its early years as a rentier state from 1950 to 1965, the period of Abdullah's rulership.

In Kuwait, the rentier state model comprises the following. First and foremost, Abdullah established a welfare state system — Kuwaitis were to be provided for from the cradle to the grave. Citizens received free land, interest-free loans to build houses on that land, free healthcare, and free education. Secondly, Kuwaitis were guaranteed government jobs with high salaries that both tied them to the state and made them a part of Kuwait's transformation. Thirdly, Kuwaiti businessmen had their interests protected through the introduction of nationality laws requiring all businesses and business ventures in Kuwait to be 51% owned by nationals. The combined effect of these three things made Kuwaitis both dependent on the state and beholden to it. A clear understanding emerged, known as the “grand bargain”, in which Kuwaitis agreed to refrain from politics and support the government in return for these benefits.

### **1.3. Methodology**

Information for this thesis was collected from three sources: (1) archives, (2) interviews with Kuwaitis, and (3) secondary sources. The archival information was collected in the United Kingdom, while interviews with Kuwaitis were conducted in Kuwait. The secondary material (published and unpublished) was collected in both countries, in Arabic and in English. Research for this thesis took place during the first year of studies. During this period, countless trips were made to the British Library, the National Archives of the UK, and the Exeter University Library to collect information. Field trips were also made to Kuwait to collect as many primary and secondary sources as possible, and to conduct interviews with eyewitnesses.

Throughout the thesis, British Government records were the main source of information. The reason for this heavy reliance on these sources is the richness of information in the memorandums, correspondence, reports, and letters about Kuwait produced by the British Political Agency in Kuwait, the British Political Residency in the Gulf, and the British Government of India, as well as the India Office and Foreign Office in London, because of their responsibility for Kuwait's foreign affairs (1899-1961) and defence (1899-1971). These records are housed in the British Library and the National Archives of the UK in London. and the US These records were augmented by a smaller amount of US Government records from the US Consulate in Kuwait (opened in 1951). During the first stage of research, information for this study was collected from both these archives; more than 300 files and microfilms as well as thousands of documents and papers were consulted.

Due to the scarcity of Kuwaiti government records from 1895 to 1965, this thesis has had to depend heavily on British and US government records as its main primary sources. In fact, Kuwait still suffers from a shortage of government sources for information before 1990. Kuwait's Amiri Court Archive (*Arshif ad-Diwan al-Amiri*), located in the Dasman area, lacks material due to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, which resulted in the loss and destruction of most of the Kuwaiti government's documents, including the rulers' local and regional political correspondence. Although the Kuwaiti government claimed back its archives from Iraq through the United Nation's intervention immediately after the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, few documents were in good condition and many more were missing. This situation forced the government to recreate the country's archive, this time based on photocopies of British and American government records relevant to Kuwait history.

During my fieldwork in Kuwait, many endeavours were made to obtain information from *Arshief ad-Diwan al-Amiri*. These endeavours were unsuccessful primarily because of the disorganisation of the archive (it is not sorted by date or subject or class-mark but by the document's main keywords), the absence of many relevant documents, the restricted access to the archive (special permission is required to access any record), and the restriction on copying the documents. Because of these obstacles, the thesis had to rely on alternative sources of information, mainly British and US government records.

The Arab World Documentation Unit (AWDU) at Exeter University provided information about Kuwait. It contains microfilmed copies of US government records from the US Consulate in Kuwait (opened in 1951). The US Consulate in Kuwait produced less important documents than those from the British Political Agency, due to the restrictions applied to the Consulate by the British Government (such as limited access to and contact with the ruler and the heads of Kuwait's departments at that time); even so, these documents offer an alternative point of view on the development of Kuwait and the events of the period. To answer the research questions, two sets of microfilms kept in the AWDU were reviewed; between them they included more than one thousand documents.

The thesis also relied on interviews with notable Kuwaitis. During the first year of the research, at least ten interviews were conducted to collect information for this study. The interviewees were chosen from different categories: some from Abdullah's relatives, others from the older generation of political activists, and some from the new generation of political activists. I had to overcome many obstacles when collecting information through the interviews. Many interviewees were hesitant about providing detailed information about Abdullah's political life.

For example, I endeavoured to interview Shaikh Ali al-Salim, Abdullah's last surviving son. He politely refused to be interviewed and referred me instead to the Centre of Research and Studies on Kuwait. I endeavoured to interview Shaikh Mohammad Sabah al-Salim, Kuwait's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, but was unable to gain access to his office.

However, a second and third round of interviews provided very useful information for this thesis. The second round provided testimony from Kuwaiti activists who had participated in some of the political events during the time of the study. For example, Dr Ahmad al-Khatib (a famous Kuwaiti person who led the Arab nationalist opposition in the 1950s-60s) provided very good information based on his accounts of Abdullah's reign. But although al-Khatib's testimony was useful, the historical records do not corroborate it. Thus, the information collected during these interviews had to be interpreted with caution. The third round of interviews focused on Kuwaiti politicians, eyewitness, and academics. The main aim of the interviews was to reflect on and ascertain the extent of Abdullah's legacy in the country. These interviews provided general information about Abdullah, with most agreeing that Abdullah was one of the greatest rulers in the history of Kuwait and the Gulf Arab states.

The study also drew upon information collected from hundreds of books, articles, and newspaper articles. These sources were collected from public libraries in Kuwait and the UK, private libraries in Kuwait, and the Centre of Research and Studies on Kuwait.

#### **1.4. Literature Review**

This section discusses the literature covering the six challenges Abdullah faced during his political career. Little has been written in English about Abdullah's early political life, especially

the influences on his political ideas before 1950, and most of what has been recorded is scattered across several books and articles on Kuwait. Two exceptional works in English focus briefly on Abdullah's political career as a whole, including his early life. The first is a book written by Alan Rush in 1987 entitled, *Al-Sabah: History & Genealogy of Kuwait's Ruling Family 1752-1987*,<sup>26</sup> which focuses on the general history and genealogy of the al-Sabah in Kuwait. In his work, Rush summarized Abdullah's political life in a brief discussion based on British Government records from the 20th century: this text is considered to be the standard source for scholars on Abdullah and other members of the ruling family up to 1987. However, this work does not examine matters in detail and sheds no light on the early years of Abdullah's life.

The second work is a chapter entitled, "Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah" by Jill Crystal in *Political Leaders of the Contemporary Middle East and North Africa* (1990) edited by Bernard Reich.<sup>27</sup> In this chapter, Crystal emphasised Abdullah's role in the history of Kuwait by presenting him as the architect of Kuwait's transformation in the 1950s-60s. Despite its brevity (one chapter), this is the only work that clearly summarises Abdullah's early political career. Although this work is the most important work on Abdullah in English to date, Crystal did not apply rentier state theory to her study to elucidate the political motivations and strategies behind Abdullah's creation of the first welfare state in the Gulf. It was this brief study that motivated me to flesh out the full story of Abdullah's political life in greater detail.

Similarly, the literature in Arabic gives insufficient coverage of Abdullah's early political life. The few existing works in Arabic amount to three books, all of which focus on Abdullah's

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<sup>26</sup> Alan de Lacy Rush, *Al-Sabah: History & Genealogy of Kuwait's Ruling Family 1752-1987* (London, Ithaca Press, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> Jill Crystal, "Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah," in *Political Leaders of the Contemporary Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Bernard Reich (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 8-14.

legacy to Kuwait's youth. Fatma al-Ali wrote the first political biography of Abdullah's political life in 1984, entitled *'Abd Allah as-Salim: Rajol 'Asha wa-lm Yamut* [Abdullah al-Salim: a Man who Lives and does not Die].<sup>28</sup> In this book, she outlined Abdullah's achievements in his reign, that is, his astute and intelligent political life which she thought was a reflection of his early childhood. Yosef al-Turki gave another account of Abdullah's life in his book, *Al-Shaikh 'Abdullah as-Salim as-Sabah, 1950-1965 Hayatuh wa-A'amaluh* [Abdullah al-Sabah, 1950-1965: His Life and Deeds]<sup>29</sup> written in 1985. Al-Turki followed al-Ali's aims by providing a descriptive biography that emphasised Abdullah's reforms and achievements in the 1950s-60s. The third work by Ahmad al-Baghdadi, entitled *al-Shaiykh 'Abd-Allah as-Salim Ensan wa-Rajol Dawlah* [Abdullah: Human Being and Statesman],<sup>30</sup> aimed to show Abdullah's high regard for humanity in treating all members of Kuwaiti society justly, including the poor, both before and after his ascendancy to the rulership. None of these books analysed Abdullah's main political challenges in his reign or examined his political activities before he came to power in 1950, and as a result, many important parts of the man's life in the history of Kuwait remain unknown to the readers such as the important influence on his reign of his travel to India. This thesis examines Abdullah's political life in its entirety.

The second challenge Abdullah faced in his political career was his long struggle to become ruler during 1921-50. Many historians have discussed the chronicle of the succession cases in Kuwait, starting from its first case in 1766. For example, in his book, *Tarikh al-Kuwait* [Kuwait History], Abdulaziz al-Rasheed wrote about the continuity of succession among the al-

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<sup>28</sup> Fatma al-'Ali, *'Abd-Allah as-Salim: Rajol 'Asha wa-lm Yamut* (al-Kuwait: Matba'at hkwm al-Kuwait, 1984).

<sup>29</sup> Yosef Abdul-Muhsin al-Turki, *Al-Shaikh 'Abdullah as-Salim as-Sabah, 1950-1965 Hayatuh wa-a'Amaluh* (al-Kuwait: al-Turki lil-Nasher, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Al-Baghdadi. *Al-Shaikh 'Abd-Allah as-Salim*.

Sabah successors prior to 1928.<sup>31</sup> Another important book is, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al Hadith* [Modern History of Kuwait] written by Ahmad Mustafa Abu-Hakima, which provides a good account of the transfer of power in the ruling family of Kuwait until 1950 (only 15 pages were allocated for Abdullah's reign).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, in Yusuf bin Isa al-Jena'ai's book, *Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwait* [Pages from the History of Kuwait], the author provided a brief account to show how the al-Sabah ruled the country in 1752 and subsequently organised the process of succession among its members.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, in his five volumes, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi* [Kuwait's Political History] Hussain Khalaf Khaz'al provided a very detailed study that describes the reigns of al-Sabah's rulers in Kuwait before 1962.<sup>34</sup> Finally, Fred Anscombe's book, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* offered a good account of how and why Kuwait and other Gulf Arab states sought independence from the Ottoman Empire with ties with the British in the beginning of the twentieth century. He attributes the Ottoman Empire's loss of power in the Gulf area to the combination of poor communication, scarce resources, and misplaced security.<sup>35</sup>

Concerning the efforts of previous authors, none of them explained in detail the system of choosing a ruler's successor, which Abdullah sought through his birth right and acquired through political strategy, in order to assume power in 1950. Only one exceptional study came close to explaining the nature of the succession process and its main pillars in Kuwait before 1962 (the year of the ratification of the constitution which now orders the process of succession in the country). This study was *Rooh al-Destour* [Spirit of the Constitution] by Muhammad

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<sup>31</sup> Abdulaziz al-Rasheed, *Tarikh al-Kuwait* (Kuwait: Dar Quarts lil-Nasher, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Ahmad Mustafa Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al Hadith* (Al-Kuwait: Dar al-Salasil, 1965).

<sup>33</sup> Yusuf bin Isa al-Jen'ai, *Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwait*. Fifth edition (Al-Kuwait: Dar al-Salasil, 1988).

<sup>34</sup> Shaiykh Hussain Khalaf Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi*, vol.1-5 (Beirut: Maktabat al-Hilal, 1988).

<sup>35</sup> Frederick F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

Abdulqader al-Jassim in 2007.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, his study focused largely on discussing the articles of the Kuwait Constitution, and made little effort to analyse the succession process in detail, including Abdullah's striving for succession. This thesis, therefore, offers a unique opportunity to examine and discuss a new subject in the field of constitutional study that would contribute to Abdullah's experiment.

Because the third aspect in Abdullah's political life is his achievement in transforming the country during the 1950s and 1960s, the context of the literature mentioned in this paragraph focuses on the discussions of historians of this important phase in the history of Kuwait. In this context, most historians have concentrated on the effect of oil on Kuwait and the ways in which Abdullah used it for the sake of his people; however, each author takes a slightly different approach to the others. Peter Mansfield tackled this subject in his book, *Kuwait: Vanguard of the Gulf* (1990), offering considerable information about Abdullah's special role in transforming Kuwait into a centre of learning, research, and expertise, and a major financial centre in the Arab World.<sup>37</sup> Jill Crystal added detailed information on the stages of the Kuwaiti transition in 1950s-60s in her book, *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State* (1990), which shows that Abdullah steered Kuwait towards the modern era but this was based on the condition that the ruling family would control political power in the country.<sup>38</sup> Finally, Rosemarie Said Zahlan contributed to the subject in her book, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States* (1989) by emphasising that Abdullah

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<sup>36</sup> Muhammad Abdulqader al-Jassim, *Rooh al-Destour* (Al-Kuwait: Dar Quarts, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Peter Mansfield, *Kuwait Vanguard of the Gulf* (London: Hutchinson Publishing, 1990).

<sup>38</sup> Jill Crystal, *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

was dedicated to using the oil revenues for the socio-economic improvement of Kuwait because of his belief in the principle of democracy.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the efforts of previous historians and others to discuss Kuwait's transformation era, there is a lack of detailed information regarding Abdullah's political decisions that underpinned the rule of the country between 1950 and 1965. The historians have paid special attention to the possible incentives behind Abdullah's decision to distribute wealth amongst Kuwaiti society (albeit sometimes, unequally), but although they covered Abdullah's reign intensively because of its links to oil and the transformation of Kuwait, they have not focused in depth on the obstacles that he faced in managing the country's development plan.<sup>40</sup> In addition, they did not pay attention to Abdullah's efforts in terms of transforming Kuwait into a welfare, rentier, state, which contributed to enhancing Abdullah's reputation among all Kuwaitis. Therefore, this research contributes to the field by addressing these two important aspects in Abdullah's political life.

The historians' coverage of the fourth aspect in Abdullah's political life, i.e., his influence on the ruling family's position in Kuwait's government administration, is another very important subject for discussion. In his book, *All in the Family* (1999) Michael Herb looked at the way the ruling family in Kuwait was the first in the Gulf area to become dominant in the administration of its country, just after the discovery of oil in 1938.<sup>41</sup> He also discussed how and why the ruling family system in Kuwait survived during a period of massive changes in monarchical rule in the Middle East. In a similar effort, Jill Crystal's book, *Oil and Politics in*

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<sup>39</sup> Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter Four for more explanation of how much power and wealth Abdullah shared with Kuwaiti society.

<sup>41</sup> Herb, *All in the Family*.

*the Gulf: Ruler and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (1995) pointed out that the ruling family had always looked for a prominent role in Kuwait's government administration.<sup>42</sup> She noted the ruling family's strategies to minimize the infighting among its senior members for power and prestigious positions, and to prevent the merchants from affecting the political scene by securing their absence from decision-making, through the government's adoption of a distribution plan for the oil revenues. Simon C. Smith's book, *Kuwait, 1950-1965: Britain, the al-Sabah, and Oil* (1999), was written in the same context.<sup>43</sup> It looked at the collaborative relations between the three components of political development in Kuwait during the 1950s and 1960s, noting that the al-Sabah had managed to overcome all the constraints on maintaining their prominent position in Kuwait and the region. The ability of the al-Sabah to survive eased the transition of Kuwait to a modern state.

The historians mentioned above have put considerable effort into discussing the effect of oil on the survival of the ruling family in Kuwait. However, not one of them focused specifically on Abdullah's decisions during the 1950s and 1960s that resulted in the expansion of the prominent position of the ruling family in Kuwait's government administration. While oil represents an important component in calculating the survival of the ruling family, Abdullah used it carefully for its benefit. The essential role played by Abdullah in Kuwait's development, including the expansion of the ruling family's position in Kuwait's government administration, is also dealt with by the present research

The fifth important matter in the political life of Abdullah, that is his relationship with the Arab nationalists and Britain, is covered by three important books. The first is Ahmad al-

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<sup>42</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*.

<sup>43</sup> Simon C. Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965: Britain, the al-Sabah, and Oil* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Khatib's *Al-Kuwaiyt: Min al-Emarah ila al-Dawlah, Dhkraiya al-'Amal al-Watani* [Kuwait: from Emirate to State, Memories of the National Action], which reflects the author's endeavour to record a valuable account of the political activities of the Arab nationalists in Kuwait from the beginning of the 1950s. This work is important because of the author's own participation in previous activities as a leading figure of the Arab Nationalists' Club in Kuwait. Al-Khatib provided detailed information on the relations between the Kuwaiti authorities and his group of Arab nationalists within and outside Kuwait's government administration. The second work is a PhD thesis produced by Falah al-Mdairis in 1987 entitled, *The Arab Nationalist Movement in Kuwait from its Origins to 1970*.<sup>44</sup> This academic study is one of the finest attempts to analyse the Arab nationalist movement in Kuwait during Abdullah's reign. Finally, Riyadh N. al-Rayyes wrote a well-researched chapter about the nationalist influence on the Gulf in the book, *The Arab Gulf and the Arab World*. His work focused in general on the Arab nationalists' influence on Kuwait and other Gulf Arab states in 1950s-60s.<sup>45</sup>

Even though the influence of Arab nationalists on the stability of Kuwait in the 1950s-60s is a major subject for discussion by historians, none of these scholars analysed Abdullah's role in containing the issue itself or its effect on his decisions. Since the intention of these historians was to show how monarchic rule in Kuwait survived the peak of Arab nationalism in the Middle East, they did not cover the strategies Abdullah deployed to improve his country's relations with Arab nationalism and Britain in any particular detail. During the peak of the Suez Crisis and the increasing grievances among the Arab nationalists towards Britain's imperialist policies in the Middle East, Abdullah tried his best to retain his alliances with the British and as well as the

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<sup>44</sup> Falah al-Mdairis, "The Arab Nationalist Movement in Kuwait from its Origins to 1970" (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1987).

<sup>45</sup> Riyadh N al-Rayyes, "Arab Nationalism and the Gulf," in *The Arab Gulf and the Arab World*, ed. B. R. Pridham (London: Croom Helm, 1988), 67-94.

Arab nationalists. This thesis therefore provides a new account of an important aspect in Abdullah's politics.

Three significant studies covered the sixth matter in Abdullah's political life that concerned Kuwait's political problems with Iraq. Details of all of these problems were published after the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In his book *Kuwait and Iraq: Historical Claims and Territorial Disputes* (1991) Richard Schofield clearly made the point that the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border dispute during the twentieth century was based on the beliefs of various Iraqi governments and their insistence that Kuwait was simply a province of their own country.<sup>46</sup> However, David H. Finnie in, *Shifting Lines in the Sand: Kuwait's Elusive Frontier with Iraq* (1992), added that, as a result of historical evidence, Kuwait under al-Sabah's rule could not be considered simply to have been an integral part of Iraq.<sup>47</sup> In the same context, and following the line taken by Finnie, Abdullah al-Ghunaim published, *Tarsiym al-Hadud al-Kuwayityyah al-'Araqia: Al-Haq al-Tarikhii wa al-Erada ad-Duwaliyya* (1994) [The Demarcation of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border: the Historical Right and the International Will], which was written with the aim of expanding Kuwait's right to denounce all Iraqi claims to his country as an integral part of Iraq immediately following the invasion of 1990.<sup>48</sup>

Even though these three studies have done much to cover the main Kuwaiti-Iraqi political issues of the twentieth century, they failed to focus on Abdullah's influence on these problems. In fact, most studies conducted in the 1990s were aimed specifically at investigating the origins of the problems between Iraq and Kuwait, which had led to the August 1990 events and Iraq's

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq: Historical Claims and Territorial Disputes* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991).

<sup>47</sup> David H. Finnie, *Shifting Lines in the Sand: Kuwait's Elusive Frontier with Iraq* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1992).

<sup>48</sup> Abdullah al-Ghunaim, *Tarsiym al Hadud al Kuwayityyah al iraqia: al Haq al Tarikhii wa al Erada al Dawliyya* (al-Kuwayit: Markaz al-Buhuth wa al dirasat al Kuwayityyah, 1994).

incursion into Kuwait. At that time, historians were keen to evaluate the political position of the two countries and their long-standing disputes over the issue of the demarcation of the border. Their relentless pursuit of the issue of whether to defend Kuwait's stand on the matter, or to look elsewhere for the origins of the problem has reduced the chance to focus on the effect of Abdullah's decisions on the development of Kuwait's case. Therefore, this study focuses on the effect of the decisions on this issue taken during his reign by one of Kuwait's most important rulers.

It is important at this point to discuss one more study that contradicts the previous works. While most historians direct the reader's attention to Abdullah's rulership abilities, Miriam Joyce moved in the opposite direction. She offered a different explanation of the life of Abdullah, in the light of his relations with the British and American diplomatic corps in Kuwait.<sup>49</sup> Her book, *Kuwait 1945-1996: An Anglo-American Perspective* (1998), described Abdullah as a mysterious man with contradictory qualities who, at some moments, escaped from political events by holidaying abroad or who retreated into isolation on the island of Failaka, and threatened to abdicate because of the difficulties he faced in getting to grips with his internal problems. At other times, she portrayed Abdullah as a statesman who had decided to accelerate progress towards achieving Kuwait's independence, to strengthen his domestic front against the Iraqi claim to Kuwait in 1961, and to introduce democracy in 1963. Joyce barely accounts for Abdullah's political career before 1950; she only mentioned that he was the president of the 1938 *Majlis* or the reasons behind his seemingly "strange" behaviour as a ruler.

The discussion of the literature on Abdullah has revealed six key aspects of his political life that require further investigation. This study endeavours to cover these aspects by offering

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<sup>49</sup> Mariam Joyce, *Kuwait 1945-1996: An Anglo-American Perspective* (London: Frank Cass, 1998).

the first book-length academic study of his political career. Various challenges in Abdullah's life are examined, based on British and US government accounts, relevant sources, and interviews with eyewitnesses. This effort begins with a discussion of how, early on in his political career, Abdullah strived to develop his political ideas, and to secure authority and power in Kuwait's government administration.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Abdullah's Early Life and Political Influences, 1895-1950

#### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter examines Abdullah's early life, between 1895 and 1950. It focuses on his political relationship with his family and the Kuwaitis. It discusses the influences of several events in these early years which affected Abdullah's political thoughts and later life's decisions as ruler in Kuwait from 1950 to 1965. The chapter is intended to establish a good understanding of how Abdullah's personality shaped to create the first rentier state in the Gulf.

The chapter is divided into four main sections: (1) Abdullah's genealogy, his childhood and its influences on him; (2) his financial status and struggle with Ahmad al-Jabir; (3) the withdrawal period from his political life and its influence on his political thoughts and relationships, (4) his re-engagement with Kuwait politics in 1935 including his participation in the 1938-39 *Majlis* Movement, and his domination of a large share of Kuwait's administrative system from 1939 to 1950.

#### 2.2. Abdullah's Genealogy

Abdullah was the eldest son of Salim al-Mubarak (r. 1917-21), the ninth ruler from the al-Sabah. Abdullah's grandfather was Mubarak al-Sabah (r. 1896-1915), the seventh ruler, and his uncle was Jabir II al-Mubarak (r. 1915-17), the eighth ruler. Abdullah's turn to be the ruler came in

1950 when he assumed power after a long wait during the reign of his cousin, Ahmad al-Jabir (r. 1921-50).<sup>50</sup>

Abdullah was born in Kuwait in 1895, and his mother was Mariam al-Jarrah, a cousin of his father, Salim al-Mubarak. During his life, Abdullah married more than once, the most important of these marriages were with Mariam al-Jabir, Bebe al-Nasser and Nassima al-Hamad (all of them were his first cousins). However, from other marriages, mostly from outside the ruling family, Abdullah had three sons, Saad al-Abdullah (r. 15 January – 24 January 2006),<sup>51</sup> the fourteenth ruler of Kuwait, Khalid al-Abdullah and Ali al-Abdullah. He also had two daughters, Hassa al-Abdullah and Luluwa al-Abdullah.<sup>52</sup>

Abdullah had three half-brothers, Ali al-Salim, who died in the al-Raq'ai battle in 1928, Sabah al-Salim (r. 1965-77), the twelfth ruler of Kuwait, and Fahad al-Salim, who died in 1959. He had one sister, Bebe al-Salim who was the wife of Ahmad al-Jabir and the mother of Jabir al-Ahmad (r. 1977-2006), the thirteenth ruler of Kuwait.

Abdullah's genealogy describes his interfamilial link with the rest of al-Sabah in Kuwait; and this description indicates Abdullah's place amongst the ruling family. Because of his important position in the family, Abdullah was able to engage with the rulership and social affairs of the al-Sabah from an early age.

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<sup>50</sup> Rush, *Al-Sabah*, 39-44.

<sup>51</sup> His short reign was the result of a deterioration in his health, and to the ruling family and the National Assembly's vote to bypass the rulership of Kuwait to Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmad (2006 to present).

<sup>52</sup> Rush, *Al-Sabah*, 39-44.

### 2.3. The Assassination of 1896

A year after Abdullah's birth, the system of rule in Kuwait and the relationship between Mubarak al-Sabah and his descendants, and the remainder of the ruling family and Kuwaitis changed greatly. This happened due to the fact that Mubarak al-Sabah, Jabir II al-Mubarak, and Salim al-Mubarak assassinated the sixth ruler of Kuwait Muhammad al-Sabah (r.1892-96) and Jarrah al-Sabah in 1896 (both brothers of Mubarak al-Sabah).<sup>53</sup> This assassination is considered to be the first and only case to occur in the history of the ruling family in Kuwait; therefore, naturally, a change was expected.

The old system of rule in Kuwait shifted from the Islamic principle of *Shura* (consultation) between the ruler and the ruled to autocratic rule maintained and protected by Mubarak al-Sabah. The Kuwait system of rule changed completely after the assassination in 1896; Mubarak al-Sabah ruled autocratically by refusing to delegate any of his powers to his close relatives.<sup>54</sup> He appointed only close and loyal followers, all of whom were from outside the ruling family and he placed them in important positions, such as: the Secretary to the ruler, in the Customs Department, and in the Business Headquarters in Iraq and India.<sup>55</sup>

Probably the obvious reason for Mubarak al-Sabah's new adopted procedures was his fear that if he let any of the al-Sabah share part of his responsibility, it would create an opportunity to overthrow him. Based on this interpretation, Abdullah, Salim al-Mubarak and Jabir II al-Mubarak were consequently out of power and control as they were not

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<sup>53</sup> Al-Jen'ai, *Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 25-27.

<sup>54</sup> Extract from notes on Kuwait prepared by Major J. C. More (PA, Kuwait), 1927, IOR: R/15/1/504 (British Library, London).

<sup>55</sup> Mullah Salih was Mubarak al-Sabah, Jabir II al-Mubarak, Salim al-Mubarak, and Ahmad al-Jabir, who was the only commercial agent for the al-Sabah in Kuwait. Abdulaziz al-Bader was Mubarak al-Sabah's agent in Basra. Abdullatiff al-AbdulJalil was Mubarak al-Sabah's manager of Customs dues in Kuwait. Al-Qasimi, *Biyan al-Kuwait*, 248-9; Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi*, vol. 2, 297.

allowed to exercise any power in higher positions and they were under a very strong centralization of financial control from Mubarak al-Sabah.<sup>56</sup> For example, Jabir II al-Mubarak was the Deputy ruler of Kuwait when Mubarak al-Sabah was away; however, his power was limited to certain domestic duties involving local disputes in the courts and not the important decisions of finance and war. Another example was in 1915 when Mubarak al-Sabah sent Salim al-Mubarak to rescue Ibn Saud from the Ajman siege in Hasa. He was given strict orders to follow, so as not to involve the Kuwaiti army in a fight with the Ajman (Arab Desert tribe) until Ibn Saud's army showed defeat or victory.<sup>57</sup>

These examples provide insight into the relationship between the two closest people to Mubarak al-Sabah, "his sons", who he obviously did not fully trust. But what about the other parts of the ruling family? Abdullah did not have a chance to fulfil his ambition to control power in Kuwait, as Mubarak al-Sabah continued his autocratic rule until 1915. Therefore, Abdullah had little opportunity to gain power or political control until Salim al-Mubarak's accession in 1917 when he had the opportunity to implement some change.

Another consequence of the assassination of 1896 was the separation of the ruling family into two main branches. On the one hand were Mubarak al-Sabah and his descendants, and on the other the descendants of Muhammad al-Sabah and Jarrah al-Sabah, led by Yusuf al-Ibraheem (one of the wealthiest merchants in Kuwait and a close relative to the al-Sabah). The assassination naturally caused a rift between the two branches of the ruling family, particularly when the second branch moved to Iraq and contracted with the Ottoman authority in Basra to

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with former Kuwaiti Minister Yusuf al-Nssuf in Shuwaikh industrial area, Kuwait: 9 October 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

return the descendants of the two murder victims to power in Kuwait and to plot against Mubarak al-Sabah.<sup>58</sup>

There is no doubt that Abdullah was involved in the dispute, especially since his mother was a daughter of the murdered Jarrah al-Sabah and considered to be a close relative to the second branch. Fortunately, Abdullah was too young to officially join one of the two contesting branches; however, his unique situation and close relationship with both branches had an effect on his personality as well as his decision-making when he became ruler in 1950 (see Chapter Four).

The final consequence of this event was the change in the concept of a transition of power in Kuwait. The assassination had paved the road for Mubarak al-Sabah to monopolise Kuwait's eligibility of rule within his descendants, therefore, disqualifying all other relatives from the ruling family. Mubarak al-Sabah's decision had not been opposed or rejected by his relatives or Kuwaitis apart from his murdered brothers' descendants, with whom they finally reached a settlement of their differences with Mubarak al-Sabah. They joined the others in accepting Mubarak al-Sabah as ruler of Kuwait when the latter promised to return their rights to date plantations in Iraq and to property in Kuwait, in 1903.<sup>59</sup>

Consequently, Mubarak al-Sabah's relatives' and the Kuwaitis' acceptance of his rule was a continuation of his policy of limiting eligibility to succeed to his descendants. Before reaching the agreement with his relatives in Iraq in 1903, Mubarak al-Sabah managed to sign a treaty with the British in 1899. The treaty and other later ones in his reign in 1907 and in 1914

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<sup>58</sup> Khalaf al-Shammari. *Al-Mustawda' wa al-Mustahdar fi Asbāb al-Nizā' Bayna Mubārak al-Ṣabāh wa-Yūsuf al-Ibrāhīm 1896-1906* (Jordan: Dar al-Salatien 2010), 46-50.

<sup>59</sup> Al-Ghanim, "The Reign of Mubarak Al Sabah," 10-103.

fortified his policy of limiting the eligibility of rule in his descendants. Among the treaty text, the sentence “Mubarak and his heirs pledged themselves,” gained importance as it limited the nomination for succession in Kuwait to Mubarak al-Sabah’s descendants.<sup>60</sup> As a result, the possibility that Abdullah might rule increased, as well as his position within the local community as a prospective candidate for succession just after Salim al-Mubarak and Jabir II al-Mubarak. To sum up, the event of 1896 changed Abdullah’s prospects by putting him on top of the list of successors in Kuwait and it prepared him to engage in Kuwait’s ruling affairs.

#### **2.4. Abdullah’s Upbringing**

Abdullah spent his childhood in the Shaikhs Avenue district in the *Wassat* neighbourhood in the centre of Kuwait City. Shaikhs Avenue was a famous area located to the east of Kuwait’s main market and next to the shore. In the beginning of the twentieth century, all the ruling family lived in this area, near *Bahita* hill (the location of Sief Palace today).<sup>61</sup> In 1901, Abdullah moved with his family to a well-built property in *Bahita* hill.<sup>62</sup>

During his early years, Abdullah grew up under the shadow of Mubarak al-Sabah. Since he was the chief commander of the desert districts, Abdullah’s father, Salim al-Mubarak spent most of his time with the Bedouins outside Kuwait City. Thus, Abdullah was closer to Mubarak al-Sabah, the dominating figure in the ruling family. Therefore, along with the rest of the young shaikhs of the al-Sabah, Abdullah was influenced by Mubarak al-Sabah’s character and leadership. Mubarak al-Sabah became an ideal figure to Abdullah who emulated his strong rule

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<sup>60</sup> see pages 236-37 for more detail information on the full content of the treaty

<sup>61</sup> Saif al-Shamlan. *Min Tarikh al-Kuwait* (Al-Kuwait: that al-Salasil, 1986), 102.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Yacoub al-Ibraheem (a grandson of Yusuf al-Ibrahim), London: 23 November 2010.

in establishing the modern Kuwait.<sup>63</sup> By the time he became a man, Abdullah's relationship with Mubarak al-Sabah was strengthened. However, Mubarak al-Sabah's death early in 1915 halted his impact on Abdullah's personality and the formation of his political thoughts.

Mubarak al-Sabah's relationship with Salim al-Mubarak also reflected on Abdullah's later life and political thoughts. This relationship deteriorated during the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. In fact, it led Salim al-Mubarak to partly withdraw from politics in Kuwait to the desert with Bedouins. This deteriorating relationship was the result of several issues all of which reflected Salim al-Mubarak's dissatisfaction with Mubarak al-Sabah's way of ruling Kuwait. One reason for his dissatisfaction was Mubarak al-Sabah's reluctance during his last years of rule to strengthen Kuwait's desert sovereignty over the Bedouins of Arabia. Salim al-Mubarak's feeling was based on the fact that a strong tide of sovereignty over the deserts of Arabia had been created, by a new Prince in Najd, Ibn Saud. However, Mubarak al-Sabah's attitude was to support Ibn Saud no matter the result, even if it was to harm his relationship with Salim al-Mubarak.<sup>64</sup>

Another reason was Salim al-Mubarak's view concerning the close relationship between Mubarak al-Sabah and the ruler of Muhammarah Khaz'al. Salim al-Mubarak saw in this close relationship a great threat to Mubarak al-Sabah and the ruling family's position and role in Kuwait. To him, the threat to the ruling family was presented by the alteration in Mubarak al-Sabah's main role, that is, — from dealing with local affairs into dealing with regional affairs, therefore, ignoring the importance of gaining local support which was considered to be the main basis of the ruling family's role and existence in Kuwait. Salim al-Mubarak did not succeed in

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<sup>63</sup> Crystal, "Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah," 8-14.

<sup>64</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 17 February 1917, IOR: R/15/1/513; PA, Kuwait to Sir Percy Cox, Basra, 15 February 1917, IOR: R/15/5/19 (British Library, London).

his attempt to change Mubarak al-Sabah's decisions and ideas, thus he preferred semi-retirement from the political life of Kuwait.

Evidence of the deteriorating relationship between Mubarak al-Salim and Salim al-Mubarak came in May of 1908, when Mubarak al-Sabah arranged lavish wedding festivities for Abdullah and Hamad al-Mubarak. These matrimonial festivities were held in the plush new *Sief* Palace of Mubarak al-Sabah (built in 1904). This ceremony was considered the most notable social event of the year for the ruling family; indeed, a sum estimated at 30,000 pounds was collected from the merchants and shopkeepers in the Kuwait market to cover the expenses of this event. The Political Agent in Kuwait stated that, "the money was exacted from the Kuwaiti people by circulating a list just after the merchants had dutifully presented their rich gifts to the Shaikh [Mubarak al-Sabah]." <sup>65</sup> This wedding festival was attended by Mubarak al-Sabah's best friend Khaz'al and many other notables and merchants from Basra. The honoured guests were entertained by two Egyptian singers, Munira al-Mahdiya and Mahmoud Hamdi al-Mawlawi, and their orchestra. <sup>66</sup>

In 1908, Abdullah married Mariam, the daughter of Jabir II al-Mubarak and the sister of his cousin Ahmad al-Jabir. Abdullah's wedding followed Hamad al-Mubarak's wedding by three days. Abdullah would have been twelve to thirteen years old when he married. Following the festivities, Khaz'al invited Mubarak al-Sabah and his descendants to complete their wedding festivities in Muhammarah Palace. Mubarak al-Sabah accepted the invitation and took both new grooms and his sons to the city of Muhammarah. Salim al-Mubarak did not attend Abdullah's wedding ceremony and the public and his believers saw his action as that of a stern Muslim who

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<sup>65</sup> India Office, Administration report for Kuwait, for the year ending 31 December 1908 IOR: R/15/508 (British Library, London): Al-Ghanim, "The Reign of Mubarak Al Sabah," 192-93.

<sup>66</sup> Al-Ghanim, "The Reign of Mubarak Al Sabah," 192-93.

disapproved of musical festivities. However, most probably Salim al-Mubarak's action was the result of his opposition to his father's way of ruling Kuwait when the latter invited Khaz'al to the wedding of Abdullah.<sup>67</sup>

Overall, Abdullah learned many political ideas for his future life from his father. Firstly, he learned how to show his opposition to the ruler of Kuwait. Secondly, he learned how to use the instrument of withdrawal from Kuwaiti political life as a way of demonstrating his protest against the method of ruling Kuwait. Finally, he learned how to interrupt his protest in order to open negotiation channels with the ruler and public in order to return to political life. He learned this from his father's failure to assume rulership of Kuwait in 1915 when he was absent so much that he failed to engage in succession matters during Mubarak's last days of rule (for more details see Chapter Three).

## **2.5. Abdullah's Education**

Abdullah's early education was shaped by the main principles of the Islamic tradition as a result of his father, Salim al-Mubarak's desire to bring him up properly. Consequently, Abdullah's education was a combination of Quranic studies and basic mathematics. This was the typical education that any child from the ruling family would have received while attending the *Kutab* (traditional Arabic school). Despite the low level of education for children in the *Kutab* at that time, there was an opportunity for clever children to continue their education. This was based on the principle of self-study when a child began to increase his knowledge by reading Arabic books, magazines, newspapers and poems. Abdullah was one of these children. He read Arabic

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<sup>67</sup> Nasser Ahmad Khaz'al, *al-Hwaz al-Mady wa al-Hader wa al-Mustaqbal* (Beirut: Dar al-M'arafah, 1990), 169; Yahya al-Robi'an, *Malamah min at-Tarikh al-Musaww il-shaikh 'Abd-Allah as-Salim: min al-Jad ila al-Hafid* (al-Kuwayt: Sharikat al-Robi'an lil-Nasher, 2002), 47.

literature, history, and poems, especially from the period of the Rashidun, Umayyad, and Abbasid caliphate. He also subscribed to the only private library in Kuwait at that time, the “al-Rwwayah library,” so he was able to read the new journals and newspapers that were delivered to the library from Iraq and Egypt.<sup>68</sup>

As yet, there is no evidence of the newspapers and publications that Abdullah read or collected in his early age. However, according to Abdulaziz al-Rasheed during Kuwait’s intellectual and reform movement in the beginning of the twentieth century, which was carried by some famous merchants and educated Kuwaitis who were inflamed by the visit of many Arab nationalists and scholars, one can assume that Abdullah at least read the *al-Mannar* Magazine and the *al-Muayad* newspaper. Those two publications were the first to reach Kuwait and they aimed to spread the banner for the Intellectual movement, which called for unity among Arabs in the Middle East.<sup>69</sup>

Chronologically, Abdullah’s early years of education had accompanied the intellectual and reform movement in Kuwait that started in the early twentieth century. The first library was opened in 1904 by merchants’ efforts to distribute some famous newspapers and books around the Arab World and India. Next, Kuwait witnessed the establishment of the first school and hospital in 1911. In spite of the failure of the hospital, due to the use of an unskilled Turkish doctor, the first school proved to be useful to the local society, and the merchants, with some help from the ruling family, who expanded it in 1921 and opened two other schools. In 1928, the first Kuwaiti magazine was published by Abdulaziz al-Rasheed, and in 1932 the first

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<sup>68</sup> Al-Turki, *Al-Shaikh ‘Abdullah as-Salim*, 19-20.

<sup>69</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 350-65.

municipality was opened by Yusuf bin Isa and some merchants.<sup>70</sup> Overall, the reforms increased yearly and Kuwait reaped the benefits as did Abdullah.

Abdullah was not completely removed from these obvious improvements to the local society, and he participated secretly in the intellectual and reform movement. According to al-Rasheed, Abdullah was considered one of the top workers in administering the intellectual and reform movement through his subsidies and contributions to its activities. Abdullah purchased ten subscriptions to the first Kuwait magazine in 1928 and sent it abroad to some famous institutions in Iraq, Egypt, and India. He also continued to subsidize his father Salim al-Mubarak's blind's poet, Saqer al-Shibib, a famous poet of the twentieth century, and remained loyal to him. Saqer al-Shibib described Abdullah in his poem as the only asset that Salim al-Mubarak passed on after his death. Abdullah supported the thoughts and suggestions of the young Kuwaitis to carry on their studies abroad paid for by the country's income from taxation.<sup>71</sup> However, Abdullah's obvious contribution to the Kuwaiti intellectual and reform movement could not be described as large. This came in 1938, during the *Majlis* Movement (see pages 68-76).

Abdullah was deeply fascinated by Arabic literature and poems; and this made him more attracted to the litterateurs and reformists of Kuwait.<sup>72</sup> According to the famous Kuwaiti historian and litterateur Abdulaziz al-Rasheed (1887-1938), "Abdullah is one of the greatest men in Kuwait; he has such beautiful morals which make him one of the unique figures in his time". Al-Rasheed also maintained that Abdullah frequently discussed much literature and science

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<sup>70</sup> Yacoub al-Ghunaim. *Malamah min Tarikh al-Kuwait* (Al-Kuwait: published by the author, 1998), 11-31.

<sup>71</sup> Abdulaziz al-Rasheed. "al-Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim," *Kuwait al-Yaum* (1928), 229.

<sup>72</sup> Najat al-Jassim, *Al-Shaikh Yusuf bin Isa al-Qina' ai: Dawrh fi al-Haiat al-Ejtima'ayyah wa al-Siasiyah fi al-Kuwait* (Al-Kuwait: Sharikat kathmah 1989), 18.

when he gathered with other Kuwaiti litterateurs. Abdullah often recited poems for the famous Arabic poet al-Mutanabbi in front of his friends and litterateurs.<sup>73</sup> Abdullah also wrote some Arabic poems to his friends (there is only one found written to his friend Yusuf bin Isa), and also managed to read some European fifteenth and sixteenth century books, such as, *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli, which was translated into Arabic.<sup>74</sup>

In 1938, the Political Resident in the Gulf mentioned that when he was the President of the Legislative Council, Abdullah kept an Arabic Encyclopaedia, which he used with some members of the Legislative Council to draft an executive constitution similar to the French constitution in 1789.<sup>75</sup> Whether the Political Agent's statement is credible or not, one fact is obvious: Abdullah maintained his own library of important books, which in general reflected his sympathy with the intellectual and reform movement in Kuwait.

When Abdullah was younger, he and Salim al-Mubarak learned grammar under the tutelage of the famous Kuwaiti reformist Yusuf bin Isa, who became one of Abdullah's best friends and advised him in matters of Kuwaiti history. Abdullah often attended the reception *Majlis* of Yusuf bin Isa, where Islam, grammar and literature were discussed. These *Majlis* were attended by other members of the public in Kuwait, therefore, Abdullah developed friendships with many Kuwaitis. Abdullah's friends were a mix of ruling family members, notables, and merchants, some of whom led the intellectual and reform movement. Among these people was the previously mentioned Yusuf bin Isa.<sup>76</sup> Yusuf bin Isa's name will be repeated many times in the thesis because of his deep relationship with the intellectual and reform movement and

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<sup>73</sup> Al-Rasheed. *Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 357.

<sup>74</sup> Al-'Ali. *'Abd-Allah as-Salim*, 85-7.

<sup>75</sup> PR, Bushire to Mr R T Peel (India Office), 18 July 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>76</sup> Al-Jassim. *Al-Shaikh Yusuf bin Isa*, 111.

because of his personal activities not only with Abdullah, but also with Ahmad al-Jabir, in dealing with the ruling dilemma in Kuwait. According to Yusuf bin Isa, his relationship with the ruling family and with Abdullah reflected his and his ancestors' relationships to the ruling family since Kuwait's establishment in the eighteenth century.<sup>77</sup>

Abdullah continued to strengthen his relationship with the Jina'at family in Kuwait by choosing Yusuf bin Isa to be his private counsellor. Yusuf bin Isa also stated that the al-Sabah strengthened its relations with his family because they lived as neighbours and, most importantly, that they did not have any political ambition. The ruling family trusted them on their estates in Iraq, and Mubarak al-Sabah appointed one of them, Abdulaziz al-Bader, to be his agent in Basra in the 1890s.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, Abdullah's early education and support of the Intellectual and reform movement in Kuwait had a great impact on his later life. For example, he probably used his difficulty in gaining proper learning in his childhood in a positive way since he founded a modern free education system for Kuwaitis when he became ruler in 1950.<sup>79</sup> Also, Abdullah's own efforts to find a way to improve his knowledge indicate his unique personality compared with his peers in the ruling family in Kuwait. Abdullah's knowledge and appreciation of literature and politics was an advantage point over his peers since he was much respected by Kuwaitis and the ruling family. They all regarded him highly and called him the father of modern Kuwait.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Al-Jen'ai. *Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 96-8.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

<sup>79</sup> Crystal, "Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah," 8-14.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Baghdadi. *Al-Shaikh 'Abd-Allah as-Salim*, 22-5.

## 2.6. Abdullah's Financial Status

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the ruling family's main income came primarily from two main sources.<sup>81</sup> The first source of income was from the ruling family's ownership since 1833 of a number of date plantations in Iraq (Fao area on Shatt al-Arab). These estates and gardens were given to Jabir I al-Sabah (r. 1814-59) by Rashid al-Sadoun (Shaikh from al-Sadoun tribal in Basra).<sup>82</sup> Other date plantations were given to Abdullah II al-Sabah (r. 1866-92) by the Ottoman authorities as rewards for his loyalty and support to their Army campaign at Hasa in 1876.<sup>83</sup> Others were bought later, in the era of Mubarak al-Sabah.

In Kuwait, the al-Sabah did not have a private source of income compared to that from their date plantations in Iraq. According to the British consul in Basra in 1903, Mubarak al-Sabah sent a letter regarding the consequences of the assassination in 1896 and the demands of property by the murderers' heirs. Mubarak al-Sabah's letter indicated all real estate of the ruling family in Kuwait; the property only included three large houses with two reception *Majlis* and eighteen small shops in the Kuwait market.<sup>84</sup>

Although the ruling family owned some property in Kuwait and Iraq, it was regarded locally as less wealthy than merchant families that controlled a considerable sum in Kuwait and abroad. Consequently, this consideration was due to the fact that the ruling family income was partly distributed between all descendants of Jabir I al-Sabah, including women and children, as a monthly payment, and mostly allocated for the ruler of Kuwait as a payment for ruling Kuwait.

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<sup>81</sup> PR, Bushire to Government of India, 30 January 1899, IOR: R/15/1/472 (British Library, London); al-Jen'ai. *Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, 23-24.

<sup>82</sup> Al-Ghanim, "The Reign of Mubarak," 15-25.

<sup>83</sup> Saeed Khalil Hashim, "The Influence of Iraq on the Nationalist Movements of Kuwait and Bahrain (1920-1961)" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Exeter, March 1984), 16.

<sup>84</sup> Translation of Agreement between Mubarak al-Sabah and his nephews, 6 September 1903, IOR: L/P&S/19 (British Library, London).

Therefore, except for the financial status of the ruler of Kuwait, the other members of the ruling family, including Abdullah, received few subsidies from the income collected from their date plantations in Iraq and they were considered close to being poor people in the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>85</sup>

The second source of income for the ruling family in Kuwait came from the frequent and unstable collections from the merchants in Kuwait. This collection came from a tacit agreement made at the beginning of the al-Sabah's rule when Sabah I agreed to rule Kuwait without interfering in trade matters; however, in exchange, the merchants were expected to subsidise the ruler and his family to help meet their needs. Abdullah was one of the ruling family members who at an early age received some subsidies from the merchants. Many merchant families in Kuwait such as al-Ghanim, al-Khalid, al-Ibraheem, etc regularly subsidised the ruling family. This matter was not something that was considered informal in this period; however, as indicated previously, it was the norm for merchants to provide money and subsidy for the ruler and the ruling family to fulfil their unspoken agreement of not interfering in trade matters in Kuwait while continuing to rule the country.<sup>86</sup>

Abdullah's financial status in the beginning of the twentieth century was not much better than his peers in the ruling family. However, due to the accession of Mubarak al-Sabah in 1896, it had improved compared to other members of the al-Sabah. Nevertheless, Abdullah did not always enjoy life due to the Kuwaiti rulers' financial difficulties before the advance of the oil era in 1938. According to the Political Agent in Kuwait in 1938, some of the ruling family members

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<sup>85</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 19 March 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>86</sup> Interview with former Kuwaiti Minister Yusuf al-Nssuf in Nssuf company in Shuwaikh industrial area (a member of famous Kuwaiti merchant family), Kuwait: 9 October 2010. Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi*, vol. 2, 297; Kuwait administration report for 1951, FO 371/98323 (TNA, London).

received monthly subsidies from Ahmad al-Jabir that were less than the porter's salary in the British Agency. Therefore, Abdullah's life prior to the oil boom was not very much better than his peers in the ruling family and in the local community. This situation made him desperate for an increase in his allowances and subsidies from 1921 to 1938 during the reign of Ahmad al-Jabir.<sup>87</sup>

Therefore, before 1938, Abdullah and the ruling family relied financially on the rulers and the merchants' community for subsidies. Abdullah could not live properly with the little money that he received from the rulers of Kuwait. As a result, he always aimed to improve his financial status before the oil era in Kuwait. With this financial motive, Abdullah looked to implement changes to his status as soon as he had any opportunity to gain in Kuwait politics. Abdullah's first opportunity to gain more financial and power over Kuwait and the ruling family financial status came in 1921, just after the accession of Ahmad al-Jabir.

## **2.7. Abdullah's Financial Struggle with Ahmad al-Jabir, 1921-23**

In 1921, Ahmad al-Jabir assumed the rulership of Kuwait after the death of Salim al-Mubarak. Abdullah was obliged at this moment to accept Ahmad al-Jabir as the new ruler of Kuwait due to the ruling family's vote. This event resulted in Abdullah's entrance into a financial and power struggle with Ahmad al-Jabir. Abdullah aimed to increase his financial and power status at the expense of Ahmad al-Jabir and the rest of the ruling family's members.

There was no violence involved, nor were there any plots to overthrow Ahmad al-Jabir, but the rivalry ultimately resulted in Abdullah's decision to withdraw from engagement in Kuwait's politics, including the rulership from 1923 to 1935. In fact, this rivalry was motivated

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<sup>87</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 19 March 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

by Ahmad al-Jabir's easy-going delegation of part of his power to Abdullah in 1921 in contrast to the usual autocratic rule which had been adopted by Kuwaiti rulers since the accession of Mubarak al-Sabah in 1896. Abdullah was an ambitious man who looked forward to securing his financial and power status at the expense of the rest members of the ruling family. Abdullah's rivalry with Ahmad al-Jabir was the same as Mubarak al-Sabah's struggle with his brothers Mohammad al-Sabah and Jarrah al-Sabah that resulted in the assassination of 1896. This situation indicated that Abdullah might be adopting Mubarak al-Sabah's strategy to gain power.

The rivalry centred on two matters during Ahmad al-Jabir's early rule. First was the matter of Abdullah's strategy to control Kuwait's internal financial management, including the fiscal conditions of the al-Sabah. In 1921, Ahmad al-Jabir had given Abdullah a good share of power to administer Kuwait's financial management. Ahmad al-Jabir's reaction was perceived by Britain as a way of satisfying Abdullah and depriving him of succession. According to the Political Agent in Kuwait, "He [Abdullah after gaining power] seems to have been trying to discredit Ahmad and issuing orders etc. not as Ahmad's Deputy but in his own name."<sup>88</sup> The Political Agent ascribed this reaction from Abdullah to three main reasons: (1) Abdullah's hopes of succeeding Salim al-Mubarak; (2) Abdullah's serious quarrel with the rest of the al-Sabah; and (3) the easy-going nature of Ahmad al-Jabir.<sup>89</sup>

Abdullah was not the only one to be satisfied by Ahmad al-Jabir in order to remove him from succession; even Hamad al-Mubarak, the other candidate for succession in 1921, was given the title of deputy ruler for some time in the absence of Ahmad al-Jabir. Ahmad al-Jabir's policy of distributing power in order to satisfy his rivals for the succession worked with Hamad al-

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<sup>88</sup> PA, Kuwait to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 26 February 1921, IOR: R/15/1/513 (British Library, London).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

Mubarak, who attained the position of deputy ruler in 1923.<sup>90</sup> However, it did not succeed with Abdullah, who had to contend with many impediments because of his strategy of enhancing his financial and power status in Kuwait.

Abdullah's strategy to improve his status emerged as soon as Ahmad al-Jabir became the ruler, when he endeavoured to administer the main source of income of the ruling family, the Iraq plantations' revenue. Abdullah tried to gain absolute power over the ruler's secretary, Mullah Salih, the only commercial agent for the al-Sabah in Kuwait and abroad in Iraq, who had been the secretary of Mubarak al-Sabah, Jabir II al-Mubarak, and Salim al-Mubarak before Ahmad al-Jabir. At that time, Mullah Salih had control over the main source of income for all members of the al-Sabah. According to the Political Agent in Kuwait, Abdullah tried to contact Abdulaziz al-Bader, the al-Sabah's permanent agent in Basra, to gain some level of control over the ruling family's date plantation in Iraq.<sup>91</sup> The effort to reduce Ahmad al-Jabir's private secretary's power was thwarted by the ruling family, who thought that Abdullah would control their main source of revenue. Abdullah's failure on this occasion only encouraged him to make another attempt at his goal.

Abdullah's next strategy was to administer the financial status of the ruling family. He managed to draft a list of allowances for all members of the ruling family in which he allotted himself nearly as much income as Ahmad al-Jabir, which was considerably more than any of the other members of the al-Sabah, including his nearest contender for succession, Hamad al-Mubarak. He presented the list to Ahmad al-Jabir during a ruling family meeting and, according

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<sup>90</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 14 July 1923, IOR: R/15/5/96 (British Library, London).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

to the Political Agent in Kuwait, “it was refused outright by the rest of the al-Sabah.”<sup>92</sup> Jabir Sabah al-Sabah (Mubarak al-Sabah’s brother) in particular, “set out to insult Abdullah by criticising his style of dress,”<sup>93</sup> which indicated that Abdullah was not yet considered a fit candidate for succession, let alone deserving of more privileges than other members of his family. Other members of the ruling family accused Abdullah, Fahad al-Salim and Sabah al-Salim, of trying to control the al-Sabah’s fortune by consolidating their influence over the family’s trade stores in Kuwait’s market as well as the ruler’s new list of allowances for family members. After a stormy scene with the ruling family, Abdullah decided to share their date plantations in Fao and Basra and thereby solve the internal dispute among the al-Sabah. However, when Abdullah learned that his list and suggestions were neither respected nor implemented, he decided not to engage any further in the Kuwaiti ruling family’s affairs, and instead stayed in his houses located outside the City walls in Sh’ab and Failaka (Kuwaiti Island).<sup>94</sup>

As a consequence of this series of events, the reactions of the ruling family members against Abdullah divided the al-Sabah into two factions: (1) the sons of Salim al-Mubarak, and (2) Ahmad al-Jabir and the rest of the ruling family. The first faction was led by Abdullah and his half-brothers, Ali al-Salim, Sabah al-Salim, and Fahad al-Salim. The second faction, which was larger than the first, was led by Ahmad al-Jabir, Hamad al-Mubarak, Ali al-Khalifa, Jabir Sabah al-Sabah, and Abdullah al-Jabir. The discord among the ruling family would dominate

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<sup>92</sup> PA, Kuwait to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 26 April 1921, IOR: R/15/1/513 (British Library, London).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Khaz’al, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi*, vol. 5, 18.

Kuwait's domestic and external political discourse until 1938; and the only changes that occurred resulted from political events or death.<sup>95</sup>

The second event that caused Abdullah's withdrawal from Kuwait's politics was the way in which Ahmad al-Jabir dealt with external political events. In April 1922, Ahmad al-Jabir received a letter from the Sultan of Najd, Ibn Saud (later King Abdulaziz), urging him to agree to the collection of customs dues in Kuwait City on goods exported from Kuwait to Najd, and promising in return to allow the resumption of trade. Ibn Saud wanted either the establishment of a Saudi customs house in Kuwait City or to let Ahmad al-Jabir collect the customs dues on his behalf, according to Ahmad al-Jabir's preference. Having discussed the question with the ruling family and merchants, Ahmad al-Jabir refused Ibn Saud's request, since it could be considered to be the equivalent of recognising Ibn Saud's sovereignty over Kuwait.<sup>96</sup> The Sultan of Najd raised the question on several occasions, relentlessly increasing the pressure each time he tried. Historically, Ibn Saud had begun his claims in 1916, during the era of Jabir II al-Mubarak. However, Ibn Saud's efforts did not succeed, due to the al-Sabah's and tough notables' opposition to terms that involved reclaiming customs dues inside Kuwait City.<sup>97</sup>

In May 1923, Abdullah came to prominence again when Ibn Saud sent his representative, Sayid Hamzah al-Ghauth, to Kuwait to consider the pending question of the Najd customs issue and the re-opening of trade. A conference was held in the hope of reaching an understanding among the representatives of Ahmad al-Jabir and Sayid Hamzah. However, negotiations were suspended, and Sayid Hamzah left Kuwait for Riyadh on 19 May 1923. Ahmad al-Jabir had

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<sup>95</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 44.

<sup>96</sup> Memorandum by PA, Kuwait sent to Secretary to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 26 April 1922, IOR: R/15/5/96 (British Library, London).

<sup>97</sup> Sir Percy Cox (PR, Bushire) to PA, Kuwait enclosing letter from PA to Ruler of Kuwait, 14 July 1916; Ruler of Kuwait to PA, Kuwait, 15 July 1916, IOR: R/15/5/25 (British Library, London).

found no hope of coming to an agreement with the Najdis on the terms proposed by Sayid Hamzah, so he allowed Abdullah, as his personal representative, to accompany the Najdis' deputation.<sup>98</sup>

Abdullah went to Riyadh in May 1923 to meet Ibn Saud, bearing gifts from Ahmad al-Jabir, and spent almost a month in Riyadh hosted by Ibn Saud, who liked having him as his own agent in Kuwait.<sup>99</sup> There is, however, no information about the private talks between Abdullah and Ibn Saud in Riyadh, which reflects the general lack of documentation about most of the events in Kuwaiti and Saudi history during the 1920s.

Abdullah returned to Kuwait on 27 June 1923, bringing with him a settlement of the pending trade agreement between Najd and Kuwait. The settlement recognised Abdullah as the agent of Ibn Saud in Kuwait who would collect and remit customs dues twice yearly on land exports from Kuwait to Najd. This settlement dented the prominent positions of the al-Sabah and some of the merchants in Kuwait rather heavily. In particular, Jabir Sabah al-Sabah, along with some of the ruling family who had stood firmly against the settlement said that, "The whole idea was preposterous, as Ibn Saud had no right at all to what he claimed and [...] it was unthinkable that Abdullah should act as his agent".<sup>100</sup> In addition, one of Kuwait's famous pearl merchants Shamlan bin Ali, remarked that, "friendship with Ibn Saud was most desirable but they [the leading merchants] were not going to have trade reopened at the expense of their own shaikh's position and prestige".<sup>101</sup> As a result, this opposition front seriously affected Ahmad al-Jabir's

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<sup>98</sup> Lt-Col S G Knox (PR, Bushire) to Duke of Devonshire (Secretary of State for Colonies), 20 Jun 1923, IOR: R/15/5/53 (British Library, London).

<sup>99</sup> Amin al-Rihani. *Mluwk al-'Arab: Rihla fi al-Blad al-'Arabi* (Beirut: none, 1926), 114.

<sup>100</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 7 July 1923, IOR: R/15/5/53 (British Library, London).

<sup>101</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, (2) 7 July 1923, IOR: R/15/5/53 (British Library, London).

final decision and made the situation much harder for Abdullah to persuade Ahmad al-Jabir of the vital importance of accepting Ibn Saud's terms to avoid an economic blockade.<sup>102</sup>

Consequently, an argument erupted between Abdullah and Ahmad al-Jabir to settle the matter immediately without returning to the ruling family's members or merchants. Ahmad al-Jabir refused, and several meetings were held between him and other members of the ruling family and merchants while Abdullah nearly succeeded in persuading a large portion of Kuwaiti notables to take up his plan. The Kuwaiti notables headed by Yusuf bin Isa thought they would have no rest until they agreed to Abdullah's private understanding with Ibn Saud about Najdi-Kuwaiti trade. Therefore, they signed a petition to Ahmad al-Jabir, informing him that they agreed with the choice of Abdullah as an agent of Ibn Saud, offering Abdullah their full help. Abdullah argued with Ahmad al-Jabir many times about reaching an agreement with the Kuwaiti notables and gaining Ibn Saud's understanding. However, Ahmad al-Jabir, after wavering for several days, eventually wrote to Ibn Saud rejecting his terms.<sup>103</sup>

In fact, Ahmad al-Jabir's rejection of Abdullah's private understanding with Ibn Saud was mainly the result of Britain's fears of the potential future status of Kuwait should the offer be accepted. The British interpretation of the event was that Abdullah was the author of the whole idea and had persuaded Ibn Saud to authorise him to act, hoping to gain power and become the ruler of Kuwait. In fact, the Political Resident in the Gulf, remarked that, "If Ahmad al-Jabir allows this transparent intrigue to go forward, Abdullah will eat Ahmad al-Jabir and

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<sup>102</sup> The Kuwaiti-Najdi desert trade and exchange had been stopped for 20 years lasted from 1922 to 1942.

<sup>103</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 12 July 1923, IOR: R/15/5/53 (British Library, London).

‘Abdulaziz [Ibn Saud] will swallow Abdullah, and the end of Kuwait’s independence is in sight’.<sup>104</sup>

In fact, Abdullah and some Kuwaiti notables were backed by the articles of the Anglo-Najdi treaty of Darin. Ibn Saud had signed this treaty with the British in December 1915. It sought to recognise Ibn Saud as ruler of Najd and Hassa, and to put him under a British protectorate. In exchange, Ibn Saud had pledged himself, his heirs and his successors, to support the British side in the First World War against the Ottoman Empire, and not to interfere in the internal affairs of Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar or to attack their territories.<sup>105</sup> This treaty was regarded by Abdullah and Kuwaiti notables as a physical proof for Ibn Saud’s good intention towards Kuwait and its ruling family in 1923.

Ahmad al-Jabir’s rejection of Ibn Saud’s terms prompted Abdullah’s withdrawal from Kuwait’s politics from 1923 to 1935. As a result of his failed strategy, Abdullah decided to escape political life and live quietly, spending most of his time in Sh’ab or in Failaka Island.<sup>106</sup> It appears that Abdullah was trying to discredit Ahmad al-Jabir and the ruling family, and improve his financial position at the expense of the whole country. Meanwhile, Abdullah was unable to improve either his financial position or his political standing and power until the late 1930s.

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<sup>104</sup> Lt-Col S G Knox (PR, Bushire) to PA, Kuwait, 17 July 1923, IOR: R/15/5/53 (British Library, London).

<sup>105</sup> Muhammad Husain al-Aidaros, ‘‘Etifakiat 1915 byna Ibn Saud wa Britannia: Derasa Wath’igiah,’’ *Majalit Jami’at Demashg* 21, no. 1 & 2 (2005): 93-124.

<sup>106</sup> There was one occasion in 1926 when Abdullah returned to renew his attempts to implement proper financial management of the ruling family’s income in Iraq. However, this effort was not considered to be as important as his full return in 1935.

## **2.8. Abdullah's Withdrawal from Political Life, 1923-35**

Abdullah withdrew from Kuwaiti politics in 1923 and this continued for twelve years. Abdullah's protest action was similar to that of Salim al-Mubarak who avoided Kuwaiti politics during some parts of Mubarak al-Sabah's reign. Abdullah's withdrawal period gave him the opportunity to crystallize his personality and political ideas. It also gave him the ability to establish a good understanding of the Kuwaiti demands for reforms and to increase his awareness of the world around him by travelling abroad frequently in the first half of the twentieth century.

### **2.8.1. Abdullah in Kuwait**

During Abdullah's withdrawal period, Kuwaitis regarded him as a champion of reform, while the British regarded him as the leader of the opposition.<sup>107</sup> Abdullah's disagreement with Ahmad al-Jabir in 1923 was described by the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf as, "the reason that made him the leader of the opposition."<sup>108</sup> Throughout his absence, Abdullah formed a closer relationship with Kuwaiti merchants, and notables, and became more interested in their demands for reform. According to Ghanim al-Najjar, "Abdullah often shared his private concerns regarding the deteriorating situation of administration in Kuwait with his close friends among the merchants and notables."<sup>109</sup> Therefore, his withdrawal period increased his interest in the public's demands for improvements and reforms in Kuwait's politics and administration. In addition, it cultivated his sense of the world's latest developments, i.e., the Arab nationalist movements in most of the Arab countries and their anti-imperialist policies, especially after the Palestinian Revolutions in 1929 and 1936.

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<sup>107</sup> Al-Robi'an, *Malamah min at-Tarikh al-Musawr*, 55.

<sup>108</sup> Foreign Office: General Correspondence of Persian Gulf Shaikhdoms, Arabia, part 4, pp.5. 15 March 1950.

<sup>109</sup> Ghanim al-Najjar, *Madkhal li-ittawer as-Siyasi fi al-Kuwait* (Kuwait: Dar Quarts, 2000), 42.

Abdullah's establishment of good communications with Kuwaitis, including notables and merchants in the 1920s-30s had an impact on his future life. It led to his successful return to Kuwaiti politics in the *Majlis* movement of 1938-39. Consequently, Abdullah became the ideal figure for reformation among the merchants, notables and Kuwaitis during the 1930s. He was clearly mentioned in rumours, leaflets and wall writings in 1938 regarding the Legislative Council. The people behind this threatened Ahmad al-Jabir with the installation of Abdullah as the ruler if the former would not take the reforms seriously.<sup>110</sup> Basically, Abdullah was the saviour and the hero of Kuwaitis who could possibly achieve the reforms should Ahmad al-Jabir fails to succeed in his efforts.

In Kuwait, Abdullah often appeared in his favourite place in the Sh'ab area. In 1921, he inherited the Sh'ab Palace from his father Salim al-Mubarak. Salim al-Mubarak built this palace outside the Kuwait wall in 1907, and Abdullah remodelled it in 1926 and fitted it with electricity, water and phone services to update it to conform to modern life. The palace became one of the most beautiful in Kuwait, which led Abdullah to settle there permanently for the rest of his life, enjoy his privacy and meet with his friends and family members. The last moments of Abdullah's life were spent in this palace where he died in 1965 in one of his rooms, in the presence of his son, Saad al-Abdullah.<sup>111</sup>

Abdullah's second favourite place during his absence was Failaka Island. This island is the biggest and only the inhabited island in Kuwait; this was a result of plenty of fresh water and agriculture. On this island, the ruling family including Abdullah, built and bought their own houses during the first half of the twentieth century to help them to rule the island at times, but

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<sup>110</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 19 March 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Ali al-Rayyes (Kuwaiti history and antic collector) who showed the author an original bell of the constriction cost of Sh'ab Palace in 1926, paid by Abdullah.

mostly to enjoy a good vacation during the spring and summer seasons. The al-Sabah settled in the western part of this island around a large courtyard known as Shaikhs Avenue close to the coast. Its name reflected the existence of several houses belonging to al-Sabah, including the house of Abdullah, and the house of Jabir bin Abdullah al-Sabah. Abdullah regularly visited the island and spent a long period there in the early thirties. He began his visits to the island, living with his friend Yusuf bin Isa when he bought his house from him in the early thirties for 25,000 rupees. Abdullah enjoyed the island's climate and meeting with his friends, merchants and people in the main market. He also used to pass the island every day to look for people and ask them about their condition. Even after he assumed power in 1950, he still spent several days of the year on the island.<sup>112</sup>

### ***2.8.2. Abdullah Abroad***

Abdullah travelled to some neighbouring countries, such as Iraq, usually in the summer period, to deal with the ruling family's properties there. He travelled to Bahrain on his way to India to enjoy the summer with some of his merchant friends who had established permanent Kuwaiti trade houses there. There is no doubt that Abdullah travelled to countries that were more advanced in establishing government and public institutions than Kuwait in the 1920s and 30s. In this context, the influence of his travel on his political thoughts will be examined.

While in Iraq, Abdullah, as well as most of the ruling family and Kuwaitis, witnessed the great improvements in the country's internal governmental institutions in the 1920s and 30s. After the First World War, Iraq came under the British mandate as a result of the International Conference of San Remo in 1920 between the Allied powers in Italy. Following a strong

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<sup>112</sup> Khalid Salim Muhammad, *Jazierat Failaka Ash-har al-Jozor al-Kuwayityyah: Tarikh-ha wa Turath-ha* (al-Kuwayiyt: the author, 2006), 66-7.

internal revolution in Iraq in 1920, the British announced Faisal bin Husain al-Hashamie as its King. He was the King of Syria from 1918 to 1920 until the French defeated his army and formed a local government under the high supervision of British experts. From 1921 to 1932, Iraqi government institutions were apparently improved under this government. These improvements, of course, reached Abdullah and the Kuwaitis. In his regular visits to his family's date plantations in Iraq Abdullah probably saw the huge differences in the administration of the two countries. Also, he was most probably interested to hear the news of the developments in Iraq's administrative affairs, particularly its transformation from the old traditional rule under the Ottoman authorities into a Kingdom under the British mandate.<sup>113</sup>

However, this interest only lasted for a short time before the Iraqi government turned against Kuwait and the ruling family. In the 1930s, the Iraqi government filed a lawsuit to exact taxes on the date plantations of the al-Sabah in Basra. The lawsuit was based on the concept that the last Ottoman authorities in Iraq gifted this estate to the al-Sabah without paying taxes.<sup>114</sup> Also in the 1930s, the Iraqi newspapers started a hostile campaign against the rule of the al-Sabah.<sup>115</sup> Those two incidents changed Abdullah's attitude toward Iraqi improvement, when he discovered that these improvements worked to highlight Iraqi claims not only for the al-Sabah date plantations in Fao and Basra but also to end the rule of the al-Sabah in Kuwait (see Chapter Seven).

In Bahrain in the early 1930s, Abdullah learned that the country's internal administration system and services had been improved greatly under the hands of a British man, Charles

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<sup>113</sup> Hashim, "The Influence of Iraq on the Nationalist," 145-66.

<sup>114</sup> Schofield. *Kuwait and Iraq*, 111-7.

<sup>115</sup> Lt-Col H R P Dickson (PA, Kuwait) to Lt-Col G Loch (PR, Bushire), 8 August 1935, IOR: R/15/1/506; PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire enclosing translation of article from Baghdad newspaper *Al-Bilad*, 5 September 1935, IOR: R/15/1/506 (British Library, London).

Belgrave, who was a personal and financial advisor for the rulers of Bahrain from 1926 until 1957.<sup>116</sup> The British advisor worked on establishing the first municipality in the Gulf of Bahrain, which had fulfilled its duties by cleaning and controlling the streets of the capital Manamah, and countless other social reforms.<sup>117</sup> In fact, Abdullah's best friend Yusuf bin Isa was the first Kuwaiti to report these improvements to the al-Sabah and notables in the beginning of the 1930s. Abdullah was impressed by these improvements in Bahrain, as were most of the al-Sabah, merchants, and notables. However, Abdullah's absence from the political life of Kuwait kept him out of the events that followed when the merchants and notables led by Yusuf al-bin Isa persuaded Ahmad al-Jabir to allocate two percent of taxes on Kuwait imported goods to support the first two elected councils for a new municipality and education department in 1932.<sup>118</sup> Abdullah's admiration of this experiment in Bahrain was witnessed in 1938 during his presidency of the Legislative Council, when he told the Political Agent in Kuwait his thought that a British advisor, like the one in Bahrain (Belgrave), is necessary to advise the council of how to implement reforms in Kuwait by peaceful means.<sup>119</sup> Abdullah's admiration of the Bahrain experiment was limited to channelling the internal demands for reforms into proper participation of Kuwaiti political movements in decision-making while maintaining the stability of the al-Sabah rule (this will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter).

Abdullah also travelled to India regularly almost every summer during his absence from Kuwaiti politics and even when he became ruler in 1950. It has been said that he bought a palace

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<sup>116</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah (Ruler of Kuwait) to PA, Kuwait, 9 August 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>117</sup> Muhammad al-Rumaihi, "Harakat 1938 al-Islahiyya fi al-Kuwait wa al-Bahrain wa Dubai," *Journal of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies*. Vol. 1 (1975): 29-68.

<sup>118</sup> Al-Jassim. *Al-Shaikh Yusuf bin Isa*, 18-50.

<sup>119</sup> PA, Kuwait to Sir Trenchard Fowle (PR, Bushire), 24 June 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

in Bombay (now Mumbai) where he used to stay with friends during his summer visits.<sup>120</sup> In fact, Kuwaiti relations with India date back to the eighteenth century when, in the reign of Abdullah I al-Sabah (r. 1766-1812), large Kuwaiti ships reached the coast of the subcontinent of India. During Mubarak's reign, the first trade houses had been established there in 1907 to ease the trade dealings of the Kuwaiti merchants in India. In the beginning of the twentieth century, these relations were improved by the launching of British steamships from Kuwait to India, which facilitated Abdullah's and the Kuwaitis' travel to India.<sup>121</sup>

Abdullah was fascinated by the development in India and the settlement of many famous Kuwaiti trading family houses there. According to Mansfield, Abdullah's regular visits to India stimulated his belief in the need for political systems to evolve in the modern world and gave him a wide view of the world around him.<sup>122</sup> Mansfield's view was accurate, because when Abdullah assumed the rulership in 1950, he rushed to implement an ambitious plan for developing Kuwait as a welfare state in 1951, similar to that of India in 1947. Perhaps, Abdullah worked on copying India's reforms for Kuwait's internal situation, such as the infrastructure and the public welfare services. However, with the absence of physical evidence of it, more investigation is needed in the future to clarify this information in detail (see Chapter Four for more details).

## **2.9. Abdullah's Re-Engagement into Kuwait's Politics in 1935**

After his long absence from political life, Abdullah returned in June 1935.<sup>123</sup> His reappearance led to a considerable change in his future life, especially when Ahmad al-Jabir, who was

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with Yacoub al-Ibraheem (Kuwaiti historian), London: 23 November 2010.

<sup>121</sup> Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi*, vol. 2, 297; Abu-Hakima. *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Hadyth*, 335-9.

<sup>122</sup> Mansfield, *Kuwait Vanguard*, 40-1.

planning to leave Kuwait for a long visit to Britain appointed him as deputy ruler, with full powers.<sup>124</sup>

Abdullah's return was surrounded by several events, and certain issues that might have prompted his decision to go back to decision-making and politics. One such event was the deteriorating health of Hamad al-Mubarak, who was Ahmad al-Jabir's deputy ruler and who had been the main challenger to Abdullah in the succession process between 1921 and 1935. Hamad al-Mubarak died in 1938 after a long illness, thereby paving the way for Abdullah to return, since he was the strongest succession candidate among Mubarak al-Sabah's descendants. Given this circumstance, his return to political life in Kuwait had been a reasonable move, and changes were inevitable.

However, this was less important than the other main events that might have played an important role in determining his decision to return in 1935; some of these might have been created by the circumstances and Ahmad al-Jabir's wish to bring Abdullah back into politics in 1935; others might have resulted from Abdullah's own desire to be more involved and to have more power, in decision-making and Kuwait's government administration.

The second possible reason for Abdullah's return resulted from Ahmad al-Jabir's response to the British interpretation during the 1930s of the tradition of succession in Kuwait. For the first time since his accession in 1921, Ahmad al-Jabir accepted the need to appoint

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<sup>123</sup> Lt-Col H. R. Dickson (PA, Kuwait) to Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah (Deputy Ruler), 7 August 1935, IOR: R/15/5/295 (British Library, London).

<sup>124</sup> Ruler of Kuwait to Secretary of State for India, New Delhi, 31 July 1935, IOR: L/P&S/12/3844 (British Library, London); during this trip, the ruler would travel through many Arab capitals including Baghdad, Cairo, and Beirut.

Abdullah as deputy ruler.<sup>125</sup> During the 1920s and early 1930s, Ahmad al-Jabir had overshadowed Abdullah by excluding him from power and important positions in Kuwait, and had initially appointed Hamad al-Mubarak, as deputy ruler.

In January 1935 the British authorities in the Gulf found it expedient to discuss the succession in Kuwait in order to avert any disruption to their oil interests should Ahmad al-Jabir suddenly die. They therefore examined the status of the ruling family members with some care, looking for a prospective successor among them while working out the systemic process of succession. They concluded that, according to the Kuwaiti tradition of succession, “the presumed heir apparent ... is the ruler’s [Ahmad al-Jabir] uncle, Hamad al-Mubarak (born 1894), who has a son Mubarak and that the Political Agent, Major J. C. More, in 1921 referred the succession rule in Kuwait to the Turkish line of succession.”<sup>126</sup> To confirm this assumption, the British insisted on discussions with Ahmad al-Jabir.

On 14 February 1935, during talks with the Political Agent, Ahmad al-Jabir stated that “Kuwait was not following the Turkish line of succession and that Hamad al-Mubarak had no particular right over any others to the rulership after him, and confirmed that Kuwait was following Arab rule of transition power where the most capable man should win after the death of the ruler.”<sup>127</sup> This means that Kuwait was not following an unorganized system for succession but rather it strived for political balance and power among the ruling family (see Chapter Three).

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<sup>125</sup> Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim had once previously been given charge over a Kuwait town by his ruling family for a short period (almost a month), pending Ahmad al-Jabir’s return from Najd to assume complete power in Kuwait upon the death of his father Shaikh Salim and the events that followed in 1921. This short period occurred before the official recognition of Ahmad al-Jabir as ruler of Kuwait and did not happen again in this ruler’s era except in June 1935 onward.

<sup>126</sup> India Office, New Delhi to PR, Bushire, 29 January 1935, IOR: R/15/5/180 (British Library, London).

<sup>127</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 14 February 1935, IOR: R/15/5/180 (British Library, London).

In Ahmad al-Jabir's explanation to the British about the succession in Kuwait, he confirmed that neither Hamad al-Mubarak nor any of his sons had the right over any other members of the ruling family to be the presumed heir apparent. In his aim to show the tradition of succession in Kuwait, Ahmad al-Jabir was trying to prevent the British from believing that Hamad al-Mubarak would be the heir apparent while simultaneously applying some weight to the candidacy of his sons for succession. Ahmad al-Jabir probably endeavoured to prove to the British that Hamad al-Mubarak had no right to be his successor, which he did by appointing another candidate for succession from the ruling family as his deputy ruler during his next absence from Kuwait.

In light of these circumstances, Abdullah became the rightful and most experienced person, after Hamad al-Mubarak, to take charge of Kuwait. Ahmad al-Jabir had many reasons for appointing Abdullah to this post. For example, Ahmad al-Jabir's decision was backed by Abdullah's brief experience of ruling Kuwait in 1921 pending the formal return from central Arabia. Therefore, when Ahmad al-Jabir had visited Britain at the invitation of the British authorities in June 1935, Abdullah had been identified as the most fitting man within the ruling family to take charge of Kuwait.

Abdullah's second reason for returning to Kuwait's political scene was fully supported by Ahmad al-Jabir himself, who wanted him to re-engage in Kuwait's policies and decision-making. Ahmad al-Jabir probably ensured Abdullah's return by appointing him deputy ruler, thereby proving to the British that Kuwait was not following a particular tradition of succession, and that no one among the ruling family had the upper hand over any others to be the successor.

In this case the British had linked the position of deputy ruler with the heir-apparent because of the political weight and respect that usually accompanied it. However, as the British noted, according to Sabah al-Salim, the deputy ruler, “did not have to be the next in line, but could be any person in the family considered suitable without regard to formal seniority (and, by implication, that the succession could equally be regarded as a matter not constrained by seniority)”.<sup>128</sup>

The third possible reason for Abdullah’s return was the rise of the oil era, when the Kuwait Oil Company (a joint Anglo-American oil company) signed an agreement with Ahmad al-Jabir to start drilling for oil in Kuwait in 1934; by mid-1938, oil had been discovered in sustainable quantities in the Burgan field.<sup>129</sup> Due to these new circumstances, Abdullah possibly tried to confirm his candidacy for ruling the country while preventing potential competitors in the ruling family from becoming the second in line. He most probably tried again to apply his financial opposition to Ahmad al-Jabir by refusing to allow him or his secretaries to control the oil income without heavy regulation.

In fact the new oil income was meant to be funnelled into Kuwait’s budget; instead, it poured into Ahmad al-Jabir’s private accounts. Ahmad al-Jabir promised more distribution of oil income for the ruling family and the Kuwaitis but he failed to introduce any laws or guidelines for its use. On 13 June 1938, Ahmad al-Jabir stated in an interview with the Political Agent in Kuwait that he was waiting for the oil royalties to come in before starting improvements in Kuwait for the ruling family and for the public.<sup>130</sup> However, he made no serious effort to implement his ideas about equal distribution of the new oil revenues within his society. Indeed,

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<sup>128</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 5 August 1959, FO 371/140083 (TNA, London).

<sup>129</sup> Y. S. F al-Sabah, *The Oil Economy of Kuwait* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1980), 32.

<sup>130</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 13 June 1938, IOR: L/P&S/12/3894A (British Library, London).

the Political Agent in Kuwait estimated that in 1938 the state budget, including the allowances for the ruling family and the private incomes of Ahmad al-Jabir, was more or less equal to Kuwait's entire income going into Ahmad al-Jabir's personal account, which, understandably, raised local grievances.<sup>131</sup>

Abdullah and the ruling family were aware of the financial transformation that usually accompanied an oil boom, and that it would bring prosperity to Kuwait and its people. However, against their wishes, Ahmad al-Jabir did not distribute the wealth from oil revenues appropriately as soon as it reached him through the ruling family and the Kuwaitis. Consequently, the ruling family, as well as the Kuwaitis, particularly the merchants and notable started to ask for a greater say in Kuwait's management and in political participation. According to Crystal, this situation caused, "sharpened cleavages both within the ruling family and between the ruler and the merchants".<sup>132</sup>

Given that new oil revenues would produce enormous authority and power for Ahmad al-Jabir, not surprisingly the situation made the Kuwaiti merchants and notables and some of the ruling family more suspicious about the future of financial administration in Kuwait and their loss of power to make decisions. Therefore, the emergence of the oil era was one of the major factors that smoothed the way for Abdullah to return to Kuwait's politics. Most probably, he was aiming to manage and control the effective investment of the new wealth while ensuring that it would be allocated to benefit both the merchants and notables, and the ruling family.

The fourth and final possible reason for Abdullah's return was his adoption of a new strategy to gain power in Kuwait's government administration. This strategy aimed at destroying

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<sup>131</sup> Annual account of the Ruler PA, Kuwait, 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>132</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 44-55.

the ruler's stronghold of power in Kuwait's government, which had been realized with the ruling family before the Legislative Council of 1938. On his return in 1935 as deputy ruler, Abdullah had identified an excellent opportunity for enabling himself and his supporters from the ruling family to curb much of Ahmad al-Jabir's power. The ruling family's role in running the country was overshadowed by the autocratic role of Ahmad al-Jabir and his secretaries, all of whom were outside the ruling family and the ruling descendent of Mubarak al-Sabah. In fact, Ahmad al-Jabir managed to administer all the affairs of Kuwait and the ruling family through his secretaries without giving any opportunities for his close relatives and cousins to participate.

Consequently, Abdullah had tried to oust Ahmad al-Jabir's secretaries in 1921, but, his efforts were countered by a strong opposition from most of the ruling family. By the 1930s, the situation had changed in favour of Abdullah, as Ahmad al-Jabir had lost many supporters in the ruling family as a result of economic difficulties (global economic depression, the Saudi blockade, and the invention of the cultured pearl in Japan), which reflected on the financial situation of the ruling family members. In addition, Ahmad al-Jabir's autocratic rule and the dominant position of the ruling family members were instrumental in losing supporters within his house during the 1930s. For example, in 1926, Abdullah had led the opposition against Ahmad al-Jabir that had been growing since the events of 1923; he was now supported by a majority of the ruling family, including his uncle Hamad al-Mubarak. According to the Political Agent in Kuwait on 13 October 1926:

There is great discontent at present against Ahmad al-Jabir amongst the other members of the Sabah Family, who all complain that he is mismanaging the property, and that they do not get their proper shares. As usual Abdullah al-Salim, who has been very quiet since the events of July 1923, is at the head of his opponents, but even Shaikh Hamad al-

Mubarak, who up till now has been friendly to Ahmad al-Jabir and has always acted for him in his absence, has now gone against him.<sup>133</sup>

In 1926, Abdullah succeeded in persuading the ruling family of the importance of having more financial management over their date plantations in Iraq, and of trying to break up Ahmad al-Jabir's and his secretaries' monopoly over the al-Sabah's income.<sup>134</sup> Although Abdullah's efforts were not completely successful, for the first time in his political life he gained the sympathy of most of the ruling family towards his endeavours to change the system of managing their date plantations, and controlling and distributing their income. Therefore, in returning to Kuwaiti politics, Abdullah succeeded in finding an opportunity to achieve political and financial benefits for himself and the rest of the ruling family by countering the role of Ahmad al-Jabir's secretaries.

To conclude, it is possible that Abdullah's final reason for returning to politics was his desire to achieve more power and control in Kuwait's government administration and decision-making. However, his efforts were limited, as he had to wait for a critical event, such as the Legislative Council of 1938-39, to support the wave of demand from Kuwaiti merchants and notables for political reforms, alongside his private aim of enhancing his power in Kuwait.

## **2.10. Abdullah and the Legislative Council of 1938-39 and Thereafter**

In 1938, Abdullah used the merchants' and notables' demand for reforms in return for a large share of power and control over the Kuwaiti administration. This strategy was a continuation of his failed efforts in 1921 to gain power over the country's financial situation. There was a secret

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<sup>133</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 23 October 1926, IOR: R/15/1/504 (British Library, London).

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

opposition front and resentment was growing among Kuwaiti merchants and notables against Ahmad al-Jabir's way of ruling the country. Also, the ruling family, led by Abdullah, was dissatisfied with its financial statements and allowances, especially after the emergence of extensive oil revenues in 1934. Members of the al-Sabah met in July 1938 to discuss their income shares from their Iraq date plantations, which were controlled by Ahmad al-Jabir and his secretary Mullah Salah with little or no reference to the ruling family.<sup>135</sup> In addition, Kuwaitis were dissatisfied with the low levels of education, social development, financial management, and city improvement at the hands of Ahmad al-Jabir, compared to the situation in the neighbouring countries of Bahrain and Iraq. A secret youth movement was therefore set up by several merchants and notables to air their grievances about the situation in Kuwait.<sup>136</sup>

Such grievances against Ahmad al-Jabir's method of rule, from both the ruling family and the Kuwaitis, became a visible movement in June 1938 when several merchants and notables put together a delegation and petitioned Ahmad al-Jabir to form a Legislative Council (an elective council). Abdullah was present in Ahmad al-Jabir's *Majlis* when this delegation arrived with the petition. Once Abdullah had understood the purpose of the delegation's interview with Ahmad al-Jabir, he immediately ordered Fahad al-Salim to talk to Yusuf bin Isa, the head of the delegation, regarding his complete support for their demands. The delegation was in need of support from the ruling family at that time, and therefore it immediately agreed to Abdullah's offer of support.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Extract from report entitled 'Administration of Kuwait', unsigned, 8 July 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>136</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 19 March 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>137</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire with translation of demands submitted to Ruler of Kuwait by reformist party, 29 June 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

In the last week of June 1938 Ahmad al-Jabir agreed to the principle of establishing a new council and eventually gave in to the merchants' and notables' demands. He agreed after having been advised by Captain de Gaury, the Political Agent in Kuwait and the Political Resident in the Gulf. The British advice was to adopt a new council to help Ahmad al-Jabir in administrating Kuwait and to associate himself more closely with the ruling family and the general population through such a body.<sup>138</sup>

Fearing that Ahmad al-Jabir would appoint the members of the new council, rather than hold an election among the merchants and notables, a group of Kuwaitis gathered at the house of Yusuf al-Marzooq to draw up an electoral list of one hundred and fifty people. The election duly yielded fourteen members, most of whom were of Najdi origin or were Sunni merchants who lived in the al-Qebla area. They chose Abdullah to be the president of the new council, as a reward for his support and also as a way of finding a form of legalisation for their new experiment.<sup>139</sup> In fact, establishing a new council with a local president from outside the ruling family would have been an impossible experiment without the supervision of the ruling family and the British. If the merchants and notables had managed to choose a president from outside the ruling family, there might have been violent interference from the ruling family on one side and the British on the other.<sup>140</sup>

The new body was named the Legislative Council, and it survived for only six months, at which point Ahmad al-Jabir dissolved it, as a result of its over-ambitious desire to turn Kuwait into a republic. This situation had first become apparent when the members of the Legislative

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<sup>138</sup> PR, Bushire to Ahmad al-Jabir, 18 June 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>139</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire with two appendices, 6 July 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>140</sup> Kuwait's first experiment with a government council was in 1921; the president of the council was the ruler Ahmad al-Jabir.

Council, without considering the position of the ruling family and the interests of the British Government, tried to reduce Ahmad al-Jabir's executive power for the sake of achieving full democracy. They did, in fact, manage to extract a promise from Ahmad al-Jabir to receive the cheque for the oil revenues in December 1938. They wanted to deal directly with the oil company without yielding to Ahmad al-Jabir's desires. They had also controlled the arms and weapons in the arsenal, which put Ahmad al-Jabir's position in Kuwait in great danger. These two reasons were enough to bring Ahmad al-Jabir and the British together to dissolve the Legislative Council in late 1938.

As president of the Legislative Council during the six months of its existence, Abdullah showed his sympathy with Kuwaiti's demand for reform, although this was also seen as a way for him to gain more power and to fulfil his ambition to improve his financial status and position in government administration via the ruling family. In fact, as the president of the Legislative Council, he showed great perception in dealing with the sensitive subjects discussed by its members, especially subjects linked with Ahmad al-Jabir's privileges and powers, constitutional issues, the arms reserve, and Kuwait's oil revenues. Under Abdullah's supervision, the members of the Legislative Council immediately set about preparing a basic law detailing their powers in Kuwait. This law, which was shown to Ahmad al-Jabir by Abdullah himself on 18 July 1938, contained five articles that transferred most of the ruler's authority to the Legislative Council:

Article 1. The people are the source of power, as represented by the Council.

Article 2. The Legislative Council has to establish the following laws: the law of budget, the law of justice, the law of public security, the law of education, the law of improvements, the law of emergency, and whatever other law it found necessary to establish.

Article 3. The Legislative Council is the place of reference for all treaties, concessions, monopolies and agreements, both internal and foreign.

Article 4. As the State has no Court of Appeal, the powers of such a Court will rest temporarily with the Legislative Council.

Article 5. The President of the Legislative Council represents the Executing Authority in the State.<sup>141</sup>

This new law, with its five articles, gave extremely broad powers to the members of the Legislative Council, especially to its president, Abdullah (including legislative, executive, and some judicial power). According to the Political Agent in Kuwait, “some of the law reads somewhat like the declaration of the French Assembly in 1791”.<sup>142</sup> He also stated that Abdullah had doubtless referred to his Arabic encyclopaedia for guidance in writing the articles of the law.<sup>143</sup> This was an interpretation from the Political Resident that was probably based on the fact that, as the Legislative Council’s president, and according to the law, Abdullah would exercise the highest authority in Kuwait, thereby satisfying his desire to gain power, to secure his position for succession, or even to use it against Ahmad al-Jabir.<sup>144</sup>

Even so, on 9 August 1938, Abdullah understood that the demands of the Legislative Council’s members might work against the position of the entire ruling family in Kuwait. He therefore started to adopt a new line in dealing with the increasing demands of the Legislative Council, especially by persuading Ahmad al-Jabir to adopt his suggestion of appointing a British

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<sup>141</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, enclosing translation of declaration concerning Kuwait Council, 12 July 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>142</sup> PR, Bushire to Mr R T Peel (India Office, New Delhi) 18 July 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> The articles of the Kuwaiti Constitution of 1938 granted more power to the government of Kuwait than the French Constitution of 1791 did to the French government. It did not separate the powers in the country, rather it gave Kuwait’s Legislative Council and its president all the powers in the country. This means that the Kuwaiti merchants and notables’ achievement was far more than an agreement with Ahmad al-Jabir, it could mostly be accepted as an endeavour to overthrow Ahmad al-Jabir.

adviser for the Legislative Council who would exercise more political support and control over the Legislative Council's activities of reform.<sup>145</sup>

Abdullah knew that a British adviser, similar to the one serving in Bahrain at that time, would be essential for ensuring the success of Kuwait's democratic experiment. He intended to calm the covert agitation among Kuwaitis, especially when he informed the Political Agent in Kuwait that, "the present agitation may turn not only against Ahmad al-Jabir but against the whole ruling family".<sup>146</sup> However, the British Government did not have an opportunity to consider Abdullah's suggestion before deciding to support Ahmad al-Jabir in his decision to dissolve the Legislative Council in December 1938.<sup>147</sup> This British reaction was a result of the Legislative Council's increasing threats to Britain's oil and strategic interests in Kuwait, in favour of clandestine pro-Iraqi feeling in Kuwait and the broad interest in Iraq's aspirations.

On 17 December 1938, Ahmad al-Jabir dissolved the Legislative Council. According to the Political Agent in Kuwait,

Ahmad al-Jabir informed [me] that he was about to see Council and he would not insist on dissolution but that they must hand over to him arms reserve. There is a good deal of opposition to Council but less than shaikh [Ahmad al-Jabir] supposes. Majority of electors are still for Council, all Sabah except Abdullah Salim [Abdullah] for shaikh and population about 50% or more for Council.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah (Ruler of Kuwait) to PA, Kuwait, 9 August 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>146</sup> PA, Kuwait to Sir Trenchard Fowle (PR, Bushire), 24 June 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>147</sup> PR, Bushire to Mr R T Peel (India Office, New Delhi), 17 November 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>148</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 17 December 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

Ahmad al-Jabir's intention to dissolve the council caused a protest amongst most of the Legislative Council's members, who managed to gather their weapons and followers while moving to the Naiyf fort in Kuwait City where the arsenal was located, and where they barricaded themselves in and waited. Ahmad al-Jabir also had sufficient time to gather his followers and Bedouins together around his palace at Dasman, before moving in to besiege the fort. With his persistence as the leader of the dissolved Legislative Council, Abdullah tried to arrange an arbitration and conciliation committee of four elders from each side to solve the widening rift, encouraged and supported by the Political Agency in Kuwait. Abdullah and other Kuwaiti merchants and notables including Yusuf bin Isa tried to keep the negotiations alive and to avoid bloodshed, aware that the quickest solution would be to withdraw the besiegers and send the Legislative Council's members back to their normal daily lives in return for establishing a new elective council with a bigger electorate.<sup>149</sup>

The election of the second Legislative Council yielded 20 members, twelve of them from the previous council, and again, Abdullah was elected as president. Because twelve of the members from the last Council had been re-elected and this time, due to the events on 17 December, Ahmad al-Jabir was more cautious regarding the laws of the second Legislative Council. Rather than the constitution that had been created by the dissolved Council, Ahmad al-Jabir planned instead to introduce a new constitution for Kuwait with more executive powers granted to him. Consequently Ahmad al-Jabir postponed the second Legislative Council's session while he consulted the British Government regarding his proposed new constitution.

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<sup>149</sup> PA, Kuwait to Sir Trenchard Fowle (PR, Bushire), 17 December 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

In March 1939, Ahmad al-Jabir introduced the new constitution in the first session of the second Legislative Council, but it was rejected by the members. Hence, Ahmad al-Jabir decided to dissolve the second Legislative Council once again. This second dissolution caused a violent standoff in Kuwait; two men were killed, several more were imprisoned, and others escaped to other countries.<sup>150</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir and the ruling family then decided to nominate another (appointed) Consultative Council that would contain four members from the al-Sabah and seven from Kuwaiti notables. In addition, the ruling family took up superior positions in all departments of Kuwait's government administration, including security, finance, the coast guard, supervision of arms supplies, and the city police.<sup>151</sup>

After the unpleasant events of March 1939 and the subsequent establishment of the Consultative Council, Ahmad al-Jabir presented Abdullah with most of Kuwait's financial management, including the distribution of the ruling family's allowances, and the allocation of the budgets of Kuwait's administrative departments. This decision proved that Abdullah had succeeded in his strategy to gain executive power over Kuwait's administrative system. Abdullah had in fact control of several positions in the state departments, including: (1) president of the Consultative Council; (2) chief of the Food Supply Department (during World War II); and (3) manager of the Financial Department. According to the Political Resident in the Gulf,

the ruling family felt as if they had won this country with the sword [after the events of March 1939] and expect [all] to be shared in common, and if the ruler does not give an adequate share of the swag to members of his family he is certain to meet trouble sooner or later, usually sooner.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 10 March 1939, IOR: R/15/5/206 (British Library, London).

<sup>151</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 6 January 1939, IOR: R/15/5/206 (British Library, London).

<sup>152</sup> PR, camp Muscat to Secretary to Government of India, New Delhi, 11 February 1940, IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

This description was accurate, especially in Abdullah's case, since he managed, with the help of Fahad al-Salim and Sabah al-Salim, to handle day-to-day matters in the key areas of finance, customs, supplies, and police. Ahmad al-Jabir only retained his position as an overseer of political matters. Abdullah's efforts to control Kuwait's financial management could not have been successful during the 1940s without the backing of Fahad al-Salim and Sabah al-Salim, who ran the Treasury and the Police respectively. Abdullah, Fahad al-Salim, and Sabah al-Salim created a solid alliance against Ahmad al-Jabir, by controlling crucial departments in Kuwait's administrative system. As a result, Abdullah's new positions in Kuwait's administrative system were not interfered with, either by Ahmad al-Jabir or the Kuwaitis. Abdullah's ultimate success in his strategy of gaining power, after a long period of absence from politics gave him the upper hand in his efforts to be the next successor for Kuwait's rulership. Abdullah continued to practice ultimate authority in Kuwait's government administration for the whole period of the 1940s until the death of Ahmad al-Jabir in 1950. After that, he assumed the rulership without any problems.

Ahmad al-Jabir was not able to diminish Abdullah's control over Kuwait's government administration, as he needed Abdullah and other members of the al-Sabah to secure the al-Sabah's reliance and hold over the government administration after the standoff of 1938-39. Therefore, Abdullah's efforts in that year were a turning point in the history of Kuwait. It signified the start of an expanded role for the al-Sabah in governing the country in addition to the ruler. This solidified the family's hold over the country in advance of the huge changes brought about by the oil era in the 1950s-60s.

## **2.11. Conclusion**

This chapter analysed the influence that several events in Abdullah's early years had on his later life and Kuwait's history from 1950 to 1965. These events were as follows: (1) Abdullah's childhood; (2) Abdullah's financial status; (3) Abdullah's withdrawal period; and (4) Abdullah's re-engagement with politics and participation in the 1938-39 Legislative Council's Movement. The influence of these events on Abdullah shaped his personality and political thoughts in his later life. In other words, they contributed to the advancement of Abdullah's political skills and abilities, and to they played a part in his future plan to transform Kuwait into the first welfare, rentier state in the Gulf area. Perhaps without his many political victories and defeats in his early life, his decisions would not have been so different from the previous rulers of Kuwait.

Abdullah's childhood, his genealogy, and his experiences during his upbringing, education, and more significantly, the assassination of 1896 had the most important influence on Abdullah's later life. Without the incidence of the assassination of 1896 Abdullah would not have been able to play a key part in the ruling system and politics of Kuwait during the twentieth century. His grandfather, Mubarak al-Sabah's decision to monopolise the succession and rulership so that it came from within his descendants after the incident provided Abdullah with a great chance to assume high positions in the government's administration and to engage in the rulership and political affairs of Kuwait. The other experiences mentioned above had less influence on Abdullah's later life, as he was not so different from his relatives, the descendants of Mubarak al-Sabah.

Abdullah's unstable financial status, including his fiscal difficulties, struggle, and differences with the ruler, Ahmad al-Jabir and the ruling family in the early 1920s, was another

source of influence on his later life. His history with fiscal difficulties pushed the ruling family and the Kuwaitis to question his motives regarding his private understanding with Ibn Saud in 1923 to reopen Kuwait's trade with Najd. His effort to be Ibn Saud's private agent was one of the unexplained mysteries in the history of Kuwait. Did he want to plot against Ahmad al-Jabir as the British record stated or did he want to improve his fiscal status for his personal benefit? Overall, his failure to implement a private understanding with ibn Saud led him to withdraw from Kuwait politics in 1923.

Abdullah's withdrawal period from 1923 to 1935 had the most important influence on his later life. In his absence from politics, he established good relationships with merchants and notables in Kuwait. Without his strong relationship with Kuwaiti notables and his open-minded and flexible beliefs, he would not have changed his presence in Kuwait's politics. Also during his absence from politics, his knowledge of the political, economic, and social development in the world around him increased due to his frequent travel abroad. He used this experience perfectly when he became ruler of Kuwait in 1950, and benefited the most from the emergence of the oil era by introducing his visionary plan to transform Kuwait into the first welfare state in the Gulf area.

The Legislative Council's movement in 1938-39 was another event that influenced Abdullah's later life. This event afforded him a life-time opportunity to return to political life in Kuwait. Abdullah used the Kuwaiti demands for reforms to serve his interest in controlling power in the administrative system. He kept silent after Ahmad al-Jabir's dissolution of the second Legislative Council in 1939, thereby winning Ahmad's support and important positions

in Kuwait's government administration during the 1940s. Abdullah's intelligence, and luck during 1938-39 were the main factors underlying his re-engagement in Kuwait's politics.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Abdullah and the Succession Question, 1917-50**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines Abdullah's efforts to increase his chances of succession in Kuwait between 1917 and 1950. Its main aim is to examine how and why Abdullah became the ruler of Kuwait in 1950, starting with his first engagement and strategies for succession in 1917 following his father, Salim al-Mubarak's accession to the rulership. It also includes an examination of the way Abdullah managed to test these strategies in 1921 on the death of Salim al-Mubarak, when his first opportunity to rule Kuwait was presented.

Before examining his efforts at succession in 1921 and 1950, the chapter focuses on the origins of Kuwait, and in particular, how the al-Sabah established its rule and how the rulership transferred from one ruler to another within the same ruling family. These discussions, all in all, will provide more information about the mechanisms of succession in Kuwait from 1766 to 1962 that affected Abdullah's efforts during the first half of the twentieth century.

#### **3.2. Al-Sabah's Legitimacy to Rule**

Before examining Abdullah's efforts at succession in 1921 and 1950, it is helpful to investigate the origin and the legitimacy of the al-Sabah's rule in Kuwait. In other words, how did the al-Sabah establish its right to dominate the succession question in Kuwait in 1766? Was it achieved by peaceful means or with the use of force? Through these questions the research will provide an answer to the unique event of the al-Sabah's ascension to power in the Gulf area.

In fact, the al-Sabah has ruled Kuwait continuously since its establishment as an autonomous entity in the mid-eighteenth century. Fifteen rulers have ascended peacefully to the rulership, with only one assassination in 1896. The ruling family did not come to power by force, as in the case of the emergence of the al-Saud (the ruling family of Saudi Arabia) in 1744, or the al-Khalifa (the ruling family of Bahrain) in 1783. The unique emergence of the al-Sabah to power can basically be described as an agreement between the rulers and the ruled. This tradition of rule was maintained in Kuwait, as became evident when al-Sabah indicated the strong intention to limit the succession process to members of the family, supported by their unanimity and their links with Kuwaiti notables and merchants, a strategy that still continues today. Whenever this sense of unity weakened, signs of tensions would rise to the surface, as in the case of: the emigration of the al-Khalifas from Kuwait, followed by the al-Jalahma in 1766, in the Kuwaitis' general resentment of the autocratic rule of Mubarak al-Sabah and his successors, as reflected in the emigration of three prominent merchants from Kuwait to Bahrain in 1911,<sup>153</sup> in the 1921 petition, and in the 1938-39 Legislative Council's movement.

Even so, the ruling family continued to dominate the rulership in Kuwait by going through three stages of progress: (1) the migration of the al-Sabah with other families from Najd to Kuwait, followed by (2) the formation of the earliest political entity (a triple alliance) between these families to rule Kuwait, and (3) al-Sabah's domination of the rulership in Kuwait after the abandonment of the triple alliance.

The first stage of the emergence of the al-Sabah's rule in Kuwait began with the emigration of the family from Najd to Kuwait at some point around the early-to-mid-seventeenth

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<sup>153</sup> They were Hillal al-Mutairi, Shamlan ibn Ali, and Ibrahim ibn Mudhaf; see al-Ghanim, "*The Reign of Mubarak Al Sabah*," 201-2.

century as part of a wider confederation of families called the ‘Utub, which included the al-Khalifa, al-Jalahma, and al-Zayed, among others. This confederation, according to traditional sources, emigrated from Najd in central Arabia to Zubarra (on the north east coast of what is now Qatar), then to Basra. Some were said to have moved on to southern Persia, finally settling in Qurain, locally known as, Kuwait.<sup>154</sup> Historians have not confirmed what factors urged them to emigrate; some have mentioned political conflicts while others argue for environmental disasters such as drought.<sup>155</sup> Despite these variations, all are agreed that the place of origin of the ‘Utub tribe was Najd and their ultimate destination was Kuwait.

Although traditional sources confirm the emigration of the ‘Utub to Kuwait, they do not confirm the exact date of the families’ arrival there, or the establishment of rule by the al-Sabah. The earliest contemporary source to support local stories of the arrival of the ‘Utub families in Kuwait was published in *Al-Wathiqah*, an historical periodical published in Bahrain by Ali Aba Husain under the title, *Dirasah li Tarikh al-’Utub*.<sup>156</sup> This official Ottoman report had been written in 1701 by Ali Pasha, governor of Basra from 1701 to 1705, and it indicated the presence of the ‘Utub tribe in Mekhrag since this confederation of families had asked for approval from the Ottoman authorities to settle in nearby Basra.

According to B.J. Slot’s research in *Mühimme*, the Ottoman archives, the absence of records for the ‘Utub as civilians in Basra suggests the failure of their request and their consequent emigration to Kuwait after 1701.<sup>157</sup> Another later source supporting the local story

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<sup>154</sup> Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al Hadith*, 22-5.

<sup>155</sup> Al-Rasheed. *Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 33-6; al-Shamlan, *Min Tarikh al Kuwait*, 106.

<sup>156</sup> This document appeared in an article written by Ali Aba Husain, “A Study of the History of Utoob”, *Al-Wathiqah*, no.1 (1982): 94-104, and see a facsimile of the document on p. 102; B. J. Slot, *Nasha’t al-Kuwait* (Al-Kuwait: Markaz al-Buhuth wa al-Derasat al-Kuwayityyah, 2002), 116.

<sup>157</sup> Slot. *Nasha’t al-Kuwait*, 118.

appeared in an article written in 1817 by Francis Warden, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bombay, which stated that the arrival of the ‘Utub families in Kuwait had occurred in 1716.<sup>158</sup> However, the long gap between the presumed date of the ‘Utub’s arrival in Kuwait and the date of the article indicated the probability that it was based on local testimonies rather than on documented evidence.<sup>159</sup> Overall, and despite the vagueness of the exact date of the arrival of the ‘Utub families in Kuwait, which many agree was around the beginning of the eighteenth century, their arrival and first political formation was confirmed for the first time in a document dated in 1756.

The second stage of the al-Sabah’s progress towards stabilising the rulership began just after its settlement in Kuwait in the early eighteenth century. The earliest document to support the al-Sabah’s progress towards the second stage of completing the full stabilisation of its rule in Kuwait came in 1756. In a Dutch report written by Baron Tiddo Frederik van Kinnphausen, head of the Dutch East India Company’s establishment on Kharg Island, and addressed to Jacob Mossel, the Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company, Kinnphausen described Kuwait and its political formation as follows:

Both (Failaka Island and Kuwait) are inhabited by an Arab tribe of which we have spoken before: the Etoubis [the *‘Utub* families]. They are formally dependent on Abdullah of the desert [shaikh of the Bani Khaïld of al-Hasa] although they pay him only a very small contribution.... Several different shaikhs rule them, all living in relative unity. The highest ranking shaikh is Mobarak Eben Saback [Mubarak bin Sabah], but because he is poor and still young, another, called Mahometh Eben Khalifa [Muhammad bin Khalifa] who is rich and possesses many vessels, enjoys almost equal respect among them.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayyt al Hadith*, 25-6.

<sup>159</sup> Slot, *Nasha’t al-Kuwayyt*, 118.

<sup>160</sup> This is a translation of the text relevant to Kuwait published in Slot, *Nasha’t al-Kuwayyt*, 127-31.

Kniphausen's report indicates that by 1756 the 'Utub family had already allocated the al-Sabah the highest position in the town, based on tradition, and not on its genuine fortune. According to Slot, "It cannot be verified exactly how far back this goes, but such traditional prestige could not have been of recent origin".<sup>161</sup> Nevertheless, the report fails to identify the origins of the al-Sabah's position in Kuwait, which is supported by later traditional sources focusing on the establishment of this family's legitimacy to rule in Kuwait.

While Kniphausen's report gives a summary description of Kuwait's political entity in 1756, another, later traditional source defines the first movement of the 'Utub families to distinguish different roles for them in ruling the country. This source describes the formation of an alliance among three prominent families in the 'Utub confederation in 1716 to divide the administration of Kuwait City and its income equally among them: the al-Sabah, whose leader Sabah bin Jabir was to lead and control rulership affairs; the al-Khalifa, whose leader Khalifa bin Ahmad was to control trade and financial affairs; and the al-Jalahma, whose leader Jabir bin Rhama al-'Uttabi was to control maritime affairs.<sup>162</sup> Although the date of the triple alliance among these 'Utub families cannot be precisely verified, it probably occurred before 1756; indeed, this 'Utub alliance complies with the Dutch report that Kuwait was being ruled by several shaikhs, with the al-Sabah having the highest rank among the 'Utub families, based on tacit agreement and tradition.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Slot, *Mubarak al-Sabah*, 7-8.

<sup>162</sup> Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwayyt al-Siyasi*, vol. 1, 42.

<sup>163</sup> These shaikhs were: the shaikh of the al-Sabah family (the "shaikh of the desert" or the "shaikh of the government"), the shaikh of the al-Khalifa family (the "shaikh of the sea" or the "shaikh of the merchants"), and the shaikh of the al-Jalahma family. For more information on why the 'Utub chose Sabah I, see al-Jen'ai, *Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwayyt*, 15-6; al-Rasheed, *Tarikh al-Kuwayyt*, 109; Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwayyt al-Siyasi*, vol. 1, 43.

The final stage of the al-Sabah in stabilising its legitimacy to rule Kuwait concluded with the end of the triple alliance among the ‘Utub families during the second half of the eighteenth century. Although the al-Sabah were already enjoying the highest prominence in Kuwait by 1756, an alliance with the other ‘Utub families was considered to be a negative factor working against the complete control of the administration of the country and its income.

Thus, two events in Kuwait during the 1760s supported the ambitions of the al-Sabah to dominate the country as rulers. The first was the emigration in 1766 of the al-Khalifa, the second element of the triple alliance, from Kuwait to Zubarra. The second was the emigration of al-Jalahma, the final part of the triple alliance, from Kuwait. Discussing these two events in the history of Kuwait is important for answering the main question of this part of the chapter: How did the al-Sabah establish its rule and birth right in Kuwait?

The emigration of the al-Khalifa family from Kuwait to Zubarra (in Qatar) in 1766 is a controversial matter, since the motives for this move can be divided into three stories. The first indicates that economic and independent motives were the main reasons behind the emigration of this rich family from Kuwait. Indeed, in Warden’s 1817 report on the establishment of Kuwait, he stated that fifty years after the settlement of the ‘Utub (1716–1766), this country had witnessed great economic growth that encouraged the al-Khalifa, whose family members were bound by an alliance with other ‘Utub families, to take responsibility for trade and financial affairs in Kuwait and divide their trade income equally with others. Eventually they sought to disband the alliance in order to reap the profits of this growth, in addition to the Bahrain pearl beds, entirely for themselves. Mr Warden added that under the leadership of Khalifa bin Muhammad, the al-Khalifa enticed the al-Sabah and al-Jalahma with the prospect of the

enormous profits that they would all acquire if they and other 'Utub families were allowed to settle and establish a trade centre for pearl diving in Zubarra, on the Arab shore next to the rich pearl beds opposite Bahrain Island. According to Warden, the al-Sabah and al-Jalahma agreed to the al-Khalifa's plan, based on the economic benefits that all would gain from it; therefore, the al-Khalifa settled in Zubarra and were followed by some other 'Utub families. However, contrary to the expectations of the al-Sabah and al-Jalahma, the al-Khalifa revealed its hidden intention: on arrival in Zubarra, the families broke the triple alliance by establishing their rule independently of Kuwait, and later conquering Bahrain.<sup>164</sup>

The second story mentioned by some historical sources based on local testimonies, suggests that the reason for the al-Khalifa's emigration was a disagreement with the al-Sabah over the issue of raids against Kuwait by the Bani Ka'b. According to one source, the difficult situation due to the painful humiliation in Kuwait, combined with the Bani Ka'b's increasing forays to attack the country along with the al-Sabah's failure to solve this predicament, was the main motivation for the al-Khalifa's departure.<sup>165</sup> Another source contended that Bani Ka'b's plan to control Kuwait through a political marriage between one of their shaikhs and Mariam al-Sabah (daughter of the ruler of Kuwait) led to intense disagreement between the al-Sabah and al-Khalifa. Abdullah I al-Sabah, who was the ruler of Kuwait at that time, refused the marriage proposal after a discussion with the al-Khalifa, who were aware that Abdullah I must sacrifice his daughter to satisfy the Bani Ka'b. This disagreement resulted in the al-Khalifa's move out of Kuwait.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayyt al Hadith*, 63-4.

<sup>165</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Tarikh al-Kuwayyt*, 112; Al-Shamlan, *Min Tarikh al Kuwayyt*, 120-1.

<sup>166</sup> Dickson, *Kuwait and her Neighbours*, 25-6.

Others have argued that the main cause of the differences between the al-Sabah and al-Khalifa and the decision of the latter to leave Kuwait was the murder of a member of the Bani Ka'b tribe in Dauraq near Shatt al-Arab, which was carried out by a member of the al-Khalifa. The al-Sabah then suggested that the al-Khalifa should resolve the situation privately with the Bani Ka'b, rather than engaging the whole 'Utub community in the matter.<sup>167</sup>

The final story, which was also based on historical sources, proposes that Muhammad al-Khalifa, who had ambitions to become the ruler, did not wish to be in second place after the accession of Abdullah I in 1766, and therefore left Kuwait with his family. According to Khaz'al, after the 'Utub families had settled in Kuwait and founded the triple alliance, Muhammad bin Khalifa, who had inherited the al-Khalifa leadership from his father, did not want the succession to be limited to the al-Sabah, particularly after the accession of Abdullah I, the youngest son of Sabah I bin Jabir. When Muhammad found it difficult to put forward a strong claim for the rulership, he decided to leave Kuwait with his family and followers.<sup>168</sup> Based on this interpretation of events, the reason for the al-Khalifa's emigration from Kuwait to Zubarra can be understood, although not confirmed. In any event, their emigration created an important question to be answered: would Kuwait continue to be ruled by the remaining members of the triple alliance, al-Sabah and al-Jalahma, or would the victor in the power struggle dominate it?

The al-Khalifa's emigration to Zubarra saw the al-Sabah begin to emerge as a new ruling family in the Gulf region. Historical sources indicate that the al-Khalifa were the only family from the 'Utub community whose ambitions to rule Kuwait equalled those of the al-Sabah: thus

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<sup>167</sup> Maimona al-Sabah, *al-Kuwayyt Hadharah w Tarikh*, (Al-Kuwayyt: Published by the Author, 1989), 62-3.

<sup>168</sup> Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwayyt al-Siyasi*, vol. 1, 46.

their departure in 1766 left the al-Sabah without any real challengers, thereby strengthening the family's position among other 'Utub families in Kuwait. However, an obstacle still remained in the path to power: i.e., the al-Sabah's political and financial connections to the al-Jalahma.

Whereas the al-Khalifa's emigration had started the third stage of the al-Sabah's path to ruling Kuwait, the emigration of the al-Jalahma from Kuwait and the collapse of the triple alliance ended it. The al-Jalahma's position in Kuwait, where they had been responsible for its maritime affairs and had controlled a third of the county's income, became the last obstruction preventing the al-Sabah from consolidating its authority to rule Kuwait. According to Khaz'al (who is the only source concerning this aspect of history), just after the al-Khalifa had settled in Zubarra, Abdullah I, leader of the al-Sabah and of Kuwait City, recognised the main reasons for the families' having emigrated and also felt the great loss to the county's income, due to the departure of a major partner who had subsidised the triple alliance financially. In an effort to minimise further losses, he cut off the al-Jalahma's right to any income in the country, which led to the al-Jalahma's emigration to Zubarra.<sup>169</sup>

Although, this description of its emigration from Kuwait can be found only in this source, which makes it less reliable, most other traditional sources confirm that a large part of the al-Jalahma family followed the al-Khalifa to Zubarra. The departure of the al-Jalahma from Kuwait showed that this family was the victim of the al-Khalifa's emigration, whether it was intended by the al-Khalifa or was due to the al-Sabah's pressure on the al-Khalifa. This was because the loss of an important pillar (i.e., the al-Khalifa) in the triple alliance had pushed the remaining parties to engage in a challenge for the country's income. The al-Sabah was ultimately victorious and the ruling family was thus established in Kuwait.

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 47.

Overall, the emigration of the al-Jalahma from Kuwait to Zubarra, which probably occurred in or around 1766, must be recognised as the point at which the al-Sabah emerged as a new ruling family in the Gulf. The exclusion of two important members in the triple alliance ultimately led to the end of the alliance and allowed the third party, the al-Sabah, to establish its legitimacy, to dominate in ruling the country by limiting the succession to its own family members and to controlling the country's income.

### **3.3. Succession in Kuwait before 1921**

Before discussing Abdullah's experiences at succession in 1921 and 1950, it is important to analyse the cases of succession that followed the al-Sabah's establishment in 1766 of its legitimacy to rule. This examination is essential because it will give a wider overview of the random patterns in the practice of transition of power in Kuwait from 1766 to 1950. For example, the history of succession in Kuwait is full of incomprehensible cases of the rulership's transition; sometimes power transferred after the death of a ruler to his eldest son, whereas at other times it went to one of his sons or brothers or even a nephew or cousin.

This disorderly transition of power in Kuwait did not happen coincidentally; it was at least led by traditions for succession resulting from the absence of a crown prince in Kuwait before 1962 (see Figure 1 on page 38 for the al-Sabah House's succession cases from 1766 to 1950). It is important to explore these traditions and their development in some depth, in order to understand how they influenced the practice of succession in Kuwait from 1766 to 1917.

According to historical sources, the first tradition for succession in Kuwait was the practice of consultation, *Shura*, among the al-Sabah that enabled Kuwaiti merchants and notables

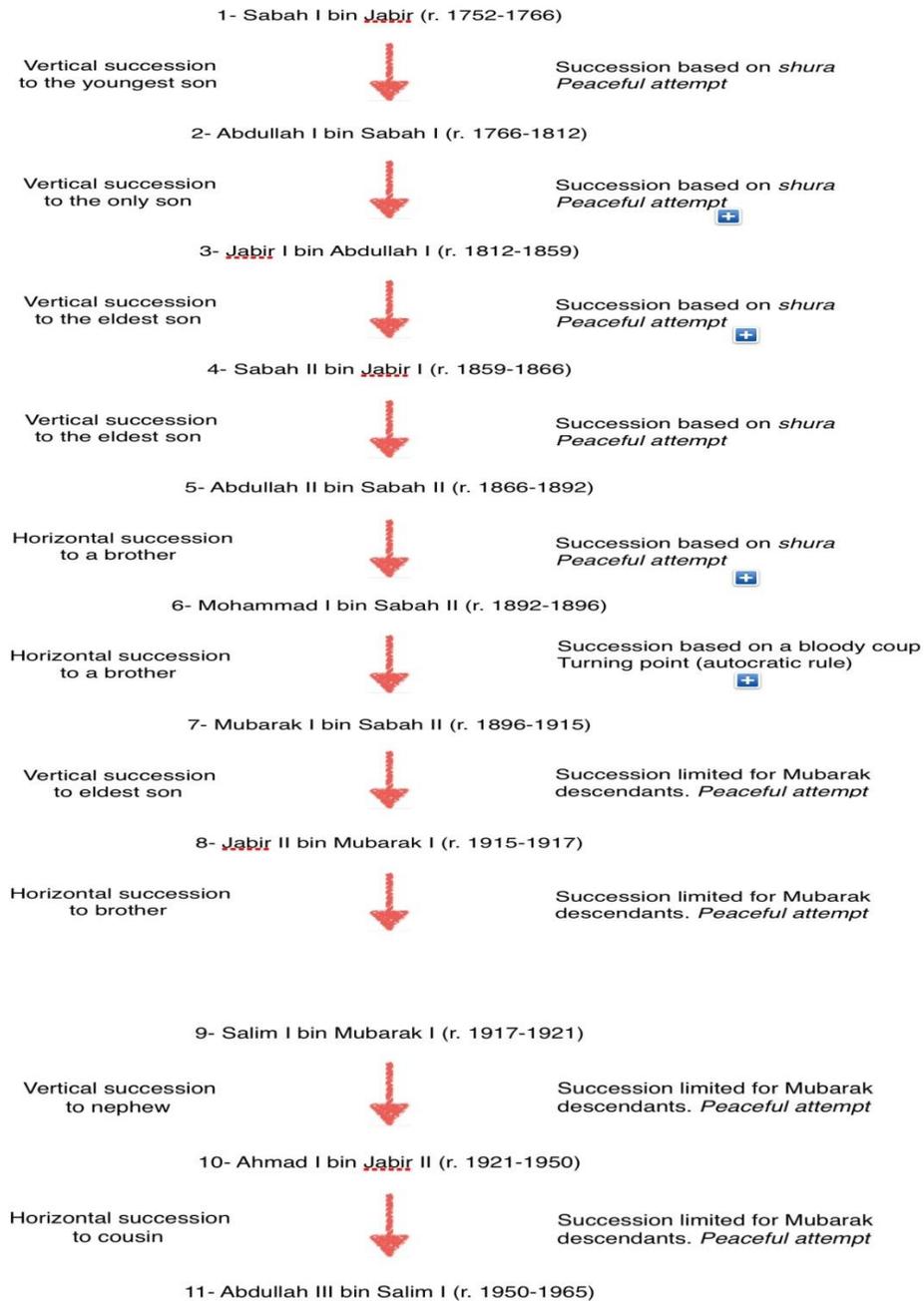
to choose the successor after the ruler's death (see Chapter Four to see how these two social groups have influenced society in Kuwait before 1950s). This tradition was the main mechanism behind the choice of successors in Kuwait starting from the election of Sabah I in the first half of the eighteenth century to the assassination in 1896. During this period, historical sources define the al-Sabah as a ruling family with a prominent role in Kuwait based on tradition, where merchants and notables had the upper hand in choosing successors among the family to rule the country based on promises from potential successors to seek the Kuwaitis' advice through consultation on important matters.<sup>170</sup> Some went so far as to explain that at this stage the authority of the successor did not reach the limit of enforcing judgment on local Kuwaitis.<sup>171</sup> This period of transitional power in Kuwait went through two stages. The first one crystallised in the vertical transition of power genetically from the father to one of his sons, thereby narrowing the circle when choosing candidates, to the sons of the ruler. The second stage crystallised in the horizontal succession, which for once occurred peacefully, in 1892, and enlarged the circle of potential candidates to the brothers of the ruler and their descendants. These two stages marked a peaceful period that lasted until the late nineteenth century.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Al-Shamlan, *Min Tarikh al Kuwaiyt*, 117; al-Shammari, *al-Mustawda ' wa al-Mustahdar*, 47-50.

<sup>171</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 90-1.

<sup>172</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 20.



**Figure 1:** the direction/nature of the succession cases in the al-Sabah House, 1766-1950<sup>173</sup>

<sup>173</sup> This figure is constructed by the Author of this thesis, Abdullah Alnajdi.

The first stage of the period of *Shura* began with Abdullah I al-Sabah's accession in 1766. On this occasion, the rulership went to Abdullah I al-Sabah vertically, even though he was not the ruler's eldest son.<sup>174</sup> According to historical accounts, he was brought up to rule after a consultation between the al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti merchants and notables. This consultation had led to sworn allegiances (*mubaia'ah*) to Abdullah I al-Sabah rather than to one of his brothers, because of his characteristics which included generosity, courage, good conduct, and intelligence.<sup>175</sup> The next succession in this stage occurred in 1814, when the only son of Abdullah I al-Sabah, Jabir I al-Abdullah, became the ruler of Kuwait. In this case, the rulership went to Jabir I al-Abdullah vertically and not horizontally, to one of his uncles. Consequently, later sources again explain that the will of the Kuwaitis was behind the accession of Jabir I al-Abdullah. Jabir I al-Abdullah was in Bahrain as a result of an on-going dispute with Abdullah I al-Sabah; therefore, the Kuwaiti people appointed Muhammad al-Salman (Jabir I al-Abdullah's cousin) to be the deputy ruler pending Jabir I al-Abdullah's return to Kuwait.<sup>176</sup> In this case, the transition of power to Jabir I al-Abdullah demonstrated the power of the will of the people of Kuwait, including the ruling family, merchants, and the notables, in limiting the succession and birth right to Abdullah I al-Sabah's descendants, and not to one of his brothers or cousins.

The third case from the first stage happened in 1859, when Sabah II al-Jabir succeeded Jabir I al-Abdullah, thereby continuing the chain of vertical succession. Sabah II al-Jabir was the eldest of Jabir I al-Abdullah's twelve sons; one of the main reasons for his accession, which proved the influence of the will of the Kuwaiti people during this period, was his long

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<sup>174</sup> There is a belief that the rulership went to him horizontally from his brother Mubarak bin Sabah; see Slot, *Mubarak al-Sabah*, 1; Al-Jen'ai, *Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 10. The other sons of the ruler were Salman, Muhammad, Mubarak, and Malik.

<sup>175</sup> Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi*, 45.

<sup>176</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 116; Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi*, vol. 1, 72.

engagement with Kuwait's government administration during most of Jabir I al-Abdullah's reign. According to Rush, quoting from a Bombay report dated 1 July 1854, "Sabah II [al-Jabir] was considered Kuwait's virtual chief, his father, Jabir I, being merely the titular chief."<sup>177</sup> Therefore, Sabah II al-Jabir had served as the true ruler of Kuwait from as far back as 1854, and possibly much earlier, which was why the Kuwaiti people chose him. The final case in this stage of succession occurred when the eldest son of Sabah II al-Jabir assumed power in Kuwait in 1866: this was Abdullah II al-Sabah. In this case, the line of succession continued vertically according to the will of the Kuwaiti people, thus limiting the path of succession to a move from the father to one of his sons. However, the will of the Kuwaiti people did not continue to move vertically, instead, shifting to a horizontal approach for the next succession.

The second and final stage of the first period of succession in Kuwait occurred in 1892 when the rulership after Abdullah II al-Sabah moved horizontally to his brother Muhammad al-Sabah, rather than vertically to one or other of his adult sons, Khalifa and Jabir. Without any doubt this stage proved that the pattern of *Shura* among the Kuwaiti people was the dominant practice in choosing successors in Kuwait. According to later sources, Abdullah II al-Sabah's policy of relinquishing some of his powers and authority to his brothers, Muhammad al-Sabah, Jarrah al-Sabah, and Mubarak al-Sabah rather than to his sons was the main factor in deciding Muhammad al-Sabah's accession.<sup>178</sup> Other later sources add that the will of the Kuwaiti people was the main reason for Muhammad al-Sabah's accession, in view of his skills and abilities to rule.<sup>179</sup> This overview of the stages of the first period of succession in Kuwait suggested the first norm for the process of transitioning power in Kuwait from 1766 to 1892. It highlighted the will

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<sup>177</sup> Rush, *Al-Sabah*, 229.

<sup>178</sup> Al-Jen'ai, *Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 23-4.

<sup>179</sup> Al-Shammari, *al-Mustawda' wa al-Mustahdar*, 51-4.

of the Kuwaitis in choosing their ruler as the main mechanism behind the accession of the al-Sabah's successors. It further proved that succession could move vertically to the next generation, but not in reverse, as well as horizontally within the same generation.

The second tradition in the process of the transition of power in Kuwait began in 1896, when the practice of succession moved by force to one branch of the ruling family. This followed the assassination of the ruler of Kuwait, Muhammad al-Sabah and his brother Jarrah al-Sabah in 1896 which was led by Mubarak al-Sabah, helped by his sons Jabir II al-Mubarak and Salim al-Mubarak.<sup>180</sup> Although this event, which was of a type considered rare in the history of Kuwait, forcibly moved the practice of succession in a horizontal manner to Mubarak al-Sabah (who was considered as third in line of succession after his murdered brother Jarrah al-Sabah), it did not, initially, limit succession to Mubarak al-Sabah's descendants.

According to one source, the first challenge for Mubarak al-Sabah was to find legitimacy for his rule, both locally and regionally.<sup>181</sup> In the local arena, Mubarak al-Sabah managed to obtain strong support for his claim to rule among a large number of Kuwaitis who swore allegiance to him within days of his accession. Surprisingly, this forced accession was neither opposed nor rejected, with the exception of Mubarak's murdered brothers' sons. Eventually Mubarak al-Sabah reached a settlement with his nephews over their differences with him, following which they joined the others in accepting him as ruler of Kuwait, especially when he promised in 1903 to restore their property rights in both Kuwait and Iraq. In the regional arena, Mubarak al-Sabah managed to win the recognition of the Ottoman Empire in 1896, which duly declared him *Qaimaqam* (the Ottoman title for a sub-governor) of Kuwait.

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<sup>180</sup> Al-Jen'ai, *Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 7-25. This murder was the only assassination to occur in the history of the ruling family in Kuwait since 1752.

<sup>181</sup> Slot, *Mubarak al-Sabah*, 77-87.

However, the most important aspect of the recognition of Mubarak al-Sabah's rule by the regional arena started from 1899 and thereafter. Mubarak al-Sabah first managed unobtrusively to sign a secret treaty with the British authorities in the Gulf, in which he pledged that neither he, nor his heirs or his successors would receive foreign agents or representatives or cede or sell territory without the approval of the British Government in 1899. This treaty was followed and renewed by another in 1907, known as the lease of Bander Shuwaikh. In this agreement, Britain promised to guarantee Kuwait's internal independence, its boundaries, and the rulership of Mubarak al-Sabah and his heirs.<sup>182</sup> In 1914, Mubarak al-Sabah joined Britain in its war against the Ottoman Empire in return for Britain's recognition of Kuwait as an independent state under British protection. Britain subsequently assumed responsibility for Kuwait's foreign affairs and British officials consulted with the ruler on important matters impacting on British interests in Kuwait.<sup>183</sup> These treaties ensured that Mubarak al-Sabah and his heirs would remain rulers of Kuwait so long as they respected and fulfilled these agreements.

Mubarak al-Sabah's treaties with Britain expanded the practice of consultation (*Shura*) for choosing a ruler from a small circle of domestic elites (senior members of the ruling family and the most influential merchants and notables) to a wider circle of foreign parties (the British Government and Kuwait's neighbours, such as Khaz'ali of Muhammarah, and Ibn Saud of Najd).<sup>184</sup> In other words, these treaties opened up Kuwait's rulership and other domestic matters to international influence or pressure.

Aside from the Ottoman Empire, which Kuwait was nominally a part of during 1871-1914, Britain was the first foreign country to try to influence the matter of succession in Kuwait.

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<sup>182</sup> Al-Ghanim, "*The Reign of Mubarak Al Sabah*," 221; Slot, *Nasha'at al-Kuwait*, 405-6.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 111-4.

<sup>184</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 11 December 1915, IOR: R/15/1/513 (British Library, London)

In fact, Britain had already intervened in Kuwaiti domestic affairs between 1899 (the date of the secret agreement with Mubarak al-Sabah) and 1904 (when Britain appointed its first Political Agent to Kuwait), although not in relation to succession. After the start of World War I, however, succession in Kuwait became an important question in Britain's consultations with Mubarak al-Sabah, the aim being to ensure Kuwait's stability and, consequently, the safety of British interests in the country. The matter became increasingly important during the last days of Mubarak al-Sabah's reign, when his health was deteriorating.<sup>185</sup>

Upon Mubarak al-Sabah's death in 1915, at a time when Salim al-Mubarak was not in Kuwait, the first instance of succession according to the new tradition of transition took place in Kuwait. Having gained the support of the British, who brought a naval sloop to Kuwait's port to ensure the safe transition of power, Jabir II al-Mubarak, the eldest son of Mubarak al-Sabah, took on the rulership.<sup>186</sup> Jabir II al-Mubarak's succession was also supported by the second influence on Kuwait's succession process, namely, Khaz'al, ruler of Muhammarah, who had enjoyed a strong friendship with the al-Sabah, and with Mubarak al-Sabah in particular. Khaz'al put pressure on the ruling family, merchants and notables in Kuwait to choose Jabir II al-Mubarak instead of his brother Salim al-Mubarak, who was a stronger character but who had been absent from Kuwait during the succession (he was busy with a military rescue expedition to Ibn Saud near Hasa).<sup>187</sup> In this case, the rulership shifted vertically to Mubarak al-Sabah's eldest son, due in large part to the pressure put on the ruling family by both Khaz'al and the British. Salim al-Mubarak had always considered himself to be the best person to succeed his father; thus, when

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<sup>185</sup> PR, Bushire to Government of India, New Delhi, 9 November 1913, IOR: R/15/5/65 (British Library, London).

<sup>186</sup> PR, Bushire to Government of India, New Delhi, 2 December 1915, IOR: R/15/1/513 (British Library, London); PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 3 December 1915, IOR: R/15/5/59 (British Library, London).

<sup>187</sup> Extract from Col. S. G. Knox's summary (PA, Kuwait), 4 January 1915, IOR: L/P&S/10/827 (British Library, London).

he returned to Kuwait, he was surprised by his brother's accession and had a long feud with Jabir II al-Mubarak and Khaz'al.<sup>188</sup>

Jabir II al-Mubarak did not in fact rule for long. His death in 1917 marked the second occurrence of the new tradition in the transition of power. In this case, Salim al-Mubarak was present in Kuwait at the time, and therefore became the ruler, having been chosen by the ruling family based on his strong personality. The British also gave his rulership official recognition.<sup>189</sup> Thus, in this case, the succession moved horizontally to the brother of the ruler, Salim al-Mubarak, based on the ruling family's decision and British recognition.

This accession proved useful for Kuwait's stability and unity, particularly within the ruling circle formed from the descendants of Mubarak al-Sabah. However, it further complicated the succession, especially in the case of the early death of Salim al-Mubarak in 1921, which resulted in the emergence of a struggle for succession among the narrow and youthful circle of descendants of Mubarak al-Sabah.

### **3.4. Criteria for Succession**

Since the establishment of the al-Sabah rule in Kuwait in 1766, the practice for choosing successors had remained almost the same until 1962. After consulting with the merchants, notables, and in later cases with allies, Al-Sabah had to elect a successor from within, who was then recognised by the public who swore allegiance to the new ruler "*Mubaia'ah*". This practice ensured the stability and sustainability of the ruling family's rule in Kuwait.<sup>190</sup> However, the first step of succession that is, the appointment practice among the al-Sabah, was always considered

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<sup>188</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 11 December 1915, IOR: R/15/1/513 (British Library, London)

<sup>189</sup> Note on Salim I's accession PA, Kuwait, 6 February 1917, IOR: R/15/5/19 (British Library, London).

<sup>190</sup> Al-Jassim, *Rooh al-Destour*, 20-5.

to be the right of the ruling family. However, the ruling family's right to elect a successor raised a question about how the al-Sabah identified the appropriate group of candidates for succession and choose one from among them to be ruler. This matter became ever more controversial as the criteria were not explained. Thus, this part of the chapter aims to analyse the criteria that influenced the choice of successors in Kuwait from 1766 to 1950 in order to understand, theoretically, the effects on Abdullah's candidacy in both 1921 and 1950.

From the historical context of the succession cases in Kuwait between 1766 and 1917, the first criterion for choosing al-Sabah rulers was clear: the rulership could be achieved vertically, that is, from among the sons and nephews (through generations) and horizontally from the brothers (among the same generation), but among the sons of rulers only. Jabir I al-Abdullah's succession in 1814 was the obvious example of this criterion. When Jabir I al-Abdullah was in Bahrain, his father Abdullah I al-Sabah died, and the ruling family, merchants, and notables of Kuwait appointed Muhammad al-Salman as deputy ruler until Jabir I al-Abdullah's return to be ruler. Muhammad al-Salman was a cousin whose father had not been ruler of Kuwait.<sup>191</sup> In this case, the ruling family, the merchants, and the notables of Kuwait had the chance to choose Muhammad al-Salman as ruler but, based on the first criterion of choosing successors whose fathers were rulers, they decided to give Jabir I al-Abdullah rulership of the country. In this case Jabir I al-Abdullah was the only candidate for succession as he was the only son of Abdullah I al-Sabah.

However, when there was more than one candidate, either as sons of the ruler or brothers or sons of brothers who had ruled before, another criterion for choosing the successor had to be considered, namely, the seniority of the candidate and length of engagement in Kuwait's affairs.

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<sup>191</sup> Al-Shamlan, *Min Tarikh al Kuwaiyt*, 125.

This criterion was obvious in the case of Muhammad al-Sabah's accession in 1892. Muhammad al-Sabah was the eldest brother of the dead ruler Abdullah II al-Sabah. The ruling family, merchants and notables of Kuwait chose him to rule based on his seniority among the other candidates for succession, including his brothers Jarrah al-Sabah and Mubarak al-Sabah and the sons of the dead ruler, Jabir and Khalifa. This criterion was often supported by the candidate's long engagement in managing Kuwait's affairs, such as in the case of Sabah II al-Jabir's accession in 1859. In this case, Sabah II al-Jabir's seniority among the candidates for succession, including his brothers and uncles, coupled with his long experience in managing Kuwait's affairs during the last period of his father Jabir I al-Abdullah's reign, led to the ruling family, merchants, and notables' decision to name him ruler. However, this strategy of coupling seniority with experience in governing the country did not always work to ensure accession, as was evident in the accession of Abdullah I al-Sabah the youngest son of the ruler, Sabah I in 1766. This case opens the door for the next criterion in choosing the successors.

The third criterion for choosing successors in Kuwait, and the most important criterion, was based on the collective term *al-Arshad* in Arabic (in English: the most capable person). This word was inspired by the method used in choosing Islamic caliphs during the first four Rashidun Caliphates in Islam's history, which was founded after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632. This method was adopted in Kuwait in that a group of elites including the ruling family pledged loyalty to one candidate for succession based on his capabilities (i.e., skills, abilities, qualities, and health). This criterion was first mentioned on 14 February 1935, during an interview with Ahmad al-Jabir by the Political Agent in Kuwait. Ahmad al-Jabir stated that Kuwait was following the Arabs' practice for succession, where the *al-Arshad* among al-Sabah should achieve rulership after his death. He thought that none of his sons had fulfilled the

collective meaning of this term to succeed him; however, if they proved the opposite in the future, one of them would deserve the right to rule Kuwait.<sup>192</sup> This term was also stated in a draft of a constitution written by Ahmad al-Jabir for submission to the second Kuwaiti Legislative Council in 1939: “Article thirteen: rulership of Kuwait is for the descendants of the late Mubarak al-Sabah. Article fourteen: heir-apparentship is for the most capable senior descendant (*al-Arshad*) of the late Mubarak al-Sabah.”<sup>193</sup> However, these two pieces of evidence that suggest the existence of this criterion did not provide detailed information on how al-Sabah determined the most capable person for succession. Thus, it is important to describe these capabilities in greater detail.

Candidates for rulership were expected to meet four expectations, as mentioned in Harold Dickson’s book *The Arab in the Desert*, as well as in Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah*.<sup>194</sup> The first expectation was that the candidate be wise, eloquent, persuasive, able, and a brave leader. The person who demonstrated these qualities coupled with *hadh* (luck) would be considered the most able candidate. The second expectation was that the future ruler be a “father to his people” by taking on all responsibilities, including the payment and collection of taxes and tributes from people in return for his physical and diplomatic protection. This expectation related to the third one: the future ruler had to keep his house open as a father of the people. This expectation was evident in the ruler’s open *Majlis* (council), which he regularly attended and often opened for the public in order to raise enquiries, make requests, or have cases settled and enforced by him. The fourth expectation was that the future ruler be generous. This expectation would increase the

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<sup>192</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 14 February 1935, IOR: R/15/5/180 (British Library, London).

<sup>193</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, enclosing Ruler of Kuwait’s new Constitution for Kuwait, 19 February 1939, IOR: R/15/5/206 (British Library, London).

<sup>194</sup> A. M Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. F. Roseenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967 [1377]), 111-4; Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), 52-3.

ruler's reputation and legitimacy to rule the country tremendously.<sup>195</sup> Although these expectations had to be met by candidates for succession, they were not enough on their own to secure succession: a candidate had to command political influence and popular support.

This was the practice of succession in Kuwait when Abdullah's opportunity to rule emerged in 1917 after his father Salim al-Mubarak became the ruler of Kuwait. The succession was influenced by the second tradition of succession, coupled with the specific criteria for choosing successors among the ruling family. Abdullah's claim for succession started in 1917 and it was based on the first criterion of succession, when his father became the ruler of Kuwait as a descendant of Mubarak al-Sabah.<sup>196</sup> However, others in the ruling family had established claims before him, thereby challenging his claim. These included his cousin Ahmad al-Jabir and his uncle Hamad al-Mubarak. The next sections of this chapter will focus on Abdullah's first effort to succeed in 1921, including the tactics and strategy he used to improve his position and candidacy during his father's reign.

### **3.5. Abdullah's Preparation for Succession, 1917-21**

Abdullah's claim for succession in Kuwait began in 1917, when his father, Salim al-Mubarak became ruler of Kuwait. From 1917 to 1921, he tried to benefit, as much as was possible, from his father's ultimate power in Kuwait. He applied strategies to increase his position for succession against the claim of his cousin Ahmad al-Jabir, who had made the highest bid for succession, and Hamad al-Mubarak, who had made the lowest.

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<sup>195</sup> James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study," *History and Anthropology* 17, no 3 (September 2006): 189-208.

<sup>196</sup> When his father assumed the power in 1917, Abdullah was the third in age and seniority (21 years old) among Mubarak al-Sabah's descendants, just junior to Ahmad al-Jabir (31 years old) and Hamad al-Mubarak (22 years old).

With the assistance of his father Abdullah applied two strategies to improve his position in the process. The first strategy was that Salim al-Mubarak's used his power to bring Abdullah into the forefront of Kuwaiti prominence.<sup>197</sup> The evidence for this strategy appeared in Abdullah's appointment to the first of his two political careers in Kuwait in February 1917, a few days after Salim al-Mubarak's accession. Abdullah was tasked with dealing with tribal issues in Kuwait's desert, in collaboration with his brother, Ali al-Salim, Ali al-Khalifa, and armed men. Abdullah was to look after the tribes of the hinterland and maintain order among them. The obvious reason for this mission, according to Salim al-Mubarak, was to reinstate Kuwait's legitimacy over the desert and counter the emerging power in the hinterland under the prince of Najd, Ibn Saud.<sup>198</sup> However, the lack of other succession candidates' participation in this important mission, namely, Ahmad al-Jabir and Hamad al-Mubarak, indicated that Salim al-Mubarak sought to increase the roles of his sons, particularly Abdullah, in Kuwait's political life. Overall, there are no records concerning Abdullah's first task in this mission; however, one can assume that he gained skills and great experience in dealing with desert affairs and Arab tribes, which would support his candidacy for succession and which he would use in his second career in 1918 as a supplement chief officer in Kuwait City.

The second task in the first strategy to increase Abdullah's position for succession came in August 1918 when Salim al-Mubarak appointed Abdullah to work alongside British officers engaged in preventing the export of supplies from Kuwait to the Ottoman army in Syria and Hejaz during World War I. Abdullah was tasked with issuing permits for trade caravans, that is, dealing with the Kuwait market and authorising them to buy certain amounts of supplies from Kuwait to sell in Aleppo, Najd, and Hejaz. In this role, Abdullah complied with Salim al-

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<sup>197</sup> Abdullah Alnajdi. *Shaikh Abdullah as-Salim: His Politics Life*. MA Dissertation, University of Exeter, 2008, 12.

<sup>198</sup> PA, Kuwait to Sir Percy Cox, Basra, 15 February 1917, IOR: R/15/5/19 (British Library, London).

Mubarak's wishes to satisfy the Kuwaiti trade community, which was dissatisfied with the British officers' blockade.<sup>199</sup> In fact, during World War I, the British discovered that Kuwait's seaport was the weakest spot in the blockade's link around the Ottoman army in the Middle East.<sup>200</sup> Therefore, the Political Agent in Kuwait offered Salim al-Mubarak two British officers to work in preventing goods and supplies from reaching the Ottomans; the alternative was for the British army to air bomb Kuwait. Salim al-Mubarak immediately opposed this threatening proposal, and created a furore among the ruling family, merchants, and notables, who condemned the British intervention in Kuwait's internal affairs. However, after a letter of satisfaction was sent to Salim al-Mubarak by the Political Resident in the Gulf, Percy Cox, assurances were given of Britain's good will, that the blockade would be temporary and that the British Government would compensate Kuwait for any economic losses.<sup>201</sup> Salim al-Mubarak agreed to Britain's proposal, and two British officers started to work in cooperation with the Political Agent to prevent goods from being smuggled out of Kuwait. According to Abdullaziz al-Rasheed, "the British blockade led to put tough restrictions on not only import goods and foods from India to Kuwait but also on supplies distributed among Kuwaiti subjects and foreigners".<sup>202</sup> Al-Rasheed also stated that the British officers went so far as to search local houses for smuggled goods and money, causing the trading community to form a solid opposition to stop the practice. Under this new circumstance, Salim al-Mubarak was obligated to put the British officers' activities under the supervision of one of his sons: Abdullah.<sup>203</sup> In this role, Abdullah managed to ease and relieve the British blockade by serving as a mediator

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<sup>199</sup> Sir Percy Cox, Kuwait to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 20 August 1918, IOR: R/15/5/103 (British Library, London).

<sup>200</sup> Colonel Hamilton (PA, Kuwait) to Chief Political Officer, Baghdad, 10 November 1917, IOR: R/15/5/27 (British Library, London).

<sup>201</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 238-9; Chief General Officer Commanding, Baghdad to Government of India, New Delhi, 6 December 1917, IOR: R/15/5/27 (British Library, London).

<sup>202</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 238-40.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

between British officers working in Kuwait and the trading community. Although he succeeded in his second task, which increased his popularity among the trading community on the other hand his role as the controller of a large part of the ruling family's income in Kuwait, with the help of Salim al-Mubarak, impacted on the British opinion of his candidacy in the succession dilemma in 1921.

The second strategy to increase Abdullah's candidacy for succession in Kuwait was to rely on his position as the eldest son of the existing ruler Salim al-Mubarak. In this strategy, Abdullah relied on Salim al-Mubarak's long rule of Kuwait to achieve his goal of succession, biding his time while cementing his position among the descendants of Mubarak al-Sabah. In fact, before the death of Salim al-Mubarak in 1921, Abdullah, who was in his mid-twenties, ranked third in terms of age within the Mubarak al-Sabah's descendants, behind Ahmad al-Jabir, the 35-year-old and eldest son of Jabir II al-Mubarak, and Hamad al-Mubarak, the 26-year-old and eldest living son of Mubarak al-Sabah. Ahmad al-Jabir was considered to be the most experienced man in Kuwait's affairs and administration among the ruling family (he will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter) while Hamad al-Mubarak had a highest respect among the ruling family as the eldest living son of Mubarak al-Sabah, which made him a likely candidate for succession.<sup>204</sup> Although Abdullah was not ranked first in terms of age, his standing as the eldest son of the current ruler Salim al-Mubarak made him an equal challenger to the other candidates.

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<sup>204</sup> This shaikh, during the succession issue in 1921, had been satisfied with supporting the candidacy of Ahmad al-Jabir, showing no motivation to be the ruler of Kuwait, thereby limiting the succession debate between the two candidates, Ahmad al-Jabir and Abdullah. In addition, when Ahmad al-Jabir came to power in 1921, Hamad al-Mubarak had for many years been deputy ruler, leading during the ruler's absence and resolving disputes between the Kuwaiti people in the market. Information from an Interview with Ahmad al-Deyain (the famous Kuwaiti writer and political activist) in his office in his bookshop (Quarts for publishing), Kuwait Capital: 15 Oct. 2010; Major J C More (PA, Kuwait) to Lt-Col S G Kox (PR, Bushire), 14 July 1923, IOR: R/15/5/96 (British Library, London).

However, Salim al-Mubarak's short reign did not give Abdullah the time to apply all of his strategies for succession in full. Indeed, it divided the ruling family in terms of the succession contest between the sons of Jabir II al-Mubarak, the sons of Salim al-Mubarak, and the living sons of Mubarak al-Sabah. As a result, after the death of Salim al-Mubarak in 1921 Abdullah was obliged to test his eligibility for the rulership of Kuwait.

### **3.6. Abdullah's Opportunity for Succession in 1921**

The sudden death of Salim al-Mubarak on 21 February, 1921, after a short reign, was a significant setback to Abdullah's strategies to become the next ruler of Kuwait. Abdullah's tactics depended on Salim al-Mubarak's long rule to increase his position for succession. When Salim al-Mubarak died unexpectedly as a result of a severe stomach illness, Ahmad al-Jabir, accompanied by Kasseb, son of Khaz'al, ruler of Muhammarah, was on a political mission in central Arabia visiting Ibn Saud in order to reach a solution to the personal differences between Salim and Ibn Saud.<sup>205</sup> As Ahmad al-Jabir was absent when Salim al-Mubarak died, Abdullah took charge of Kuwait, the ruling family having accepted the Political Agent's advice to choose someone from among Mubarak al-Sabah's descendants to deal with Kuwait's affairs pending Ahmad al-Jabir's return. Abdullah immediately sent many telegraph messages to the Political Resident in the Gulf, to Khaz'al, and to Ibn Saud to announce Salim al-Mubarak's death.<sup>206</sup>

After Salim al-Mubarak's burial on 24 February 1921, the Political Agent in Kuwait sent a telegram to the High Commissioner, Baghdad and to Political Residents regarding the succession in Kuwait:

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<sup>205</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 23 February 1921, IOR: R/15/2/44 (British Library, London).

<sup>206</sup> Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim to Major. C. More (PA, Kuwait), 11 and 15 March 1921; Major J. C. More (PA, Kuwait) to Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah, 8 and 13 March 1921, IOR: R/15/5/20 (British Library, London).

The possibility of making a bid for the throne has I think presented itself to Abdullah, but I do not think he will do so now. The most popular idea is, I understand for Ahmad to be ruler with a small Mejlies [Majlis] and for Abdullah to be his Assistant.<sup>207</sup>

The Political Agent's view was correct. Analysis of Abdullah's telegrams to the British Government and other principalities in the Gulf indicated that he had taken charge of Kuwait, but did not suggest that he considered himself to be the ruler of Kuwait. On the contrary they reflected the ruling family's decision to choose Ahmad al-Jabir as ruler of Kuwait. In contrast, Ahmad al-Jabir, having received the telegram about Salim al-Mubarak's death, indicated in one of his telegrams in reply sent to a Political Resident in the Gulf that he regarded himself as the ruler even before he had arrived in Kuwait or had been recognised by the ruling family, merchants, and notables.<sup>208</sup> In fact, the ruling family meeting that was held after the death of Salim al-Mubarak chose Ahmad al-Jabir as the ruler when he had returned to Kuwait on 24 March 1921.<sup>209</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir's actions during this period and the decision of the ruling family must be examined to understand the reasons behind the accession of Ahmad al-Jabir and the overshadowing of Abdullah's claim for succession.

There were three possible reasons why Ahmad al-Jabir was chosen instead of Abdullah as ruler of Kuwait in 1921. The first was pressure among the Kuwaiti merchants, and notables to maintain political influence in decision-making by announcing their nominations for the successors and calling for reconciliation within the house of al-Sabah. At the beginning of the twentieth century, local discontent and grievances with the autocratic method of ruling Kuwait had increased against the al-Sabah rulers, as a result of the long absence of political participation

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<sup>207</sup> PA, Kuwait to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 24 February 1921, IOR: R/15/1/513 (British Library, London).

<sup>208</sup> PA, Kuwait to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 12 March 1921, IOR: R/15/1/513 (British Library, London).

<sup>209</sup> PA, Kuwait to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 26 March 1921, IOR: R/15/1/513 (British Library, London).

in decision-making by Kuwaiti merchants, and notables during the reign of Mubarak al-Sabah and his heirs, Jabir II al-Mubarak and Salim al-Mubarak. The rulers' era became far more autocratic and absolute than that of any previous ruler, which was why the Kuwaiti merchants, and notables' grievances and afflictions reached a peak. In particular, Salim al-Mubarak who brought conflict, blockades, and wars to Kuwait with the ruler of Najd, Ibn Saud, but without the Kuwaiti merchants', and notables' agreement motivated the reform 'front' to seek a realistic and practical solution to the problem after his death.<sup>210</sup>

Kuwait's merchants and notables could not change the situation during the 1910s; however, they tried to complain to the British Political Agent about Salim al-Mubarak's autocratic rule and asked the British to dismiss him and recognise Ahmad al-Jabir as ruler instead.<sup>211</sup> Meanwhile, the British authorities in the Gulf assured Salim al-Mubarak of the need to solve this internal agitation in his own way, without Britain's interference in Kuwaiti internal affairs.<sup>212</sup> Consequently, the only thing Kuwaiti merchants, and notables could do was wait for Salim al-Mubarak's death.

Upon the death of Salim al-Mubarak in 1921, Kuwaiti merchants, and notables were ready to push forward their demands to the al-Sabah for their political participation and reconciliation in the ruling family's dispute over the succession. Indeed, as soon as Salim al-Mubarak died in February 1921, a group of merchants and notables in Kuwait led by Hamad al-Saqr, submitted a petition to the ruling family demanding their rights in the administration of the country and to the succession. The group of merchants, and notables consisted of twelve men

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<sup>210</sup> Salim al-Mubarak had two wars with al-Ekhwan, the Bedouins army of Ibn Saud, Hamdh and al-Jahrah; the latter war, indeed, threatened the existence of Kuwait in 1920 and caused two decades of Saudi blockade of exports from Kuwait to Najd, 1922-42.

<sup>211</sup> PA, Kuwait to Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, 28 August 1920, IOR: R/15/5/94 (British Library, London).

<sup>212</sup> Civil Commissioner, Baghdad to PA, Kuwait, 31 August 1920, IOR: R/15/5/94 (British Library, London).

who made the following demands: (1) that quarrelling among al-Sabah regarding the succession should be avoided; (2) that Ahmad al-Jabir, Hamad al-Mubarak, or Abdullah would be accepted, subject to the approval of His Majesty's Government; (3) that the appointed ruler would be the head of the Consultative Council (*Majlis al-Shura*); and (4) that a fixed number of councillors would be elected from among the al-Sabah and the inhabitants.<sup>213</sup>

Al-Sabah received the petition and convened a meeting in which members accepted the demands of the merchants, and notables by choosing Ahmad al-Jabir as the ruler of Kuwait, while the demand for a Consultative Council was submitted by Ahmad al-Jabir as soon as he arrived from central Arabia. However, the Consultative Council only sat for a few months before being closed down due to the serious quarrelling among its members.<sup>214</sup> Another interpretation of the short life of the Consultative Council suggests that Ahmad al-Jabir played a major part in its closure because he failed to attend most of its meetings, thus leaving its members without a president.<sup>215</sup> No one knows the truth; however, the fact remains that neither Ahmad al-Jabir, nor the members of the Consultative Council asked for the establishment of another council until the oil boom in 1938. According to Rush, some council members may have supported Abdullah in his succession hopes after they became disappointed with Ahmad al-Jabir.<sup>216</sup>

The second reason for choosing Ahmad al-Jabir was the widespread admiration for his capabilities compared with those of Abdullah. By contrast with Abdullah's relative obscurity, Ahmad al-Jabir's standing among the British, the ruling family, merchants, and notables considerably influenced the decision of the al-Sabah. Ahmad al-Jabir was also older than

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<sup>213</sup> PA, Kuwait to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 24 February 1921, IOR: R/15/5/180 (British Library, London).

<sup>214</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 277-8.

<sup>215</sup> Interview with former Kuwaiti Minister Yusuf al-Nssuf in Shuwaikh industrial area (former Minster), Kuwait: 9 October 2010.

<sup>216</sup> Rush, *Al-Sabah*, 54-5.

Abdullah, and he was not associated with his uncle Salim al-Mubarak's regime and policies. In fact, when Jabir II al-Mubarak died in 1917, Ahmad al-Jabir was the leading candidate for succession after Salim al-Mubarak. As the Political Agent noted, at the time of Jabir II al-Mubarak's death (r.1915-1917), "Salim [al-Mubarak] is the best and strongest candidate, but there is a possibility that a bid for rulership will be made by Ahmad bin Jabir who is popular".<sup>217</sup> Generally speaking, the Political Agent in Kuwait knew that Ahmad al-Jabir was still too young to rule Kuwait, but it was decided to keep him devoted to the British by promoting him against the background of the succession at some future date. In 1919, the Political Agency in Kuwait invited Ahmad al-Jabir to visit Britain as the first Kuwaiti to meet King George V,<sup>218</sup> and he also commanded a Kuwait City garrison in the Jahrah battle, sending reinforcements to Salim al-Mubarak in Jahrah town and leading desert forces in numerous clashes. When Salim al-Mubarak died, Ahmad al-Jabir was on a political mission to Ibn Saud, with the Kuwaitis awaiting his return and a settlement of the issue under discussion. Such actions strengthened Ahmad al-Jabir's position as second in line in the ruling family. Meanwhile, Abdullah remained in the background and apart from his initial leadership roles in reinstating Kuwaiti sovereignty over tribes in the desert and supervising the British blockade officers during World War I, apparently, he did not engage in any important political events in Kuwait. Therefore, the priority and preference was for Ahmad al-Jabir to be the next ruler of Kuwait.

The third reason for choosing Ahmad al-Jabir was the support for his candidacy shown by the British, Ibn Saud, and Khaz'al and their pressure on the ruling family to choose him. These external pressures had begun with the British opinion of Abdullah upon Salim al-

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<sup>217</sup> PR, Bushire to Commodore of the "Bramble", 6 February 1917, IOR: R/15/1/513 (British Library, London).

<sup>218</sup> Invitation sent to Ahmad al-Jabir through the PA, Kuwait, 3 August 1919; account of visit to London, prepared by PA, Kuwait, 28 December 1919, IOR: R/15/1/504 (British Library, London).

Mubarak's death in 1921. The British felt that Abdullah was likely to be uncooperative unlike Jabir II al-Mubarak (r. 1915-1917), whose son Ahmad al-Jabir was quite popular at that time in Kuwait. According to Alan Rush, Abdullah cooperated reluctantly in his second task, which led to the British decision to invite Ahmad al-Jabir to visit England in 1919 and attend the victory ceremonies following World War I instead of Abdullah (thereby making him the first Kuwaiti from the ruling family to travel to London).<sup>219</sup> In a British memorandum in 1919, Salim al-Mubarak was "very perturbed" at Ahmad al-Jabir's invitation and "if the selection had been left to himself [Salim al-Mubarak] he would have decided in favour of his own son, Abdullah, whom he had for a long time been trying to bring into prominence with a view to the succession."<sup>220</sup> This hint in the British memorandum suggests that the British put pressure on Salim al-Mubarak to accept Ahmad al-Jabir as his successor instead of his eldest son Abdullah.

In addition, Ibn Saud and Khaz'al both supported Ahmad al-Jabir rather than Abdullah. When Ibn Saud called off the negotiations with Ahmad al-Jabir after the death of Salim al-Mubarak, he declared that all problems were solved between him and Ahmad al-Jabir regarding the new ruler of Kuwait. Ibn Saud also sent a letter to the al-Sabah and to Khaz'al in Kuwait, most probably recognising Ahmad al-Jabir as the appropriate person to solve the existing problems.<sup>221</sup> This decision greatly influenced the al-Sabah, who at that time sought peace with Ibn Saud. Furthermore, Khaz'al was afraid that Abdullah would continue Salim al-Mubarak's hostile policies towards Ibn Saud, and of hiding his dislike of the British. After attending Salim al-Mubarak's funeral, and using his popularity within the ruling family as Mubarak's best friend,

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<sup>219</sup> Rush, *Al-Sabah*, 39. The British saw during the World War I that Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim was not showing his full support to them as he helped his father's intention to ease and revive the British officers' blockade on Kuwait's caravan exportation, therefore, the local merchants' community.

<sup>220</sup> Administrative Report for Kuwait for the year ending 31 December 1918, IOR: R/15/5/343 (British Library, London).

<sup>221</sup> PA, Kuwait to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 12 March 1921, IOR: R/15/1/513 (British Library, London).

Khaz'al proceeded to apply pressure in favour of Ahmad al-Jabir.<sup>222</sup> These three issues played a part in the decision as to whether the next ruler of Kuwait would be from the branch of Jabir II al-Mubarak in favour of Salim al-Mubarak or the sons of Mubarak al-Sabah; and in backing the nomination of Ahmad al-Jabir rather than Abdullah or Hamad al-Mubarak.

In 1921, Abdullah was obliged to enter an unequal challenge for the succession against Ahmad al-Jabir's claim; since he was overshadowed by Ahmad al-Jabir's reputation Abdullah consequently lost the battle for succession in Kuwait. The various circumstances that supported the candidacy of Ahmad al-Jabir instead of that of Abdullah meant that Abdullah would either be excluded entirely from the succession process, or had to control as much power as possible within Kuwait's government administration to secure his eligibility to assume the rulership after the death of the new ruler. Abdullah's earlier failure to gain power in Kuwait ultimately led to his withdrawal from the succession process (see Chapter Two). During his absence from 1923 to 1935, there were no important events that demonstrated Abdullah's ambition to assume the rulership of Kuwait.

### **3.7. Abdullah's Position for Succession during the 1930s and 1940s**

The strength of Abdullah's return to politics in 1935 in fact represented a new start for his long and uncompromising challenge for the succession. The death of Hamad al-Mubarak, who was his main rival for the succession, and his ability to overcome Ahmad al-Jabir's stronghold of power during 1938-39 placed Abdullah at the top of the succession list in the 1930s and 1940s (see Chapter Two for more information of Abdullah's successful endeavour in 1938-39 to gain power).

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<sup>222</sup> Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi*, vol. 5, 18.

Generally speaking, from the time of the Legislative Council events until the death of Ahmad al-Jabir from 1939 to 1950, Kuwait experienced a remarkable level of political stability, to a degree that it had never experienced before. This stability resulted from such events as Ahmad al-Jabir's reassertion of his full authority through his absolute rule (with the help of the ruling family), World War II, the death of King Ghazi of Iraq, and the oppressive actions that had been taken against the Legislative Council's members and the members of the Youth Movement in 1939.<sup>223</sup>

Meanwhile, Abdullah continued to be announced, and tacitly regarded, as the second in line by Kuwaitis as well as by the British authorities in the Gulf. He also continued to take charge of Kuwait in the absence of Ahmad al-Jabir, as for example in December 1939, when Ahmad al-Jabir went on an official visit to Saudi Arabia to see King Ibn Saud.<sup>224</sup> Thus Abdullah was awaiting Ahmad al-Jabir's inevitable death in order to test his eligibility for ruling Kuwait.

Although Abdullah was assured of his eligibility for the rulership in Kuwait since he was the most capable man for these duties, he was also responsible for maintaining his respected and high-status position among the contenders within the ruling family. During the 1940s, Abdullah worked to maintain his position between two other major candidates for the succession: (1) Jabir III al-Ahmad, the son of Ahmad al-Jabir, and (2) Abdullah al-Mubarak. According to the Political Agent in Kuwait, "Jabir III al-Ahmad was too young to give serious consideration to

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<sup>223</sup> Al-Najjar, *Madkhal li-Ittawer as-Siyasi*, 35.

<sup>224</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir to Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah informing him of safe arrival in Riyadh, 1 December 1939, IOR: R/15/5/187 (British Library, London).

contesting the succession in Kuwait; however, since he was growing up, this might have given him a good opportunity in the coming decade or so to form a solid front for the succession”.<sup>225</sup>

Competition for the succession in Kuwait during the 1940s therefore focused around two main shaikhs: Abdullah, who was publicly accepted as the second in line, and who controlled the Finance, Supply, and Police Departments, and Abdullah al-Mubarak, the last living son of Mubarak the Great, who controlled the important Public Security Department. According to the Political Resident in the Gulf, Abdullah supported his claims for succession by believing that the succession should revert to the Salim branch since Salim al-Mubarak had been the ruler in 1917. However, Abdullah al-Mubarak believed that the succession should remain with Mubarak al-Sabah’s descendants, particularly himself as the last living son of Mubarak al-Sabah.<sup>226</sup> Consequently, in the interpretation of the eligibility of succession in Kuwait this difference between the main two candidates for succession posed new challenges to Abdullah’s position.

The first challenge was in April 1942, when Ahmad al-Jabir suffered a heart attack, although the news of his condition was kept secret for a few days by his doctors and by the British authorities in the Gulf.<sup>227</sup> The delay in announcing Ahmad al-Jabir’s illness served to avoid any serious disputes among the ruling family members over the rulership; it also gave the British time to discuss the succession matter in Kuwait namely, whether, in the event of Ahmad al-Jabir’s death, the successor would accept all his predecessor’s obligations to the British Government or whether it would be necessary to send a sloop, as had been done during the previous two succession-related instances, in order to avoid any disturbances in the

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<sup>225</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 17 January 1957, FO 371/127007 (TNA, London).

<sup>226</sup> Note by Mr G W Furlonge on Kuwait succession, 23 January 1950, FO 371/ 82162 (TNA, London).

<sup>227</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 28 March 1941 and 4 April 1942, IOR: R/15/5/180 (British Library, London).

succession.<sup>228</sup> Certainly the British feared that Abdullah, whom they believed to have had Axis leanings during World War II, would cause major disruption to their interests in Kuwait. As the Political Agent in Kuwait had remarked in April 1942,

I presume it is certain that Abdullah al-Salim will succeed? He refers to himself in conversation as the Prince of Wales and I have gathered from you [the Political Resident in the Gulf] in conversation that he is generally accepted as Ahmad al-Jabir's successor.<sup>229</sup>

to which the Political Resident replied that, "I believe that Abdullah will be returned unopposed and that he will accept his predecessors' obligations. Should the change take place in the immediate future I see no reason to send a sloop here".<sup>230</sup> From this discussion among British officials in the Gulf, it was clear that they regarded Abdullah as the second man in the line of succession after Ahmad al-Jabir and that he was unlikely to face any problems in his succession from other candidates for the rulership.

However, when succession was required, Abdullah was away on Failaka Island. A few days after Ahmad al-Jabir's serious illness, the Political Agent decided to inform the ruling family about it.<sup>231</sup> The news reached Abdullah on Failaka Island by way of other senior shaikhs including Abdullah al-Mubarak, and Abdullah al-Ahmad. Abdullah immediately returned to Kuwait to look after Ahmad al-Jabir.<sup>232</sup> During this episode, Abdullah al-Mubarak was reported to show an ambition to take over from the ailing ruler.<sup>233</sup> Concerned by the situation Abdullah

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<sup>228</sup> The ruler severe illness occurred during the sensitive period of the WWII. The British afraid that the successor might have an Axis leaning, thus, would form a direct threat to their perspective oil interest in Kuwait.

<sup>229</sup> PR, Bahrain to Major Hinkinbotham (PA, Kuwait), 24 April 1942, IOR: R/15/5/180 (British Library, London).

<sup>230</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 10 May 1942, IOR: R/15/5/180 (British Library, London).

<sup>231</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 5 April 1942, IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

<sup>232</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 5 April 1942; Note from Doctor Scudder on illness of Ahmad al-Jabir in 1942 sent by the PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, in 10 April 1942, IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

<sup>233</sup> PR, Bahrain to Ernest Bevin M.PP. (FO, London), 27 January 1949, IOR: R/15/5/180 (British Library, London).

decided to remain as close as possible to Ahmad al-Jabir in his illness since, if he did not do so, even if he was the second in line, it might create the perfect chance for another candidate “probably Abdullah al-Mubarak” to ascend to power with the help of the British. He therefore returned immediately from Failaka in order to align himself more closely with Ahmad al-Jabir and with his hoped-for safe recovery from his illness; this motivated the British authorities in the Gulf to try to push him forward as heir apparent for the succession in front of Ahmad al-Jabir.<sup>234</sup>

Meanwhile, Ahmad al-Jabir’s condition was critical; another heart attack could prove fatal, and the risk of another attack would undoubtedly increase if he heard about a controversial matter such as the succession. This persuaded the British not to pursue the matter any further with Ahmad al-Jabir.<sup>235</sup> During the following months, Ahmad al-Jabir’s health condition improved, which helped to bring the question of succession in Kuwait to an end, with the tacit recognition, during the 1940s, of Abdullah as second in line by the ruling family, the Kuwaitis, and the British.

### **3.8. Abdullah’s Accession in 1950**

In January 1949, the question of the succession returned to the forefront in Kuwait and again Abdullah’s position as second in line was questioned by the British and the Kuwaitis. On this occasion, Abdullah had once more to prove his capabilities for succession when Ahmad al-Jabir’s health deteriorated again. By the late 1940s, the competition over succession in Kuwait had increased due to the emergence of ambitious younger shaikhs descended from Mubarak al-Sabah. As a result, once again, Abdullah’s suitability for succession was questioned by Britain.

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<sup>234</sup> PR, Bushire to PA, Kuwait, 11 May 1942, IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

<sup>235</sup> PR, Bushire to Secretary to the Government of India, New Delhi, 14 May 1942, IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

By the end of 1949, it was clear to both the Kuwaitis and the British that Ahmed al-Jabir's health had severely worsened. As a result, it was not uncommon to find both the Kuwaitis and the British discussing the succession, and in particular the question of who would be the rightful heir to the rulership after Ahmed al-Jabir had died. In practice, it was not clear to the British who would be supported as the rightful heir by the Kuwaitis, since succession was clearly defined as falling to the "most capable" person from among Mubarak al-Sabah's descendants.

The view of the merchants, and notables, and the ruling family in Kuwait regarding the succession was clear during the 1940s; there was general, if tacit, agreement on the selection of the successor, namely, Abdullah since he had been a candidate for the succession in 1921, just after the death of his father Salim al-Mubarak, and he had become the second-in-charge in Kuwait after the Legislative Council in 1938-39. Both his seniority as Mubarak al-Sabah's oldest living descendant, and his long experience of managing Kuwait's government administration strengthened his chance of succession, although the British remained pessimistic despite local agreement that Abdullah was the rightful heir.

Britain's view on the probable succession scenario was based on the Political Agent's expectation that the transition of power in Kuwait would be accompanied by a power struggle between the two top nominees for succession: Abdullah and Abdullah al-Mubarak. In January 1950 the Political Agent in Kuwait predicted that Abdullah al-Mubarak could use force to seize power in Kuwait, given that he controlled the Public Security Department and had more than three hundred armed men at his disposal. The Political Agent emphasised the high likelihood of a violent confrontation between Abdullah al-Mubarak and Abdullah.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 19 January 1950, IOR: R/15/5/180 (British Library, London).

Adding to these fears was the fact that Abdullah was in Oman which could have provided a fine opportunity for Abdullah al-Mubarak to trigger a family feud. Therefore, Britain expected something dramatic to occur in the succession process, which prompted them to prepare their military troops based in Basra for any emergency that might affect British interests in Kuwait. Basically, the British Government took this precaution to protect their oil interests in Kuwait if a power struggle emerged.<sup>237</sup>

Abdullah returned to Kuwait within three days of Ahmad al-Jabir's death, and was inaugurated by the ruling family and the people of Kuwait as their ruler in early February 1950. This smooth transition of power reassured the British, whose expectations of a violent transfer had been proved wrong, especially when Abdullah al-Mubarak was the first to support Abdullah's inauguration and swear loyalty to him. However, soon after the accession to power in 1950, new challenges emerged for the new ruler Abdullah, most notably in the shape of high expectations and demands for reform from the Kuwaiti dynamic community and the ruling family.<sup>238</sup>

### **3.9. Conclusion**

This chapter analysed Abdullah's strategies to improve his chances of succession, and how he ultimately became ruler of Kuwait in 1950. Abdullah's assumption of rulership could not have occurred without a return to the origins of the al-Sabah's establishment of legitimacy in ruling the country and a limitation on the number of candidates for succession. This chapter showed how the al-Sabah had dominated the rulership in Kuwait from 1766. Subsequently the al-Sabah

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<sup>237</sup> Note by Mr G W Furlonge on Kuwait succession, 23 January 1950, FO 371/ 82162 (TNA, London); al-Najjar, *Madkhal li-ittawar as-Siyasi*, 36.

<sup>238</sup> Note to Secretary of State on accession of Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim, 7 February 1950, FO 371/82162 (TNA, London).

managed to secure its legitimacy for ruling the country through the succession question. Also the al-Sabah families managed to stabilize their rule through engaging different traditions in the practice of succession. All of the ruling family traditions in the transfer of power had contributed to maintaining the stability and sustainability of the rulership of Kuwait.

Since 1766, the succession practice in Kuwait followed two specific traditions. The first tradition was based on *Shura* (consultation) between the ruling family, merchants, and notables in choosing a candidate for succession from among the sons of rulers from the al-Sabah. This tradition continued until 1896, when a new one emerged for the process of transferring power. This was based on limiting the choice of successors to Mubarak al-Sabah and his progeny, after consultation with the ruling family, the British, and Kuwait's neighbours, that is, mainly the rulers of Muhammarah, Khaz'al and on one occasion the Najdi ruler, Ibn Saud. In addition to these two traditions, four main criteria had influenced the election of successors in Kuwait. These criteria included: that the candidate was the son of rulers, was senior, had experience, and fulfilled the collective term of *al-Arshad* (e.g., skills, capabilities, and qualities). The ruling family relied on these criteria to appoint their candidates for rulership. Although these criteria have been identified throughout the history of succession cases in Kuwait, at the end of the day, the balance of power is the main factor in the al-Sabah's competition and activity in succession.

The succession question in Kuwait dominated Abdullah's life before 1950. Abdullah's ambition to become ruler started with the accession of his father, Salim al-Mubarak in 1917. As a direct descendant of Mubarak al-Sabah, Abdullah aimed to ascend to power after Salim al-Mubarak. However, the short reign of Salim al-Mubarak put him in an unbalanced competition for succession with Ahmad al-Jabir in 1921. Ahmad al-Jabir assumed the rulership in 1921, thus,

leaving Abdullah to struggle with the other candidates for succession until 1950. Abdullah managed to increase his legitimacy to rule in 1930s and 1940s, to the extent that he did not face any challenges to his assumption of the rulership in 1950.

In summary, Abdullah not only targeted an increase in his financial and power status in Kuwait from 1917 to 1950, he also aimed at the rulership of the country. After he had achieved his goals, what was the main priority for Abdullah? Did he follow his predecessors' policies or look for a new direction to maintain his country's stability? What type of country was he aiming for? These questions will be examined in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Abdullah and the Welfare State, 1950-65

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the way that Abdullah used Kuwait's newfound oil revenues to transform Kuwait into a welfare state between 1950 and 1965, and how his policies turned Kuwait into the first rentier state in the Gulf. It examines Abdullah's ideas and decisions, and compares the pace of development<sup>239</sup> during his reign with that of his predecessor. Finally, it evaluates how he overcame the obstacles he faced in transforming Kuwait.

There were many decisions made throughout Abdullah's reign that demonstrated the great care he took to oversee his country's transformation. Initially, he intended to overcome the obstacles that had prevented his predecessors from achieving the transformation of the country, and then moving away from the politics of his predecessors. Eventually he altered the direction of Kuwait's development process. Ultimately, most of his endeavours were successful even though he had to face many administrative and political issues.

The dramatic oil revenue increases during the 1950s and 1960s were used by the Kuwaiti government administration to speed up progress in transforming the country's economy and society along western lines. Abdullah oversaw the country's transformation that greatly improved the standard of living and comfort of Kuwaiti citizens by introducing an extensive welfare programme that covered all aspects of social life that is, a social programme that applied

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<sup>239</sup> Defined by Oxford dictionary as "the process of converting land to a new purpose by constructing buildings or making use of its resources."

‘from the cradle to the grave’. Abdullah’s position at the head of the Kuwaiti monarchy at this time enabled Kuwait to provide its citizens with one of the world’s most comprehensive welfare systems: citizens received free education up to university level; free medical services in modern facilities; subsidised food, housing, utilities, and transport costs; and various other benefits, all without paying any taxes. Kuwait’s achievements in protecting and promoting the economic and social well-being<sup>240</sup> of its citizens throughout Abdullah’s reign made it: the first welfare state in the region, one of the most advanced countries in the region, and one that sustained the rule of al-Sabah.

#### **4.2. Abdullah’s Thoughts on a Welfare State in Kuwait**

During Abdullah’s reign from 1950 to 1965, Kuwait experienced a radical but apparently smooth transition from being an impoverished British-protected state to becoming an independent, wealthy state. As the ruler of Kuwait in 1950, Abdullah showed an intention to improve the lives of his country’s inhabitants that was visionary. Coupled with the availability of oil incomes, this vision served as one of the main and obvious reasons behind Kuwait’s transition to becoming the first welfare state in the Gulf. However, although Abdullah adopted a new direction for Kuwait’s developmental status more or less from his first days as ruler, an accurate explanation has not yet been found for the origins of his ideas about founding a welfare state in Kuwait. This section of the chapter aims to identify a possible explanation of the origins of his thinking in this regard. Abdullah’s ideas can be divided into two parts, the first of which emphasises his determination to achieve Kuwait’s welfare system, while the second attributes his ideas to pressures placed on him from various sources.

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<sup>240</sup> Defined by the Oxford dictionary as “the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.”

The first part of the explanation includes three points of view. The first is the belief held by various Kuwaitis that Abdullah's ideas could somehow be ascribed to his open-minded and liberal beliefs. According to Ahmad al-Baghdadi, some take the view that Abdullah's long engagement with the demands of Kuwaiti merchants and notables during the 1930s and 1940s established a strong liberalist streak in his outlook.<sup>241</sup> This point of view is based on Abdullah's participation in the Legislative Council in 1938-39, a period during which he supported demands for reform that called for the right of Kuwaitis to manage their country's decision-making process. His participation in the Legislative Council persuaded Abdullah of the importance of always meeting local expectations for reform; thus his support base survived, even after the Legislative Council had been dissolved. Abdullah also formed a strong relationship with Kuwaiti merchants, and notables and their demands for reform during the 1940s. Therefore, when he became the ruler of Kuwait in 1950, his old ties with the Kuwaitis, merchants and notables raised expectations that his reign would bring about massive reforms in Kuwait.<sup>242</sup> Such domestic hopes played a great role in pushing the reforms in Kuwait much further than they had been under the rule of his predecessors. Starting from 1950 Abdullah had no hesitation in meeting the domestic community's expectations by introducing a new policy based on the extensive distribution of oil revenues, for creating a welfare state.<sup>243</sup>

The second point of view stemmed from a political calculation Abdullah made during the 1950s that by ruling Kuwait he would assist the al-Sabah's position. One of the leading proponents of this approach is Jill Crystal, who argued that the main thrust of Abdullah's decision, as head of state, was his traditional thinking about retaining the loyalty of his citizens.

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<sup>241</sup> Al-Baghdadi. *Al-Shaikh 'Abd-Allah as-Salim*, 22-5.

<sup>242</sup> Al-Najjar, *Madkhal li-Ittawer as-Siyasi*, 42-3.

<sup>243</sup> Ahmad al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwaitiyt: Min al-Emarah ila al-Dawlah, Dhkraiya al-'Amal al-Watani* (al-Maghreb: al-Markaz al-Thqfi al-Araby, 2007), 104-5.

His policy was to expand the scale of wealth distribution. She explained that Abdullah managed to use his new policy to pay off the opposition in Kuwait and prevent them from engaging in politics, thereby allowing him and the ruling family to continue to administer the country by controlling the highest offices in the government. She added that in Kuwait in the mid-1950s, a tacit agreement between the ruling family and merchants involved continuous government subsidies from the new oil wealth for the merchant community, in return for the exit of the merchants from Kuwaiti politics. This situation allowed Abdullah to withdraw from his major pre-oil economic dependence on the merchant community in Kuwait, while enabling him to form new alliances with local communities by introducing a policy of extensive distribution of the new oil wealth. She argued that the main purpose of Abdullah's decision to distribute the oil wealth to Kuwaitis, including the merchants, was to achieve political acquiescence by founding a new financially secure community in Kuwait. This would consist of members of both the upper and middle classes who relied on government subsidies for their living costs. Building loyalty among them would ensure Abdullah's success and the survival of the legitimacy of the al-Sabah's prominent role in the country.<sup>244</sup>

The third point of view is based on Abdullah's frequent travels to India as well as his friction with the British authorities in Kuwait that might have cultivated his ideas about the establishment of a welfare system in Kuwait. Britain and India's experiences in establishing the welfare system started just after the Second World War. Between 1945 and 1951, the British Government under the Labour Party introduced a welfare system. India introduced a similar welfare system after its independence from Britain in 1947. It seems likely that Abdullah

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<sup>244</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*.

followed one or both of these countries' experiences in establishing a welfare system in Kuwait.<sup>245</sup>

In contrast to the first explanation, a second explanation could attribute the origins of Abdullah's ideas to external influences: Britain *advised* Abdullah to invest Kuwait's mounting oil wealth in the local economy by founding a major plan for reform. After the Second World War, British interference in Kuwait's internal affairs increased; most notably, Britain frequently advised the rulers to appoint senior British advisers in order to ensure more efficient management of the disbursement of oil revenues.<sup>246</sup> There were several reasons why the rulers resisted this pressure, whether in the later period of Ahmad al-Jabir's reign or during the early years of Abdullah's reign. However, at the end of November 1950, Abdullah gave in to this pressure, albeit after he had requested an amended job description. Abdullah and the British reached an agreement to change the title and level of authority of the proposed new appointment from being that of a senior adviser with unrestricted authority and access to the ruler to being that of a junior British expert with limited authority under the direction of Kuwaiti heads of departments.<sup>247</sup> Although the appointments gave the British experts less authority in Kuwait's internal affairs, it secured an excellent position for Britain that would enable it to benefit economically from the country's increasing oil revenue surpluses and prospective development plans. Clifton S. English, the American Consul in Basra, stated in March 1950 that the British

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<sup>245</sup> Mansfield, *Kuwait Vanguard*, 40-1. This point of view is needed to have more research in the future to figure out the influence of these experiments on Abdullah's decision.

<sup>246</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Shiraz, 16 September 1944, IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London).

<sup>247</sup> PR, Bahrain to (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London), 25 November 1950, FO 371/82163 (TNA, London); al-Najjar, *Madkhal li-Ittawar as-Siyasi*, 39.

were pushing these appointments in order to effect changes in Kuwait's government administration that would ultimately strengthen their own position.<sup>248</sup>

Having discussed two possible explanations for the origins of Abdullah's idea of distributing the oil wealth to Kuwait society, it would appear that the first interpretation, with its three points of view, would be the more likely. There are many illustrative events introduced during the first phase of Abdullah's reign that highlight his very different approach and visionary ideas to ruling the country. For example, he donated his entire fortune to the poor and sold off his predecessor's luxury yacht, which earned him tremendous popularity within the ruling family and among the public at large. He also repaid all the debts owed by the ruling family, and increased members' allowances to improve their standard of living.<sup>249</sup> He also closed the final chapter on the ruling family's history of internal strife that stemmed from the 1896 murder; he called for the full return to Kuwait, under his personal care, of the exiled branches of the al-Sabah that had been living in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, including the descendants of the murdered ruler, Muhammad al-Sabah, and his brother, Jarrah al-Sabah.<sup>250</sup> Finally, he appointed British experts to oversee the reorganisation of Kuwait's spending system and to draw up a development plan for doing so by the end of 1950.<sup>251</sup>

This successful beginning for Abdullah confirmed that while the defining characteristics of his approach to ruling the country highlighted his intention for change in Kuwait, they also

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<sup>248</sup> (American Consul, Basra) to (Department of State, Washington D.C.), 8 March 1950, US National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59, subject-Political Affairs [General], 1950-4, Kuwait. The document is extracted from *Confidential U.S. State Department central files: the Persian Gulf states and Yemen, 1950-1959*. Microfilm reel 1. Bethesda, Maryland: University Publications of America, (1991), p. 7.

<sup>249</sup> Extract from Persian Gulf Residency Summary of Events, 3 June 1950, FO 371/82004 (TNA, London).

<sup>250</sup> Interview with Yacoub al-Ibraheem (Kuwaiti historian), London: 23 November 2010.

<sup>251</sup> PR, Bahrain to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, 25 November 1950, FO 371/82010 (TNA, London).

differed from those of his predecessors. Rupert Hay, the Political Resident in the Gulf, predicted in March 1950 that Abdullah,

...will move slowly and will do his best to carry his people with him in any reforms he may introduce . . . there is . . . good reason to hope that he will steadily improve the general administration of the state and that he will spend its enormous income wisely.<sup>252</sup>

While according to Peter Mansfield,

... at a time when some of shaikhly princes of the Arabian Peninsula were beginning to become a byword for profligate personal extravagances, [Abdullah] showed that he was prepared to devote much of the greater part of Kuwait's oil revenues to the welfare of his people.<sup>253</sup>

The above outlined information confirms, to me at least, that Abdullah's efforts probably derived from a combination of: his travel and tension with regional countries, his political effort to sustain the ruling family's position, his personal belief in the importance of increasing the standard of living and the well-being of all of Kuwaiti society, and his determination to act in this regard.

However, appreciating the two explanations for the origins of Abdullah's introduction of policies, his intention for distributing oil revenues and for creating the welfare state raises another question: what was the nature of the situation in Kuwait before the 1950s, and did Abdullah follow his predecessors' paths or not?

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<sup>252</sup> PR, Bahrain to Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 11 March 1950, FO 371/82029 (TNA, London).

<sup>253</sup> Mansfield, *Kuwait Vanguard*, 40-1.

### 4.3. Kuwait's Development in the 1940s

This section examines the limitations on the progress of development in Kuwait before Abdullah's ascendancy. At the end of the 1940s Kuwait's development was not much better than it had been three or four decades earlier, during the immediate pre-oil era. This period had bequeathed a considerable burden of issues that Abdullah had to bear during the 1950s. It is therefore useful to provide some background information to Kuwait's development before Abdullah's rule began, with the aim of establishing some understanding of his impact on altering the country's path towards establishing the welfare state system between 1950 and 1965.

During the 1940s Kuwait was a small walled city that had many more issues to deal with than a few developmental reforms. In 1945, it had a population of approximately 100,000, including both native Kuwaitis and expatriates, more than two-thirds of whom lived within the walls of the City, which itself was estimated to be no more than 150,000 square metres.<sup>254</sup> Outside the walls, the rest of the country was desert (currently Kuwait's total size is 17,820 square kilometres). This caused overcrowding for the population inside the walls, and providing space inside the walls for development projects and ensuring good health and education services for its citizens represented a major challenge for Ahmad al-Jabir, and for Kuwait's administrative departments. Such overcrowding meant that Ahmad al-Jabir was unable to prevent any future efforts to expand development beyond the City walls, since the increase in population had created the expectation that people would have to move outside Kuwait City.<sup>255</sup> As a result

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<sup>254</sup> The population of Kuwait had grown gradually from a reported total of 35,000 in 1907, to around 60,000 in the 1930s. The first official census was held in Kuwait in 1957 and reported a population of 206,473 individuals living in the country. The census carried out in 1965 put the total population at 467,337. Information taken from C.A. Sinclair, *A Note on the Size and Characteristics of Expatriate Communities in Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar* (Durham: Durham University, 1978), 1.

<sup>255</sup> Preliminary report on development of Kuwait State presented to Ruler of Kuwait, February 1952, FO 1016/217 (TNA, London).

Ahmad al-Jabir had to satisfy local expectations by developing a new plan based on the anticipated changes and the fact that Kuwaitis were relying on the use of the newly acquired oil wealth as the main resource for solving the overcrowding issue. Unfortunately, the expected development plan did not materialise during the later years of Ahmad al-Jabir's reign.

Towards the end of the 1940s, progress on Kuwait's development was slow and was focused only on the area of the City that was inside its walls.<sup>256</sup> Despite the availability of oil revenues, which had started to flow into the government's coffers in 1946, there were various probable reasons for this delay, one of which was the fact that the Kuwaiti government had been unable to proceed with development plans due to insufficient financial income. This lack of income was in turn the result of the unfair oil agreement of 1934 between Ahmad al-Jabir and the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC; an Anglo-American company). Although Kuwait had started to export its oil in 1946, its agreement with the KOC allocated royalties of only US\$0.09 per barrel to Kuwait out of the total selling price of US\$1.12 in 1946 and US\$1.71 in 1951.<sup>257</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir's failure to amend the extortionate terms of this treaty by the end of his reign deprived Kuwait of its rightful oil profits, and as a result restricted the availability of financial resources for speeding up the development process.

The second reason for the delay was Ahmad al-Jabir's deteriorating health during the later period of his reign (when oil extraction in Kuwait was just beginning), along with the autocratic policies that he had undertaken after the *Majlis* Movement of 1938-39 (the Legislative Council). Ahmad al-Jabir's efforts to maintain his autocratic rule during the 1940s by

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<sup>256</sup> In 1950, the most significant development project was the Amiri Hospital, the first Kuwaiti government hospital, which opened in 1949 inside Kuwait town.

<sup>257</sup> For the source of crude oil prices in 1946 and 1951 see BP's *Statistical Review of World Energy 2012*, London: BP plc, at <bpp.com/statisticalreview> information retrieved on 15 October 2012; also Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 64.

suppressing the local opposition had the effect of centralising the country's administrative power in the hands of the heads of Kuwait's departments; all of them were senior shaikhs among the al-Sabah and were closely related to Ahmad al-Jabir. In effect these department heads were similar to the barons of medieval Europe: each one was considered the king of his fiefdom, and Ahmad al-Jabir had no power to interfere with them.<sup>258</sup> This issue was exacerbated by Ahmad al-Jabir's illness in the latter part of his reign since he was unable to curb the power of the senior shaikhs who were running the country's departments. Indeed, any effort on his part to adjust or challenge al-Sabah's prominent role in Kuwait's government administration after 1939 could have potentially threatened what remained of the respect for Ahmad al-Jabir's position as ruler.

The third reason was the lack of experienced leaders to manage Kuwait's departments, which had taken on full responsibility for the administration of the country's development schemes. All the department heads were senior shaikhs from the ruling family; they were also inexperienced and in desperate need of foreign experts to help them promote development. This situation accelerated with Ahmad al-Jabir's repeated rejections of the British Government's offers to appoint a senior adviser to look after the development process and initiate good management of the oil revenues that flowed to the country's budget.

Ahmad al-Jabir rejected offers from the British for several reasons, the most important being his unwillingness to give Britain greater power to interfere in Kuwait's internal affairs, and thereby circumventing the terms of the 1899, 1907, and 1914 treaties (see Chapter Three).<sup>259</sup> The pressure exerted on Ahmad al-Jabir by the ruling family had also played a major role in the

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<sup>258</sup> Brief for British Prime Minister with two annexes, May 1953, FO 371/104328 (TNA, London); Crystal. *Oil and politics in the Gulf*, 12-3.

<sup>259</sup> Note on Mr. Burrows' interview with His Highness Ahmad al-Jabir, 14 May 1949, IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London).

rejection of the British senior adviser. Having seen the experience of Qatar and Bahrain with British senior advisers, who had ultimately marginalised the role of the rulers and the ruling family by interfering openly in the internal affairs of these countries, al-Sabah did not want the British to repeat this in Kuwait.<sup>260</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir was also afraid of the criticism that would be directed at Kuwait, not only by the ruling family, but also by other Arab neighbouring countries, particularly Iraq, seeking to prevent any direct British interference in the region, since feelings of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism were spreading widely in the Arab World (see Chapter Six for more information).

#### **4.4. Abdullah Overcomes Obstacles for Development**

This section examines the problems facing the development process in Kuwait once Abdullah had come to power in 1950, and also identifies Abdullah's success in overcoming all the obstacles that he had inherited from his predecessor.

In 1950, Abdullah inherited a country that had not benefited very much from its huge oil reserves, and its administrative institutions had not developed much beyond the pre-oil period. Based on the previously discussed reasons for the slowdown in Kuwait's development process at the end of the 1940s, Abdullah's first task in Kuwait was to eradicate the obstacles that were delaying development. From the very earliest days of his rulership, he began a new era of reforms by devising new methods to overcome all obstacles that he had inherited from his predecessor.

The first obstacle to development in Kuwait was evident in the low oil revenues flowing into Kuwait's budget as a result of the 1934 oil agreement with the KOC. On the basis of this

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<sup>260</sup> PR, Bahrain to Foreign Office, London, 14 January 1949, IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London).

agreement, between 1946 and 1951 Kuwait received less than 10 percent of the total profits from its oil production, with the bulk of the profits going to the other oil company owners. It was clear how badly Kuwait, as the producing country, had been treated by the foreign oil company; not only did it not receive a respectable share of the newfound wealth but its share of the profits was meagre.<sup>261</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir had tried to amend the terms of the 1934 agreement with the KOC in the later years of his reign, but failed due to his weak position in relation to the KOC's strength based on its monopoly situation.

However, when Abdullah took power in 1950, his negotiating position with the KOC was strengthened by two important events which occurred at the time and which he used to support his side in the negotiations. The first event was the successful efforts of Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Iraq to reach a new agreement with their oil companies by dividing the profits of the oil sales equally (that is, 50/50) between the host country and the foreign oil company. This provided a useful incentive for establishing a strong claim for a new agreement with the foreign oil company, in order to equalise Kuwait's position with that of other oil countries in the world.<sup>262</sup>

The second event was Mossadegh's nationalisation of Iran's oil facilities in 1951. This affected Britain significantly because it had come to rely heavily on Iranian oil to meet its energy consumption needs during the 1940s. Iranian oil exports to Britain were now replaced by Kuwaiti exports, thereby opening the door for a new discussion with Abdullah over permission to increase the exportation levels of oil. Overall, both events greatly strengthened Abdullah's

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<sup>261</sup> Mansfield, *Kuwait Vanguard*, 40.

<sup>262</sup> Ghanim Hamad al-Najjar, "Decision-Making Process in Kuwait: the Land Acquisition Policy as a Case-Study," (PhD thesis, Exeter: University of Exeter, 1984), 28-30.; Sharikat Naft al-Kuwait, *The Story of Kuwait* (Al-Kuwait: Sharikat Naft al-Kuwait, 1959), 20; Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 64-5.

position in his negotiations with the KOC; these duly culminated in a new agreement at the end of 1951 that ensured that Kuwait would receive a 50/50 share of the total profits.<sup>263</sup> This new agreement immediately provided Kuwait with an enormous oil income in 1952 that combined all the oil revenues received during the past six years. Not only did Abdullah achieve what his predecessor had failed to do, but he also proved his shrewdness as a negotiator by having used the exceptional conditions prevailing in 1950 to help him attain his aim of increasing Kuwait's oil production income.

The second obstacle to development in Kuwait was the absence of a central authority or institution to unify the efforts of Kuwait's administrative departments. By 1950, the country's administrative power was concentrated in the hands of the department heads, "each of whom [all were ruling family shaikhs] conduct[ed] the affairs of the department entrusted to him with the minimum of financial or any other control by any central authority".<sup>264</sup> Although Kuwait's Consultative Council, founded in 1939 and composed of the department heads and some notables, aimed to unify the reforming efforts of departments, its sessions had been suspended in the mid-1940s due to differences among its members.<sup>265</sup> Since then, the administrative system in Kuwait had been functioning without a central body to supervise departmental budgets or allocate responsibilities.

In his efforts to implement reforms, and given the situation as outlined above, Abdullah needed, during his reign, to introduce administrative changes in the government apparatus that would be respected by Kuwaitis, the ruling family, and the British. In fact he began the process

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Rupert Hay. *The Persian Gulf States* (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1959), p. 101.

<sup>265</sup> PR, camp Muscat to Secretary to Government of India, new Delhi, 11 February 1940, IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London); General information on Kuwait and hinterland with who's who, prepared by Lt. Col. H. R. P. Dickson, PA, Kuwait in 1933, with updated amendments, 1943, IOR: R/15/15/1/179 (British Library, London).

as early as 1952, with administrative changes that aimed to centralise decision-making in the hands of a cooperative body. Abdullah's administrative changes during the 1950s encompassed four differing execution orders.

The first occurred in 1952 when Abdullah established a development board to oversee the state's spending on a major development plan for Kuwait City, with the assistance of the public works department.<sup>266</sup> This board was composed of heads of departments and advisers and lasted until 1961, when it was replaced by the Planning Council. The second execution order for reform was in 1954, when Abdullah established the Higher Executive Committee; this consisted of three shaikhs and three notables who worked to reorganise the functions of the departments to provide efforts for reforms.<sup>267</sup> This committee lasted only briefly as it failed to achieve its endeavours, and was replaced in 1956 by another administrative body, called the Supreme Council, which consisted of ten shaikhs only, who were responsible for handling most state affairs.<sup>268</sup>

The Supreme Council continued to function in Kuwait until 1962. However in 1959 a third reform execution order occurred when Abdullah was forced to undertake a major reshuffle of Kuwait's department heads in an effort to contain a domestic disturbance. In reaction to the disturbance, Abdullah changed the main purpose of the Supreme Council from merely organising the efforts of Kuwait's departments to guiding the country towards achieving its independence, and composing its legal codes (for more details see Chapter Six).

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<sup>266</sup> Report by Mr N M Reilly on development of Kuwait to July 1954, FO 371/109860 (TNA, London).

<sup>267</sup> Proclamation by Ruler of Kuwait, 19 July 1954, FO 371/109810 (TNA, London).

<sup>268</sup> PA, Kuwait to Mr. DM H Riches (Foreign Office, London), 17 April 1956, FO 371/120550 (TNA, London).

In 1962 the fourth execution order for reforms occurred when the Supreme Council was replaced by a Cabinet of Ministers.<sup>269</sup> The new cabinet in Kuwait was the final execution order at administrative reform. Through these various execution orders to reorganise the Kuwaiti administration, Abdullah and Kuwait managed to overcome the challenges that had plagued them in order to speed up the development, thereby ending the final phase of his solution to the administrative difficulties.

The third obstacle to the development process was mismanagement and alleged corruption among the department heads (the senior shaikhs) in matters such as planning and applying reforms in Kuwait. As early as 1938 this situation had enabled the British to exert pressure on Ahmad al-Jabir over appointing senior advisers for them. In order to achieve their financial interests, the British aimed to control and regulate the functions of departments by securing successful and sustainable development in Kuwait.

As previously discussed, British pressure on Ahmad al-Jabir to appoint a senior adviser began in 1938 and escalated after the Second World War, when Kuwait's oil revenues began to flow.<sup>270</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir, had resisted this pressure, aware that such a position was needed for Kuwait's development but unsure whether it could be easily processed. Ahmad al-Jabir did not feel that he wanted an appointment made on British terms only and that it would do nothing to address the ruling family's position in Kuwait.<sup>271</sup> Since the British had continued to insist on their full terms for the appointment, both parties eventually abandoned their discussions on the subject.

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<sup>269</sup> Al-Turki. *Al-Shaikh 'Abd-Allah as-Salim*, 48.

<sup>270</sup> PR, camp Bahrain to Secretary of State for India, New Delhi, 7 July 1946, FO 371/52247 (TNA, London).

<sup>271</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Shiraz, 16 September 1944, IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London).

When Abdullah became ruler of Kuwait in 1950, the British resumed their pressure for a senior advisor appointment to be made. He resisted this move from the British and led the latter to use his position as a political tool, believing that their formal recognition of him would be the best way to gain approval for the appointment of a senior advisor. Because he refused to give in to this new approach, the British delayed their formal recognition of his status for almost a month.<sup>272</sup>

Nevertheless, Abdullah's resistance continued until the end of 1950, at which point the British decided to back away from their previous policy of insisting on the appointment of a senior advisor. They agreed instead to a new arrangement that would involve appointing several experts to positions in the Kuwaiti administration.<sup>273</sup> With this agreement between Abdullah and the British having been put in place, the former was now able to deal with the country's inexperienced department heads when drawing up the development plan by using expert advice, enhancing the position of the ruling family, and establishing a solid foundation for the future of Kuwait.

As well as successfully overcoming the three obstacles to the development process during the early 1950s, Abdullah also initiated various strategies for creating a welfare state in Kuwait that focused on education, health care, and social security. During the 1950s and 1960s these initiatives moved Kuwait towards its complete transformation to a wealthy welfare state.

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<sup>272</sup> PA, Kuwait to Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah, with enclosed letter, 16 February 1950, FO 371/82029 (TNA, London).

<sup>273</sup> PR, Bahrain to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, 25 November 1950, FO 371/82010 (TNA, London).

#### 4.5. Abdullah and the Welfare State

This section discusses Abdullah's efforts to create a welfare state in Kuwait during his reign. It examines how the development of the country's administration systems and economy reached the point of being able to announce the welfare state. Were there difficulties to be faced because British experts were used, and did Abdullah's early decisions made in 1950 prove to be the right ones for accelerating Kuwait's development?

At the beginning of 1950 — in his position as ruler and head of Kuwait's government administration — Abdullah had begun to draw up an ambitious plan for turning Kuwait into one of the first welfare states in the Middle East.<sup>274</sup> This plan was to meet the Kuwaitis' expectation of spending the country's oil revenues (which, as has been noted, had increased enormously after the 50/50 agreement with KOC in November 1951), on local infrastructure, economy, and administrative development schemes. This plan also aimed to achieve the state's transformation as soon as possible with optimum costs. Initially, it was agreed that the plan be achieved in 5 years.<sup>275</sup>

To achieve this major goal, Abdullah relied initially on skilled foreign expertise for drawing up a plan for his country's development schemes. As the only foreign power in Kuwait at the beginning of the 1950s, the British were the only providers of experts for Abdullah's initial development efforts. Abdullah's decision to appoint British experts in Kuwait's government administration in the early 1950s was therefore justified since it provided him with skilled and

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<sup>274</sup> Preliminary report on development of Kuwait State presented to Ruler of Kuwait, February 1952, FO 1016/217 (TNA, London).

<sup>275</sup> PR, Bahrain to Mr. G W Furlonge (Foreign Office, London), 13 November 1951, FO 371/91300 (TNA, London).

trained staff who were able to supervise the major transformation of Kuwait from a traditional state into a busy, modern, and outstanding welfare state.

During Abdullah's reign Kuwait's complete transformation into a welfare state went through three different stages. The first two were regarded as the country's preparation for transformation by establishing the essential infrastructure; the last stage was considered to be the actual stage of announcing and establishing the welfare state.

The first stage emphasised the role of the British experts in controlling the implementation of the development programme in Kuwait from 1952 to 1954. Once Abdullah had become the ruler, he trusted the British as the best choice for transforming Kuwait into a welfare state. However, he was surprised as were most Kuwaitis by the high cost of the development plan under British supervision and therefore turned to Arab experts for assistance during the next phase of transformation.

The second stage, with the help of Arab experts, emphasised the role of the senior al-Sabah shaikhs as department heads in controlling the implementation of the development schemes in Kuwait between 1954 and 1961. It ended with the announcement of Kuwait's independence in 1961 and the issuing of its constitution in November 1962.

The final stage emphasised Abdullah's role in ratifying Kuwait's constitution that protects the rights of local Kuwaitis to enjoy the services offered to them by their country. With this stage, the transformation of Kuwait had been completed; it now provided a good share of protection for the local population to benefit from the oil revenues and it lifted the government's huge burden of commitments to its citizens (the typical type of rentier state). Overall, these three

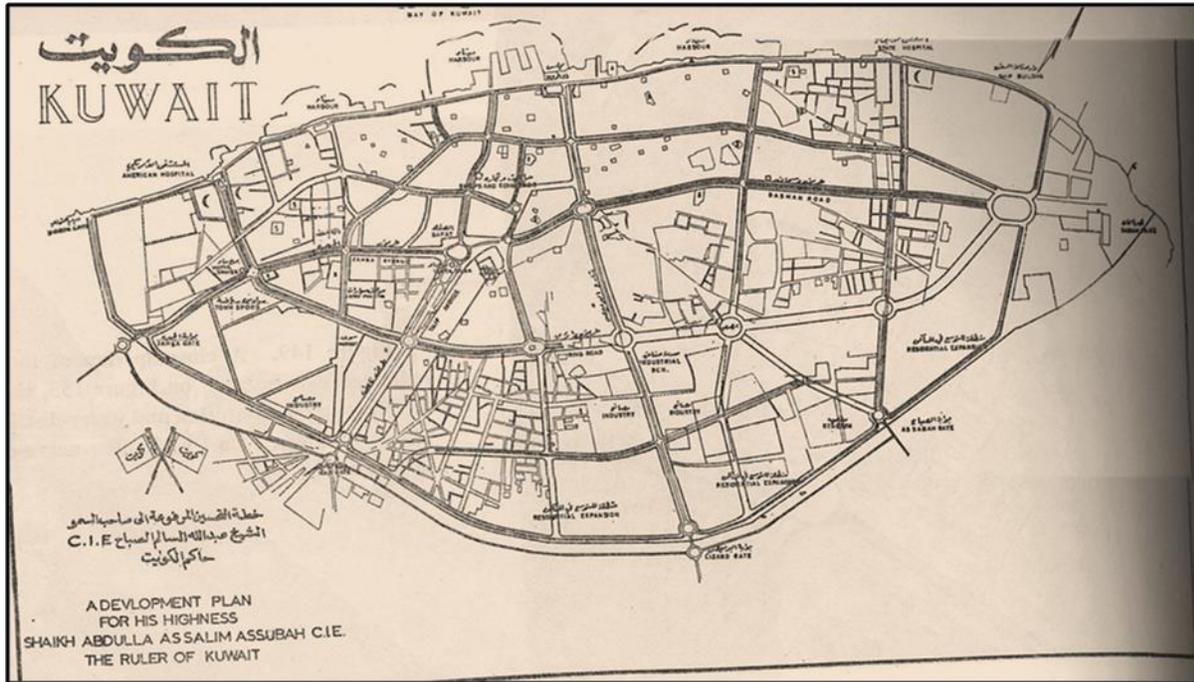
stages in Abdullah's reign served ultimately to achieve a single target: the welfare state of Kuwait.

The first stage of Kuwait's development and transformation started when Abdullah began to organise his priorities for constructing Kuwait's development projects. This strategy was necessary for the initial transformation and enhancement of the well-being of the citizens. Abdullah initiated his prioritised tasks three months after becoming ruler by solving the water shortage problem in Kuwait. He dealt with this issue through the appointment, in November 1950, of Ewebank & Partners Limited (a British company) as consultants for a water desalination plant and for water distribution (desalination started on 29 March 1953, with a total production of 1 million tonnes of water per a day). The second priority was to deal with Kuwait's electricity. He managed to nationalise the private electricity company, which had been in operation in Kuwait since 1938, and appointed J. D. Addison, a British expert, as the chief electrical engineer in the summer of 1951 to oversee the establishment of a new electricity station.<sup>276</sup>

Having managed to provide and control water as well as electricity supplies in Kuwait, Abdullah began his third and most important priority in October 1951. Under his orders, experts from the British firm of Minoprio, Spencely and Macfarlane, architects and city planners, presented their master plan for the new City area of Kuwait. This plan, which was initiated in April 1951, aimed at remodelling the old City within the walls by cutting new roads and widening and improving others, clearing sites, and engaging in extensive rebuilding (see the map below).

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<sup>276</sup> Report by N. M. Reilly on the development of Kuwait to July 1954, FO 371/109860 (TNA, London).



**Figure 2:** Minoprio, Spencely and Macfarlane’s plan.<sup>277</sup>

This plan was improved in February 1952 by delineating 23 areas outside the walls, with each area intended to focus on a specific type of development, such as residential, industrial, ports, hospitals, university, and other aspects as indicated, and the location of important projects carefully chosen.<sup>278</sup>

<sup>277</sup> Kuwait History website, accessed June 12, 2013, [www.kuwait-history.net/vb/showthread.php?t=9981](http://www.kuwait-history.net/vb/showthread.php?t=9981).

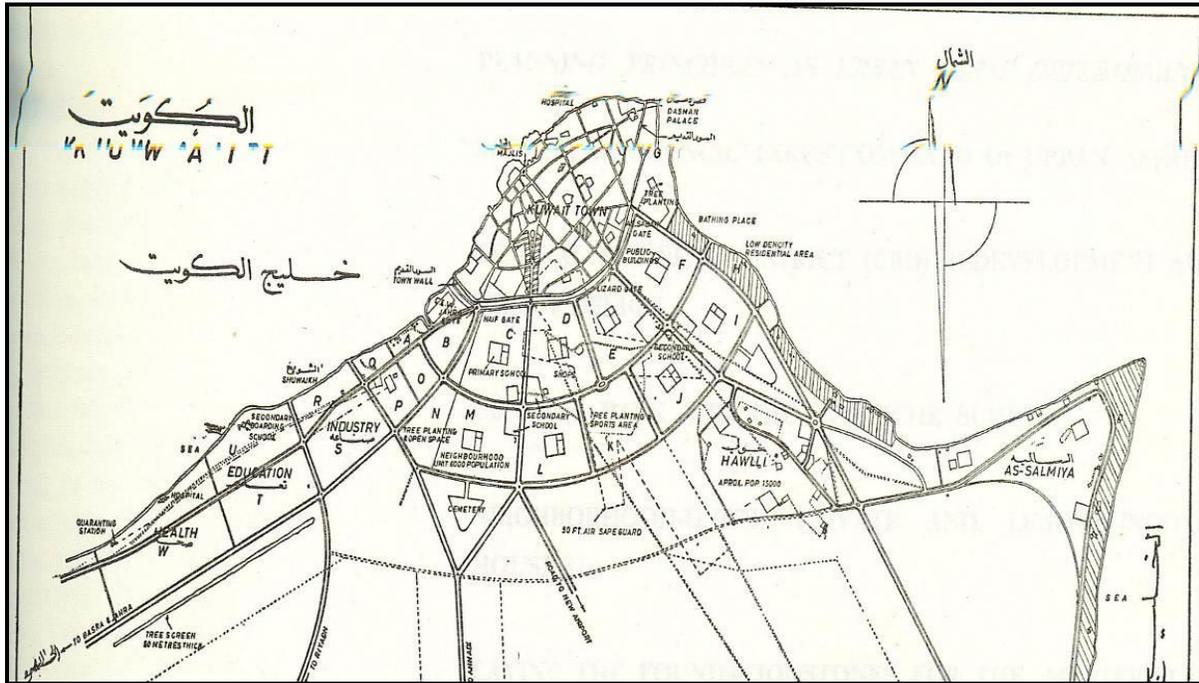
<sup>278</sup> Preliminary report on development of Kuwait State presented to Ruler of Kuwait, February 1952, FO 1016/217 (TNA, London).

Abdullah approved the plan in January 1952 and then established a Development Board<sup>279</sup> under the control of the newly-appointed British expert, General Hasted, assisted by several technical staff members (all of whom were British experts). In February 1952 Hasted submitted a preliminary report to Abdullah on the development of Kuwait with a view to beginning the work within four months. The plan was initially designed as a ten-year development programme, but was subsequently adjusted to take five years, from 1952 to 1957. The cost of the programme was estimated at £UK91.5 million during its five years.<sup>280</sup> The new plan's major projects included the construction of 10,000 houses, around 650 miles of roads, a deep-water port, a new international airport, government buildings, education buildings, health buildings, and a desalination plant, as well as infrastructural development in agriculture, electric power and sewage, and various industries. As the first such development plan in the history of the country, the 'Minoprio Plan' contributed significantly to Abdullah's legacy. See the map below.

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<sup>279</sup> This Kuwaiti development board was similar in its aims to the Iraqi Council of Construction which was established in 1950 and lasted until 1958, Bashar al-'Akiydi, "Al-Tanafus al-Ameciy al-Britani fi Majlis al-E'amar al-Iraqi fi al-Khmsiniyat," *Jardat al-Mada*, 18 September 2011.

<sup>280</sup> Report on estimate for cost of engineering works and services in Kuwait, 5 January 1953, FO 371/98400 (TNA, London).



**Figure 3:** Minoprio Plan.<sup>281</sup>

The new Development Board with Hasted as chairman, included the Kuwaiti directors of the Departments of Finance, Education, Municipality, Health, Public Works and Awqaf (Endowments), as well as some of the British experts who worked in these departments, and Colonel Crichton (who was Controller of Finances). The Board met under the chairmanship of Hasted from February to November 1952, during which time the main focus of the development programme was agreed. Based on the recommendations of Hasted, five large British contractors were signed up to work on the programme's major development projects, under the Development

<sup>281</sup> Kuwait History website, accessed June 12, 2013, [www.kuwait-history.net/vb/showthread.php?t=9981](http://www.kuwait-history.net/vb/showthread.php?t=9981).

Board's control, and work started in the summer of 1952. Kuwait's Public Works Department, assisted by local contractors, carried out the development programme's smaller tasks.<sup>282</sup>

The British contractors' work in Kuwait was completed at cost plus 15 percent, based on the contract with Abdullah, which negatively affected Kuwait's financial situation. This type of contract had been presented to Abdullah by a British company, Langdon and Every, Quantity Surveyors, as the best and most appropriate form of contract to meet his demands for accelerated implementation of his country's development plan.<sup>283</sup> However, entirely against Abdullah's wishes, this contract inflated the estimated costs of the project from £UK91.5 million in 1950 to more than £UK170 million in 1954, an increase in cost that had almost brought Kuwait to bankruptcy by the end of 1953.<sup>284</sup> Although there were several contributing factors to this situation, the two most important were the over-cost fare of some of the British firms working in Kuwait, and the failure of Hasted to stick to the development programme's agreed budget.<sup>285</sup>

This situation meant that in April 1953, Abdullah had to take action and make new arrangements regarding the position of the British companies in Kuwait and Hasted, as the programme controller. First, Abdullah issued a directive to his half-brother Fahad al-Salim, President of the Development Board, to stop the awarding of any new contracts in Kuwait to the five British companies although they were allowed to complete the rest of their work, which

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<sup>282</sup> Report by Mr N M Reilly on development of Kuwait to July 1954, FO 371/109860 (TNA, London).

<sup>283</sup> Report on development contracts and British contractors, unsigned, 1953, FO 371/104327 (TNA, London).

<sup>284</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 74-5.

<sup>285</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 8 April 1953, FO 371/104327 (TNA, London); for more reasons see: Zahlan. *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*, 33; Smith. *Kuwait, 1950-1965*, 50-4.

ended in 1954. Any new contracts were to be awarded by open tender, with preference given to Kuwaiti contractors whenever possible.<sup>286</sup>

Secondly, Abdullah managed to curb the power and patronage that appeared to rest in the hands of Hasted by turning his executive authority over the development schemes into the giving of technical advice and information. Hasted's job responsibilities had now to focus on issuing technical reports for any new development project, which were then submitted to the Development Board for preliminary approval and to the Finance Department for final approval of the costs. These restraints indicated to Hasted by April 1954 that he was no longer allowed to perform his executive functions over Kuwait's development schemes, whereupon he resigned.<sup>287</sup>

By 1954, Abdullah realised that he had to stem the financial losses caused by the British monopoly and Hasted's carrying out of the development schemes. When the prominent positions of the five British companies were reduced, he enabled the start of the second stage of the development process. The second stage focused on Kuwait's determination to take charge of its development scheme with the assistance of Arab experts.

The second stage started in mid-1954 when the al-Sabah senior shaikhs, as departmental heads, took charge of the development scheme under Abdulla's supervision. After Hasted (who was regarded by the Kuwaiti Democratic Party as serving British imperial interests) resigned as controller of the development programme, the chairmanship of the Development Board went to a former Syrian minister, Majadin Jabir.<sup>288</sup> As president of the Development Board Fahad al-Salim, had appointed Jabir in February 1953 to serve as the new head of policy, under the

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<sup>286</sup> Confidential letter to London with attached items of local news, 12 April 1953, FO 371/104326 (TNA, London).

<sup>287</sup> PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 30 March 1953, FO 371/104272 (TNA, London).

<sup>288</sup> To see the Kuwaiti Democratic Party's petition looks at: Memorandum and letter submitted to Ruler of Kuwait, 9 July 1954, FO 371/109810 (TNA, London).

guidance of the ruling family and with the help of Arab experts, to control development and achieve Kuwait's transformation.<sup>289</sup> Commenting on this new policy in April 1953, the Political Agent remarked about Abdullah's arrangement:

I think it is wrong to attribute all the blame for the present situation [the loss of the prominent British firms' position in Kuwait] to one man. In my opinion it has been all brought about because the Kuwaitis [the ruler and the ruling family] determined to take charge of development themselves.<sup>290</sup>

In addition, the issuing in 1954 of certain civil service regulations for gaining government jobs indicated the change in Kuwaiti policy towards foreign experts and employees. These regulations gave preference to Kuwaitis, then Arabs, and finally, if it proved to be essential for the work and no one from the previous categories presented themselves for the job, to foreigners.<sup>291</sup> With this policy, Abdullah and the ruling family in the Kuwaiti departments showed that they were determined to rely on themselves and other Arabs for planning and controlling development, while foreign experts would only be called on for advice if and when the Kuwaiti departments were desperate. Through this policy, Abdullah managed to limit the part played by the foreign experts and employees in controlling the country's development programme while broadening the role of Kuwaitis and other Arabs in dealing with this task.

The year 1954 represented the starting point for Kuwait's development process towards achieving its transformation. In this year, Abdullah issued a decree establishing the Higher Executive Committee, which was in direct contact with him at all times, and which had complete

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<sup>289</sup>Memorandum from Brigadier Burton, John Howard & Co Ltd to Sir Peter Macdonald, 26 March 1953, FO 371/104272 (TNA, London).

<sup>290</sup>PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 26 April 1954, FO 371/109864 (TNA, London).

<sup>291</sup>Confidential letter to London with attached items of local news, 12 April 1953, FO 371/104326 (TNA, London).

power to reorganise the administrative system, curb the power of senior shaikhs in Kuwait's departments, and oversee the development programme. Abdullah issued this decree to comply with the pressure of demands from the emerging political movements in Kuwait to reform the administration and address local grievances and dissatisfaction against Britain's position in steering the development.<sup>292</sup> The Higher Executive Committee stressed the importance of establishing new departments in the administration to provide high standards of service for Kuwaiti citizens. Abdullah's aim was to accompany development along with its infrastructure and economy, with additional development undertaken in the departments' services and administration. In 1955, the Higher Executive committee suggested many departments, bringing the total to 24 departments in Kuwait, although not all had been implemented, but one of the most important of them was the Department of Social Affairs.<sup>293</sup>

In 1955, under Abdullah's supervision, the Development Board introduced a new modification programme for the development scheme in Kuwait (see the map of the plan in the next page), which was designed to cover the next five years, starting from 1956 and continuing until 1961, and was intended to bring about huge change in Kuwait's social and economic development progress, although it was regarded as a continuation of the previous development plan that had begun in 1952.<sup>294</sup> One of the first tasks for the Kuwaitis and Arab experts on the development board was to extend the circle of acceptable contractors for carrying out major projects in Kuwait's development schemes to include both local and international firms. This decision was implemented by establishing a Tenders Committee, headed by Fahad al-Salim, to

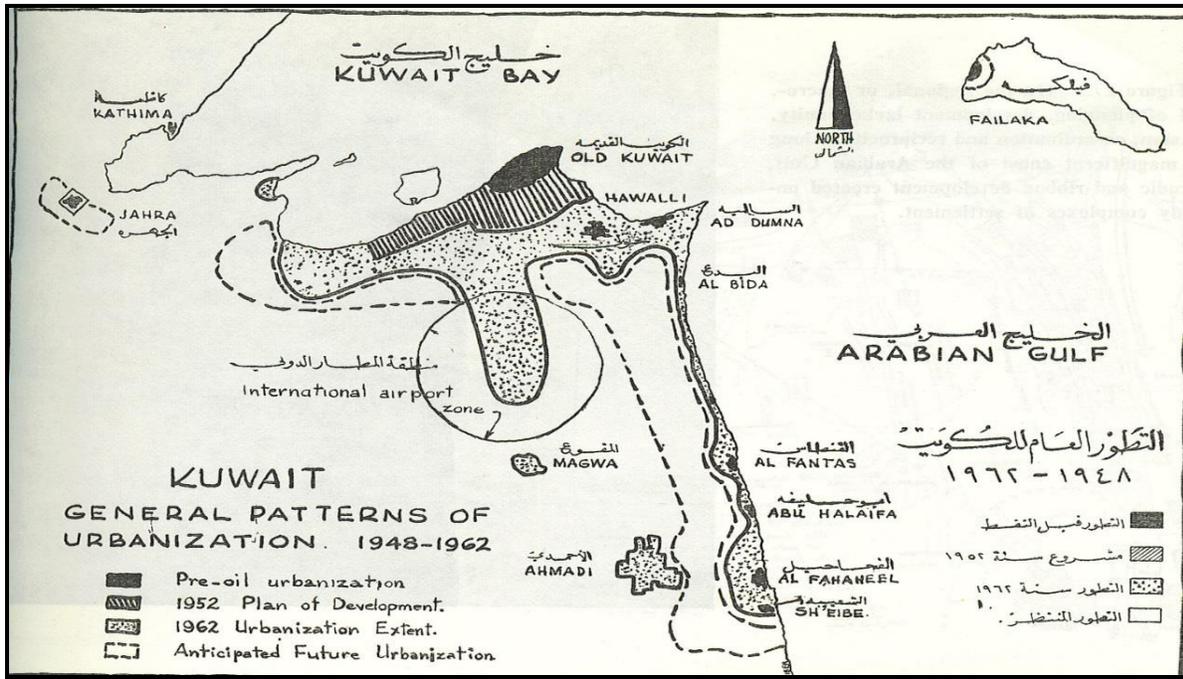
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<sup>292</sup> Memorandum and letter submitted to Ruler of Kuwait, 9 July 1954, FO 371/109810 (TNA, London).

<sup>293</sup> Abdulritha Asiri. *Al-Nitham al-Siyasi fi al-Kuwait: Mabad'a wa Mumarasat* (al-Kuwait: the author, 1994), 70.

<sup>294</sup> Memorandum concerning labour projects of major contractors in Kuwait including translated extract from Kuwait Gazette, 1 January 1955, FO 371/114588 (TNA, London).

scrutinise contractors' offers based on open bids, thereby achieving optimum costs and high quality for completing the projects.<sup>295</sup>



**Figure 4:** The Kuwaiti Development Board's plan.<sup>296</sup>

Some of the important projects presented in the 1950s 'modification programme' included the construction of major water installations, 2000 houses, police stations, a port, clinics, schools, government buildings, and a public library.<sup>297</sup> This new programme aimed to complete Kuwait's infrastructure by the late 1950s. However, it did not set up all the requirements for Kuwait's transformation, such as the issuing of civic and government laws to move the country toward independence. This position kept Kuwait in a state of some uncertainty

<sup>295</sup> Memorandum entitled Shaikh Fahad's Increasing Stranglehold by Mr. N M Reilly with supplementary observations, 26 April 1956, FO 1016/514 (TNA, London).

<sup>296</sup> Kuwait History website, accessed June 12, 2013, [www.kuwait-history.net/vb/showthread.php?t=9981](http://www.kuwait-history.net/vb/showthread.php?t=9981).

<sup>297</sup> Memorandum concerning labour projects of major contractors in Kuwait including translated extract from Kuwait Gazette, 1 January 1955, FO 371/114588 (TNA, London).

as it waited for Abdullah's next move and the administrative departments to fully transform the country into a welfare state.

The next move came in 1959, when Abdullah reshuffled the offices of senior shaikhs in the departments of Kuwait.<sup>298</sup> This was Abdullah's effort to respond to domestic instability coupled with the demands for reform by local political movements. He, therefore, endeavoured to speed up the transformation due to the significance of events following the rally at Shuwaikh's high school in 1959 (now Kuwait University).<sup>299</sup> In fact, the rally was organised by the Arab nationalist bloc in Kuwait; several department heads, all senior shaikhs, had attended the celebration of the first anniversary of the United Arab Republic (formed by the union of Egypt and Syria). At the rally, one of the speakers, Jassim al-Qutami (a founder of the Arab nationalist bloc in Kuwait in 1950s), had described Abdullah's reign as a continuation of the autocratic tribal rule of his predecessors. The event was followed by a demonstration and subsequent confrontation in Kuwait City between the supporters of the UAR President, Jamal Abdul Nasser, and the supporters of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Abdul Kareem Qassim. This was at a time when the tension between the UAR and Iraq was at its height.<sup>300</sup>

In reaction to these events, Abdullah reminded the people of Kuwait in 1959 and that throughout his reign he had made constant efforts to ensure the well-being of his citizens; and reassured them that his next efforts for reforms would involve the elimination of maladministration in Kuwait.<sup>301</sup> Following this announcement, Abdullah managed to start the

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<sup>298</sup> Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim founded this council in 1956 to unify the efforts of heads of Kuwait departments in implementing reform and to control and supervise the development programme in the country.

<sup>299</sup> Shuwaikh High school was the highest educational institution in Kuwait in 1950s. It was later merged with Kuwait University.

<sup>300</sup> Al-Khatib. *Al-Kuwaitiyat*, 202-9.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

final stage in the country's development, in which he focused on establishing the necessary laws and regulations for independence.

The final stage of Abdullah's execution order to create a welfare state in Kuwait began in 1959 when he appointed a Consultative Council consisting of 11 Kuwaiti notables to assist the Supreme Council in making decisions about reform. After establishing the new body, an Egyptian lawyer, Abdulrazzak al-Sanhuri, was appointed in 1960 to assist in establishing Kuwait's department for *Fatwa* (Islamic laws) and legislation.

Al-Sanhuri drafted 43 laws for Kuwait, including the budget code, the civil and commercial code, the penal code, the abolition of foreign judiciary code, and the monetary and issuance of currency code. He also drafted laws to regulate the judicial system, nationality, passports, and foreign residency systems in Kuwait.<sup>302</sup> With these laws, Abdullah was able to issue decrees to regulate the functions of his department institutions and to protect the rights of both citizens and foreigners in Kuwait. However, these legal decrees did not enable him to reach the final point in creating the welfare state. He still had to deal with two issues, both of which were political and each of which formed an obstacle to the success of his efforts: (1) gaining independence for Kuwait, (2) drafting a constitution for Kuwait.

The major obstacle for Abdullah in the final stages before establishing a welfare state was for Kuwait to gain full independence. At the end of the 1950s, Kuwait was aiming towards gaining its full sovereignty in the international and regional arenas as an independent state, and not as a British protectorate. Kuwait's efforts were similar to those of other Arab countries seeking their independence. Even the United Kingdom understood Abdullah's intention and

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid, 211.

therefore, at the end of the 1950s, it continually announced in the international arena that Kuwait was an independent state. In 1960, Kuwait joined several world organisations, such as IMO in 1959, WHO in 1960, and UNESCO.<sup>303</sup>

By 1961, Abdullah had decided to achieve his goal of full independence. He duly exchanged notes with Sir William Luce, the British Political Resident at that time, to terminate the 1899 treaty and gain independence for Kuwait. Abdullah received the British reply on 19 June 1961, after both sides had reached four conditions in their negotiations:

(1) the 1899 agreement would be terminated as being inconsistent with the sovereignty and independence of Kuwait; (2) the relations between the two countries would continue to be governed by a spirit of close friendship; (3) when appropriate the two governments would consult together on matters concerning them both; and (4) nothing in the conditions would affect the readiness of the British Government to assist the government of Kuwait if the latter requests such assistance.<sup>304</sup>

With this new treaty of friendship, Kuwait gained its full independence from the British and therefore was now responsible for discharging its own external and internal affairs. However, this only established Kuwait's right to control its local and foreign affairs; it did not recognise the rights of the Kuwaiti political movements to participate in decision-making.

Thus, the second obstacle for creating the welfare state in Kuwait emerged in 1961 as the Kuwaiti political movements expressed their demands for a constitution to regulate their relationship with the rulers. After Kuwait's independence, Abdullah lost no time in focusing his attention on the reform of Kuwait's internal ruling system to overcome the second obstacle. He

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<sup>303</sup> IMO is the International Maritime Organization. WHO is the World Health Organization. UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

<sup>304</sup> Exchange of note regarding relations between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the State of Kuwait, 19 June, 1961, FO 371/156836 (TNA, London).

aimed to draw up a constitution for Kuwait that would meet the needs of its new independent status in the Arab World and internationally. He immediately issued a decree on 26 August 1961 calling for the election of a Constituent Assembly, and for the appointment of a Regulatory Authority consisting of eleven members of the Consultative Council and eight members from the Supreme Council. The Regulatory Authority divided Kuwait into ten electoral districts and the election was held in November 1961.<sup>305</sup> The election for the Constituent Assembly yielded twenty members, all from the merchants and notables, joined by eleven appointed Ministers, mostly from the al-Sabah. Abdullah also decreed that Kuwait enter into a transition period of one year during which a constitution would be drafted.<sup>306</sup>

During this transition period, the Constituent Assembly met thirty-two times between 20 January 1962 and 15 January 1963. One of the Assembly's main decisions was to form a commission to draft the constitution on 3 March 1962.<sup>307</sup> This commission consisted of five members of the Constituent Assembly: Saad al-Abdullah (the chairman, who was Abdullah's son and the Minister of the Interior), Hamood al-Khalid (the Minister for Justice), Abdullatif al-Thniyan (the president of the Constituent Council), Yacoub al-Homaidhi, and Saud al-Abdulrazzak.<sup>308</sup> The commission drafted the articles of the constitution with the help of Egyptian lawyers. The commission submitted the final draft of the constitution to the Constituent

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<sup>305</sup> Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), *Hadatha fi Methal Hath al-Youm*. 26 August, 2009.

<sup>306</sup> Kuwait National Assembly. *The Minutes of the Meeting of the Kuwaiti Constituent Assembly*, session number 19, 11 September 1962. The information retrieved on 10 of February 2014 from <http://www.kna.kw/clt/run.asp?id=1568#sthash.oE20tse0.dpbs>

<sup>307</sup> Kuwait National Assembly. *The Minutes of the Meeting of the Kuwaiti Constituent Assembly*, session number 6, 2 March 1962. The information retrieved on 10 of February 2014 from <http://www.kna.kw/clt/run.asp?id=1568#sthash.oE20tse0.dpbs>

<sup>308</sup> Kuwait National Assembly. *The Minutes of the Meeting of the Kuwaiti Constituent Assembly*. All the sessions from 1 to 32, 20 January 1962 and 15 January 1963. The information retrieved on 10 of February 2014 from <http://www.kna.kw/clt/run.asp?id=1568#sthash.oE20tse0.dpbs>

Assembly for discussion on 11 September 1962. A few disagreements subsequently emerged over articles numbered, 2, 4, 16, 20, 78, 121, 131, 137, 142, 151, and 167.<sup>309</sup>

However, Abdullah's conciliatory efforts to mediate between the ruling family and the elected members in the Constituent Assembly helped considerably in calming the atmosphere and in ratifying the draft of the constitution. He prevented eleven ministers in the Constituent Assembly from voting on the constitution on 11 November 1962.<sup>310</sup> The ratification of the final draft of the constitution aroused opposition from parts of the ruling family, especially Mubarak Abdullah al-Ahmad and Muhammad al-Ahmad, who decided to leave Kuwait soon after.<sup>311</sup> They opposed Abdullah's decision to share power beyond the confines of the ruling family and to grant the right to all Kuwaitis to have a say in government and to hold government officials to account.

Kuwait's constitution was the crowning achievement in Abdullah's transformation of Kuwait into a welfare state. The constitution included 183 articles divided across five parts as follows: (1) the state and system of government, (2) the fundamental constituents of Kuwait society, (3) public rights and duties, (4) powers, and (5) general and transitional provisions. The constitution is based on democratic principles, combining aspects of presidential and parliamentary systems. It separates the powers of government into three areas: executive, legislative, and judicial. It states that the head of the state is to be the Amir (previously termed, 'the ruler'), who has extensive competencies. The Amir, along with his cabinet, constitutes the executive branch of government. The elected National Assembly, together with the Amir, forms the legislative branch of government. The courts constitute the juridical branch.

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwaitiyat*, 225-50; al-Najjar, *Madkhal li-ittawar as-Siyasi*, 71-9.

<sup>311</sup> Interview with Ghanim al-Najjar, Kuwait: Jibla area, October 2010.

The constitution emphasises the role of the government in safeguarding the universal human rights of Kuwaitis through justice, liberty, and equality. It identifies the duties of Kuwait's government to provide protection and public services to Kuwaitis, such as social insurance, education, and healthcare. It details the public rights and duties of Kuwaitis, including the freedom of religion, belief, opinion, and expression, as well as rights in the event of prosecution (i.e., not to be deported, tortured, or abused). It obligates the Kuwaiti government to provide Kuwaitis with education, healthcare, and employment.<sup>312</sup>

There are limitations to the constitution, however. Chief among these limits is the resistance of the constitution to any amendment, for fifty-two years, until 2014. The constitution's complicated regulations to amend its articles, the approval of both the Amir and two-thirds of parliament are required, also make it resistant to change. Even though the constitution gives the MPs the right to revise the constitution's articles after five years from its ratification, this was no easy task to achieve.

Another limitation of the constitution is the Amir's extensive competencies. The Amir can dissolve parliament at his discretion. This right has been exercised twice since 1962: by Sabah III al-Salim in 1976 and by Jabir III al-Ahmad in 1986. The justification for the dissolution of parliament in both cases was the Amir's need to stabilise Kuwait's domestic affairs.<sup>313</sup>

Yet another limitation of the constitution is the continuing struggle between parliament and the cabinet over the execution of the government's duties. According to the Egyptian lawyer, Khaleel Othman, this struggle justifies the Amir's occasional intervention as overseer of

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<sup>312</sup> Government of State of Kuwait, *Kuwait Constitution*, 1962.

<sup>313</sup> Al-Najjar, *Madkhal li-Ittawer as-Siyasi*, 94-122.

the government and guarantor of the constitution. The struggle between parliament and the cabinet has resulted in considerable delays in Kuwait's development plans in recent years, due to the erosion of parliament's trust in the cabinet. So long as the Amir continues to appoint his cabinet without the input or support of parliament, parliament's mistrust of the cabinet will continue, and it will continue to oppose reforms initiated by cabinet. Numerous stand-offs between parliament and cabinet since 2006 have resulted in the cabinet's resigning twelve times and the Amir having to dissolve parliament and call for new elections, six times.

Despite the limitations of the constitution, the fact that Abdullah and other political actors in Kuwait reached an agreement in 1962 over the ruling system is regarded in Kuwait as a great achievement. Kuwait's constitution is the most advanced and sustainable one in the GCC. A common perception or claim in Kuwait is that the West should be tolerant of the short-comings of Kuwait's parliament, since it is only half a century old, while the parliaments in Western countries pre-date the twentieth century; they have had much longer for their democracies to develop.

#### **4.6. Approaches to the Welfare, Rentier State**

This section examines the steps Abdullah took to transform Kuwait into a welfare, rentier state, the programmes he implemented, the effects they had, and their legacy. There are four key features: (1) the policy of Acquisition of land, (2) the policy of education, (3) the policy of healthcare, and (4) the policy of social security and employment.

#### ***4.6.1. Kuwait's Acquisition of Land***

The land Acquisition Policy/Program (LAP) was one of the main key features of Abdullah's plan to transform Kuwait into welfare, rentier state. In 1952, Abdullah introduced the LAP, the first in the Gulf, to distribute oil wealth across Kuwaiti society through government land acquisition in an effort to eradicate poverty. The government bought family houses in Kuwait City and the other small towns, paying exceptionally high prices for them. It then demolished the houses to make way for a grand development plan of new homes, neighbourhoods, and streets. The LAP lasted for decades and resulted in the transfer of vast sums to all Kuwaitis.<sup>314</sup>

Although the LAP had many benefits, it had number drawbacks. When Abdullah ratified the Kuwait development plan in February 1952, which included the construction of new neighbourhoods just outside Kuwait City, several shaikhs and merchants attempted to claim large tracks of lands inside and outside the city in order to receive as much money as possible. According to al-Najjar "the holdings of large estates were in the hands of the few, the merchants and the ruling family. Such a fact was imposed upon the reality of LAP. It meant that large compensations would inevitably reach these two groups."<sup>315</sup>

Responding to the ruling family and the merchants' attempts to claim lands, Kuwait's administrative system issued many decrees in the 1950s. Abdullah issued a decree prohibiting the registration of all unused lands inside and outside the city in the state's records in December 1951. His decision was taken after he received advice from the Kuwait Municipal Council. In August 1954, the Higher Executive Committee issued a decree to stop state land acquisition

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<sup>314</sup> Najat 'Abdulqader al-Jassim. *Baladiyyat al-Kuwait fi Khamsin Aman* (Kuwait: Kuwait Municipality, 1980), 200-12.

<sup>315</sup> Al-Najjar, "Decision-Making Process in Kuwait," 146.

outside the city limits and urban areas, the public organising line, unless it was important for the state to acquire, but the decree was neither respected nor implemented. Therefore, in 1956, the Supreme Council issued one of the most important decrees in Kuwait's history, to define a firm public organising line outside Kuwait City. The line defined the areas outside Kuwait city that consisted of 96.95% of the whole territory as Amiri states. With the public organising line in place, the LAP only applied to 3.05% of Kuwaiti territory.<sup>316</sup> According to al-Najjar the implementation of this decision “not only increased the value of land in general but also forced the real estate market to restrict itself to a tiny area. The value of land within that area rose astronomically”.<sup>317</sup>

Although the LAP aimed to eliminate poverty and distribute oil wealth to Kuwait's society, it was not implemented in sufficient or just ways. Although it managed to save a large part of the society from poverty by the end of 1960s, it also increased the financial gap between the emerging classes in Kuwait society, that is; (1) the upper class, which included the ruling family and merchants, and (2) the middle class, which consisted of the general public. Thus, it did not initially distribute wealth in equal way among society as its impact on the economy could be argued to have been damaging.

#### ***4.6.2. Kuwait's Education***

The massive development of the education system in Kuwait was another key feature of Abdullah's legacy in creating the welfare, rentier state. From the first months following Abdullah's accession in 1950, an expansion was achieved in local education services, due primarily to his unlimited support through subsidies produced from oil revenues which was

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid, 93-98.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

allocated to the members of the Educational Council, all of whom believed that education was the main area for promoting and developing Kuwait's future human resources.<sup>318</sup>

Based on this belief, spending on education in Kuwait had ranked among the highest expenditures in the country's budget since the late 1940s. In 1950, the British Political Agency estimated that local Kuwait expenditure on educational services topped the state's budget by almost 5.4 million rupees.<sup>319</sup> Such spending continued to dominate Kuwait's budget until 1952, when the costs of the development project took its place. Overall, the state's expenditures on education continued to be one of the principal features in the budget until Abdullah's death in 1965.<sup>320</sup>

In addition to improved educational services in Kuwait, there was an increase in the number of schools constructed as well as the number of teachers and pupils. The fifteen schools in Kuwait in 1949 had grown almost twelve-fold by the end of Abdullah's reign in 1965. These schools were for both girls and boys and were located in different areas in Kuwait, such as in the old town, the villages, and the new suburban areas. In addition, the number of teachers in Kuwait increased from 189 in 1949 to 5422 in 1965. Most of those teachers were of Arab origin, such as the Palestinians and Egyptians. Finally, the number of pupils rose from only 5256 in 1949 to around 101,000 in 1965. From the late 1950s the number of expatriate students attending Kuwait schools had also increased.<sup>321</sup> Overall, these numbers indicate the enthusiasm and determination

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<sup>318</sup> Mousa al-Hatim. *Al-Tatawar al-Eqtisadi fi al-Kuwait* (al-Kuwait: Matba'at al-Jami'ah, 2001), 426-41; Al-'Ali. *'Abd-Allah as-Salim*, 40-1.

<sup>319</sup> H J Evans (PR, Bahrain) to Mr C M Rose (Foreign Office, London), 1 March 1951, FO 371/91300 (TNA, London).

<sup>320</sup> After the end of the World War II, the exchange rate of the rupee was rupees 13.33 per Pound sterling. Ramesh Basant Roia. Historical Perspective of the Exchange Rate Regimes of the Rupee (Part II), *Le Mauricien*, 14 May, 2013, the information retrieved on 12 January 2013 from the website: [www.lemauricien.com/article/historical-perspective-exchange-rate-regimes-rupee-part-ii](http://www.lemauricien.com/article/historical-perspective-exchange-rate-regimes-rupee-part-ii).

<sup>321</sup> Education figures are taken from Statement of number of students, Education Department, Kuwait, 1949-1950,

of the Kuwaiti administrative system, led by Abdullah, to invest the country's newfound oil wealth in education.

From the time of Abdullah's accession, Kuwait provided free subsidies for pocket money, meals, clothing, transport, and books to all pupils in Kuwait. The state also expanded the number of students that it sent to Arab and Western countries for advanced studies. This situation not only encouraged locals to attend schools in Kuwait, but also attracted students from impoverished neighbouring countries. The state tried hard to combat illiteracy in Kuwait by enabling people who had missed the usual path of studies to retake the missed years without any costs. It also provided special schools to teach disabled people who had previously been ignored by society. Finally, the state worked on diversifying the outcomes of education in Kuwait through the provision of advanced educational facilities and institutions, such as high schools, technical schools, colleges, and universities.<sup>322</sup> With these and other changes, the state led by Abdullah, managed to transform education in Kuwait from education that was restricted by a limited budget and provided for only a few members of society into one of the top expenditures in the budget, and by 1965 providing education for all Kuwaitis.

#### ***4.6.3. Kuwait's Healthcare***

The development of Kuwait's healthcare services during Abdullah's reign was the third key feature in the creation of the welfare, rentier state. Kuwait's healthcare system witnessed a massive transformation during Abdullah's reign, shifting from a reliance on visiting foreign

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IOR: R/15/5/235 (British Library, London); Educational progress: statistics for period 1937-1950, FO 371/82151 (TNA, London); *Kuwait Planning Board: The First Five Year Development Plan: 1967-68 to 1971-72*, issued in December 1968 by Kuwait Government.

<sup>322</sup> The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. *The Economic development of Kuwait* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), pp. 144-63.

doctors and American mission hospitals to self-reliance by providing healthcare through Kuwait's health institutions. Healthcare services had started in Kuwait in 1911 when an American mission set up a hospital in the country. This hospital dominated healthcare in Kuwait until after the discovery of oil in 1946, at which point the state of Kuwait planned to build the first self-sufficient hospital in the country. The new state hospital (the Amiri Hospital) was finished in 1949 and began to attract increasing numbers of local patients.<sup>323</sup> This situation continued until 1951, when the state hospital finally overtook the American mission hospital, although the real transformation of the system did not begin until later.

From 1951 until 1965, healthcare figures for construction, facilities, attendances, and staff increased dramatically, as a result of the state's new policy of taking responsibility for the citizens' medical care as a part of Kuwait's major plan for development in 1952. Through the health department in Kuwait the plan provided the country with many new health constructions. In 1949, the country had just one state hospital; by 1965, it had eight hospitals, two sanatoria, 37 dispensaries and health centres, 148 school dispensaries, and nine centres for preventive medicine. This increase in the number of health facilities was accompanied by an equivalent expansion in the number of doctors. In 1950, there were fewer than 10 doctors working in the country; by 1965, there were 623 doctors working in Kuwait. Similar increases occurred in the number of nursing staff and patients. However, the most important achievement of the medical services during Abdullah's reign occurred when the number of inhabitants per doctor declined

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<sup>323</sup> PR, Bahrain to Mr B A B Burrows, 25 October 1949, IOR: R/15/5/227 (British Library, London).

from 25,000 in 1949 to 768 in 1965.<sup>324</sup> This major achievement improved healthcare in Kuwait generally, as well as raising the life expectancy of its inhabitants.

Health achievements continued throughout Abdullah's reign. The state managed to expand its medical services from offering only diagnostic services and free medicines for patients with straightforward ailments in 1949 to conducting complicated surgeries, psychological/psychiatric treatments, and after-treatment care and rehabilitation programmes for patients of all types in 1965. The state also provided patients with treatment abroad if their cases proved too complex for local doctors to address. In addition, the state introduced a frequent national vaccination programme to decrease and contain the chance of epidemics spreading within society. This service was provided by the state for all inhabitants in the 1950s and 1960s through Kuwait's health institutions.<sup>325</sup> By 1965, healthcare expenditure in Kuwait had reached KD 11 million, up from only 3.8 million rupees in 1950.<sup>326</sup> Overall, these and other services were fully provided by the state, and free of charge, which made Kuwait unique in the region at that time, as well as making Abdullah a pioneer in his effort to adopt the welfare state system.<sup>327</sup>

#### ***4.6.4. Kuwait's Social Security and Employment***

Kuwait's introduction of policies for social security and employment during Abdullah's reign was the fourth key feature in the creation of the welfare, rentier state. During the 1950s and 1960s, social security and employment policies in Kuwait experienced their own expansion within the major transformation of the country. Social security had not been known in Kuwait

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<sup>324</sup> Preliminary report on development of Kuwait State presented to Ruler of Kuwait, February 1952, FO 1016/217 (TNA, London); *Kuwait Planning Board, the first five year development plan*.

<sup>325</sup> *Kuwait Planning Board, the first five year development plan*; al-Hatim. *Al-Tatawar al-Eqtisadi fi al-Kuwait*, 442-9.

<sup>326</sup> H J Evans (PR, Bahrain) to C M Rose (Foreign Office, London) 1 March 1951, FO 371/91300 (TNA, London).

<sup>327</sup> The Kuwaiti Dinar (KD) was introduced in Kuwait in June 1961, and it valued 13.33 rupees. Muhammad Abdulhadi Jamal. *Tarikh al-'Amlah w al-Nquod fi al-Kuwait* (Kuwait: al-Bank al-Sina'ai, 2010), 112-25.

before the mid-1950s. Although weak and needy individuals in society were subsidised through irregular donations from the rich, the Kuwait authority's first effort to deal with this issue came in the late 1930s. This movement advanced in cautious steps and efforts had been made to solve this issue on only two occasions. The first was a successful effort to build an orphanage, managed and maintained by two employees who received their salaries and subsidies from private donations.<sup>328</sup> The second was Ahmad al-Jabir's failure in 1939 to found a Kuwaiti constitution that included an Article that suggested that every Kuwaiti would be able to secure a suitable job. These efforts were not renewed, and the situation continued until December 1954.

During the reign of Ahmad al-Jabir (1921-50), Kuwait had suffered an economic decline. First, the Saudi trade embargo on Kuwait during 1921-45 disadvantaged the Kuwaiti import-export sector, as Kuwait was the entry port for northern Saudi Arabia. This was followed by the introduction of Japanese cultured pearls in the late 1920s, which seriously undermined Kuwait's pearling industry, since cultured pearls were much cheaper than natural pearls and, to the untrained eye, were indistinguishable from them. Added to this was the Depression of the 1930s, which eliminated what was left of the demand for natural pearls and these events diverted Kuwait's economy.<sup>329</sup>

Before the oil era, the merchants, as the dominant social group, controlled Kuwait's economy; it was from them that the state received most of its revenue through the pearling industry, imports, and exports. They were the country's bankers, loaning money to the government when needed. Those who dived for pearls were indentured labourers tied to the pearl merchants. Since the majority of Kuwait's adult male population worked in the pearling

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<sup>328</sup> Al-Baghdadi. *Al-Shaikh 'Abd-Allah as-Salim*, 5-8.

<sup>329</sup> Interview with Ali Abdulrahman al-Najdi, eyewitness of the transformation of Kuwait before and after the 1950s and the 1960s, Kuwait: Sura area, March 2014.

industry, the pearl merchants not only employed but also controlled a large percentage of Kuwait's population.<sup>330</sup>

Between the 1920s and 1950s, the Kuwaiti pearl fleets and transit trade ships had decreased dramatically. At the dawn of the oil era, the traditional bond of dependency between the merchants and the people had been eroded by years of unemployment. From 1952 onwards, Abdullah began to redirect the people's dependency on the merchants towards the government by providing employment in the expanding government administration and by awarding construction contracts to Kuwaiti merchants for the 1952 development programme to expand Kuwait City. In this way, Abdullah shifted the people's dependency on the merchants to the government; and therefore the merchants were now dependent on the government.<sup>331</sup>

In 1954, the way the state solved the mounting problem of the unemployed working forces, was that the Higher Executive Committee founded a Department of Social Affairs and Work. This department took charge of subsidising and assisting the poor and the weak in society as well as organising the country's workforce, until it was replaced by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Work in 1962. Although a decision had been made in 1955 that the Department of Social Affairs and Work would take care of the most needy persons in Kuwaiti society, the state provided many free services to protect the community, including regular public assistance for widows, orphans, the disabled, the infirm, the aged, and very low-income families, in addition to welfare institutions for the old, disabled persons, and children. Moreover, the state helped people to establish themselves in business by implementing a scheme to provide recipients with a

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<sup>330</sup> Kuwait National Assembly. *The Minutes of the Meeting of the Kuwaiti Constituent Assembly*, session number 10, 17 April 1962. The information retrieved on 10 of February 2014 from <http://www.kna.kw/clt/run.asp?id=1568#sthash.oE20tse0.dpbs>; interview with Hamad Bohamdi, eyewitness of the transformation of Kuwait in the 1950s and the 1960s, Kuwait: Qadsiya area, March 2014.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

small shop for retailing to the public.<sup>332</sup> In 1960 alone, 4,402 cases were assisted by the state's social welfare system; in 1965, the state's total expenditures on social affairs had reached KD 3.0 million.<sup>333</sup>

However, the most important social affairs service was providing low-income families in Kuwait with state housing in return for a 30-year interest-free loan extracted from the salaries of the head of the family. In this way, the state had managed, by the end of 1966, to distribute more than 9000 houses to limited-income families in the different areas of Kuwait.<sup>334</sup>

The state also focused on securing the rights of Kuwaiti workforce to have suitable employment. The Department of Social Affairs and Work issued the first Kuwaiti civil work regulations in 1955 and updated them in 1960 to protect the rights of all state civilian workers in their jobs, including both Kuwaitis and expatriates.<sup>335</sup> Kuwaiti civil workers benefited the most from these regulations as the state ensured that: they could not easily be replaced, they would have a pension upon retirement, and they would have the right to choose suitable jobs for themselves. The most important achievement for the Kuwaiti workforce came in 1961 with Article 41 of the constitution, which stressed the state's responsibility for guaranteeing suitable jobs for all capable Kuwaitis who were seeking employment.

Although the state proceeded with its major policy of equal distribution of the oil wealth among the Kuwaiti society in order to solve its problems, this policy also made the public sector more attractive for Kuwaiti job seekers and employees than the private sector. This situation

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<sup>332</sup> International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. *The Economic development of Kuwait* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 142-3.

<sup>333</sup> Al-Hatim. *Al-Tatawar al-Eqtisadi fi al-Kuwait*, 420-3.

<sup>334</sup> Kuwait Planning Board, *the first five year development plan*.

<sup>335</sup> Report by Kuwait's Department of Social Affairs on organisation of cadre for government workers, sanctioned on 30 August 1955, FO 371/114773 (TNA, London).

resulted in increased state expenditure on salaries and wages year on year. These expenditures grew from 76,778 rupees in 1955 to KD 68.1 million in 1965. As a result, the public sector began to dominate the Kuwaiti workforce. The number of Kuwaitis working in the civil service was almost 5,000 in 1955, but had increased to 25,770 by the end of 1965.<sup>336</sup> Given this increase in the number of Kuwaiti civil service workers, the state led by Abdullah had succeeded in showing its humanitarian side in terms of social care for Kuwaiti society, by providing for its essential needs through direct subsidies.

However, despite the state's efforts to assist Kuwaiti society during Abdullah's reign, there was a negative impact on society. The state's assumption of responsibility for employing all Kuwaitis has resulted in wage inflation well above that of the private sector, discouraging Kuwaitis from becoming involved in private business. This has limited the size of the private sector economy and kept Kuwait and Kuwaitis dependant on oil revenue and the fluctuations in the oil market, putting Kuwait on the edge of a deficit by 2014. Furthermore, Kuwait's expanding population and the increasing number of university educated Kuwaitis eventually made it impossible for the government to provide employment for all Kuwaitis by 2010. Thus, Kuwait's policies of the 1950s and the 1960s were not sustainable; they provided only temporary stability.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

This chapter analysed Abdullah's aim to create the first welfare, rentier state in the Arabian Peninsula. It demonstrated that from as early as 1950 Abdullah believed in the need to introduce a major development plan and welfare system in Kuwait. It also showed that he introduced a

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<sup>336</sup> Kuwait, Planning Board, *1965-1975 Censuses*, Government of the State of Kuwait, 1976; the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. *The Economic development of Kuwait*, 51-3.

distribution policy for the largest part of the income derived from the increase in oil revenues internally to local society. Even though the method of wealth distribution was far from perfect, it raised living standards among all Kuwaitis. It also turned the local society into an asset community where its upper and middle classes relied on the government for financial shares of the oil wealth (rentier state).

Abdullah's decision probably stemmed from his extensive engagement with local demands for reform before he assumed the rulership plus his efforts to copy the experiences of Britain and India in establishing their welfare states after WWII. However, the most probable reason for his decision was to stabilize the al-Sabah rule of Kuwait in the short term during his reign, and in the long term, for the reigns of his successors.

As soon as Abdullah became ruler in 1950, he began the process of transforming Kuwait into a welfare state. This process was completed in two combined phases; (1) the development plan, and (2) the creation of the welfare system. The first phase entailed a massive economic transformation that involved extensive legal and constitutional changes. To achieve this phase, Abdullah relied initially on the British to manage the development process. Then in 1954, Abdullah depended increasingly on Arab experts to assist the department heads in managing the development process. In 1959, Abdullah introduced administrative reforms, as well as laws and regulations to systematise the relationship between the government and the people that assured Kuwait's independence in 1961, and constitution in 1962.

Together with the first phase, the second was to introduce a welfare system for Kuwait. This phase began with the land acquisition policy in 1952 and carried on with education, health, social security, housing and employment policies. All these policies made Kuwaiti society,

including its social groups of the ruling family, merchants, notables, and public an asset society who participated in maintaining the welfare system. Overall, by managing these two phases Abdullah was able to secure the well-being of all Kuwaitis plus he brought the reliance on the al-Sabah rule of Kuwait for decades to a head.

Although Abdullah managed to create the welfare, rentier state in Kuwait, he did not study the negative impact of this new system of rule. His distribution policy of the oil rent among Kuwaitis in the 1950s and the 1960s had left two negative impacts on the development of Kuwait's future and society. The state's policies in the 1950s and 1960s created two classes in Kuwait society: the upper and the middle class. The upper class controlled most of the government's expenditure on development, and the middle class relied completely on the state for employment and wages. Also, it increased the government's expenditure on maintaining the welfare system in the long term. The government's inflationary spending on high wages in public services jobs was the main issue that put the country on the verge of deficit by the end of 2010; and the increase in Kuwait's population participated in accelerating this situation.

Kuwait's essential first phases of evolution as a new developing state in the region in the 1960s were achieved mainly by Abdullah's hasty decisions in the early 1950s. However, his decisions did not result in a long-standing welfare, rentier system. Today, problems and consequences are emerging and Abdullah's successors have to solve them carefully. Among these problems is that increasingly, the middle class are demanding a just share of the oil wealth to match that of the upper class. Also, there is an increase in the middle class's demand for better investment of the oil wealth, internally and externally. In short, the middle class seeks more

participation in managing the oil wealth investment as well as finding solutions to the corruption in Kuwait's development.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Abdullah, the Ruling Family, and Britain's Role in Kuwait, 1950-65**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter focuses on another aspect of Abdullah's legacies in the history of the country's development. From the beginning of the al-Sabah's rule in Kuwait in the mid-eighteenth century until 1965, the control exercised by the members of the ruling family over various aspects of authority in Kuwait's internal affairs evolved in four different stages. In the later stages of this development, Abdullah operated as the top decision-maker. The authority of the al-Sabah in Kuwait's political and administrative life before and during the first half of the twentieth century had continued to be based solely on traditional foundations and had not been clearly defined. However, when Abdullah became the ruler in 1950, he showed the first signs that he would change this situation, which demonstrated a strong determination to place the ruling family in a position that would completely transform Kuwait's politics and administration by sustaining and expanding their role, and strengthening the traditional basis of authority and legitimacy.

The ruling family's sustained/expanded role and enhanced legitimacy were introduced during Abdullah's administrative reforms during the 1950s and 1960s, ending with the constitution of Kuwait in 1962 which enshrined the ruling family's authority over Kuwait's politics and administration. Although his efforts were successful in securing the ruling family's position in Kuwait, he faced two main obstacles: Britain's endeavours to exploit rivalries within

the al-Sabah to enhance its own control of the country, and the political movement's demands to participate in decision-making in Kuwait.

## **5.2. The Ruling Family's Authority before 1940s**

This section identifies the evolution of the ruling family's position in Kuwait's politics and administration vis-à-vis the ruler from 1752 to 1940. It provides a background for the four distinctive stages of the al-Sabah's efforts to prove its legitimacy by sharing the responsibility for managing Kuwait's politics and administration with the ruler. It also describes Abdullah's significant impact on the two latter stages of the al-Sabah's position and authority in Kuwait.

Before 1940, the dominance of the ruling family in Kuwait's internal affairs passed through four stages. The first stage began with the establishment of the al-Sabah's rule in Kuwait in the mid-eighteenth century and lasted until the accession of Abdullah II al-Sabah in 1866 (r. 1866-1892). The second stage lasted from 1866 until the assassination carried out by Mubarak al-Sabah in 1896. The third stage extended from 1896 until the dissolution of the Legislative Council in 1939, while the final stage lasted from 1939 until the ratification of the Kuwait Constitution in 1962.

During these four stages, the power and authority of the ruling family in Kuwait's political and administrative affairs developed. In the first stage, the power of the wider ruling family was non-existent; power was concentrated in the hands of the ruler only. During the second stage, some of the senior shaikhs of the al-Sabah gained limited authority, but the ruler marginalised this in the third stage. During the fourth stage, Abdullah and his supporters from the ruling

family were able to regain such extensive authority over Kuwait's politics and administration that the ruler was unable to prevent them from exercising it.

Two main factors generated these evolving changes in the power of the ruling family. The first was the variety of abilities of the Kuwaiti rulers in allocating powers to their relatives. Each ruler's attitude towards his family was different from that of others and this affected how much power and authority he was prepared to grant to his family members. The second was the various political and economic circumstances facing Kuwait during these periods, including for example the assassination of 1896 and the extraction of oil in the 1930s (which initiated the forming of the rentier state). These two factors shaped the development of the power and authority of the ruling family, in politics and administration as well as in their relations with the ruler.

For a better understanding of these changes, this discussion examines each period in detail. During the first 114 years of the al-Sabah's rule, from 1752 to 1866, the members of the ruling family had no power or authority of their own that was separate from that of the ruler. Only the ruler could govern; other shaikhs could not. The only constraint on the ruler was that he had to consult Kuwait's merchants, and notables (including senior members of his own family) on important matters, based on power politics.

There were two causes for the marginalised role of the al-Sabah shaikhs in Kuwait's politics and administration. The first was the simplicity of Kuwait's political and administrative system during the first century following its establishment. During this period, Kuwait's rulers took responsibility for the country's entire and diminutive political and administrative system, which included: collecting customs duties and taxes from desert tribes and pearl divers, declaring war, representing Kuwait in regional political events, and judging traditional civil cases on local

disagreements. This centralisation of Kuwait's politics and administration in the hands of the ruler meant that the ruling family's shaikhs were left with no more than the role of assisting or advising the ruler in his duties, the same role that was played by other Kuwaiti merchants and notables. Beyond this, the ruler's family had no other responsibilities in the country.<sup>337</sup>

The second reason for the marginalised role of the al-Sabah shaikhs was a result of the strong impact of the merchant community's financial domination over the ruler and his family. Kuwait's merchant community had been firmly established within the decision-making process in the country since its establishment in the mid-eighteenth century; as a result the rulers were financially dependent on the merchants for subsidies (This is discussed in Chapter Four). The ruling family's shaikhs had not yet managed to combine their traditionally dominant position of supplying Kuwait with rulers with any form of financial independence from the merchants' subsidies. During this period, in fact, the ruling family was unable to acquire the private external financial incomes that would have enabled them to break the domination of the merchant community in decision-making in Kuwait. The merchant community's dominant position came at the expense of the ruling family's power and authority in Kuwait's politics and administration when the latter's position in the country was marginalized by the former one. This situation continued until the next stage of the ruling family's development in its gaining authority in Kuwait.<sup>338</sup>

The second stage began with the succession of Abdullah II al-Sabah as ruler in 1866. During this period, which lasted until 1892, the ruling family's authority in Kuwait's politics and administration improved, because the ruler's brothers took on a share of the ruling power.

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<sup>337</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 116; Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi*, vol.1, 72.

<sup>338</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 18-26; al-Shammari, *al-Mustawda ' wa al-Mustahdar*, 68-83.

Despite their marginalized role in the first stage, the second stage enabled the ruling family to start to gain a certain level of control over the highest positions in Kuwait's government administration. Abdullah II al-Sabah's decision to allocate many of the responsibilities and powers related to Kuwait's internal and external affairs to his brothers, Mohammad al-Sabah, Jarrah al-Sabah, and Mubarak al-Sabah was the main cause of the change in the ruling family's role. The exact date of this decision is not known, but apparently it happened during his reign, possibly in its early stages. Mohammad al-Sabah took charge of Kuwait's external negotiations, Jarrah al-Sabah took charge of the country's treasury, and Mubarak al-Sabah was responsible for its desert army.<sup>339</sup>

The consequences of this sharing of power and authority actually caused the appearance of the beginning of the end of this stage. Abdullah II al-Sabah's easy-going attitude caused his brothers to focus more assertively on matters related to the question of succession. Indeed, when Abdullah II al-Sabah died in 1892 Mohammad al-Sabah assumed power, thereby marking the first case of horizontal succession in the history of the al-Sabah in Kuwait. With this new pattern of succession, signs of rivalry began to appear among the brothers over power and authority in the country. Their rivalry lasted until 1896 and was focused around their financial allocations from the country as well as the al-Sabah's private incomes from the date plantations in Iraq. The leader of this rivalry with Mohammad al-Sabah was Mubarak al-Sabah who demanded more power to support his ambitious plans to extend Kuwait's sovereignty over the Arabian Desert.

Ultimately, this rivalry resulted in the assassination of the ruler of Kuwait when Mubarak al-Sabah, assisted by his two sons, Jabir II al-Mubarak and Salim al-Mubarak, and his retainers, murdered Mohammad al-Sabah and Jarrah al-Sabah in 1896. This event marked a turning point

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<sup>339</sup> Al-Jen'ai, *Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 23-8.

in the evolution of the ruling family's power and authority in Kuwait, and was also the beginning of the third stage during which a new way of conducting relations between the ruler and the ruling family was put in place.<sup>340</sup>

The third stage started with Mubarak al-Sabah's succession in 1896 and lasted until 1939. The main sign of this phase was the return of the marginalisation of the al-Sabah's shaikhs' role in assuming power and authority in Kuwait's politics and administration. Once Mubarak al-Sabah had taken charge of Kuwait, he established a new pattern of autocratic rule which enabled him to control all power and authority in the country. He marginalized not only the participatory role of the merchants and notables in decision-making related to the country's politics and administration, but also the role of his close relatives in assuming offices in Kuwait's government administration. During his reign, Mubarak al-Sabah consistently oversaw Kuwait's political negotiations and wars except in a few isolated instances when his elder sons, Jabir II al-Sabah and Salim al-Sabah, took on such responsibilities, albeit with significant restrictions.<sup>341</sup>

In addition, Mubarak al-Sabah only ever appointed his retainers and loyalists to important offices, such as the head of his Secretary's office and the head of the Treasury and Customs administration. There were two main purposes behind this new pattern of rule in Kuwait. The first purpose was to enable Mubarak al-Sabah, in the wake of his accession, to strengthen his position against any endeavours by the ruling family or neighbours to overthrow him. The second purpose was to facilitate Mubarak al-Sabah's control of the country without challenge and to implement his ambitious plans to create a modern state in Kuwait under his rulership and that of his descendants, thus limiting the succession in his descendants. Following Mubarak al-

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<sup>340</sup> Al-Shammari, *al-Mustawda' wa-al-Mustahdar*, 51-68.

<sup>341</sup> Rush, *Al-Sabah*, 101-4; al-Shammari, *al-Mustawda' wa al-Mustahdar*, 87-141.

Sabah's death, this pattern of rule continued; his sons Jabir II al-Mubarak and Salim al-Mubarak, and his grandson Ahmad al-Jabir, ruled Kuwait from 1915 to 1950.

During most of this period, from 1915 to 1938, the ruling family suffered from the marginalization of its role in the country's politics and administration. On several occasions during Ahmad al-Jabir's reign, one shaikh, Abdullah, tried to change this imposed marginalization (for details see Chapter Two). However, the opportunity for change did not come until after the discovery and extraction of oil and the appearance of the Legislative Council in 1938. On this occasion, Abdullah and his supporters from the ruling family used the demands of the Kuwaiti merchants and notables for reform as a means of gaining extensive authority in Kuwait's politics and administration.<sup>342</sup>

The fourth stage began in 1939 and lasted until 1950, during which time the al-Sabah shaikhs, with Abdullah at their head, recovered a considerable level of internal authority over Kuwait and on many occasions were able to circumvent the ruler's efforts to control them. This reclaiming of internal authority by the al-Sabah shaikhs did not happen accidentally, but was the result of a standoff against autocratic rule in Kuwait; headed predominantly by Kuwaiti merchants and notables. The standoff was later joined by Abdullah, and his supporters from the ruling family.

The immediate winners in this standoff were the merchants and notables, who established a Legislative Council to ratify a constitution handed down from Ahmad al-Jabir in August 1938. Having extracted the executive, legislative, and judicial powers from Ahmad al-Jabir, the Legislative Council duly passed them on to its elected members for six months, a situation that

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<sup>342</sup> Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayyt al Hadith*, 341-73.

continued until its dissolution in March 1939. However, Abdullah and his supporters from the ruling family were the ultimate winners of this standoff since, with the rest of the Kuwaiti community, they pushed their demands for reform until they had managed to take over the leadership. Having eventually gained a large share of Ahmad al-Jabir's authorities and powers they were able to marginalize the merchants' and notables' role in Kuwait's politics and administration.<sup>343</sup>

After the Legislative Council was dissolved in 1939, Abdullah and his supporters managed to gain control of all the administrative institutions in Kuwait, from the Treasury to the Department of Public Security, a situation that arose mainly from Ahmad al-Jabir's relaxed attitude towards the ruling family's activities, which, given his efforts to suppress local opposition in Kuwait, was justified.<sup>344</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir also aimed to strengthen his rule by delegating much of his authority and powers to the ruling family's senior shaikhs, headed by Abdullah. In fact, Ahmad al-Jabir's efforts at suppression and his delegation of powers supported the ruling family's belief that they had dominated the internal authority of Kuwait, following the dissolution of the Legislative Council. Such beliefs influenced the activities of the al-Sabah's senior shaikhs in Kuwait's government administration during the 1940s including Abdullah, who faced various difficulties in his dealings with the ruling family during his reign.

### **5.3. Abdullah and the Ruling Family's Authority in Kuwait in the 1940s**

This section examines Abdullah's and the senior shaikhs of the al-Sabah's role in Kuwait's politics and administration during the 1940s. It aims to identify the division within the house of the al-Sabah that had split the ruling family into two factions. The dispute revolved around who

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<sup>343</sup> Herb, *All in the Family*, 73.

<sup>344</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 6 January 1939 IOR: R/15/5/204 (British Library, London).

stood to gain the greatest benefits from the oil wealth and from the highest positions in Kuwait's politics and administration, and it was this divisive situation that prompted the British decision to interfere in Kuwait's internal affairs in order to serve Britain's interests in the country. While the British, starting from 1939, continued to exert pressure on Ahmad al-Jabir to dispense with the use of senior shaikhs in the Kuwaiti administration, Abdullah was leading the al-Sabah's opposition to such pressure.

Following the Legislative Council's event in 1938-39, a long period of discord emerged within the ruling family, particularly among Mubarak al-Sabah's descendants who fought for power and authority in Kuwait well into the 1940s. The split within the ruling family began when Ahmad al-Jabir was criticised for dissolving the Legislative Council in March 1939, thereby suppressing Kuwait's first democratic experience. Subsequently the British authorities in the Gulf advised him to establish another appointed Council that would include a few members of the ruling family and others from among the merchants and notables.<sup>345</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir followed this advice and duly formed the new Consultative Council, appointing Abdullah as its president.

The Consultative Council started meeting in March 1939. A few years later, however, internal differences among its members and the president led to its meetings being suspended. The main dispute, which emerged in July 1940 as a result of conflicting attitudes among the Consultative Council members focused on their differing beliefs related to whether Kuwait's wealth should be shared within the ruling family or among the people. According to the Political Agent in Kuwait, "there had been a stormy meeting of the *Majlis* [Consultative Council] in July 1940 concerning inspection of the Treasury Department's accounts, headed by Fahad al-Salim

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<sup>345</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 12 March 1939 IOR: R/15/5/206 (British Library, London).

who was travelling to Bahrain”.<sup>346</sup> In this case, Abdullah supported the stand taken by Fahad al-Salim, which resulted in two of the non-al-Sabah’s members, resigning from the Consultative Council, after which its sessions were suspended for three months.<sup>347</sup>

This caused the Political Agent in Kuwait to wonder whether the entire Consultative Council had resigned or whether Ahmad al-Jabir had appointed another Council or had simply reshuffled its existing members.<sup>348</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir confirmed to the Political Agent in Kuwait in December that the Consultative Council was still in existence, except for the two members who had resigned, and that it would meet again on 7 December 1940.<sup>349</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir then reshuffled the cabinet, sending both Hamood al-Jabir and Muhammad al-Ahmad into retirement.<sup>350</sup> However, subsequent sessions of the Consultative Council were effectively suspended since it met only rarely during the 1940s.

The main reason for the ruling family’s disputes within the Consultative Council is summarised in the Political Resident in the Gulf’s notes, as follows:

The ruling family felt like they won this country with sword [after the event of March 1939] and expect to be shared in common, and if the Ruler does not give an adequate share of the swag to members of his family he is certain to meet trouble sooner or later, usually sooner.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Extract from Kuwait Intelligence Summary, 16-31 July 1940 IOR: L/P&S/12/3894A (British Library, London).

<sup>347</sup> The members who resigned were Khalid al-Zaid al-Khalid and Thniyan al-Ghanim. The rest of the Majlis’ members were Abdullah, Salim al-Hamood, Fahad al-Salim, Abdullah al-Jabir, Muhammad bin Shamlan, Abdulrahman Salim al-Abdulrazzak, Mishari al-Rodhan, Muhammad al-Hamood al-Shay’, Ahmad al-Humaidhi, Yusuf bin Isa, and Ali al-Khalifah. See the list of new Council members appointed by Ruler of Kuwait, undated, IOR: R/15/5/206 (British Library, London).

<sup>348</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 13 October 1940 IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

<sup>349</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 4 December 1940 IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

<sup>350</sup> General information on Kuwait and hinterland with who’s who, prepared by Lt. Col. H.R.P. Dickson, PA, Kuwait in 1933, with update amendments, 1943 IOR: R/15/15/1/179 (British Library, London).

<sup>351</sup> PR, camp Muscat to Secretary to Government of India, New Delhi, 11 February 1940 IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

Such a belief, held by most of the ruling family, was strengthened by three main factors: (1) Opposition was repressed in Kuwait in 1939. That is, when most of the leading members that opposed the later Legislative Council had fled from Kuwait or were caught by the ruler Kuwait was without political opposition and was under censorship; (2) The ruling family was willing to copy the autocratic style of rule in other Gulf Arab states and kingdoms, where the ruling families controlled the wealth of the State and distributed it as they liked; and (3) Ahmad al-Jabir's easy-going manner which ignored the fact that younger shaikhs were growing up without strong leadership.

In December 1939, in order to counter the ruling family's improved beliefs and activities, the British authorities in the Gulf advised Ahmad al-Jabir to adopt more cohesive policies with the al-Sabah by raising their allowances. They told Ahmad al-Jabir that,

one of the reasons why he had not received the support from his family that he was entitled to expect was that he had been somewhat niggardly with the allowances which he made to them, and pointed out that Shaikh Hamad of Bahrain had always been very careful to have his family four square behind him.<sup>352</sup>

In January 1940, Ahmad al-Jabir duly increased the ruling family members' allowances by between 40 and 250 percent, leading the British authorities in Kuwait to predict that this would cement the al-Sabah's support for him.<sup>353</sup>

Although the increase in the al-Sabah allowances in 1940 was aimed at stopping senior shaikhs from fighting over wealth and authority in Kuwait, the fact was that this stimulated

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<sup>352</sup> PR, Camp in Muscat to Secretary to the Government of India, New Delhi, 11 February 1940 IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

<sup>353</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire 18 January 1940 IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

members of the ruling family to undermine Ahmad al-Jabir's decisions. Each senior shaikh of the ruling family was acting individually in his department during the 1940s, without Ahmad al-Jabir's taking any serious financial control or accountability. The British authorities in the Gulf referred to the undermining of Ahmad al-Jabir's authority in Kuwait as just one more example of the price the British had to pay, and would continue to pay, for their pre-1939 policy of encouraging the opposition in Kuwait.<sup>354</sup>

Ahmad al-Jabir's easy-going stance on the activities and behaviour of senior shaikhs made part of the ruling family rich, since members owned enormous properties within and around Kuwait City. Ahmad al-Jabir's inability to share a similar vision to all parts of the ruling family placed him in a more subjective mood when it came to separating them into factions. This divisiveness dominated the relationship between the two factions (i.e., the Ahmad al-Jabir's faction and Abdullah's faction) and was to continue for decades to come. The power struggle was due to both factions' ambitions to take over government administration positions and benefit from Kuwait's oil wealth.

However, the factions did not share similar ideas about the administration of the country. Ahmad al-Jabir (the leader of the Jabir branch of the family) preferred to adhere to his grandfather Mubarak's traditionalist style of rule which involved autocratic and absolute methods, whereas Abdullah, (the leader of the Salim branch of the family) preferred modern and more liberal ways of ruling, in which the ruling family and the population in general both enjoyed a good share of influence in the country's decision-making process.

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<sup>354</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire with first part of note on Shaikh Sabah al-Nasir, 14 January 1945 IOR: R/15/5/218 (British Library, London).

The two main factions, known as, “the ruler’s faction”, which was loyal to Ahmad al-Jabir and “Aulad Salim’s faction” which was loyal to Abdullah, were led by senior members of the ruling family. According to the Political Agent in Kuwait in 1941,

The Sabah are, broadly speaking, split into two factions, the Shaikh’s who support Ahmad and those who support the Salim branch. Of the former the most important are Ali al-Khalifah, grandson of Abdullah the eldest brother of Mubarak, and Ahmad’s son Abdullah, a ponderous person in charge of the Arsenal. The Salim were three in number, Abdullah al-Salim who is in charge of Treasury and President of the *Majlis* [Consultative Council], Fahad his half-brother who runs the Treasury and Sabah who is in charge of the police. A turbulent young Shaikh who seems chiefly to be out for himself is Abdullah al-Mubarak the only surviving son of Mubarak [al-Sabah].<sup>355</sup>

The divisiveness and rivalry among the ruling family in the 1940s occurred as individuals sought to gain wealth, fortune, and power, coupled with the disappearance of public opposition. As a result, Kuwait very nearly turned into a medieval feudalist state.<sup>356</sup> For example, when several senior and some junior shaikhs argued over redrawing the demarcation lines on the ground within Kuwait City, individuals rushed to seize and acquire lands, claiming them as their private property. To stop such actions, Ahmad al-Jabir again raised the allowances of the ruling family and gave them almost free run of the Treasury; however, this action did not change the fact that the al-Sabah, even Salim’s line, remained busily preoccupied with claiming lands.<sup>357</sup> In addition, they sought the State compensation for building the new State infrastructure on these lands and estates. According to the Political Agent in Kuwait, “the quarrel over land marking

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<sup>355</sup> PR, Kuwait to Secretary to Government of India, New Delhi, incomplete, 28 March 1941 IOR: R/15/5/214 (British Library, London).

<sup>356</sup> Smith, *Kuwait 1950-1965*, 18-21.

<sup>357</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 28 March 1941 IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

resumed with the rise in land prices that followed in the wake of the new post and telegraph offices that were being established in Kuwait.<sup>358</sup>

During the 1940s, those who had benefited from the political vacuum in Kuwait after the suppression of the opposition and the dissolution of the Legislative Council considered Abdullah to have gained the most from the split in the ruling family. Abdullah had managed to gain executive power over financial management in Kuwait, especially when he took control of several positions in the State's government; namely, as president of the Consultative Council, as chief of the Food Supply Department during the Second World War, and as manager of the Financial Department. He handled day-to-day matters in the key areas of Kuwait's finance, customs, supplies, and policing, while Ahmad al-Jabir kept his position as ruler and overseer of the country's politics.

Overall, Abdullah's efforts to control financial management in Kuwait could not have succeeded in the 1940s without the backing of his half-brothers, Fahad al-Salim and Sabah al-Salim; the former ran the Treasury and the latter ran the Police. Together with his half-brothers, Abdullah formed a solid opposition to the possibility of Ahmad al-Jabir's faction having any control over these two crucial institutions. This was to ensure that the ruling family authority would not be able to regain its previous marginalized position but would instead continue along its more recent path of overseeing the development of, and investment in, Kuwait's new source of revenue, that is, its oil.

Although Abdullah's intention was to recover and protect the ruling family's prominent position of authority in Kuwait, he was not able to control the behaviour of all his faction in

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<sup>358</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 23 July 1941 IOR: R/15/5/188 (British Library, London).

administering Kuwait during the 1940s. For example, in 1944, Abdullah entrusted Fahad al-Salim with control of the State's finances; however, the British highlighted Fahad al-Salim's mismanagement in a report to Ahmad al-Jabir.<sup>359</sup> In November 1946, the British returned to find further mismanagement in Abdullah's departments. This time they discovered a huge discrepancy in the Supply Department between the goods imported from India and the rate of consumption of these goods in Kuwait. The British linked this to the issues of corruption and smuggling in Kuwait, which they considered were the result of appointing Fahad al-Salim as the chief deputy of Abdullah's departments.

Due to his position in the line of succession Abdullah could not entirely control his faction's behaviour in the administration during the 1940s. As second in line he needed to show his loyalty to, and support for the ruling family, and in order to ensure the al-Sabah's support for his smooth accession after the death of Ahmad al-Jabir. Somehow, he had to ignore the suspicious activities of his faction in Kuwait's government administration, and was therefore unable to put a stop to their behaviour. His endeavours to do so always occurred only after the discovery of such issues and never before they accelerated.<sup>360</sup> Ultimately, Abdullah's best efforts were to act as the overseer and supervisor of the ruling family's financial situation and the Kuwaiti society.

With both Ahmad al-Jabir and Abdullah unable to restrict the ruling family's activities during the 1940s, the British sought to intervene in the matter. As the only foreign observers of Kuwait's internal affairs the British were able to use the discord within the ruling family to interfere in Kuwait's internal affairs. Not only did they criticise Abdullah's mismanagement of his departments but they also asked Ahmad al-Jabir to remove him from his posts. The intention

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<sup>359</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Shiraz, 16 September 1944 IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London).

<sup>360</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 28 March 1941 IOR: R/15/5/194 (British Library, London).

was to appoint a senior British official who would advise Ahmad al-Jabir about the supervision of Kuwait's government administration.<sup>361</sup>

Given Abdullah's position as chief of the financial department, which was responsible for Kuwait's finances, the British targeted both his authority and his position in Kuwait's government administration, by providing Ahmad al-Jabir with highly critical reports that focused on mismanagement and corruption in the financial department. However, neither Ahmad al-Jabir's efforts nor the British challenges to Abdullah's authority were successful. Although Ahmad al-Jabir pressed Abdullah to implement reforms in his departments, Abdullah managed to preserve his powerful position in the Kuwaiti government's administration until his accession in 1950. In fact, Abdullah managed to unite the ruling family against the British intervention in Kuwait's internal affairs. By using the al-Sabah's high respect for him, Abdullah maintained his and the ruling family's position and authority in Kuwait's internal affairs until the British accused him of being pro-Nazi during World War II.<sup>362</sup>

Abdullah's opposition demonstrated that the more the British interfered in Kuwait's internal affairs, the more the ruling family united to protect its privileges and authority in Kuwait's government administration. This case is discussed further as the first threat to the ruling family's role and authority in Kuwait after the Legislative Council of 1939 in the following section.

#### **5.4. The British Threat to the Ruling Family's Authority in Kuwait, 1944-54**

By examining British interference in Kuwait's internal affairs between 1944 and 1954, this section aims to identify Abdullah's successful efforts, as the leader of the ruling family's

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<sup>361</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 4 June 1946 IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London).

<sup>362</sup> Al-Najjar, *Madkhal li-Ittawer as-Siyasi*, 37-8.

resistance, to maintain and protect its position and authority over the country's administrative system.

When the British entered into an agreement with Mubarak al-Sabah in 1899, they had no idea that after the 1938-39 standoff, the ruling family would be sharing most of Kuwait's government administration's power with the rulers. Certainly the ruling family's control of authority in Kuwait changed political calculations in the country. The ruler represented the only contact through whom the British Government was able to secure and maintain its interests in Kuwait, yet the ruling family now joined the game by influencing the two traditional parts of the agreement.

The oil factor helped a great deal in changing the position of the ruling family in Kuwait as well as influencing British policies towards this new factor and its consequences for Kuwait. In 1944 Britain, having understood that the huge oil revenues would change Kuwait's economic and financial situation, altered its attitude to the management of Kuwait's economic and financial situation.

The British also worked to re-centralise the power of decision-making in Kuwait in the hands of the ruler. Britain's main reason for taking this decision, which included a clear interference in Kuwait's internal situation, was to secure (a) the optimal use of oil incomes and (b) the protection of British interests in Kuwait.<sup>363</sup> However, Britain's efforts to pressurize the ruler met with strong resistance from the ruling family based on the notion that any British action prejudicial to the agreements of 1899, 1907 and 1914 would not be allowed or tolerated.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Note on Kuwait succession by Mr G.W. Furlonge, 23 January 1950 FO 371/82162 (TNA, London).

<sup>364</sup> According to the treaty of 1899, the British had to conduct Kuwait external affairs while the internal affairs were the sole responsibility of the ruler of Kuwait.

Realising that they were facing solid opposition from the ruling family in Kuwait, and having identified Abdullah and his faction as the source of that opposition, the British came to regard them as the main opponents to Britain's interests in Kuwait during the late 1940s.

#### ***5.4.1. British Interventions in Kuwait's Internal Affairs, 1944-50***

As early as September 1944, the British had tried to destabilise the ruling family's authority in Kuwait's internal affairs. Thereafter the British frequently endeavoured to interfere in internal matters as, for example, when Ahmad al-Jabir gave provisional approval to the perceived need for a British adviser for Kuwait's government administration. Ahmad al-Jabir had admitted to the British in 1944 that there had been some mismanagement in Kuwait's finance departments under Abdullah. He also stated that there was no one among the ruling family or his subjects who was capable of handling the finances once the oil companies had re-started development of the oil fields. This gave the British a sound reason to destabilise the ruling family's authority in Kuwait's government administration.<sup>365</sup>

With the preliminary approval from Ahmad al-Jabir, the British authorities in the Gulf focused seriously on pushing a proposal to appoint a British financial adviser for Abdullah's Treasury and Supply Departments. In 1945, the British authorities voiced their concerns to Ahmad al-Jabir that with the new oil revenues starting to pour into the Kuwaiti coffers from July 1946 it would be necessary to retain Abdullah's services until an outsider could be found to fill his place. In their discussions with Ahmad al-Jabir, the British stressed the importance of appointing an adviser with a pro-British stance, even if the individual was from an Arab country.

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<sup>365</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Shiraz, 16 September 1944 IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London).

They also emphasised the need to prevent Fahad al-Salim from taking control of the two departments.<sup>366</sup>

However, in July 1946, Ahmad al-Jabir changed his mind about the appointment of the British adviser in Kuwait and Abdullah's position as head of the two departments. According to the Political Resident in the Gulf, Ahmad al-Jabir was afraid of offending Abdullah if he ousted him from his present office. He also stated that Ahmad al-Jabir was reluctant to face the criticisms that would inevitably be directed at him from Iraq and other countries if he employed a British adviser.<sup>367</sup>

Ahmad al-Jabir probably rejected the British suggestion in order to avoid strong opposition to such a decision from among the ruling family. Abdullah led this opposition, which was motivated by the 'Belgrave model' in Bahrain. Belgrave had been the senior adviser to the ruler of Bahrain and since 1926 had controlled the country's entire administration by marginalizing the role of the ruler and the ruling family.<sup>368</sup>

In the 1940s, Kuwait's ruling family refused to allow a second Belgrave model in Kuwait. Most members of the ruling family were sensitive to their status within the Arab World as rulers of Kuwait. For example, in May 1948, Ahmad al-Jabir managed to persuade the ruling family, including Abdullah, of the importance of appointing a British adviser to the Police Department. Abdullah and the ruling family agreed to this proposal, and the British adviser duly began his work in the department. However, when news of the appointment of the British adviser reached Iraq, criticism of Ahmad al-Jabir and the ruling family was published in various Iraqi

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<sup>366</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 4 June 1946 IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London).

<sup>367</sup> PR, Bahrain to Secretary of State for India, New Delhi, 7 July 1944 IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London).

<sup>368</sup> Interview with Dr Ahmad al-Khatib in Kuwait on Oct. 2010.

newspapers, forcing Ahmad al-Jabir to stop pursuing the plan to appoint other senior advisers to the Finance and Customs Departments.<sup>369</sup>

In an effort to remedy this problem, the British tried to alter their proposal and in 1949 endeavoured to persuade Ahmad al-Jabir that, if he did not like the word ‘adviser’, some other term could be employed, such as ‘expert’. They wanted to assist Ahmad al-Jabir in improving the administration of his State while gaining his approval. They also assured him that they did not want a second Belgrave model in Kuwait.<sup>370</sup>

However, Ahmad al-Jabir’s illness and the return of the succession issue in Kuwait in 1949 suspended the pursuit of the new British proposal. In fact, the two previous events had made the British more cautious about Abdullah, the prospective ruler, and his attitude towards their interests in Kuwait.

#### ***5.4.2. British Intervention in Kuwait’s Internal Affairs, 1950-54***

In January 1950, while British caution was at its highest level in Kuwait, Ahmad al-Jabir died, leaving the ruling family to consider who would fill his post. Within days it was announced that Abdullah was his rightful successor and he would assume power once he had returned from Oman. Initially, the ruling family’s immediate recognition did not evoke a similar reaction from the British authorities in Kuwait. Instead the British Government endeavoured to impose various conditions on Abdullah before it would recognise him. As a result, Abdullah’s accession

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<sup>369</sup> PR, Bahrain to Dundas (Foreign Office, London), 18 May 1948 IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London); criticism in Arabic newspapers to the Ruler of Kuwait in 1949 IOR: R/15/5/226 (British Library, London).

<sup>370</sup> PR, Bahrain to Burrows (Foreign Office, London), 14 January 1949 IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London).

ceremony was delayed for almost a month after the ruling family and the Kuwaitis had acknowledged his status.<sup>371</sup>

During this period, the British worked hard to promote their earlier proposal from the 1940s that would strengthen their interests through involvement in the internal affairs of Kuwait. This time, they pressed the new ruler, Abdullah, to channel the country's increasing oil wealth into benefits for Kuwaiti society and improvements in its living conditions. Most importantly, they urged Abdullah to address the matter of his country's untrained administrative personnel, and worked towards securing his acceptance of their offer to appoint British-trained experts to take charge of Kuwait's government administration, under his supervision.<sup>372</sup>

However, British pressure met with resistance, due largely to Abdullah's previous position, backed by the ruling family, of opposition to this proposal in the 1940s. As a result of this resistance, and after being condemned by foreign powers in the Gulf, specifically the American Consulate in Basra, in February 1950 the British Government, was forced to announce its recognition of Abdullah.<sup>373</sup>

Although Abdullah's policy at the beginning of 1950 succeeded in gaining him formal recognition, it obviously undermined his power to control the behaviour of the senior shaikhs in administering Kuwait. The decision so early in his reign to resist British pressure could be ascribed to the ruling family having chosen him as ruler of Kuwait; however, this situation

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<sup>371</sup> American Consulate, Basra to Department of State, Washington D.C, 1 March 1950, US National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59, subject-Political Affairs [General], 1950-4, Kuwait. The document was extracted from *Confidential U.S. State Department central files*, 8.

<sup>372</sup> American Consulate, Dhahran to American Embassy, Jidda, 5 March 1950, US National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59, subject-Political Affairs [General], 1950-4, Kuwait. The document is extracted from *Confidential U.S. State Department central files*, 5.

<sup>373</sup> Memorandum to Mr. Ralph K. Davies, signed by J. Mac Pherson, 13 January 1952, US National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59, subject-Political Affairs [General], 1950-4, Kuwait. The document was extracted from *Confidential U.S.*, 52-4.

forced him to continue the procedures adopted by his predecessor, according to which the ruling family's behaviour with regard to the management of the country was never formally supervised or controlled.

The sudden alteration in Abdullah's status in Kuwait from being an opposition leader to becoming the ruler restricted him from advancing any new policy concerning the country's administration. Most probably, this was not going to happen unless Abdullah gave in to the British proposal. In fact, Abdullah's status shifted from having extensive power over key departments to having less control over the administration. In general, this shifted in status forced him to retain the functions of his previous positions and combine them with his new standing. This is why he never delegated his earlier authority to any of his relatives.<sup>374</sup>

This burdened Abdullah with responsibilities, thereby increasing the chances of further allegations of maladministration and corruption in his departments. In fact, a few months after his accession, claims about missing money and corruption surfaced in several departments, including finance (which was under the control of his deputy Fahad al-Salim), customs, and public works.<sup>375</sup> By the end of 1950 these allegations of mismanagement, accompanied by local expectations for reform and British pressure for the pursuit of efficient development in Kuwait, worked to change Abdullah's mind. In October 1950, Abdullah decided to accept the British

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> American Consulate, Basra to Department of State, Washington D.C, 26 July 1950, US National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59, subject-Political Affairs [General], 1950-54, Kuwait. The document was extracted from *Confidential U.S.*, 18.

proposal by appointing several experts to oversee departments in Kuwait's government administration, including finance, customs, airport, and development.<sup>376</sup>

Although Abdullah's decision certainly provided the British with a prominent position in Kuwait's government administration, they continued to press him to make more concessions. The British Government endeavoured to save its interests in the country by enlarging the benefits it expected to derive from Kuwait's anticipated increases in oil revenues and expected transformation. Abdullah and the ruling family viewed the British endeavours as an effort to undermine their personal authority in the country,<sup>377</sup> in a situation which put Abdullah between two conflicting pressure fronts, the British on one side and the ruling family on the other, with both seeking to control the most power in Kuwait's administrative system.

Two months after the British experts had been appointed in Kuwait's government administration, a discussion was started with Abdullah about the possibility of recruiting other British experts in Public Security Department, to be under the control of Abdullah Mubarak.<sup>378</sup> Abdullah reacted to this debate by announcing his provisional approval of the appointment while waiting for the head of the Public Security Department to return from a visit to Lebanon and issue a notice of reply. The British interpreted Abdullah's reaction as yet another sign of his reluctance to make a decision himself and a continuation of his resistance to their offers.<sup>379</sup>

British interference in Kuwait's internal affairs and administration did not stop at expanding the circle of experts' appointments, but reached the point of pressing Abdullah to interfere in

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<sup>376</sup>American Consulate, Basra to Department of State, Washington D.C, 29 November 1950, US National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59, subject-Political Affairs [General], 1950-4, Kuwait. The document was extracted from *Confidential U.S.*, 29-30.

<sup>377</sup> Report on Kuwait by PA, Kuwait, 29 October 1952 FO 371/98352 (TNA, London).

<sup>378</sup> H G Jakins (PA, Kuwait) to Sir Rupert Hay (PR, Bahrain), 10 December 1950 FO 371/82010 (TNA, London).

<sup>379</sup> H G Jakins (PA, Kuwait) to Sir Rupert Hay (PR, Bahrain), 31 December 1950 FO 371/91270 (TNA, London); PA, Kuwait to Sir Rupert Hay (PR, Bahrain), 24 April 1951 FO 371/91355 (TNA, London).

disputes within Kuwait departments. This pressure occurred in 1951 and was aimed at implementing more reforms in the health department, which was under the control of Fahad al-Salim, to support the position of British doctors in Kuwait. In fact, the emergence of a dispute between the head of the health department and a British doctor over decision-making in the department was the British authorities' motive for pressing Abdullah to oust Fahad al-Salim from Kuwait's government administration. In the event, Abdullah did oust Fahad al-Salim, but subsequently reinstated him in his previous position and with more authority over Kuwait's government administration.<sup>380</sup> These British endeavours to pressurize Abdullah were aimed at increasing their own control over Kuwait's government administration and challenging the prominent positions of the members of the ruling family in Kuwait's internal affairs, particularly the authority of Fahad al-Salim and Abdullah al-Mubarak.

The second British Government attempt to interfere came about through its efforts to control the financial situation in Kuwait by the appointment of Colonel G. C. L. Crichton as the controller of Kuwait's Financial Department in the summer of 1951. Crichton was assigned to assist Abdullah in estimating and controlling the country's annual budget expenditure. In fact, before Crichton's appointment, no department had ever issued an annual budget (the department heads had simply asked the ruler directly for financial subsidies), and before 1954 only two departments (Municipality and Education) in Kuwait had ever produced a summary budget.<sup>381</sup>

However, when Crichton became the controller of the Treasury, he endeavoured to regulate the functioning of Kuwait's Finance Department by working to issue and control the Kuwaiti

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<sup>380</sup> C M Pirie Gordon PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 4 December 1952 FO 371/98325 (TNA, London); C M Pirie Gordon to (Foreign Office, London), 19 December 1952 FO 371/98325 (TNA, London).

<sup>381</sup> Third report on financial control, development, progress and expenditure in Kuwait, 22 January 1954, FO 371/109860 (TNA, London).

departments' annual budget as well as to estimate and oversee the costs of the proposed development plan. Crichton's first task created huge difficulties as the only budget he managed to estimate during his time in the post of controller, from 1951 to 1956 was the annual budget for Kuwait. In addition, and as a result of the resistance of department heads to his efforts, he submitted estimated budgets to Abdullah that lacked any detailed information for expenditures across all the various departments.<sup>382</sup>

However, the main cause of Crichton's difficulties surfaced with his second task at the end of 1951, when he recommended that Abdullah appoint Hasted (a former British civil servant in the Government of India) to oversee Kuwait's proposed development plan. This decision sparked strong opposition in Kuwait, from Abdullah, the department heads, and the population against Crichton's control of the finances, thereby slowly undermining Britain's authority over Kuwait's Treasury.

Crichton's decision to recommend Hasted also marked the beginning of the third British endeavour to interfere in Kuwait's internal affairs. The British sought to benefit financially from the expenditures of Kuwait's development plan by ensuring that all contracts went to British firms. However, the British authorities learned in 1951 that the Kuwait rulers would look for contractors outside Britain, thereby creating a point of leakage for the exchange of sterling. As a result the appointment of a British controller to oversee the development plan in Kuwait became one of the main interests of the British authorities in the early 1950s.<sup>383</sup>

In November 1951, the British authorities succeeded in their third goal when Hasted arrived in Kuwait to assume his job as chairman of a new institution called the Development Board.

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<sup>382</sup> Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965*, 36-50.

<sup>383</sup> Foreign Office to PR, Bahrain, 17 October 1952, FO 371/98399 (TNA, London).

From February to December 1952, Hasted controlled the development of Kuwait while working hard to serve British financial interests by channelling most of the development plan contracts to British firms. Under Hasted's leadership, five British firms (the 'big five') were given responsibility for completing the development plan projects in Kuwait in joint ventures with companies owned and run by the ruling family members and local merchants.

Hasted also managed to persuade Abdullah of the benefits of granting Kuwait's development projects to British firms based on '15%-plus-cost' contracts. Contracts of this type quickly showed their negative side and sparked local resentment among the ruling family and Kuwaiti political movements. The main reasons for this were the big five's monopoly in Kuwait and the dramatic increase in the costs of their construction work. This almost destroyed the financial stability of the Kuwait Treasury. Thus, from the end of 1952, Abdullah and the ruling family were compelled to challenge British control over Kuwait's government administration.<sup>384</sup>

With the undermining of Hasted's position in Kuwait's government administration, the British realised that they had lost much ground in controlling the country's internal affairs. Therefore, they started their fourth and final endeavour to destabilise the ruling family's influence in Kuwait, returning in this final effort to their old proposal of pressing Abdullah to appoint a senior adviser to Kuwait's government administration. This time, the British did not use their usual contacts, i.e., the Political Agent in Kuwait and/or the Political Resident in the Gulf, to send their proposal to Abdullah. Instead, they put massive pressure on Abdullah through

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<sup>384</sup> Extract from report on local news from Kuwait, July-August, 1953 FO 371/104329 (TNA, London).

Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, who had a face-to-face meeting with Abdullah during the latter's official visit to London in 1953.<sup>385</sup>

During this interview, the Prime Minister advised Abdullah to appoint a British senior adviser at the top of Kuwait's government administration and followed this recommendation up by sending a letter to Abdullah reminding him of this advice and his ideas about it.<sup>386</sup> Abdullah's reaction was to resist this pressure, as he perceived it to be a clear intervention in Kuwait's internal affairs on the part of the British, and a threat to his position and the ruling family's authority in Kuwait's government administration.<sup>387</sup> The British did not find Abdullah's response satisfactory, and continued to interfere in Kuwait's government administration, despite efforts by Abdullah and the ruling family to undermine their control through Hasted.

In 1953, the British tried to win the contract for Kuwait's new port of Shuwaikh when Kuwait's government administration put the project out to open tender but the Kuwaitis refused to accept bids from most of the big five. To win this project, the British tried, through the Political Agent, to persuade Abdullah to grant the contract to a British firm, and discussions between the two sides progressed to the point where the Political Agent followed Abdullah to Bahrain in order to remind the latter of the importance of solving the matter. This action on the part of the Political Agent added to previous British pressures on Abdullah between 1951 and 1953, aroused furious resentment on the part of Abdullah and the ruling family.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Record of meeting at Foreign Office to discuss Sir T Rapp's report on situation in Kuwait, 22 June 1953 FO 371/104328 (TNA, London).

<sup>386</sup> British Prime Minister to the Ruler of Kuwait, undated FO 371/104329 (TNA, London).

<sup>387</sup> Ruler of Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 13 August 1953 FO 371/104330 (TNA, London); PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 16 August 1953 FO 371/104329 (TNA, London).

<sup>388</sup> C J Pelly PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, referring to attached account of conversation on 21 September 1950, between Colonel Crichton (Financial Adviser) and Shaikh Fahad al Salim al Sabah on 21 September 1953 FO 371/104330 (TNA, London).

Abdullah and the ruling family took the view that British intervention in Kuwait's internal affairs had to be stopped since it threatened the second party's adherence to the terms of the 1899 and forward treaties of 1907 and 1914. The resulting antipathy on the part of Abdullah and the ruling family led in 1954 to Britain's decision to end the pressure to interfere in Kuwait's government administration. Subsequently the British made plans to give Abdullah self-governing space to implement his reforms in Kuwait's government administration by dealing privately with the authority of the ruling family.<sup>389</sup>

#### ***5.4.3. Competing Authorities: Britain versus Abdullah and the Ruling Family***

As a result of the British authorities' interventions in Kuwait's internal affairs at the beginning of the 1950s and their threats to the influence of the ruling family in Kuwait's government administration, a resistance front emerged among the ruling family aimed at hindering British efforts to control Kuwait's development plans. This resistance was led by the top members of Kuwait's government administration, particularly department heads, and consisted of senior shaikhs from the al-Sabah such as Fahad al-Salim and Abdullah al-Mubarak.

This resistance played a leading role in managing Kuwait's government administration by using its semi-independent authority to destroy any efforts by the British, working through their experts, to secure their interests in controlling Kuwait's development plans. In addition, the resistance's most important role during the 1950s was to put counter pressure on Abdullah to stop granting the British more access to Kuwait's internal affairs. Thus, to fight the increase of British interests in Kuwait's internal affairs, the resistance line up of senior shaikhs adopted a policy of maintaining the status quo as the best way to ensure Kuwait's stability and prosperity.

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<sup>389</sup> Foreign Office, London brief for meeting of Kuwait working party, 9 November 1953 FO 371/104264 (TNA, London)

This political opposition's view immediately created a severe problem for Abdullah during his first days in charge of Kuwait. Once Abdullah assumed power in 1950, he became, as noted, stuck between two sources of pressure: firstly, from the British, who sought to increase their influence in Kuwait's internal affairs, and secondly, from the senior shaikhs and department heads, who worked to maintain the status quo by controlling the government administration in Kuwait.

While Abdullah had been second in line during the 1940s, he did not have to deal with the difficulties of rulership, and therefore, it had been easy for him to show his opposition to Ahmad al-Jabir's policies and to Britain's interference in Kuwait's domestic affairs. Once Abdullah became ruler in 1950s, however, the situation was different; he was not bound to fulfil Kuwait's treaty obligations towards Britain, and to live up to the expectations of the ruling family, who had placed him in power. Therefore, he found himself in the position of having to reconcile opposing views and sides within his family in an effort to consolidate his family's position within the government.

In terms of commitments to the British, Abdullah lost no time in securing British interests in Kuwait, especially common interests and obligations. He clearly understood the important role played by the British in having provided him and the ruling family with military protection from external threats (especially from neighbouring Iraq and Saudi Arabia) since 1899, thereby ensuring the existence of Kuwait. He also understood that the 1899 treaty with the British that had been signed by Mubarak al-Sabah, provided his country with an international political shield by allowing the other party to assume full responsibility for conducting Kuwait's foreign affairs.

With these two important thoughts in mind, Abdullah ceased the policies of opposition he had carried out from the 1940s and instead adopted a new policy. Ultimately he followed the policies of his predecessors in 1950 and, once he had become ruler, pledged to respect existing ties and relations with the British Government while also working to serve the common interests of both his own country and the United Kingdom.<sup>390</sup> For example, Abdullah approved the British proposal to appoint British experts to the government administration to serve the country's proposed development plan for transforming Kuwait. Although there were some reservations on the Kuwaiti side, particularly in terms of financial and planning control, the experience benefited both countries.

Another example was Abdullah's acceptance of the British government's proposal to invest oil surplus revenues in London by establishing the Kuwait Investment Board (KIB). The British proposal made by Sir Roger Makins (the Foreign Office Deputy Under-Secretary) to Abdullah during a visit to Kuwait in February 1952. The proposal was subsequently laid out in a short memorandum to Abdullah's representative in London, Mr H. A. Kemp. In October 1952, Abdullah accepted the proposal in principle when he informed the Political Agent at Kuwait to make arrangements for a discussion between Mr Kemp, Mr Crichton (his financial expert in Kuwait), and Mr Loombe of the Bank of England. The discussions took place in Kuwait and London and, in February 1953, Mr Kemp submitted the final proposal to Abdullah.<sup>391</sup> Abdullah accepted the proposal for the establishment of KIB and allocated £15 million of Kuwait's surplus

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<sup>390</sup> PA, Kuwait to Shaikh Abdullah al Salim al Sabah, with enclosed letter dated 16 February 1950 FO 371/82029 (TNA, London); from PR, Bahrain to the Ruler and the Ruler's reply in English and Arabic, 21 February 1950 FO 1016/119 (TNA, London).

<sup>391</sup> PA, Kuwait to (Foreign Office), 20 March 1953 FO 371/104340 (TNA, London).

oil revenue for its operations. This was a major achievement for both countries, and its benefits continue today.<sup>392</sup>

Although Abdullah understood the importance of the British presence in and its commitments to Kuwait and worked to maintain his relationship with them by achieving their common interests, he also understood that the British needed to respect and recognise his and the ruling family's control of Kuwait's internal affairs. According to the terms of the treaties of 1899, 1907, and 1914, Abdullah's duties and responsibilities in the internal affairs of Kuwait were well known to the British as well as to the ruling family; however, the British endeavoured to interfere in these commitments. For example in August 1952, the British decided to submit an oral communication to Abdullah, advising him to take certain internal measures against the difficult members of the ruling family (e.g., Fahad al-Salim) for the general strengthening and improvement of his administration.<sup>393</sup> Abdullah's reaction to this message was to pretend that he had misunderstood the Political Agent and to mention his dissatisfaction with the activities of Hasted and Crichton, who had mistreated him and had tried to interfere in the internal management of Kuwait. The British described Abdullah's action as clever since he had understood the two British experts' tactical error to be defective in terms of the proposals in the message.<sup>394</sup>

Abdullah's endeavour to resist British intervention in Kuwait's internal affairs was accompanied by his assurances to the British that (a) the difficulties in Kuwait's government

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<sup>392</sup> Report on Kuwait by PA, Kuwait, 29 October 1952 FO 371/98352 (TNA, London).

<sup>393</sup> Foreign Office, London to PR, Bahrain, 27 July 1952 FO 371/98351 (TNA, London).

<sup>394</sup> PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 2 August 1952 FO 371/98351 (TNA, London).

administration were an internal matter; and that (b) there were many ways to solve the issue; and that (c) he always continued to ask the British Government for its advice and suggestions.<sup>395</sup>

The British efforts to interfere in Kuwait's internal affairs also forced members of the ruling family, who understood the Kuwaiti's agreements with the British Government, to compel Abdullah to reject this clear intervention and violation of the terms of the treaties. As a result, and in order to protect its own authority and privileges in Kuwait, the ruling family began to apply heavy pressure on Abdullah. During the initial years of the 1950s, such pressure came in the shape of a complete rejection of any concession to the British at the expense of the family's own authority in Kuwait's government administration. Although this was not announced to the British directly, such efforts were demonstrated through their demands on Abdullah and the obstacles put in the way of British endeavours to control affairs in Kuwait. As previously discussed in this chapter, the British methods of intervention to control the administration of Kuwait came through the advice of the Political Agent and the activities of the experts, mainly Crichton and Hasted. To counter these endeavours, the senior shaikhs in the ruling family began to urge Abdullah to make decisions against the interventions of the Political Agent and to resist the activities of the experts in Kuwait's government administration.

This resistance that caused difficulties for Abdullah was led by two shaikhs in particular, Fahad al-Salim, who was the main figure, and Abdullah al-Mubarak. Fahad al-Salim prevented British endeavours to control Kuwait's government administration by vetoing any development activities in Kuwait in 1952, by replacing Hasted as head of the Development Board in December 1952, and by putting Kuwaiti development projects out to worldwide tender to attract

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<sup>395</sup> Shaikh Abdullah al Salim al Sabah, Ruler of Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 4 August 1952 FO 371/98325 (TNA, London).

other than British contractors. Meanwhile, Abdullah al-Mubarak created obstacles to Kuwait's administrative reforms. He was an extravagant, flamboyant, and impulsive shaikh whose activities were disliked by Abdullah, by a large part of the ruling family, as well as by more reasonable Kuwaitis. Like the princes in Saudi Arabia he was in effect running his own school, based on the principle of ruling the country by the sword. As a potential successor, he had been embroiled since 1950 in a severe fight for popularity and authority with the other candidates. This fight had widened the divisions among the ruling family, thus paving the way for British interventions and thereby increasing pressure on Abdullah. Abdullah was unable to prevent Abdullah al-Mubarak from fighting for succession; nor could Crichton, as controller of the Treasury, investigate his Public Security Department in order to initiate the necessary administrative reforms. The activities of these shaikhs put obstacles in the way of administrative reforms in Kuwait, and particularly of Abdullah's ability to make decisions, thereby forcing him to take unusual actions to resolve the issue.<sup>396</sup>

During his reign, Abdullah twice decided to back the ruling family against British intervention in Kuwait's internal affairs, as he had previously done in the 1940s. To achieve this aim, he took an unusual action between 1952 and 1953 by announcing privately to his close friends that he was thinking about abdication because of the difficulties he was facing in the rulership.<sup>397</sup> These difficulties included; (a) the increasing burden of responsibilities he faced because of administrative delays and the huge increase in Kuwait's oil income; (b) the ruling family's internal rifts and disputes over administrative authority and Abdullah's inability to control them; and (c) most importantly, British pressure to interfere in Kuwait's internal affairs

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<sup>396</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 66-73.

<sup>397</sup> C J Pelly (PA, Kuwait) to Foreign Office, London, 28 April 1952 FO 371/98325 (TNA, London); PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 1 October 1953 FO 371/104264 (TNA, London).

due to the ruling family's competition over the country's administration. On both occasions abdication news spread throughout the Arab World in newspapers and broadcasts, creating a crisis that continued until Abdullah denied his intention to abdicate, immediately followed by a British announcement confirming Abdullah's denial and interpreting the news as no more than an external rumour aimed at disturbing Kuwait's internal political affairs.<sup>398</sup>

In 1953 the British decided to change the policy of interference in Kuwait's internal affairs. Given the united front presented by the ruling family, the British subsequently agreed to leave Abdullah to deal with the country's administration. In September 1953, Fahad al-Salim had a long interview with the Political Agent in Kuwait, during which Fahad al-Salim conveyed an oral message from Abdullah and the ruling family expressing their resentment at British interventions in Kuwait's internal affairs. The message clarified the importance of respecting the terms of the 1899 and forwards treaties, and Kuwait's independent status,<sup>399</sup> and had a significant impact on British policy in Kuwait, especially given the deteriorating interest in their position from week to week stemming from Kuwait's new policy based on the steadily increasing inflow of foreigners from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and other neighbouring countries. These Arab foreigners were being given positions of responsibility to the detriment of the Kuwaitis themselves as well as the British.<sup>400</sup> As a result, the British Government shifted its policy to the pre-1944 efforts and based on the terms of the 1899 and forwards treaties conducted Kuwait's foreign affairs and

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<sup>398</sup> Extract from British newspapers on abdication reports, 13 October 1953 FO 371/104264 (TNA, London); Extract from Gulf Diary, 1953 FO 371/104270 (TNA, London).

<sup>399</sup> C J Pelly PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, referring to attached account of conversation on 21 September 1950, between Colonel Crichton (Financial Adviser) and Shaikh Fahad al Salim al Sabah on 21 September 1953 FO 371/104330 (TNA, London).

<sup>400</sup> Report on situation in Kuwait, unsigned, 18 November 1953 FO 371/104270 (TNA, London).

provided Abdullah with non-binding advice and suggestions for the general benefit of both countries.<sup>401</sup>

Overall, Britain's decision resulted in defeat for its policy against the authority of the ruling family in Kuwait, but did not mean that it ended Abdullah's efforts to face the challenges to the ruling family's prominent position of authority in Kuwait. A new challenge emerged on the Kuwaiti political scene in the mid-1950s, since there were strong demands for reform from emerging political movements who resented the activities of both the ruling family and the British in Kuwait's internal affairs. The next section examines this issue in more detail.

### **5.5. The Ruling Family and Kuwaiti Demands for Reform, 1954-62**

From 1954 to 1962 Abdullah's efforts to maintain and protect the ruling family's prominent position of authority in Kuwait's internal affairs were influenced by the demand of the emerging Kuwaiti political movements for reform. This section aims to identify the success of Abdullah's four efforts, and the decisions made in that regard, to channel such demands towards a positive outcome. Achieving this outcome produced an acceptable participative role for the emerging Kuwaiti political movements in decision-making and also secured regulated roles for ruling family members who were engaged in government administration. These two achievements alone have served to distinguish Abdullah's efforts as a ruler from those of others in the history of Kuwait.

Although the British policy's defeat in 1954 represented a considerable accomplishment for Abdullah and the ruling family, this was not only the result of the al-Sabah's struggle to maintain

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<sup>401</sup> Foreign Office, London brief for meeting of Kuwait working party, 9 November 1953 FO 371/104264 (TNA, London).

its position in Kuwait's internal affairs during the 1950s. The emerging Kuwaiti political movements' reaction to the country's deteriorating political, social, and economic conditions also played a crucial role. Since 1950, emerging Kuwaiti political movements had started to press Abdullah for more administrative reforms, more political participation in administration, and limitations to the control exercised by the ruling family and the British in the country's internal affairs. These demands increased in the mid-1950s, presenting a new challenge and threat to the ruling family's administrative authority in Kuwait. Therefore Abdullah had to deal with the emerging Kuwaiti political movements' demands with all possible speed, and from 1954 new administrative reforms began to be introduced throughout the country.

The emerging Kuwaiti political movements' demand was not a new phenomenon in Kuwait, having its origins in the short-lived Legislative Council of 1938-39 when the merchants and notables challenged and threatened the ruler's powers in the administration of Kuwait. Although these demands were subsequently suppressed by circumstances after the demise of the Legislative Council (see Chapter Two for more details), they returned to the forefront of the political scene with Abdullah's accession in 1950. There were two reasons for the re-emergence of the demands for reform.

The first was Abdullah's long engagement with the reformist movement in Kuwait during the 1930s, which had increased expectations that he would enact reforms upon his accession. Abdullah always shared his sympathies with the thinking of the reformist movement in Kuwait, especially among notables and merchants. He appreciated the importance of implementing administrative reform by reintroducing the best way for Kuwaiti society to participate politically in decision-making. For instance, after more than a decade during which popular political

participation was absent in Kuwait, Abdullah managed in 1951 to hold elections for Kuwait's departmental committees,<sup>402</sup> thereby fulfilling his promise to friends in the reformist and merchant movements in Kuwait.<sup>403</sup> The elections were successful, but this success was ultimately destroyed by the impact of the second reason for the re-emergence of people's demands.

The second reason was the deterioration in Kuwait's financial situation that resulted from the mismanagement of the country's administrative reforms by the British and the ruling family. The struggle for influence between these two parties almost pushed the country into bankruptcy, particularly with the 15%-plus principle written into the contracts of British firms combined with the extravagant activities of certain members of the ruling family in Kuwaiti departments. Expenditures like these paved the way for mounting local resentment and anger.<sup>404</sup>

Another factor that raised people's awareness of their political rights in the country, thereby threatening the ruling family's authority, was the Nasserist Campaign against British imperialism and Britain's supporters (the ruling monarchies in the Gulf) that was widely disseminated through *Sawt al-'Arab* (The Voice of the Arabs) radio station, a variety of newspapers, and the large number of Egyptian teachers in Kuwait's schools. This factor had a great impact on the political awakening of the 1950s, particularly by creating new leaders for the opposition in Kuwait. Prior to Abdullah's succession, opposition had always been concentrated among the merchants and notables; but by the 1950s it was led by new figures from the middle class.

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<sup>402</sup> The elections for the departments were held for the Municipal Council, the Education Council, the Health Council, and the Awqaf Council.

<sup>403</sup> Note on the election system in Kuwait, 28 November 1951, US National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59, subject-Political Affairs [General], 1950-4, Kuwait. The document is extracted from *Confidential U.S.*, 53-4.

<sup>404</sup> American Consulate, Kuwait to Department of State, Washington D.C, 12 July 1954, US National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59: Political Affairs: Executive Branch of Government—Sheikh of Kuwait, 1950-54, Kuwait. The document is extracted from *Confidential U.S.*, 331-2.

A small, educated middle class began to emerge in Kuwait during the late 1940s to early 1950s. From the very beginning, it showed interest in politics, especially reform and development. The middle class rapidly expanded as a result of the State's education policies and oil wealth distribution policies. The university scholarship scheme, that enabled Kuwaitis to attend University in Arab countries like Egypt, exposed them to the political ideas of the time: Arab nationalism, socialism, communalism, etc., ideas that they brought back to Kuwait with them. Coupled with Abdullah's tolerance of freedom of speech and freedom of the press in the early 1950s this saw the emergence of new political movements in Kuwait. Abdullah opened social clubs for young people and encouraged the establishment of newspapers, both of which turned into open places and spaces in which to discuss political matters concerning Kuwait and the Arab World. But although such decisions increased the numbers of educated individuals in Kuwaiti society, they did not give the State the ability to control the likelihood of young educated Kuwaitis being attracted to external ideologies, especially those who were very active in the Arab World.<sup>405</sup>

From July 1952 the Nasserists, who aimed to spread their revolutionary Arab nationalist ideas in the Gulf area, attracted many young Kuwaitis, since their beliefs fitted with popular demands for social and political reform. Increasing numbers of Kuwaiti students and young people joined the political movement in Kuwait, challenging the old leaders of the reform movement, particularly the merchants. During the early 1950s the merchants were busy co-operating with the State in the hope of gaining more local contracts through the development plan, and were therefore inclined to forget about the reforms. This situation paved the way for the emergence of a new, politically educated younger generation to head the political movement

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<sup>405</sup> Smith, *Kuwait 1950-1965*, 58-78.

and opposition against the State's policies. In 1953, acting in the shadow of Arab nationalism, they presented their demands for reform in the light of senior shaikhs' extravagance, corruption in the government administration, and British imperialism.<sup>406</sup>

By 1953, Abdullah and the ruling family started to feel threatened by the political movements' mounting opposition to their authority and prominent position in the country's management. In June 1953, an anti-British pamphlet was distributed domestically by a secret Kuwaiti organised group called, the Young Kuwaitis, condemning Abdullah's attendance at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in London. This pamphlet described Kuwaitis as a colonized people in their own country, under what they called the al Sabah–British treaty of 1899.<sup>407</sup> This effort was followed by an appeal submitted to the Political Agent, under the signature of the Kuwaiti people's party (the name of a secret, organised, party) which included a complaint about the activities of certain senior ruling family members in high positions in the State and requested the British to force Abdullah to dismiss them from the administration and establish a public council of 23 members to take charge of the country.<sup>408</sup>

The impetus behind this opposition's effort for change in Kuwait was not the elimination of either Abdullah or the British. Rather it was motivated by the moral advice and support of Arab expatriates in Kuwait given to the opposition, particularly through the social clubs, in their demands for extensive change in the rulership of the country.<sup>409</sup> However, at this early stage of the youth movement in Kuwait, neither Abdullah nor the British were able to solve the dilemma

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<sup>406</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 81-3.

<sup>407</sup> C J Pelly, PA, Kuwait to Sir Rupert Hay, PR, Bahrain, 18 June 1953 FO 371/104272 (TNA, London); Translation of an anti-British pamphlet circulated on Coronation Day of Queen Elizabeth II, 1953 FO371/1044272 (TNA, London).

<sup>408</sup> Complaint submitted by People's Party to British Government concerning situation in Kuwait, 21 September 1953, FO 371/104330 (TNA, London); People's Party complaint to the British Government concerning the situation in Kuwait, 21 September 1953 FO 371/104330 (TNA, London).

<sup>409</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 81-3.

of these co-operative efforts between the domestic opposition and Arab expatriates to send indirect messages to Kuwait's leaders.

Abdullah's efforts to address the mounting opposition and demands for reform began in July 1954. During 1954 the Kuwaiti youth moved to a second stage of their activities; this involved notifying the ruling family directly by submitting various petitions to Abdullah, which drew attention to local grievances against the alleged corruption and maladministration of Kuwait under the control of the al-Sabah senior shaikhs and British experts, and showed that local political movements had the ability to implement administrative reforms in the country.<sup>410</sup> Most notable among these petitions was one addressed to Abdullah and issued by the Democratic Party stating the nation's dissatisfaction with British imperialism in Kuwait. This petition called for Abdullah to respond to three fundamental, national demands:

- (1) to abolish the system of the British protection and to establish a National Independent Representative Administration, (2) to summon a Constitutional Council to draw up a Constitution for the country and to make administrative laws and regulations, and (3) to limit the greediness and monopoly of the Imperialist oil companies and to stand in the face of foreign capital and to reduce prices of food-stuffs and cut down rents.<sup>411</sup>

Abdullah considered that such demands were a direct threat to the stability of his rule in Kuwait; therefore his responses matched what he perceived to be the level of threat to the ruling family's authority.

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<sup>410</sup> Mr D A Logan, Kuwait to Mr Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 26 July 1954 FO 371/109810 (TNA, London).

<sup>411</sup> Memorandum and letter submitted to Ruler of Kuwait, 9 July 1954 FO 371/109810 (TNA, London); American Consulate, Kuwait to Department of State, Washington D.C, 18 July 1954, US National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59: Political Affairs [General], 1950-4, Kuwait. The document is extracted from *Confidential U.S.*, 80-7.

The British authorities duly notified Abdullah of their support for his efforts to counter the opposition's demands for reforms in 1954, indicating that they would not interfere, which encouraged Abdullah to adopt new tactics for dealing with the mounting opposition and threat. Abdullah initially responded with a strategy to contain the situation by issuing a decree to establish a Higher Executive Committee with complete power and direct access to him. The Higher Executive Committee included nine younger shaikhs, most of whom were new to the political scene, were outside the local circle of criticism and corruption, and who Abdullah regarded to be easy to direct. The intention was to reorganise the State departments and to fight corruption at the top of Kuwait's government administration in order to curb Fahad al-Salim and Abdullah al-Mubarak's power in Kuwait's government administration.<sup>412</sup>

However, Abdullah did not allow the Kuwaiti political movements to have any say in the administration. He refused an elected council and did not agree to the notion of half the Higher Executive Committee members being drawn from outside the al-Sabah's loyalists and supporters.<sup>413</sup> These decisions managed to remedy superficial issues quite successfully, but did not solve the problem as a whole.

Despite Abdullah's efforts to ease the situation, the Kuwaiti political movement's potential threat to the ruling family's authority increased after 1954, as Abdullah's strategy of tolerance was used by the opposition to strengthen its position. A few months after the establishment of the Higher Executive Committee, an impasse developed between the younger, reform-minded shaikhs and the older, conservative shaikhs on the Committee. Initially, Abdullah supported the

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<sup>412</sup> Proclamation by the Ruler of Kuwait, 19 July 1954 FO 371/109810 (TNA, London); Proclamation regarding State lands, 20 July 1954 FO 371/109810 (TNA, London).

<sup>413</sup> Note from British Bank of the Middle East for its directors quoting letter from F J L Wikes, Kuwait, 29 October 1954 FO 371/109810 (TNA, London).

young shaikhs' reforms, but then withdrew his support when his relationship with the senior shaikhs began to suffer. Since they were sidelined the younger shaikhs no longer acted as a curb to the senior shaikhs on the Committee, such as Fahad al-Salim and Abdullah al-Mubarak which ultimately led to the collapse of Higher Executive Committee in 1956.

Abdullah's failure to reconcile the two parties in Kuwait's government administration encouraged the opposition to benefit from the ambivalence. The opposition sought to gain local sympathy for its demands for reform by circulating a new pamphlet, signed by the Free Democratic Party, which encouraged the nation to overthrow Abdullah and the regime for the country's ultimate benefit, particularly if Abdullah did not implement the opposition's fundamental demands.<sup>414</sup> The opposition also managed to publish heavily critical articles in the *Sada' al-Eman* and *al-Fajir*' newspapers (both issued by Kuwait social clubs), criticising British involvement in the development plan of Kuwait since 1951, the State's mismanagement of the administration, and the absence of proper political participation among the political movements in decision-making.<sup>415</sup>

The opposition's efforts did not stop with the earlier movements; it indicated its intention to form an executive committee of individuals to establish a new legislative council to draw up a constitution for the country.<sup>416</sup> Through the newspapers the opposition called for a massive

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<sup>414</sup> American Consulate, Kuwait to Department of State, Washington D.C, 3 September 1954, US National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59, subject-Political Affairs: Executive Branch of Government Civil Service, 1950-4, Kuwait. The document is extracted from *Confidential U.S.*, 354.

<sup>415</sup> Memorandum on Kuwait by Mr L A C Fry (Foreign Office, London), 4 April 1955 FO 371/114603 (TNA, London).

<sup>416</sup> PR, Bahrain to PA, Kuwait, 31 May 1955 FO 371/114588 (TNA, London).

public gathering in all Kuwait's mosques for the election of this council.<sup>417</sup> It was unlikely that such a movement could occur peacefully without a reaction from Abdullah and the ruling family.

In response to the opposition's potential to galvanise the population against their privileges and authority in Kuwait, Abdullah and the ruling family then enacted a series of repressive policies. Abdullah introduced the first policy, the banning of the *Sada' al-Eman* and *al-Fajir* newspapers, late in 1954 by relying on the Higher Executive Committee.<sup>418</sup> This ban was lifted for a few months early in 1955 but was reinstated after the re-emergence of criticism of the State's management and the British. Such criticism was considered to be due to the failure of the previous decision to stop the Kuwaiti political movement's standoff.

This situation forced Abdullah to adopt another policy to deal with the opposition. Censorship became Abdullah's best choice during the second half of the 1950s, and on his behalf the Higher Executive Committee decided to initiate censorship of newspapers.<sup>419</sup> Unfortunately, this new policy was regarded as another failure on Abdullah's part to contain the situation, since the opposition circulated revolutionary pamphlets against him and the ruling family's authority in Kuwait.<sup>420</sup>

With the emergence in 1956 of internal threats to the stability of Kuwait that coincided with local demonstrations in support of Egypt (that is, the Suez Crisis), Abdullah chose to address the situation by adopting a more repressive policy; this involved expanding the scale of arrests. The main player in this new policy was the Department of Public Security, controlled by Abdullah al-

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<sup>417</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 7 June 1955 FO 371/114588 (TNA, London).

<sup>418</sup> Mr C A P Southwell (Kuwait Oil Company, Kuwait) to Mr L A C Fry (Foreign Office, London), with enclosures, 21 February 1955 FO 371/114745 (TNA, London).

<sup>419</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 8 June 1955 FO 371/114745 (TNA, London).

<sup>420</sup> A K Rothnie PA, Kuwait to J C Moberly (Foreign Office, London), with enclosure, 12 July 1956 FO 371/120551 (TNA, London).

Mubarak, who had always opposed Abdullah's tolerance of the opposition and had been waiting for the chance to show his ability to maintain the authority of the ruling family in Kuwait, based on autocratic rule. Having been given the opportunity to do so in April 1956, Abdullah al-Mubarak met the heads of Kuwait's newspapers and clubs to prevent them from criticising the State until a new law on publication had been drawn up. This action was aimed at maintaining stability in Kuwait and avoiding problems like the volatile situation that had erupted in Bahrain as the result of a massive demonstration there against British involvement.<sup>421</sup>

However, the event of the Suez Crisis worked against such efforts, since its shockwaves reached the streets of Kuwait. A call was issued for locals to gather to support the Egyptian side against the tripartite invasion (i.e., by Britain, France and Israel) in September 1956. The gathering became a demonstration against British imperialism in Kuwait and the Arab World, which turned into a direct threat to the stability of Kuwait and its rulers who had always relied on the British for protection. According to the Political Agent in Kuwait the Security Department clashed with the opposition, arresting and deporting expatriates in an effort to halt disturbances around the country.<sup>422</sup> Union members from the professional associations submitted a petition to Abdullah complaining about the Security Department's harsh and hasty action against peaceful indigenous protestors and asking Abdullah to remove this department's forces, which had robbed as well as arrested protestors.<sup>423</sup>

Abdullah believed that, as long as he was not directly in charge of the administration of Kuwait, his position would not be harmed by Kuwaiti political movements' criticisms and

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<sup>421</sup> PA, Kuwait to r D M H Riches (Foreign Office, London), 8 April 1956 FO 371/120550 (TNA, London).

<sup>422</sup> Confidential annex to Kuwait Diary No 11 by G W Bell (PA, Kuwait) covering period 28 October to 28 November 1956, FO 371/120551 (TNA, London).

<sup>423</sup> Translation of a petition addressed to the Ruler of Kuwait by the Clubs' Union, 6 September 1956 FO 371/120550 (TNA, London).

complaints because they would always be loyal to him.<sup>424</sup> However, this belief did not last long, as Abdullah realised the opposition's loyalty had changed after the events of 1958-59. In fact, a turning point had been reached when the political scene in Kuwait came to the fore around the mid-1950s when the State's harsh policy in 1956 had prompted even harsher opposition, as seen in the endeavour to bomb the Ahmadi oilfield. However, it was not until the opposition chose to celebrate the first anniversary of the United Arab Republic at a public rally in the Shuwaikh school (now, Kuwait University) in 1959 that Abdullah decided to take absolute control over Kuwait in terms of reform and stability. Through the Supreme Council he issued numerous repressive decisions that mainly consisted of the closure of all Kuwaiti newspapers and social and sporting clubs. Also, the State's decisions were intended to establish a public Consultative Council that would assist the Supreme Council to maintain the stability of the rulership against external threats, particularly in the final stages of the country's progress toward independence.<sup>425</sup>

Before moving Kuwait toward independence, Abdullah adopted one final tactic aimed, through the Arab expatriates, at weakening the influence of Arab nationalism on the opposition movement and finding a solution to the long-standing issue of the opposition's threats to the authority of the ruling family in Kuwait. Given the increasing number of Arab expatriates in Kuwait and their co-operation with the opposition, Abdullah reintroduced the idea of devising a nationality law for the country by the end of the 1950s (a previous but unsuccessful effort had been made by his predecessor during the late 1940s). The re-emergence of this idea in 1959 was aimed at finding a new and distinctive identity for the indigenous population of Kuwait, that is, one distinct from the identities of its expatriate groups, as well as widening the gap in the State's

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<sup>424</sup> Confidential annex to Kuwait Diary No 7, by Mr G W Bell PA, Kuwait, 29 June 1955 FO 371/114588 (TNA, London).

<sup>425</sup> Al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwaitiyat*, 119-208.

provision of welfare services to citizens as compared to those provided to the entire population of Kuwait. The State's policy of mass oil-revenue distribution during the 1950s had served to achieve the strategy of expanding the distance between the Arab expatriates who called for a better life for the native people, and the Kuwaitis as a distinctive national identity living in prosperity under the jurisdiction of the al-Sabah rule and the new nationality law.<sup>426</sup> The State's policies in the late 1950s had stabilised internal affairs and temporarily contained the growing opposition forces; however, the al-Sabah's authority in Kuwait had not yet been stabilised.

After Kuwait achieved independence in June 1961, a dangerous event occurred that caused Abdullah to take the final steps towards addressing the mounting opposition and its threats to the ruling family's authority in Kuwait. A few days after its announcement in the Arab and international arenas, the Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul Kareem Qassim threatened to invade Kuwait. The seriousness of this threat obliged Abdullah to take all necessary political and defensive measures to secure the country's internal and external stability. In the internal sphere, and contrary to Abdullah's thinking about its role in this event, the opposition proved fully loyal to Kuwait by mounting large demonstrations in defence of its sovereignty. The opposition's stand towards Kuwait's stability encouraged Abdullah to return in the early 1960s to a more tolerant policy towards the opposition's basic demands, in order to strengthen Kuwait's domestic front against external threats.<sup>427</sup>

To re-apply this policy, Abdullah had to show his intention to co-operate with the opposition in Kuwait. In effect, his intention concerning their demands was transformed into one of the greatest achievements in the country's history; i.e., the introduction of the Kuwait Constitution,

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<sup>426</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 81-3.

<sup>427</sup> Al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwaiti*, 211-8.

which accompanied independence and was a consensual contract between the rulers and the ruled. Through this constitution, Abdullah managed to secure the Kuwaiti political movement's right to participate in decision-making, as well as the ruling family's right to perform a leading role within the government administration of Kuwait.

Abdullah's close supervision of the different stages of drafting the constitution subsequently created the final solution to the long-standing issue of an unruly opposition and the authority of the ruling family members in Kuwait. In fact, Abdullah's power and control over them had been acquired following the death of Fahad al-Salim in 1959 and the resignation of Abdullah al-Mubarak in 1961,<sup>428</sup> that is, the events that had finally offered Abdullah an excellent opportunity to solve this issue in Kuwait with the absolute support of the ruling family for his goals.<sup>429</sup>

In November 1962, Abdullah managed to conclude an agreement with the Kuwaiti political movement: the Constitution. One of the main points was that Abdullah and the ruling family confirmed the Kuwaiti political movement's entitlement to exercise their right to participate in decision-making through the election of the National Assembly. Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti political movement had to confirm the right of the descendants of Mubarak the Great to limit the rulership of the country to their own family. The deal was confirmed in 1962 during the sessions of the elected Constitutional Council, in particular the session for the Constitution Committee. By exchanging views with each other and consulting Egyptian experts in law, the appropriate

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<sup>428</sup> Abdullah al-Mubarak's resignation came a few days before Kuwait's independence on 19 June 1961. It is regarded as controversial even to this day. Abdullah al-Mubarak's motives for his withdrawal from Kuwaiti politics are still unknown, although the reasons were: a disagreement amongst the al-Sabah over his eligibility for future succession, his opposition to Kuwaiti political movements' participation in decision-making, and his Public Security Department's extravagance expenditures. See for example, Al-Najjar, "Decision-Making Process in Kuwait."

<sup>429</sup> An interview with Yusuf al-Nssuf in 26 October 2010.

solution to the ruling family's authority in Kuwait was established as part of the Amir's constitutional powers (see Chapter Four).<sup>430</sup>

The Constitution gave the Amir (previously called the ruler) absolute control over the executive powers, supervision over the judiciary powers, and the upper hand over the legislative powers.<sup>431</sup> Through these powers, particularly the executive powers, Abdullah was able to maintain unrestricted authority over the members of the ruling family in government administration, as well as the mounting opposition. In other words, the Amir's status in Kuwait moved from having a weak position in making decisions during the 1950s to having the strongest position in 1962. The ruling family, which had historically been divided over issues of succession and authority in Kuwait, suddenly desperately sought to please and satisfy the Amir in the hope of gaining more prominent positions and privileges in government administration. In addition, the opposition, which had recently worked to galvanise the people against the State, was now able to channel its efforts into the new National Assembly. As such, Abdullah became the al-Sabah's guardian who sought to maintain the best positions in Kuwait's government administration, particularly the Ministries of Defence, Interior, and Foreign Affairs; and the father of the people, who were now to be promoted on the basis of experience and could be elected into Parliament, and who included representatives of the opposition and its supporters.

Ultimately, Abdullah managed to balance the ruling family's legitimacy to practise authority over Kuwait's executive management with almost acceptable representation of political movements in Parliament to enable them to participate in decision-making. In this final task, Abdullah proved that he was the best man to maintain this balance, thereby eliminating a huge

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<sup>430</sup> Al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwaiti*, 225-36.

<sup>431</sup> See the Constitution of the State of Kuwait, 1962.

burden for his successors when he died in 1965. Unfortunately, his successors did not manage to sustain the responsibility of maintaining mutual balance between these two main factors in Kuwait. As a result, severe struggles again emerged at the forefront of the country's political scene, and resulted in the dismissal of the National Assembly in 1976 and again in 1986.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

This chapter examined Abdullah's impact on the ruling family's development in the exercise of authority in the internal affairs of Kuwait. It showed that the ruling family's role in Kuwait's internal affairs moved through four fluctuating stages in practicing authority and power from 1752 to 1962. From having nothing to share in practicing authority and power with the Kuwaiti rulers, led by Abdullah the ruling family managed to create the most sustaining position for them in 1962.

This chapter revealed that Abdullah's decisions throughout his political life, either before or after his accession, focused on legitimising the ruling family's prominent role in the country. Abdullah's continuing efforts resulted in prolonged struggles, with Ahmad al-Jabir's autocratic rule, from 1921 to 1939, the British interferences from 1944 to 1954, and Kuwaiti political movements' opposition from 1954 to 1962.

While Abdullah resisted the tendency in some parts of the ruling family to implement an unquestioned autocratic rule like that in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states, he sought to apply a long-term and sustainable system of rule for the ruling family's administration of Kuwait. Not only did he resist all the pressures placed on him by the two pillars of Kuwait's political development during the 1950s and the 1960s, the British, and the Kuwaiti political

movements, he also mediated between them. With his mediation efforts, he was able to achieve independence and a constitution for the country by 1962. This achievement secured an unquestioned role for the ruling family in Kuwait's administrative system up to the present day.

Abdullah fought all pressures and threats put on the prominent role of the ruling family in the government administration during his reign. However, no successful solution was arrived at until after Kuwait had gained independence from Britain in 1961. At that moment, he was able to terminate British interferences in Kuwait's internal affairs, and to channel the Kuwaiti political movement's demands for reforms aimed at maintaining the ruling family's prominent role in government administration. With these two political moves, one of the greatest achievements in Kuwait's history became possible: a consensual contract between the rulers and the ruled in the form of a new constitution in 1962.

The Kuwaiti Constitution's deal of 1962 gave Abdullah, as the Amir of Kuwait, the guardian of the ruling family, and the father of all Kuwaitis, the upper hand over Kuwait's government administration. In other words, it legitimised the Amir's constitutional rights to appoint the ruling family members and the representatives of the political movements in Kuwait's Government. Thus, to a great extent this deal eliminated the question of how and why the Amir appointed the members of the Cabinet that were always led by and included senior members of the ruling family. However, in his new role the Amir learnt to sustain a balance when appointing the Government. Whenever this balance was lost, the problems soon came to the surface in Kuwait, such as in 1976 and 1986.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Abdullah, Arab Nationalists, and Britain's Role

#### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses the relationship between Abdullah's decisions during his reign and the political movement of Arab nationalists, both in Kuwait and beyond its borders. It seeks to illustrate the direct impact of the Arab nationalists' movement on Abdullah's political decisions, including his decision to open various social clubs and cultural associations, which resulted in: increased freedom for the community the publication of newspapers and magazines, the development of the country's administrative departments; a move towards Kuwait's full independence from Britain, and the ratification of Kuwait's first constitution, which led the country towards a period of "constitutional" rule.

This chapter examines the British presence in Kuwait and its impact on the relationship between Abdullah and the Arab countries' efforts to achieve unity. How did Abdullah manage to deal with a united Arab desire in Kuwait to reduce British political influence in the country? Did Abdullah try to enhance his political legitimacy at the expense of the British presence in Kuwait? What was the most significant alteration in the nature of rule in Kuwait? As this chapter seeks to demonstrate, if Kuwait and its rulers, are an integral part of the Arab World, how did Abdullah go about creating a closer relationship with other Arab States? What were the issues driving this convergence, and what was the impact of this convergence on the future of Kuwait and its people?

By answering these questions, this chapter sheds new light on an important aspect of Abdullah's political life, namely his relationship with Arab nationalists and Britain. It also continues the previous chapters' efforts to clarify the most prominent and important aspects of Abdullah's political life.

## **6.2. The Background of Arab Nationalism in Kuwait**

This section examines the emergence of an awareness in Kuwait of Arab nationalism and its impact on relations with the al-Sabah's system of rule, and it aims to identify how awareness of these issues among the Kuwaiti population changed people's thinking about the al-Sabah's role in managing and ruling the country which had previously been unquestioned. The overall observation is that this stage in the evolution of Arab nationalism contributed to Abdullah's decision during, the 1950s and 1960s, of giving Kuwaitis a greater say in the process of decision-making.

The beginning of Abdullah's reign in 1950 coincided with the emergence of the Arab nationalists' movement and their growing influence on Kuwaiti politics. Whereas Ahmad al-Jabir's decision-making before the discovery and export of oil from 1938 and 1946 revolved around those in the circle of the ruling family on the one hand, and the merchants and notables on the other the situation changed with the emergence of a new and well-educated middle class in Kuwait in the early 1950s.<sup>432</sup> At the core of this middle class was a group of young Kuwaiti intellectuals who had been educated both at home and abroad in nearby Arab countries such as Iraq, Egypt, and Lebanon. This young generation had been influenced by the new issues and evolving ideologies in the Arab World, particularly Arab nationalism, and sought to transfer and

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<sup>432</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 36-56.

apply this ideology to Kuwait.<sup>433</sup> The emergence of Arab nationalism in Kuwait was not a matter of coincidence, but rather the result of events occurring in the wider Arab World, which contributed substantially to the creation of a movement in Kuwait that sought to change the power equation in the country.

Before Abdullah's accession in 1950, Kuwait had not been completely isolated from developments in the Arab World, having encountered several episodes of friction in the country's relations with it that pre-dated the First World War. This period saw the emergence of a nascent nationalist movement in the Arab World that started at the end of the nineteenth century and continued until the First World War. The idea of Arab nationalism had been introduced by a group of Arab intellectuals in Syria in reaction to the Ottoman Empire's policy of Turkification. The Syrian group soon transformed into a more structured organisation that aimed to rally the efforts of Arab intellectuals throughout the Arab World in order to reject the domination of the Turks. Initially group sought equality with the Turks and, following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, self-rule in a unified Arab State.<sup>434</sup>

Arab nationalism reached Kuwait and its inhabitants on several fronts. Initially, before World War I, a number of Arab intellectuals and activists, among them Shaikh Mohammed al-Shanqeeti, and Hafith Wahba, had visited Kuwait. Such visits helped to increase public awareness of Arab nationalism and its supporters in the Arab World.<sup>435</sup> Subsequently, during the war years, publications condemning the policy of Ottoman Turkification in the Arab World were circulated in Kuwait. These publications were particularly influential among Kuwaiti merchants and notables. Kuwaitis also witnessed the effort of Sharif Ali, the ruler of Hejaz, to gain the

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<sup>433</sup> Abdulaziz Hussain. *Muhadarat 'an al-Mujtama'a al-Araby b al-Kuwaiyt* (al-Kuwaiyt: Dar Quarts, 1994), 83-96.

<sup>434</sup> Beverly Milton-Edwards, *Contemporary Politics in the Middle East* (Hoboken: Polity Press, 2006), 57-9.

<sup>435</sup> Al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwaiyt*, 99-100.

support of the British during the war in order to establish a united country for Arabs in the east. Although the effort failed, it made a strong impression on many Kuwaitis, who saw the need for a unified Arab State.<sup>436</sup>

The second phase of Arab nationalism in Kuwait came in the aftermath of World War I. During this period, Kuwaitis supported the Arab independence movements' efforts to liberate Arabs from Western imperial and colonial control. They also wished to resolve the worsening situation of the Palestinians. During this post-war stage, Kuwait was visited by a group of Arab nationalists led by Rashid Ridda and Abdulaziz Thâalbi who educated Kuwaitis about the Arab independence movements against the British, French, and Italian colonialists in Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Algeria, and Libya. The visitors also informed Kuwaitis about the deteriorating situation in Palestine due to the increasing Zionist influence, a situation that had motivated Kuwaitis to provide material support for the Palestinian people on several occasions during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>437</sup> Although the Kuwaitis did sympathise with Arab issues, they did not form a political bloc or party in support of the goals of Arab nationalism in Kuwait.

The Kuwaitis' shift in sympathy with Arab issues dates from 1936, when the Al-Shabab (Youth) Bloc was formed: the first secret political movement in Kuwait influenced by the ideology of Arab nationalism. The movement worked to spread its reformist ideas through leaflets distributed in Kuwait, and articles published in Iraqi newspapers. Al-Shabab criticized the ruler's policies and sought to reform the system of government.<sup>438</sup> In 1938, the National Bloc

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<sup>436</sup> Mohammad Husain al-Aidaros. *Tarikh al-Kuwait al hadith w al Mu'asar* (Abu Dubai: Dar al-Kitab al hadith, 2002), 176-82.

<sup>437</sup> Al-Ghunaim, *Malamah min Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 17-25.

<sup>438</sup> The Youth Movement consisted of several prominent merchants in Kuwait who met in secret to plan a campaign in favour of deposing Ahmad al-Jabir and installing Abdullah al-Salim as his successor with the help of the British or Iraqis. This campaign was composed of anti-ruler articles, rumours, leaflets, and wall writings.

was formed. This was Kuwait's first political party and first Arab nationalist movement, supported by a group of merchants and other notables. The Nationalist Bloc was the first to attempt to translate Arab nationalism into practical action in Kuwait.<sup>439</sup> The Bloc succeeded in persuading Ahmad al-Jabir to establish the Legislative Council of 1938-39 in order to implement reform.<sup>440</sup>

However, this parliamentary action did not last long, and for various reasons only survived for six months. This was because some members in the Legislative Council tried to violate the terms of the Exclusive Treaty of 1899 between Kuwait and Britain, which gave Britain authority to conduct Kuwait's foreign affairs.<sup>441</sup> The second and main reason was the effort made by some of the members of the Legislative Council to prove the 'Arab' nature of Kuwait by expelling all Iranian citizens from the country.<sup>442</sup> These two issues were the main factors in forcing Ahmad al-Jabir to dissolve the Legislative Council so quickly, a decision that created unrest in the country and resulted in the injury and death of a number of reformist activists in Kuwait, which will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

Even so, Ahmad al-Jabir's repressive policies in the late 1930s did not prevent the waves of Arab nationalism from affecting the awareness and thinking of Kuwaiti youth, who supported their counterparts in other Arab countries in the development of events in the Middle East, such

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<sup>439</sup> Abdullah ibn Khalid Hatim, *Min Huna Bada'at al-Kuwait*. 2nd ed. (Kuwait: Dar al-Qabas, 1980), 219-21.

<sup>440</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire with two Appendixes 6 July 1938 IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>441</sup> PR, Bushire to R T Peel (India Office, New Delhi), 17 November 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

<sup>442</sup> Exchange of letters between Kuwait and PR, Bushire from 21 September to 20 October 1938, IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

as the conflict in Palestine that resulted in the creation of the State of Israel and the loss of the Arab armies in the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948-1949.<sup>443</sup>

The dissolution of the Legislative Council in 1939 introduced a period of political stability and calm for Kuwait, which lasted until the early 1950s and enabled the country to avoid any negative impact from Arab nationalism. During this period, which included World War II, the Kuwaiti youth were very ambitious about developing their ideas and conviction regarding the need to adopt structured political thinking in order to achieve reform in their country.

The ruling authority's policies during this period ultimately benefited this expansion in the political ideas of the Kuwaiti youth. During the late 1930s and 1940s, Kuwait had experienced a massive and unprecedented leap in educational improvements. The Kuwaiti's administration adopted a new educational policy for dispatching students to study in Arab countries such as Iraq, Egypt, and Lebanon, and also adopted a policy of recruiting Arab teachers from these countries as well as from Syria, Jordan, and Palestine to enhance efforts to educate Kuwaiti students. These policies led to increased friction between the youth in Kuwait and the emerging ideologies, including Arab nationalism, in those Arab countries and in the Arab World more generally.<sup>444</sup>

Among the most important leaders of the Kuwaiti youth were Ahmed al-Khatib and Jassim al-Qutami who adopted the ideology of Arab nationalism in the late 1940s and sought to

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<sup>443</sup> John E. Peterson. *The Arab Gulf states: steps towards political participation*. (New York; London: Praeger, 1988), p. 29; Najat Abdulqader al-Jassim. *Qadaya fi al-Tarikh al-Siyasi wa-al-Ijtima'i li-Dawlat al-Kuwayt* (Kuwait: Najat al-Jāsim, 2000), 197-201.

<sup>444</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, (A) 19 March 1938 IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London); Translation of article on Kuwait in Iraqi newspaper Al-Zaman, 11 April 1938 IOR: R/15/5/205 (British Library, London).

apply it in Kuwait. Along with other young Kuwaitis who had been educated abroad, particularly in Egypt, where they established the first hostel for students and founded the first Kuwaiti magazines abroad they represented the core of the national movement in Kuwait as well as the main source of influence on Abdullah's policies during the 1950s, in their efforts to promote comprehensive reform, democracy, and independence of the country.<sup>445</sup>

### **6.3. The Arab Nationalists' Movement, Kuwait and Abroad**

This section examines the links between the young Arab nationalists in Kuwait and their counterparts in the Arab World, and it identifies a difference in ideas between the two fronts. It also analyses how Abdullah was able to use this difference to widen the gap between them.

No clear and systemic relationship existed between the advocates of young Arab nationalists in Kuwait and the trend of Arab nationalism in other Arab countries. Young Arab nationalists in Kuwait sought to bring out the spirit of unity with the Arab World, but remained at odds with some Arab nationalists in other countries. They aimed to maintain the stability of the regime in the country by achieving social, political, and economic reforms as well as complete independence from the British. Meanwhile, some Arab nationalists in other countries sought to expel the British, overthrow the regime, and maintain their respective country's savings to serve the objectives of dictatorship in the Arab World, as evident in the revolutions in Syria, Egypt, and Iraq.

Despite the absence of a strong relationship between the Arab nationalist trend in the Arab World and efforts in Kuwait, a secondary effect emerged from the Arab expatriates based in Kuwait, especially among young Kuwaitis seeking to adopt the Arab nationalist ideology. As

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<sup>445</sup> Al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwaiti*, 76-96.

noted, the State's policies aimed at bringing large numbers of Arab expatriates to Kuwait in order to manage education, which was expanding throughout the 1950s, increased the pace at which political ideas emerging in the Arab World were transferred to the Kuwaiti youth. The emotional effect on Kuwait's youth also increased in terms of associated events, such as the previously mentioned the conflict in Palestine. The influence of Arab expatriates on young Kuwaitis came about through the friction between the two that occurred in schools, social clubs, and the press.<sup>446</sup> The Egyptian Cultural Mission increased its efforts to target young Kuwaitis and had reached more than four hundred people in the country by 1958. This cultural mission sought to spread the concept and core principles of Arab nationalism, in order to unify Arab efforts to collaborate in creating a unified State for the Arab nations from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf. It sought also to spread Nasserism, which aimed to achieve unity among the Arab people in supporting the decisions in the Arab World of Egypt's President, Gamal Abdel Nasser, to unify the Arab nation, and to rouse Kuwaiti society against the British presence in the country. Nasserism also included the spread of both Socialism and Republicanism.<sup>447</sup>

A secondary front that influenced Kuwait's youth in the 1950s was Cairo's Voice of the Arab radio station, which aimed to spread Nasserism and was run by a dedicated staff. This radio station sought to incite local populations in Arab countries against colonialism while encouraging the achievement of the 'Arab' concept. The radio station engaged in what it had been perceived by the British against the stability of the Gulf shaikhs and rulers who were still under British influence in 1953. It increased its impact on local populations in Kuwait through

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<sup>446</sup> Note by the secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 14 May 1956, C.PP. (56) 122, CAB 129/81; Al-Aidaros. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-Hadith*, 222-5.

<sup>447</sup> James Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820-1971: The Politics of Protection*, Occasional Paper No 4, (Qatar: CIRS Georgetown University 2009), 1-44.

events related to the Suez Crisis in 1956 and the subsequent declaration of the United Arab Republic (UAR) between Egypt and Syria in 1958.<sup>448</sup>

Despite these secondary effects on Kuwaiti society, the youth were not completely controlled by the Arab nationalist trend, which was clearly led by Nasser, especially after the events of the Suez crisis in 1956. The small size of Kuwait's society, its composition, and its wealth during this period left a very private and distinctive imprint on the young Arab nationalists in Kuwait. In fact, the presence of oil wealth in Kuwait and Abdullah's determination to distribute this wealth to the people influenced the course of the country's Arab nationalist ideology. The small community, which did not exceed 150,000 at the beginning of the 1950s, combined with the high illiteracy rate, which exceeded 60%, contributed substantially to reducing the size of the Arab nationalists' opposition and their impact on the country's ruling system, compared to other Arab nationalists in Iraq, Egypt, and Syria.<sup>449</sup>

In addition, the situation in Kuwait eased Abdullah's efforts to control the opposition. This came about through his threatening the young Arab nationalists' opposition with the probability of the British using military intervention to take full control of the country if they felt it necessary to protect their interests. This political tool was used during the Suez crisis of 1956, when young Arab nationalists tried to support the Egyptian President Nasser against the British, the French colonial powers, and their ally, Israel. During this development, Abdullah threatened the youth movement with the possibility of losing the country as a whole as well as its sovereignty not only at the level of the current achievements, but also the privileges and limited

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<sup>448</sup> Peter Mansfield, *The Arabs* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 250.

<sup>449</sup> John Marlowe, *The Persian Gulf in the Twentieth Century* (London: The Cresset Press, 1962), 198.

freedoms of expression for the national movements.<sup>450</sup> Abdullah also controlled the national youth movement's opposition by employing, if necessary, a policy of repressing dissent and achieving reform, such as when he restricted the activities of local newspapers and clubs in 1953 and the subsequent closure of these social and political institutions from 1959 until Kuwait's independence in 1961. In a protest to Abdullah's repressive policy, Jassim al-Qutami, one of the leaders of the national movement, resigned from the police force during the Suez crisis demonstration in Kuwait in 1956.<sup>451</sup> Overall, Abdullah's ability to employ the oil revenues to serve his interests, as well as the existence of his backup tools of threats and repression gave the Kuwaiti nationalists' opposition a special character. It became peaceful in its claims, succumbing to an extent to the ruler's decisions; it was not revolutionary, but resembled an agent that maintained the achievements of reform while working to extend the benefits of reform that were generated from the oil wealth.

In 1959, the issuance of a new law of citizenship for Kuwait, based largely on the need to belong to the local nation, helped Abdullah to control the national youth movement's opposition. Abdullah sponsored the issuing of the first successful law for Kuwaiti nationality that defined the distribution of the country's oil wealth and public services to Kuwaiti citizens only. This policy gave the Kuwaiti nationalists a new and distinctive character that differed from others in the Arab World. With this new law, young Arab nationalists saw themselves as possessing oil wealth and being eligible to censorship the well-investment of the funds to ensure the continuous comfort of future Kuwaitis and to give financial support to Arab countries. Abdullah's success in distinguishing the identity of Kuwaiti citizenship was due to the increase in the number of Arab expatriates and their participation in the country's administration. The Arab expatriates had

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<sup>450</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 19 November 1956, FO 371/120684 (TNA, London).

<sup>451</sup> Al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwaiti*, 202-28.

helped make the Kuwaiti national identity less clear through their occupation of most of the top government jobs, as well as their open ambition to share in Kuwait's main source of income, oil. This last issue spurred Abdullah as well as the national youth movement to highlight their own paths in the adoption and implementation of their unique concept of Arab nationalism.<sup>452</sup>

#### **6.4. The National Youth Movement in Kuwait in the 1950s**

This section looks at the influence of the national youth movement on Kuwait's internal affairs during the 1950s. It examines the evaluation stages of the national movement's demand for reforms, democracy, and independence. It also shows Abdullah's reaction to each stage of the national movement's demands. Overall, the increasing influence of the national movement in the country had caused a deterioration in its relations with the ruling authorities by the end of 1950s, although this situation did not mean the end of all links between the two.

Young Arab nationalists had a significant impact on moving the public opinion in Kuwait to support or oppose the policies and decisions of the regime. Their presence at the head of the political opposition movement in the country during the 1950s substantially influenced Abdullah's adoption of his reform decisions. The national youth movement's leadership of the country's political opposition came about through certain promised aspects, all initially aimed at highlighting its resentment and dissatisfaction with the ruling system while focusing primarily on achieving comprehensive reform, democracy and independence for the country.

The first aspect of the influence of the young Arab nationalists on Abdullah's decisions and on public opinion was seen through the use of local newspapers in the country and abroad. Starting in 1952, Abdullah allowed several newspapers to be established in Kuwait, such as *al-*

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<sup>452</sup> Al-Rayyes, "Arab Nationalism and the Gulf," 84; Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 79-80.

*Ra'id*, *al-Eiman*, *al-Fajir*, and *al-Sha'b*. *Kazma* had been established previously, in 1948, but did not survive beyond a year. These newspapers were the responsibility of individuals and some social clubs in Kuwait, such as the Teachers' Club, the Graduates' Club, and the National Cultural Club (founded and managed by Ahmed al-Khatib). In addition, one of the most important monthly newspapers was *al-Ba'tha*, which was a platform for the political views of young Arab nationalists. Established in 1946, this paper lasted for eight years and was printed from the house of the Union of Kuwaiti students in Egypt. The presence of these newspapers and their continuation provided space for Kuwaiti youth to publish and cultivate their political thoughts and to fill it with articles of a reformation nature, especially *al-Eiman*, *al-Ba'tha*, *al-Ra'id*, and *al-Fajir*. The newspapers offered a platform for discussing events in Kuwait and the Arab World and also provided a platform for criticizing, to a certain level, the State's policies towards achieving reform in Kuwait.<sup>453</sup>

The second aspect of the influence of the young Arab nationalists on Abdullah's decisions occurred with the raising of a set of letters and petitions related to political reform. The leaders of the national movement in Kuwait, among them Ahmed al-Khatib, managed to create several petitions related to various reforms in 1954, 1956, and 1959, which they then sent to Abdullah. The purpose of these petitions was to promote the principle of, and to organize, free elections, as well as to address the corruption in departments under the influence of members of the ruling family and a number of British experts. These and other petitions from the national movement significantly affected Abdullah's decisions during his reign by forcing him towards to implement partial elections for committees that assisted government departments in 1951 and

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<sup>453</sup> Yahya al-Rubi'an, *al-Tiba'ah w al-Nasher fi al-Kuwait: Nashatoha w Tatawarah* (Al-Kuwait: al-Rubi'an ll-Nasher w al-Tawzi'a, 1995), 5-49; al-Mdairis, "The Arab Nationalist movement in Kuwait," 151; Al-Ghunaim, *Malamah Min Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 17-20; Al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwait*, 168-72.

1953. They also encouraged him to modify, expand, and increase the number of the administration's departments and powers four times during his reign: in 1954, 1956, 1959, and 1961 (for more information on reform amendments, see Chapter Four).<sup>454</sup> The national movements did not participate appropriately in Kuwait's decision-making even after independence and the ratification of the Constitution in 1961 and 1962, respectively.<sup>455</sup>

The final aspect of the national youth movement's influence on Abdullah's decisions came through the use of peaceful demonstrations and strikes to promote their political claims to the State. Such tools were used when the national youth movement took to the streets, as it did in 1956 to denounce Britain's regional policy towards Egypt's nationalisation of the Suez Canal. During this event, the young Arab nationalists met Abdullah to voice their resentment of the aggression against Egypt. They tried to win a declaration from Abdullah denouncing the British action and taking decisions against Britain's political and economic interests in Kuwait. They endeavoured to put direct pressure on Abdullah by demonstrating their ability to provoke public opinion among Kuwaitis and Arab expatriates in the country. To this end, they issued calls through the press and even in mosques for peaceful gatherings, festivals, strikes, and demonstrations in Kuwait.

The national youth opposition was in fact able to succeed in motivating public opinion, thereby increasing its popular bases and putting them at the forefront of the political movement in Kuwait from the beginning of 1956. They subsequently succeeded in organising a rally in Kuwait's largest high school, Shuwaikh, in 1959 (now Kuwait University) to celebrate the first anniversary of the union between Egypt and Syria that constituted the United Arab Republic

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<sup>454</sup> Al-Najjar, *Madkhal li-Ittawar as-Siyasi*, 47-50.

<sup>455</sup> Herb, *All in the Family*, 8.

(UAR). During this festival, several young Arab nationalists, including Jassim al-Qutami and Ahmad al-Khatib, expressed their perceptions of the deteriorating situation in Kuwait and called for radical reforms in the country.<sup>456</sup>

While the national youth movement sought various ways to transfer their concerns about Kuwait's ruling system and how to achieve effective reforms, including the political movements' participation in decision-making and steps towards full independence from Britain, their claims produced unexpected reactions from Abdullah, who used various repressive measures against them. In 1956, Abdullah received a delegation of the national youth movement to hear their demands resulting from the demonstrations against British involvement in the aggression on Egypt. Although he agreed to accept one of their demands, which was for a comprehensive boycott of trade with Israel, he gave the green light for Abdullah al-Mubarak, chief of the General Security Department, to repress the demonstrators in the streets by force, whether they were Kuwaitis or expatriate Arabs. Two people were killed and many more injured. In the rally event of 1959, Abdullah's reaction was to pursue, threaten, and make the jobs of a number of the leaders of the young Arab nationalists redundant, as well as to close all spaces in the country available for free speech and public gatherings, such as newspapers and social clubs. Yet signs of improvement in the relationship between Abdullah and the young Arab nationalists did begin to emerge, as is discussed in the next section.

### **6.5. Abdullah and the National Youth Movement in Kuwait**

Speaking to the national youth movement Abdullah told them, "I am not with the government against you and I am not with you against the government; I rule between the two parties."<sup>457</sup> It

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<sup>456</sup> Al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwaiti*, 119-268.

demonstrated Abdullah's efforts to establish a good relationship with the national movement, and shows how he tried to find a way to fit the young Arab nationalists into Kuwait's administrative process without harming the interests of the al-Sabah.

The relationship between the ruling power and Kuwait's nationalist movement was not always a relationship of either caution or constant fear. Rather, it was consistently heightened by a kind of understanding that hid much of the blame and dissatisfaction, particularly on Abdullah's part, towards the activities of the national movement during the early years of his reign, when the activities of the young Arab nationalists in Kuwait were to some extent perceived to be harmful to the interests of the country and its reputation within the Arab World. This relationship, between the regime, that is, Abdullah and the ruling family and the national youth movement headed by Ahmed al-Khatib and Jassim al-Qutami passed through two stages, that are distinguished as the era before Kuwait's independence, and the era after it.

In the first phase of the relationship, Abdullah viewed the young Arab nationalists with considerable dissatisfaction. Proof of this came in his announcement to the Kuwaiti people in 1959, following the youth Arab nationalists' rally to mark the first anniversary of UAR. In this speech, Abdullah expressed his deep criticism of and anger with the recklessness of the youth movement in their demands for reforms and their condemnation of his rule, and emphasised their lack of understanding of the consequences of this activity for the country's stability on the regional arena.

In fact, Iraq's policy of hostility towards any extension of Arab nationalism after the violent coup of 1958 that had wiped out the monarchical regime, left a potential threat to the

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

stability of Kuwait. Iraq's new regime was a danger to Kuwait's internal affairs, particularly if the Kuwaitis chose to show support for the Arab nationalists in their country.<sup>458</sup> Abdullah probably feared the possibility of renewed Iraqi intervention in the internal affairs of his country, as had happened with the Legislative Council in 1938-39. He believed that the national youth movement's support for Nasserism might make it even easier for Iraq to intervene militarily to protect its new coup against any Arab nationalism concentration in the neighbourhood.<sup>459</sup>

In his speech, Abdullah also indicated that he remained proud of his decisions, particularly those made during the pre-independence period. Despite some obstacles and problems in Kuwait's development plans, he had spared no effort in distributing the oil wealth to the Kuwaiti society and maintaining the prosperity of the country. Yet contrary to his expectation that young Kuwaitis would be proud of his achievements, they had sided with the achievements in the Arab World of the Egyptian President Nasser. Kuwaitis had undoubtedly been affected by these achievements since President Nasser was massively popular in Kuwait and local people often spoke of his achievements in the Arab World and posted photos of him in their offices and during demonstrations, such as those relating to the Suez crisis. Some national youth leaders even wanted Abdullah to declare the anniversary date of the union between Egypt and Syria (1st February 1958) an official holiday in Kuwait. Yet despite such efforts it was impossible to terminate the relationship between Abdullah and the young Arab nationalists.<sup>460</sup>

A radical change in the relationship between the two parties occurred during the period following Kuwait's independence, and proved to Abdullah the true role of the national youth movement in Kuwait in supporting its sovereignty and independence during one of the critical

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Al-Najjar, *Madkhal li-Ittawar as-Siyasi*, 67.

<sup>460</sup> Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms*, 1-44; al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwaitiyt*, 119-268.

moments in its history. Kuwait's independence in 1961 accompanied a claim from the ruling authority in Iraq to annex Kuwait to its sovereignty. Iraq's Prime Minister Abdul Karim Qassim did not recognise Kuwait's independence since he considered it to be an integral part of his country.<sup>461</sup> This Iraqi threat caused a major upheaval for Kuwait, especially in terms of the security and stability of the country's internal and external affairs (This is addressed in Chapter Seven). During this sensitive and fearful time for Kuwait's ruling authority regarding the possibility of military attack or the occurrence of internal sabotage from the Iraqi regime, young Arab nationalists moved to the forefront of the demonstrators to highlight their willingness to defend Kuwait and its sovereignty.<sup>462</sup> This action significantly changed the relationship between the Abdullah and the national youth movement, this time, for the better.

A new phase was ushered in for young Arab nationalists, whose ability to highlight their loyalty to the ruling authority against the Iraqi threat contributed greatly to the change in their relationship with Abdullah. During this stage, Abdullah was reassured by their loyalty to him and to Kuwait, and was able to address the Iraq problem while making more achievements for his country, as marked by the establishment of Kuwait's first Constitution, and the first constitution in the Arab Gulf region as a whole, in 1962. This paradigm shift gave Abdullah the opportunity to apply a semi-democratic system based on the separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers. Kuwait's Constitution gave Abdullah the power to control the executive power, the

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<sup>461</sup> Majid Khadduri, *Republican Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 166.

<sup>462</sup> Al-Najjar, *Madkhal li-Ittawer as-Siyasi*, 62-70.

ability to participate in the control of the legislative power with the people, and the overall supervision of the power of the judiciary.<sup>463</sup>

This brief explanation of Kuwait's Constitution is necessary in order to clarify Abdullah's subsequent effort to use the leaders of the young Arab nationalists in Kuwait for creating strong connections with Arab States in the Arab League. Abdullah offered Ahmed al-Khatib and Jassim al-Qutami, the national youth movement's leaders, the chance to participate in Kuwait's government administration after the ratification of the Constitution (the offer was extended by the State to other Arab nationalists as well, including Abdulaziz Hussein and Abdulaziz al-Sarawi). Al-Khatib rejected the offer to work in the Amiri Diwan while al-Qutami accepted the post of undersecretary to Kuwait's Ministry for Foreign Affairs.<sup>464</sup> The distinctive feature of the offer was that it showed the prominent change in the relationship while highlighting the ruling authority's satisfaction with and acceptance of the participation of the national youth movement which was now perceived to be in the interests of Kuwait and its new status in the Arab World.

Despite the improved relationship, the movement's leader, Ahmad al-Khatib, remained staunchly opposed to the new State system of monarchical semi-democracy. As a result, the national youth movement in Kuwait entered a third stage in its relationship with the ruling authority, based this time on the Constitution. The government either committed itself to applying the articles to avoid internal crises, or exceeded the articles to create reasons for domestic turmoil. The first test of the credibility of the relationship between the young Arab nationalists and the ruling authority came during the sessions of Kuwait's first elected parliament in 1963. Discussion during this session demonstrated that a problem existed in the country's new

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<sup>463</sup> Jacqueline S. Ismael, *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 82.

<sup>464</sup> Al-Khatib, *Al-Kuwaiti*, 119-268.

cabinet that was under the leadership of Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sabah al-Salim. Some members of parliament, including Ahmad al-Khatib, who won his seat in the first Kuwaiti election after independence in 1963, criticized the government's lack of commitment to the terms of the Constitution, which forbade ministers from undertaking both governmental and private (i.e., commercial) jobs during their period in office. The members of parliament presented evidence of some officers' ineligibility to take office that resulted in disputes between the executive and legislative powers.

Abdullah had to decide whether to intervene, to dissolve the government and the council, as sought by the prime minister, or to form a new government.<sup>465</sup> In the face of this first parliamentary juncture, Abdullah reacted negatively by dissolving the first Kuwaiti government and insisted that parliament continue until the end of its sessions, which lasted for four years, ending in 1967, despite the opposition of a large and important part of the ruling family.

Although Abdullah managed to avoid a problem that could be repeated in Kuwait in the future, he did not solve the problem completely. He only demonstrated his new commitment to the terms of the Constitution in order to keep a balance between the ruling family and the political movements, without dealing with the emergence of an internal family fight over the government's highest positions and the rulership of the country. The competition within the family for directorship of Kuwait's newly created government departments in 1950s was a fiercely contested one.

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<sup>465</sup> Abdulritha Asiri. *Al-Nizzam al-Siyasi*, 196-98; Mohammad Torqi Bani Salameh and Mohammad Kanoush al-Sharah, "Kuwait's Democratic Experiment: Roots, Reality, Characteristics, Challenges, and the Prospects of the Future," *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* Vol. 5, No. 3, 2011: 59-63.

## 6.6. Kuwait, Arab Unity, and the British, 1899-1950

This section examines the evolution of the British role in Kuwait from 1899 to 1950 and its impact on the country's progress toward Arab unity. It shows the commitments of the Kuwaiti rulers and the British Government to their treaty of 1899 in the light of the discovery of oil in Kuwait in 1938. The oil factor changed the relations between the two parties to the treaty, and also increased interest in the spirit of Arab unity in Kuwait's development as a State. Starting from the 1930s, the increase in the desire for Arab unity gave Abdullah a chance to reconsider Britain's role in their country. However, the massive change in Anglo-Kuwaiti relations did not get under way until the beginning of Abdullah's reign in 1950.

The Anglo-Kuwaiti treaty of 1899 had a great impact on the stability of the al-Sabah's rule up until the country's independence in 1961. The treaty gave the rulers of Kuwait the management of the country's internal affairs while the British Government took care of its foreign affairs.<sup>466</sup> It protected Kuwait and its rulers against any external or internal dangers that threatened the country's stability. The Kuwaiti rulers constantly turned to the British for protection and advice whenever the need arose, such as when there were threats from Kuwait's southern neighbour, Saudi Arabia, and its northern neighbour, Iraq.<sup>467</sup> In 1920 and 1928, Kuwaiti rulers requested British protection against possible raids by the Ikhwan, who formed part of the ground forces of the army of Abdulaziz bin Saud, sultan of Najd and Hejaz (modern-day Saudi Arabia).<sup>468</sup> Kuwaiti rulers also sought British protection against media attacks and

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<sup>466</sup> Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms*, 1-44.

<sup>467</sup> James Onley, "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century," *New Arabian Studies*, vol. 6 (2004): 30-92.

<sup>468</sup> Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwayyt al-Siyasi*, vol.4, 258-91.

interventions in the country's internal affairs from Iraq's King Ghazi in 1938 through his radio channel Qasr al-Zuhour.<sup>469</sup>

In both cases, the British succeeded in dealing with the threats and ended any chance of aggression against Kuwait and the ruling family either militarily and logistically in the first case or by practicing political pressure on the sources of propaganda in the latter. In a separate event, important for Kuwait, the British managed to extract the *de facto* status of Kuwait's autonomy in its internal affairs from the Ottoman Empire in the 1913 Convention, which announced Kuwait as an autonomous country under the influence of the Ottoman Empire and under the protection of the British. Thus, the convention guaranteed Kuwait and the ruling family, which was the first sign of its *de facto* status as a separate sovereign State, and drew its northern border with Iraq.<sup>470</sup>

In Kuwait, the rulers' commitment to the 1899 Treaty with Britain was one of the most important reasons for the close and cooperative relationship between the two parties that had continued for more than 60 years. During this period, four Kuwaiti rulers ascended to rule after Mubarak al-Sabah, who had signed the treaty: Jabir II al-Mubarak in 1915, Salim al-Mubarak in 1917, Ahmad al-Jabir in 1921, and Abdullah in 1950.<sup>471</sup> These rulers all came to recognise and implement the treaty's well-known principles. However, the last two rulers, particularly Abdullah, indicated shifts in this commitment in terms of the roles of both British and Kuwaiti rulers.

The first signs of change came with the discovery of oil in Kuwait in 1938 and the beginning of foreign exports in 1946, after World War II. This factor significantly affected both

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<sup>469</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir to PA, Kuwait, 9 February 1938, IOR: R/15/5/207 (British Library, London; Madi al-Khamis, *Kuwait 1938: Masirat al-Dimuqratiyah*. (Kuwait: Dar al-Hadath, 2002), 61-7.

<sup>470</sup> Slot, *Mubarak al-Sabah*, 491-5; Hussain, *Muhadarat 'an al Mujtama' a al Araby*, 37.

<sup>471</sup> See Figure 1 for the tree of the rulers of Kuwait.

parties to the treaty, especially the British. Chapter Four looked at this issue and the extent of the changes in British policy toward Kuwait that accompanied it. The British Government began to increase the pace of its interference in Kuwait's internal affairs, and the al-Sabah feared that its country might turn into another Bahrain, which was being ruled through the Senior British Adviser and not by its own ruler (for more information, see the previous chapter, section 5.4.1).<sup>472</sup>

In addition, after the discovery of oil and the increase of revenues going into Kuwait's budget, Kuwait's leadership began to focus on expanding and investing this oil intake in countries other than Britain, (such as the U.S. and Arab countries), thereby opening the way to break Britain's isolationist policy towards their country. Kuwait had remained isolated from the regional and international arenas from 1899 until 1961, according to the policy imposed by the British Government, aiming to serve its interests in the Gulf region by maintaining the telegraph lines and flight paths to Europe as well as the maritime domination, or *Pax Britannica*, in the Gulf. During this period, Kuwait was included as one of the countries under the authority of the British Empire.<sup>473</sup>

Britain's policy changed with the advent of oil, to one containing efforts to interfere in Kuwait's internal affairs. Kuwaiti rulers started to resist such intervention, and eventually succeeded in stopping it in the mid-1950s. It was not easy for the British Government to control or contain the change in the role of the ruler and the ruling family; and to break the isolationist status it had imposed on Kuwait, economically, educationally, and politically. At this time, Kuwait's leadership seemed to intend to take the direction of rapprochement with the regional

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<sup>472</sup> PR, Bahrain to Burrows (Foreign Office, London), 14 January 1949 IOR: R/15/5/213 (British Library, London).

<sup>473</sup> Onley, "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf," 30-92.

Arab countries and their sensitive and inspiring case. This was a new direction that is explored further in the following paragraphs.

After the establishment of the Arab League in 1945, rapprochement with the Arab World became an increasingly important issue for the rulers of Kuwait. In 1944, Fahad al-Salim had an unofficial meeting in Alexandria with Mustafa al-Nahas, Prime Minister of Egypt, to discuss the idea of Arab unity. Al-Nahas was one of the major contributors to the idea of establishing the Arab League.<sup>474</sup> Despite the lack of detailed information about their discussion, the meeting clearly established the al-Sabah's interest in the establishment of the Arab League, and the future Kuwait's collaborative efforts for Arab unity.

The 1944 meeting also had significant effects on the future of the Arab States' perspective of Kuwait under the protection of the British. In the period that followed this meeting, the Arab League countries adopted a new political vision of Kuwait and other States in the Gulf. In fact, the Arab League had already begun to look at the Gulf Arab states and to ensure places for them in the new organization in the form of either full or partial membership. In October 1945, rumours began to spread across the Arab World, and particularly in the Gulf, which were broadcast by Middle Aden, a radio station from Jaffa in Palestine, and other media such as the press and newspapers in Beirut and Cairo. According to the rumours, a meeting among the princes and rulers of the Gulf Arab states was being held in Bahrain to discuss the possibility of a union of these countries and the idea of sending a chosen representative to the Arab League.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> PA, Kuwait to Lt-Col C G Prior, PR, Bushire, 23 August 1944 IOR: R/15/5/217 (British Library, London).

<sup>475</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, London, 25 October 1945, extract from Al Misri of 22 October 1945 FO 371/45177 (TNA, London).

These rumours are important as they help determine the beginning of real change in the attitude of Arab countries towards Kuwait and its neighbours in the Gulf. However, the most obvious sign of change in the Arab position came in 1946, when the Iraqi Prime Minister in Cairo sent a memorandum to the British authorities asking them to consider the possibility of the Gulf Arab states joining the Arab League. The British rejected the memorandum, believing that the Arab countries' ambitions were focused on the oil and wealth of Kuwait and the region.<sup>476</sup> They insisted therefore on continuing their policies of maintaining the Gulf Arab states under the aegis of their empire and in a state of isolation. These events highlight the beginning of the emergence of new dynamics in the region that would contribute to potential change in the Kuwaiti–British relationship, including the rising tide of Arab unity.

The second sign of rapprochement with the Arab World came under increasing demands from Arab nationalists in Kuwait who called for the independence of the country. The emergence of this factor had a potentially dangerous impact on Kuwait's internal situation, especially in the late 1930s. This factor resonated within Kuwaiti local society, already affected by the expansion of Arab nationalism and calls for the deployment of their ideas among Kuwaiti youth. This situation ultimately led to a disruption in the internal stability of the regime, as demonstrated by the example of the Legislative Council between 1938 and 1939, when the council's members formed the National Bloc, the first political bloc in Kuwait's history, to raise awareness of Arab nationalism among the youth of the country. The Legislative Council members even took it upon themselves to be responsible for the official ratifying of treaties and reconciliation with neighbouring Arab States during the sessions of the Legislative Council, actions that were considered to be a rejection of Britain's role in the 1899 Treaty. Ahmad al-Jabir and the British

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<sup>476</sup> India Office, New Delhi to Foreign Office, London, 28 May 1946; Foreign Office to Sir R. Campbell, Cairo 8 July 1946, Foreign Office minute, 8 September 1946, FO 371/52315 (TNA, London).

regarded such action as a coup against the country's ruling system and the destruction of its interests. A new agreement between Ahmad al-Jabir and the British was duly arrived at, in the light of Kuwait's essential need to dissolve its Legislative Council by various means, even if it meant the use of repression.<sup>477</sup>

The Legislative Council members' last act was not the only evidence of the impact of the tide of Arab nationalism in Kuwait. Another action showed the movement's level of intolerance during the late 1930s, when the elected members of the Legislative Council called for the expulsion of all Iranians from Kuwait to strengthen the country's spirit of Arab nationalism, even if the relevant link between the person or thing and Iran was in name only. They began by pressing Ahmad al-Jabir to expel his chief secretary, Mullah Saleh, who was the sole source for conveying the views of the Iranian population in Kuwait to those in power. Still not satisfied, they endeavoured to pressure Ahmad al-Jabir and the British to agree to the deportation of the Iranian population, including Shiites, to their homeland, Iran.<sup>478</sup> This effort of dispersal indicated how far the tide of Arab nationalism in Kuwait had reached by the end of the 1930s in terms of its intolerance. This intolerance now threatened to expel an important category of Kuwaiti society that had been very important to the country's economy and social life. Ahmad al-Jabir's dissolution of the Legislative Council, which came with the blessing of the British in 1939, was considered the biggest blow to the country's Arab nationalism project. With this reaction, Ahmad al-Jabir managed to avoid major undertakings that nearly robbed him of his reign and his influence, at the expense of the interests of the internal tide of Arab nationalism in the country.

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<sup>477</sup> Khalid al-Adsanii, *Muthakerat Khalid al-Adsanii: Secarteyr al-Majlis al-Tashri'ay alAwal w alThani* (al-Kuwait: Muthakerat Khassa, 1950s), 36-80; the previous private book can be found online on the site, [adsanee.8m.com/adsanee.html](http://adsanee.8m.com/adsanee.html), retrieved on February 2010.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.* 57-62.

It is important to understand not only the proliferation of Arab nationalism in Kuwait, but also how the ruling authority in Kuwait felt after such events. Ahmad al-Jabir and the ruling family understood that it was essential to take advantage of any opportunity to intervene more firmly in Britain's role in conducting Kuwait's foreign affairs.

After the Legislative Council in 1938-1939, the al-Sabah focused on breaking away from its isolated status and highlighting its efforts to keep pace with the tide of Arab nationalism in the Arab World. This new policy was enacted by increasing the ruling family's power through rapprochement with Arab countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. The aim of this rapprochement was to show that the ruling family's views were compatible with the ideas and issues of Arab unity. After the end of World War II, the activities of the Kuwaiti ruling family abroad increased noticeably. Ahmad al-Jabir, Abdullah, and others from the ruling family made numerous unofficial trips to Arab countries, either for holidays or to exchange view on how to resolve the Palestine issue, to achieve Arab unity, and more importantly, to ensure Kuwait's internal independence from any direct influence by the British. The British were unable to stop these visits because of their unofficial nature, the verbal (i.e. undocumented) language of such communications, and more importantly the roles these meetings played in serving the interests of maintaining Kuwait's security and stability and, thus, the interests of the British in the region.<sup>479</sup>

The threat of Arab nationalism to Kuwait's stability in 1938 and 1939 forced the al-Sabah to form strong and impregnable internal and external bases to counter any influential threat from Arab nationalist ideology in the country. Starting from the early 1950s, Abdullah sought to

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<sup>479</sup> PA, Kuwait to Lt-Col C G Prior, PR, Bushire, 23 August 1944 IOR: R/15/5/217 (British Library, London); Reports by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on visit of Syrian Primer, Shaikh Mustafa al-Siba'e to Kuwait, 6-7 March 1950, FO 371/82064 (TNA, London); Lt-Col H R P Dickson (PA, Kuwait) to PR, Bushire, 20 May 1939, editor's private papers, IOR: R/15/5/217 (British Library, London).

achieve this objective by moving Kuwait closer to terminating the Treaty of 1899 and declaring the country's independence as a new political entity in the Arab World, as is discussed in the following section.

### **6.7. Abdullah, Arab Unity, and the British, 1950-1965**

In examining Abdullah's strategies to reduce the British role in conducting Kuwait foreign affairs from 1950 to 1961, it can be seen that he used the tide of Arab nationalism across the region to gain independence for Kuwait and full control of its foreign affairs. However, this tactic took eleven years of discussion with the British, and the Arab World before an outcome was reached. The aim was to maintain Kuwait's national security and its peaceful enrolment within the region and in world organizations, as an Arab State with full sovereignty and control of its land and its internal and foreign affairs.

From the beginning of his reign in 1950, Abdullah indicated his desire to make a change in his country's relationship with Britain. The obvious reason for this was the impact of Arab nationalism on British policy in the region as a whole. In the middle years of Abdullah's rule, the Arab region entered an important stage of struggle for its interests between both the regional and global powers. This era, which extended from the end of World War II until the 1970s, was known as the period of decolonization; it had emerged with new leadership in the Arab World and was led by Nasser, president of Egypt/UAR from 1954 until his death in 1970 (after 1971 Egypt became the Arab Republic of Egypt). President Nasser carried the flag for spreading the tide of Arab nationalism in the Arab World. Regarded as one of the major Arab nationalist figures, he was seen as threatening the interests of the colonial powers in the Arab World and in Kuwait. During Abdullah's reign, Nasser had a significant impact on the evolution of his

decisions, so it is useful at this point to focus on the dynamics and interrelationships between British policy toward the growing influence of Nasser in the region and on Abdullah's policy towards regional developments in the Middle East. Abdullah's decisions were a result of the conflict between the forces of classical colonialism as well as the forces of the tide of Arab nationalism in the region.

During the first period of Abdullah's reign, which lasted from 1950 to 1954, the impact of Arab nationalism on Kuwait as an exporter stemmed from the basic policies of the Arab League in the region. During this period, the Arab World was living with the consequences of a lost war with the Zionists in 1948 and the appropriate ways to destabilise the regime in the State of Israel. The first Arab nationalist pressure on Kuwait during this period took the shape of an attempt to prevent Kuwait's oil supply, for which the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) was responsible, from reaching Israel. This was to be achieved by the Arab League's policy of implementing the trade boycotting of Israel.

In 1953, the Arab League tried to contact Abdullah to ensure no Kuwaiti oil supplies and other traded goods arrived in Israel.<sup>480</sup> The Arab League was planning to send a committee, headed by Iraq's director of Customs and a group of representatives, on an unofficial visit to verify that Kuwait was joining the Arab boycott of Israel.<sup>481</sup> Britain prevented Arab League representatives from visiting Kuwait, so instead, the League sent a letter to Abdullah asking him to consider boycotting Israel. In his reply, Abdullah promised that KOC would not sell oil to Israel. Both the KOC and the British government supported Abdullah's position. The British sought not to embarrass Abdullah while simultaneously upholding Kuwait's internal stability,

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<sup>480</sup> PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 16 March 1953, FO 371/104266 (TNA, London).

<sup>481</sup> British Embassy, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 25 February 1953, FO 371/104266 (TNA, London).

not to mention their own interests since, at that time, Britain was importing more than 50 percent of its oil from Kuwait.<sup>482</sup>

During the previous mentioned event, the British had suspicions that Abdullah might be asked to join the Arab League. Abdullah denied any suspicious contact with it and emphasised his commitment to the Anglo-Kuwait treaty of 1899. However, he also stressed that his country was free to benefit from the services of the Arab League in the fields of education, healthcare, and social assistance, especially through participation in its conferences from 1952. Furthermore, he stressed that his country had committed not to make any contact with the Arab League that would prejudice the defense agreement with Britain.<sup>483</sup> The year 1952 was the beginning of Abdullah's rapprochement with the Arab nationalist tide, although it did not consider the closure of the political relations with the Arab League.

The major change in Abdullah's perspective on the British presence in his country occurred during the second phase of his reign, just after the Suez Crisis in 1956. Although the Suez Crisis did not have any significant impact on Kuwait's foreign relations with Arab countries, it caused turmoil at the domestic level, as previously discussed. In fact, during the crisis British policy created an obvious matter for Abdullah to denounce. The crisis had evolved from Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal and his country's project to build the Aswan High Dam. Nasser's decisions led to a meeting of traditional colonial powers specifically the British and the French, to devise a way of stopping his political achievement in the region. They decided to engage Israel in their plan against Nasser and to take control of the Suez Canal. The agreed plan involved Israel attacking Egypt, thereby enabling Britain and France to begin

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<sup>482</sup> PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 16 August 1953; Foreign Office, London to PR, Bahrain, 19 August 1953, FO 371/104266 (TNA, London).

<sup>483</sup> PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 23 December 1953, FO 371/104266 (TNA, London).

military intervention to end the armed conflict between the two countries. The Franco-British military intervention was to seize control of the Suez Canal. The plan's weak design created a strong reaction in the Arab World. Israel's attack on Egypt occurred in the Sinai desert, hundreds of kilometers from the locations around the Suez Canal to which the British and French troops had been dispatched, ready to resolve the dispute. This weakness increased Nasser's argument for a global condemnation of the aggression against Egypt, which was not limited to Israelis but also embodied the aggression of the traditional colonial powers, as well as highlighting their intention to occupy the Suez Canal.<sup>484</sup>

Britain's obvious hostility, and particularly its use of Israel as a pretext to occupy the Suez Canal, provoked Abdullah into denouncing the aggressive act, albeit confidentially. Although the blow he had received from British policy at the regional level affected Kuwait's internal stability, he showed an unusually positive reaction by defending his strong association with Britain. Domestically, public opinion and Arab nationalists in Kuwait demanded that he denounce the aggression toward Egypt and break his commercial ties with Britain, but he did not agree with this view and patiently kept his country's interests tied to those of the British.<sup>485</sup> The British, who had observed his extreme loyalty to the strong relationship between them, and Kuwait appreciated it.<sup>486</sup> However, the Suez crisis strained his relationship with the British, as an indication of what was to come from British policies towards Kuwait and the region. In Abdullah's view, these British policies were the main driver for change, especially when he started thinking about increasing the rapprochement with Arab League in the following years.

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<sup>484</sup> Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965*, 58-65.

<sup>485</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 9 November 1956, FO 371/120567 (TNA, London).

<sup>486</sup> PR, Bahrain to Foreign Office, London, 3 November 1956, FO 371/120567 (TNA, London).

The next stage in Abdullah's relationship with the British began in 1958 and lasted until Kuwait had gained its independence in 1961. This stage focused on Britain's strong relationship with the regime in Kuwait, especially in terms of the sensitive issues related to Iraq (see Chapter Seven). Britain's prejudice encouraged Abdullah in his belief that he should be more in tune with the Arab nationalist tide in the region. In fact, the British Government's focus on its general policies in the Middle East also contributed to its prejudices along with its responsibilities to protect Kuwait and maintain the stability of its regime.

The British prejudice towards Kuwait became evident after the declaration of the Hashemite Arab Union between Iraq and Jordan in February 1958 since both countries were led by pro-British monarchies. The British-supported Hashemite Union was a reaction to the establishment of the nationalist union between Egypt and Syria, the UAR, which was also formed in February 1958.<sup>487</sup> After the announcement of these unions in the Arab World, Nasser waged a media war against the monarchies in Iraq and Jordan.<sup>488</sup> This contributed to the vicious overthrow of the pro-British monarchy in Iraq, whose rule had been unstable for eight years.<sup>489</sup> These events highlighted the role of the British in supporting the Hashemite Union against the spread of Arab nationalism in the eastern part of the Arab World. Although the British were careful about their interests in the region, they did not consider the interests of the rulers of Kuwait in the application of their policy.

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<sup>487</sup> David R. Devereux, *The Formation of British Defence Policy Towards the Middle East, 1948-56* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 181.

<sup>488</sup> Lawrence Tal, "Britain and the Jordan Crisis of 1958," *Middle Eastern studies*, 31, 1 (1995): 42.

<sup>489</sup> Marion Farouk and Peter Sluglett, "The Social Classes and the Origins of the Revolution," in *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited*, ed. Robert A. Fernea and William Roger Louis (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991), 128.

During these events, the British, with the help of the Royal Government of Iraq endeavoured to pressure Abdullah to join the Hashemite Union against the Arab Nationalism Union. The primary reason for Kuwait to join the Iraqi-Jordanian union was purely materialistic, since with Kuwait's entry the British would be able to balance the union's financial budget. Although Iraq was an oil-rich country, Jordan lacked natural resources. The imbalance in this financial equation created a burden for Iraq that, encouraged by the British, had sought to include Saudi Arabia, which refused to join, or to ensure that the British Government would sponsor the Union financially. Saudi Arabia refused to join the union, although it was one of the monarchies in the area, because of disagreements over the regional balance of power between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. In Kuwait, Abdullah took a specific stance on joining the Hashemite Union that the British did not understand at the time. The British Government itself did not bear the burden of the budget deficit due to its clear goal in the Middle East, which was to preserve its interests during decolonisation to the greatest extent possible.<sup>490</sup>

The shift in Abdullah's appraisal of the importance of Britain's role in conducting Kuwait's foreign affairs occurred in May 1958. This assessment did not aim to alter Britain's military role in protecting Kuwait; rather it questioned the capacity and efficiency of British diplomacy to ensure Kuwait's strategic interests. At a meeting between Abdullah and Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Saeid, the Iraqis pressed Kuwait to join the Hashemite Union and accept its military protection in repelling the Arab nationalist threat that consisted primarily of Nasser against the monarchist regimes in the Middle East.<sup>491</sup> In response, Abdullah indicated that there was no danger either from Arab nationalism or from Nasser in his country as Kuwait was part of

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<sup>490</sup> Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965*, 80-7.

<sup>491</sup> British Ambassador, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 11 May 1958, FO 371/132775 (TNA, London).

the Arab nations and always followed a peaceful policy with all regimes.<sup>492</sup> Nuri al-Saeid disliked this reaction and encouraged the British Ambassador in Baghdad to convince Abdullah of the importance and need to join the Hashemite Union. During the conversation with the British Ambassador, Abdullah expressed his annoyance with Britain's dealings in this matter and indicated the serious risks facing the Iraqi and the Jordanian monarchies if they continued to express their outright hostility against Nasser and Arab nationalism.

Abdullah already knew the materialistic dimensions of the pressure on his country to enter the Hashemite Union. He also understood that the primary objectives of these pressures were to grant the Hashemite Union access to Kuwait's oil reserves and to threaten Kuwait's internal security with the possibility of Iraqi military intervention at any moment, under the pretext of stemming the risk of Arab nationalism. Ultimately, he refused to join the Hashemite Union.<sup>493</sup>

The meetings in Baghdad enabled Abdullah to question the feasibility of continuing to give Britain a full role in conducting Kuwait's foreign affairs. Two weeks after the fall of the monarchy and the appearance of a new regime in Iraq on 14 July 1958, Abdullah expressed a desire for the British to allow his country to join the Arab League in the same way that his country had been allowed to join the Hashemite Union.<sup>494</sup> This wish evolved into a statement in an Egyptian newspaper from Abdullah al-Mubarak, the deputy ruler of Kuwait, in which he explained in detail why his country wanted to join the Arab League. This wish also continued to be spread via the media surrounding Abdullah's meeting with the secretary-general of the Arab

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<sup>492</sup> British Ambassador, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 14 May 1958, FO 371/132775 (TNA, London).

<sup>493</sup> British Ambassador, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 16 May 1958, FO 371/132775 (TNA, London).

<sup>494</sup> PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 31 July 1958: Ruler of Kuwait's views of membership of Arab League, and response of PA, FO 371/132555 (TNA, London).

League to discuss the topic. Even though Abdullah disclaimed his deputy's statement in Egyptian newspapers and his meeting with the secretary-general, the British tried to examine the reasons for Abdullah's decision, and to mend fences by sending a polite and reassuring letter detailing their obligations to preserve Kuwait's stability in the internal and external spheres.<sup>495</sup>

There were three reasons why Abdullah was dissatisfied with the way the British managed their role in his country. Firstly, he was not happy about British policy in the Middle East, which introduced Kuwait, without the regime's knowledge, into the fateful decisions of the region. In the Suez Canal incident, Abdullah had expressed his displeasure and disapproval of the outcome of Britain's policy failures, whether in its war with Egypt or over the stability of the internal situation in Kuwait. He also knew that Kuwait's instability had enabled the British Government to start thinking about the possibility of dispatching military forces to maintain their interests in the country, without his knowledge or input. Secondly, the British Government had neglected their commitment to support Kuwait's perspective during discussions at the meeting with the royal Iraqi government in May 1958. Abdullah did not find the British role in the meetings unacceptable; rather it was their pre-planning with the royal Iraqi government to annex Kuwait to the Hashemite Union without considering either his input or the ruling family's feedback.<sup>496</sup> Thirdly, Abdullah had lost any hope of Britain resolving Kuwait's outstanding problems with Iraq, especially the question of the date plantations belonging to the ruling family. The al-Sabah's loss of most of their date gardens in southern Iraq in 1956 by virtue of a local court ruling had resulted in a British commitment to compensate them for this loss, based on Britain's promise to Mubarak al-Sabah in 1914 to maintain the date plantations without paying

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<sup>495</sup> PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 18 August 1958, FO 371/132847 (TNA, London).

<sup>496</sup> PR, Bahrain to Foreign Office, London, 2 August 1958, FO 371/132847 (TNA, London).

taxes to the Iraqi government.<sup>497</sup> The British Government's failure to uphold this promise upset Abdullah and the ruling family (for further details, see Chapter Seven).

These three reasons led Abdullah to recognise the emergence of Britain's weakness in a failure that encouraged him to develop a new policy for Kuwait that guaranteed a broader circle of links with the outside world. In the face of Britain's endeavours to isolate Kuwait for more than half a century, Abdullah announced his intention to demolish this link on 23 October 1958. On this date, the British Government sent a letter to Abdullah, renewing their covenant and emphasizing the readiness of the British Government to provide the support necessary to connect Kuwait with other countries while recognising the capability of the ruling family to conduct certain aspects of Kuwait's relationship with other Arab countries.<sup>498</sup> Abdullah was not satisfied with this and requested reconsideration of the possibility of Kuwait joining international organisations. With this request, Abdullah hoped to develop a friendly atmosphere in the Arab World towards the active efforts of Kuwait.<sup>499</sup> As a result, this date is regarded as the real starting point of Kuwait's trajectory in highlighting its freedom and autonomy in conducting its foreign affairs as it had always done for its internal affairs. After this date, Kuwait joined several international organisations, such as the IMO and UNESCO, and signed international maritime treaties; more importantly, it began to promote in both Kuwait and the Arab World the idea of its march to full independence from Britain.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> British Embassy, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 18 August 1958, FO 371/132839 (TNA, London).

<sup>498</sup> 'Kuwait International Relations', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 3 November 1958, Annex A: Substantive letter of assurance to the Ruler of Kuwait, 23 October 1958, C. (58) 288, CAB 129/95 (TNA, London).

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965*, 95.

From the end of 1958, Abdullah sought to develop the local potential of his country in order to identify the right diplomatic staff to manage his country's foreign affairs, in preparation for gaining full independence in the future. Indeed, Kuwait won its full independence soon after, in 1961, but the Qassim Crisis, days after independence, was an essential touchstone in Abdullah's life and his relationship with Arab nationalism. When Qassim threatened to annex Kuwait, Nasser responded by simply accepting Kuwait's membership of the Arab League. This formal recognition of Kuwait's sovereign independence occurred at the regional, but not the international, level.<sup>501</sup> When Kuwait applied for membership of the United Nations as an independent state, Iraq intervened again, this time with the support of the Soviet veto, to reject the bid. Kuwait's membership was not accepted until 1963, by which time the government of Qassim had fallen, and a new and tolerant regime had emerged to replace it.<sup>502</sup>

During the Qassim Crisis, Abdullah arrived at a unique decision for resolving his country's first diplomatic problem of Kuwait's international recognition by developing a viable solution to settle future diplomatic issues that the country would undoubtedly face. The solution to the international recognition of Kuwait as an independent State came through the establishment of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) on 31 December 1961.<sup>503</sup> The idea for the fund had emerged during the period when Iraq was threatening Kuwait. At that time, a popular Kuwaiti delegation, led by Jabir III al-Ahmad had been visiting important capital cities in the Arab World. These visits produced the idea for this project, since with a budget of KD 200 million the fund would address the economic development needs of the Arab

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<sup>501</sup> Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 227-9.

<sup>502</sup> Yelena Malchomian, *Derasat fi Tarikh Al-Kuwait al-Hadith w al-Mu'asar*, translated by Maheer Salama (al-Kuwait: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Kuwayityyah, 2011), 101-37.

<sup>503</sup> Mansfield, *Kuwait Vanguard*, 63.

World and support joint and cooperative Arab efforts for unity.<sup>504</sup> Within a year of its establishment, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, and Syria had all received loans and grants from the fund to support their development and economic projects.<sup>505</sup>

This economic support played an important diplomatic role in ensuring Kuwait's stability and political recognition among the Arab countries and their international allies, as well as supporting Kuwait's independence and right to join the United Nations. Ironically, this fund also played a significant role in winning the Iraqi government's recognition of Kuwait in the United Nations, while avoiding the Soviet Union's veto, when Iraq's new government expressed its readiness to recognize Kuwait in exchange for material economic support in 1963.<sup>506</sup>

Thanks to this viable solution, of offering economic support to the Arab countries, Abdullah strengthened his country's foreign policy and its distinctive diplomatic position, thereby gaining legitimacy for Kuwait as an independent state in the global community. Amazingly, his decision to establish this fund was regarded as something of an advantage to the developing world, representing as it did the first effort, internationally, for a developing country to assist other developing countries.<sup>507</sup> Abdullah's decision clearly marked out Kuwait's political path for the future, as defined by him, in terms of its relationship with Arab countries, whether nationalists or monarchies, in order to work towards effective cooperation and the creation of more sustainable development in the Arab World.

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<sup>504</sup> British Ambassador, Amman to Foreign Office, London, 25 July 1961, FO 371/156852 (TNA, London); Kuwait Annual Review for 1961, enclosed in Richmond's letter to Lord Home, 4 January 1962, DEFE 7/1950 (TNA, London).

<sup>505</sup> Malchomian, *Derasat fi Tarikh Al-Kuwait*, 176-7.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid*, 134-35.

<sup>507</sup> Robert McNamara, President of the World Bank (1968-1981), retrieved from the KFAED official website: [www.kuwait-fund.org](http://www.kuwait-fund.org) on March 2013.

## **6.8. Conclusion**

This chapter examined Abdullah's introduction of a new direction for Kuwait's relationship with Arab nationalists and the British from 1950 to 1965. Internally, the new direction consisted of introducing several reform decrees including those relating to: the Kuwait nationality law in 1959, the gaining of independence in 1961 and the ratifying of the Constitution in 1962. On the external sphere, it included the rapprochement with the Arab World and signing the friendship and protection treaty with Britain in 1961. The main cause of this new direction was to contain the influence of the Arab nationalists' struggle with Britain's policy in the Middle East on the stability of the al-Sabah rule of Kuwait.

Abdullah's new direction was to comply with the ruling family's belief in the necessity of achieving unity with the Arab World in the 1940s. After witnessing the negative impact of Arab nationalism on Kuwait's stability during the Legislative council of 1938-39, the al-Sabah realised that they had to gain rapprochement with the Arab World and to deal carefully with their commitments towards British interest in Kuwait and in the region. The al-Sabah aimed to avoid the reemergence of such events by demonstrating its links with the Arab World and the control of its internal affairs.

However, the mounting grievances among the Arab nationalists in Kuwait and abroad concerning Britain's policies in the Middle East during 1950s went beyond control. It pushed Abdullah to face new challenges to deal with during his reign. The Suez Crisis of 1956 and the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchical regime in 1958 were the key events that forced Abdullah to accelerate the implementation of his new direction. The consequences of such events on

Kuwait's national security forced Abdullah to push ahead with his country's progress towards joining the Arab League and canceling the 1899 treaty with the British Government in 1961.

By 1963, Kuwait's new direction had clearly shaped its development as an autonomous and sovereign State in the Middle East. Thus, it contributed to giving Abdullah one of the most prominent positions among the Arab nationalists in the Arab World. Also, the establishment of KFAED in December 1961, and the ratification of the Kuwaiti Constitution in 1962 further enhanced Abdullah's reputation in the region. Overall, after facing a decade of domestic instability in the region, Abdullah managed to channel all the mounting pressure on him from the Arab nationalists and Britain into a path that enabled the continuing of the al-Sabah's rulership of Kuwait for decades ahead.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Abdullah and Relations with Iraq

#### 7.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the outstanding problems between Kuwait and Iraq that represented one of the major challenges in Abdullah's political life between 1950 and 1965. During this period, Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations were dominated by the question of the border between the two countries. This case had been a point of contention between Kuwait and Iraq since 1932; and therefore it had a significant impact, not only on their relationship, but also on relations with the British and the Arabs. The border issue became critical with the independence of Kuwait in June 1961, when the Iraqi Prime Minister, Qassim, announced his intention to annex Kuwait.

This chapter examines the magnitude of the border question in the Kuwaiti-Iraqi relationship, especially Iraq's claims in 1961 and Abdullah's policies to resolve the issue in the light of local and regional developments. The situation raises many questions in connection with Kuwait's relationship with Iraq. For example, what was the nature of the countries' relationship? What was Britain's role in its formation? Did Ahmad al-Jabir's policies establish a strong relationship with Iraq? Did he leave unresolved problems for his successor, Abdullah? How did Abdullah handle the border question? What were the most important issues in Kuwait's relationship with Iraq during Abdullah's rule? How did Kuwait and Iraq change in terms of their proposed solutions to outstanding problems? What were the results of those changes? What was the role of other countries? Have the Iraqi claims been addressed? How, if at all, were the

remaining problems between Kuwait and Iraq solved? By attempting to answer these questions, this chapter will be able to offer a new perspective on the history of Kuwait, especially regarding Abdullah's point of view and the policies he employed in order to stabilize the country and its system of rule.

## **7.2. Britain's Role in Kuwaiti–Iraqi Relations, 1752-1950**

This section provides the background to Kuwait's relationship with Iraq, from the early days until Abdullah's reign. This examination is important for identifying the changes in these relations just after Abdullah's accession in 1950. It is also useful to examine the origins of the border issue and other linked political issues between Kuwait and Iraq. Therefore, this section begins by discussing the stages in relations between Kuwait and Iraq.

There were three stages to consider, the first being the Ottoman-Kuwaiti relationship. This is because Iraq, from Mosul and Baghdad to Basra, was part of the Ottoman Empire from the sixteenth century until the end of the First World War. The next stage is Kuwait's relationship with the forces of the British mandate in Iraq from the end of World War I until 1932. The third period extended from 1932 until Ahmad al-Jabir's death in 1950. This period saw the Kuwaiti–Iraqi relationship that left its mark on Abdullah's reign, from 1950 until 1965. The thread that links these three periods was the significant role played by the British in formulating the relationship between Kuwait and Iraq from 1904 until 1958.

The first stage of the relationships between Kuwait and Iraq began in 1752 and lasted until 1914. During this period the al-Sabah rule in Kuwait enjoyed autonomy in managing its internal and foreign affairs, although there were exceptions when its rulers accepted that they

belonged, nominally, to the Ottoman Empire's suzerainty in the Gulf region. During this period, the Ottoman Caliph conferred the position of *qaimaqam* (district governor) upon the rulers of Kuwait, without any administrative or military support from the Ottoman authorities. This situation gave Kuwait and its rulers a free rein to form relationships with regional and global powers, such as the British in the Gulf, the Ottoman administration in Basra and Baghdad, and the tribes, emirates, and sultanates across the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>508</sup>

During the nineteenth century, relations between Kuwait and Iraq were limited to the customary social and economic exchanges of migrations, marriages, and trade. The reasons for this situation were Kuwait's lack of strategic importance to the Ottomans and the de facto good relations between Istanbul and the rulers of Kuwait.<sup>509</sup> In fact, Kuwait's rulers had offered military and logistical support several times during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the Ottoman campaigns to take control of parts of the Arabian Peninsula. This included the expeditions in the 1810s and 1830s against the Saudis in Najd and the 1871 campaign to conquer the eastern part of Arabia.<sup>510</sup> This relationship did not require the demarcation of a border between the two countries until the entry of the Western European powers at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1899, after prolonged secret negotiations, Mubarak al-Sabah and the British Government signed a treaty to protect the interests of both parties in the region (the Exclusive Agreement). This Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement ensured that Britain would protect Kuwait; and it would be politically isolated from any extension of the influence of the world's colonial powers,

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<sup>508</sup> Al-Ghunaim, *Tarsiym al Hadud al Kuwayityyah*, 28-41; Slot, *Mubarak al-Sabah*, 29-37.

<sup>509</sup> Hussain Muhammad al-Qahwati. *Al-Kuwayiyt fi al-Qarn al-Tasa'a 'Ashar*. in *al-Haqiqah al-Trarikhiyah li 'Arafiat al-Kuwayiyt* (Bagdad: Wazarat al-thaqafah w al-e'alam, 1990), 53-86.

<sup>510</sup> Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayiyt al Hadith*, 128-258.

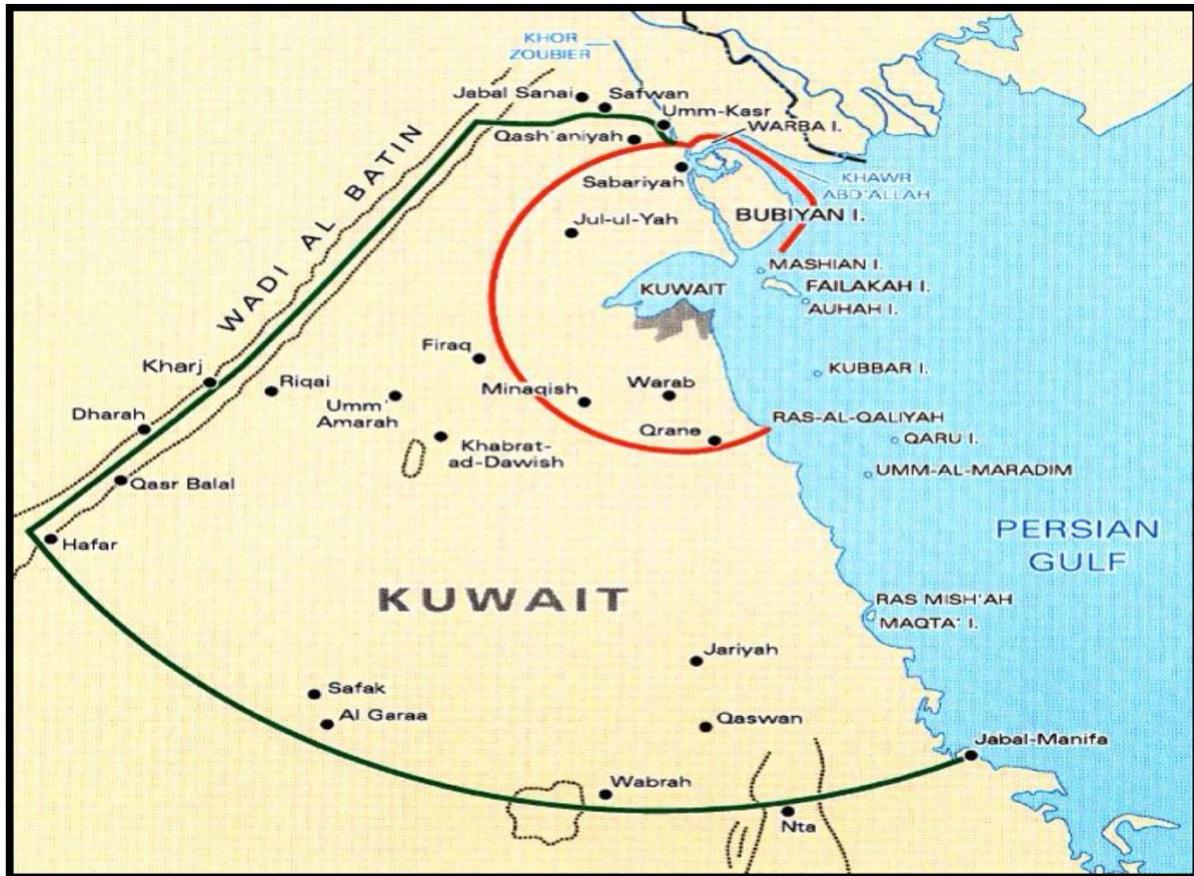
such as France and Russia, as well as regional forces such as the Ottomans in nearby Basra. The treaty transformed Kuwait into a British protected state and it enabled Mubarak al-Sabah to resist any Ottoman encroachment on his autonomy.<sup>511</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century an Anglo-Ottoman conflict of influence erupted in the Gulf region over the political status of Kuwait. This conflict had a significant impact on the formulation of the Kuwaiti–Iraqi relationship later in the century. The Anglo–Ottoman conflict over Kuwait’s political status started in 1904 and lasted until 1913, having erupted after the announcement of the Exclusive Treaty with Mubarak al-Sabah in 1903. This announcement had challenged the Ottoman influence in the Gulf region, and led to a political discussion of Kuwait’s international status between the Ottoman Empire and the British Government. At the end of the Anglo-Ottoman discussions, Kuwait’s international status had been confirmed as an independent entity in domestic administration that fell under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire with its foreign policy under Britain’s auspices. These discussions ended with the issuing of the 1913 Convention between the British and Ottoman governments, recognising the northern and western frontiers of Kuwait with its neighbour Iraq (see Figure 5, below). However this Convention was not ratified because of the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> *Kuwait: Statehood and Boundaries* (Kuwait: Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, 1992), 41-69.

<sup>512</sup> Al-Ghunaim, *Tarsiym al Hadud al Kuwayityyah*, 28-41; Slot, *Mubarak al-Sabah*, 519.



**Figure 5:** Map of Kuwait's territorial authorities (the red inner line and the green outer line) as defined in the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman convention.<sup>513</sup>

The lack of ratification left the border question unresolved into the post war period. The main reason for this complication was the emergence of a new map of the Middle East after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, which was well-known as being one of the most important consequences of the First World War. The event encouraged Britain and France to sign the secretive Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 to allocate their respective spheres of influence in the Middle East. This agreement was followed by the Lausanne Conference in 1921 which determined control of the Ottoman Empire's former Arab territories in the Middle East outside

<sup>513</sup> Harry Brown, "The Iraq-Kuwait Boundary Dispute: Historical Background and the U.N. Decisions of 1992 and 1993," *IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin*, 2 (3), (October, 1994): 66-80.

the Peninsula. Based on these agreements, Iraq and Kuwait were placed under British influence in the Middle East, that is, Iraq was put under the mandate of the British Government.<sup>514</sup> This made it possible for the British to distinguish Kuwait's territories from those of Iraq. At the same time, it created a controversial problem for the British to address regarding the future of relations between Kuwait and Iraq.

In 1923, following raids and smuggling along the borders of Kuwait, Iraq, and the Sultanate of Najd, Britain found itself once more obliged to call the parties to a special conference at the port of Uqair to delineate the borders of the three countries.<sup>515</sup> The main objective was the prevention of any violations in the border areas in order to maintain their stability, thereby securing British interests especially in safeguarding the efforts of oil companies in the region. The Uqair Conference shaped Kuwait's northern and western frontiers with Iraq to make them match the 1913 Green Line of the Anglo-Ottoman Convention. Although the purpose of the agreement was to settle border problems among Kuwait, Iraq, and Najd, it did not arrive at a final demarcation of the frontiers on the ground.<sup>516</sup> The first step towards the ratification of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi borders did not come about until 1932.

The third stage of Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations started with the expiring of the British mandate in 1932. In this year Iraq joined the League of Nations. This achievement was not an easy task for Iraq. In order to enter the League of Nations, Iraq had to ensure that it met its requirements. The main condition of membership was that Iraq would be allocated fixed land and sea borders. Thus, Iraq had no choice but to start negotiations with the British over its border question with

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<sup>514</sup> David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Owl, 1989), 286-68.

<sup>515</sup> Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi*, vol. 5, 120-45.

<sup>516</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 48-65.

Kuwait and other neighbouring countries. By the end of 1932, Iraq had begun negotiating its borders with all of his neighbours, including Kuwait.<sup>517</sup>

The negotiation for the Iraqi–Kuwaiti borders was controlled and supervised by the British. Therefore, the British produced a basic definition for Iraq’s borders with Kuwait based on their previous studies of the nature of the frontiers between the two countries. As such, the British worked to draw the borders based on the Anglo–Ottoman Convention’s map of 1913 and on the outcome of the Uqair Conference in 1922. This effort was intended to establish the foundation for discussion of the borders between Kuwait and Iraq.<sup>518</sup>

By the end of 1932, the British had a clear sense of where the boundary between Kuwait and Iraq should be. The exchange of letters between Ahmad al-Jabir, and the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al-Saeid ratified this understanding.<sup>519</sup> This mutual recognition between Kuwait and Iraq was the basic premise for the future development of the relations between the authorities in Iraq and the rulers in Kuwait.<sup>520</sup> However, the nature of the agreement between Kuwait and Iraq did not develop into any clear or cooperative effort to resolve the border issue definitively, (that is, it had not been determined nor drawn on the ground); and by the mid-1930s, this situation had already contributed to the creation of a number of problems and difficulties between Kuwait and Iraq.

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Record of the meeting held at the Colonial Office on 15 April 1932, London, FO 371/16010 (TNA, London).

<sup>519</sup> The British perception was as follows: the Kuwait-Iraqi boundary starting “from the intersection of the Wadi-el-audja with the Batin and thence northwards along the Batin to a point just south of the latitude of Safwan; thence eastwards passing south of Safwan wells, Jebel Sanam and Um Qasr leaving them to Iraq and so on to the junction of the Khor Zobeir with the Khor Abdullah. The islands of Warbah, Bubiyan, Maskan [or Mashjan], Failakah, Auhah, Kubbar, Qaru and Umm-el-Maradim appertain to Kuwait.” From Nuri al-Said to High Commissioner, Bagdad, 21 July 1932, FO 371/16006 (TNA, London).

<sup>520</sup> Yacoub al-Ghunaim, *Ahmad al-Jabir al Jabir al Sabah w Msalat al Hadood* (al Kuwaitiyt: Author, 1999), 45-52.

There were two reasons why both parties failed to resolve the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border dispute during the 1930s and the 1940s. The first was Iraq's demonstrable lack of success in solving the border question with Kuwait. The second was the dispute about the nature of the border between Kuwait and Iraq, according to the various positions held by members of the British administration in the region, especially between the British residency in the Gulf under the Government of India, and the British officials in Iraq under the Foreign Office in London.

In 1938, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Tawfiq al-Suwaydi demanded that the British Government should permit Iraq to annex Kuwait.<sup>521</sup> This Iraqi request was not a surprise to either the British or the rulers of Kuwait, since this claim had been preceded by earlier ambitious events. Between 1932 and 1939, Iraq had repeatedly endeavoured to interfere in the internal affairs of Kuwait, such as the Legislative Council Movement between 1938-39. Furthermore, violations by Iraqi border guards carried out within Kuwaiti territory occurred several times under the pretext of combating smugglers.<sup>522</sup> At the same time, the Iraqi government tolerated, and sometimes supervised a press and radio campaign against Kuwait. The aim of this media campaign was to attack Kuwait's government in preparation for annexing the country; and if oil had been discovered there, it would have been a huge gain for Iraq.<sup>523</sup>

The 1938-39's Legislative Council events fuelled Iraq's desire to control Kuwait. However, Britain's policies in the region and its interests in Kuwait meant that the Iraqi government's ambitions were impossible to achieve. Therefore the Iraqi government bowed to

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<sup>521</sup> Record of conversation with Iraqi Minister for Foreign Affairs at the Foreign Office, 5 October 1938, IOR: R/15/5/208 (British Library, London).

<sup>522</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 12 June 1936, IOR: R/15/5/131; from the PR in the Persian Gulf to the Government of India, IOR: R/15/5/184 (British Library, London).

<sup>523</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 8 August 1935, IOR [R/15/1/506]; PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire enclosing article dated 10 September 1937 from *al-Nas* newspaper, 2 October 1937, IOR:R/15/5/202 (British Library, London).

the British Government's decision, requiring it not to interfere in Kuwait's internal affairs and not to violate its borders, especially as the two states had already emerged from the Ottoman Empire and enjoyed their status as independent entities. The main reason for the Iraqis' obedience to Britain's decision in 1938-39 was their unwillingness to engage in direct conflict with British interests in Kuwait.<sup>524</sup> Overall, however, this muted response from the Iraqi government did not stop the emergence of new problems between Kuwait and Iraq at the end of the 1930s and during the 1940s.

Another disagreement between Kuwait and Iraq was the Iraqi government's interest in constructing a new port on the Gulf. The issue came to the forefront of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi relationship in 1938 and would continue to plague relations between the two countries into the early 1960s. Iraq's intention to construct a new port on the Gulf raised still more questions about land and sea borders, and about the possibility of land swaps and exchanges. In 1938, Iraq expressed its desire for the British to build a deep-water port as the alternative to Basra as a route to the Gulf. The Iraqi government wanted to reduce the country's dependence on the disputed Shatt al-Arab waterway which marked the border with Iran, and it wanted to avoid the Shatt al-Arab's narrow, 70 mile-long channel which was the access to Basra port. The Iraqi government also wanted to secure a nearby and direct port for the exporting of the oil produced in the southern fields in Zubair. Thus the alternative was the construction of another port on the shores of the Gulf.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> Note verbal for British Embassy, Bagdad to Iraqi Minster for Foreign Affairs, 6 October 1938, IOR: R/15/5/159 (British Library, London).

<sup>525</sup> A. K. Pasha. *Kuwait: Strategies of Survival* (New Delhi: Har-anand Publications, 1995), 41-2; Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 76-90.

In 1938, the Iraq government expressed its desire to take control of the Kuwaiti islands of Warbah and Bubiyan, since it wished to secure the maritime routes into and out of the proposed port on the Gulf. This forced the British to determine the border between Kuwait and Iraq yet again. Britain's revision of the frontiers ensured that the construction of the port would be inside Iraq's border and not in Kuwait. In 1939, the British concluded a survey for the Iraqi government confirming the possibility of the construction of the port at Umm Qasr area along the borders between Kuwait and Iraq. The start of World War II prevented the Iraqi government from achieving the construction of the British proposal, but the plan was eventually achieved by the Allied powers that had found it strategic to construct the port in support of their forces and as an alternative to the port at Basra in case of dangerous situations. The Allies constructed the Umm Qasr port during the War but did not use it, largely because of the absence of any strategic need to do so as long as the Basra port was not exposed to any aggressive damage or attacks from the Axis powers. Although the Allies had constructed the port because they anticipated that they would need a military base in Iraq, they did not want to hand it over to the Iraqi government after the war ended, so it was dismantled by Allied troops.<sup>526</sup>

Although the Allies had demolished the Umm Qasr port, the Iraqis remained adamant in their quest to reconstruct it in the post-war period. The Iraqis wanted to pursue their own interests even if it was at the expense of their relationship with Kuwait. This affected relations between them until Abdullah's ascendance to power in 1950. Iraq was desperate to construct the port and therefore increased its pressure on the British and the Kuwaitis while continuing to delay the setting of the boundary between Kuwait and Iraq for decades.

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<sup>526</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 85-90; Al-Ghunaim. *Ahmad al-Jabir al Jabir*, 52.

Another longstanding problem was the Iraqi government's confiscation of the al-Sabah's date plantation properties in Fao between 1930 and throughout the 1950s. The al-Sabah had gained possession of the date plantations in southern Iraq during the reigns of Jabir I and Mubarak al-Sabah (1816-1915), when they had been given as gifts to the ruling family by the Ottoman authorities and notables in Iraq. During World War I, Britain guaranteed these date plantations as an area free of taxation, based on its protectorate agreement with Kuwait in 1914 and its control of the southern provinces of Iraq in 1915.<sup>527</sup> The al-Sabah had relied financially on the income of the date plantations before the dawn of oil era in late 1940s (for more detail see Chapter Two).

After independence in 1932 the Iraqi government did not appreciate the existence of this al-Sabah concession, and therefore established an Iraqi policy that was basically either to tax or to confiscate the date plantations. Iraq's efforts began by pressuring the date plantation farmers not to work, or by inciting raiders to attack the estates. At this stage, the Iraqi government sought only to receive taxes on the al-Sabah estates, and it succeeded but from 1938 it was also able to impose taxes on the properties. However the Iraqi government still wanted to confiscate these estates, and continued its legal challenge to the al-Sabah's ownership of the date plantations in Fao until Abdullah's rule. However, the British authorities played virtually no part in coordinating the relationship between the two parties; but they were physically present. They controlled Kuwait's foreign affairs and were fully aware of the concession for the al-Sabah to run their properties in Fao without taxation in place since 1914. This made it possible for

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<sup>527</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 48-9.

Kuwait's rulers to defend the case of their date plantations in Iraq until 1958, after which the al-Sabah lost most of its property in Fao.<sup>528</sup>

Kuwait's need to import fresh water was another chronic problem between Kuwait and Iraq before 1950. While Kuwait's population had traditionally relied on local wells in and around Kuwait City, this changed with urbanisation and population growth after 1918. The nearest source of fresh water was in Iraq; the Shatt al-Arab was not far from Kuwait City, being no more than 150 kilometres by sea. In the light of Kuwait's urgent needs, the water industry and relations in general improved between Kuwait and Iraq during the 1940s. At this time, ships owned by the Kuwaiti government, various merchants, and the Kuwait Oil Company transported fresh water to the Cities of Kuwait and al-Ahmadi.<sup>529</sup> Kuwait therefore depended on Iraq for its fresh water, which meant that the Iraqi government could put pressure on Kuwait at will simply by controlling the water supply. Kuwait's rulers were therefore particularly keen to solve this serious problem.

There had been significant differences in Britain's political stance in the region, especially between the British administration in the Gulf and its counterparts in Iraq. These divergent views contributed greatly to delaying the final solution to the Iraqi–Kuwaiti boundary demarcation. While the British administration in the Gulf defended Kuwait's right to demarcate its boundary with Iraq based on the 1913, 1922, and 1932 agreements, the British administration in Iraq defended Iraq's right to acquire a maritime waterway to the Gulf with all the concessions coming from Kuwait.<sup>530</sup> According to Richard Schofield, "the dispute had, in truth, been

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<sup>528</sup> Summary of negotiations over al-Sabah date plantations, 1914-1952, FO 371/109897; PA, Kuwait to Mr D M H Riches (Foreign Office), 26 June 1958, FO 371/132839 (TNA, London).

<sup>529</sup> Y A AlGanim, Kuwait to PA, Kuwait, 2 August 1942, IOR: R/15/5/160 (British Library, London).

<sup>530</sup> L. Baggallay (Foreign Office) to India Office, New Delhi, CO 732/86/17 (TNA, London).

conducted more between the Government of India and the Foreign Office than between Kuwait and Iraq.”<sup>531</sup> The differences were not lost upon Ahmad al-Jabir. The next section considers Ahmad al-Jabir’s policies in managing the outstanding problems with Iraq from 1921 to 1950.

### **7.3. Ahmad al-Jabir’s Strategies 1921-50**

This section examines Ahmad al-Jabir’s strategies in relation to Iraq, and explains the difference between his strategies and those of Abdullah. It explores how Ahmad al-Jabir managed the dilemma and how he left his country’s relations with Iraq for his successor, Abdullah. Ahmad al-Jabir’s political decisions had a significant impact on the formulation of Kuwait’s relations with Iraq from 1921 to 1950, and certainly most of the outstanding issues with Iraq surfaced during his period of rule. Therefore, it is important to examine Ahmad al-Jabir’s political legacy, particularly his country’s relations with Iraq, and whether or not his successor continued in the same vein.

Ahmad al-Jabir strategy at the beginning of his reign was to follow Britain’s political advice in terms of Kuwait’s best interests in its dealings with Iraq. The first evidence of this policy came in 1923 with the boundary conference at Uqair that included Iraq, Najd and its dependencies, (Saudi Arabia), Britain, and Kuwait. At this conference, Kuwait’s representative was the Political Agent, Major James Moore; the representative for Najd was Abdulaziz al-Saud; for Iraq it was Sabiyh Baik, Minister of Transportation and Work, and Fahad al-Hathal, a desert shaikh; and Britain was represented by the Political Resident in the Gulf, Sir Percy Cox, who was the conference convenor. Before the conference began, Ahmad al-Jabir expressed his full confidence that Major Moore and Sir Percy would serve in the interests of Kuwait’s full rights.

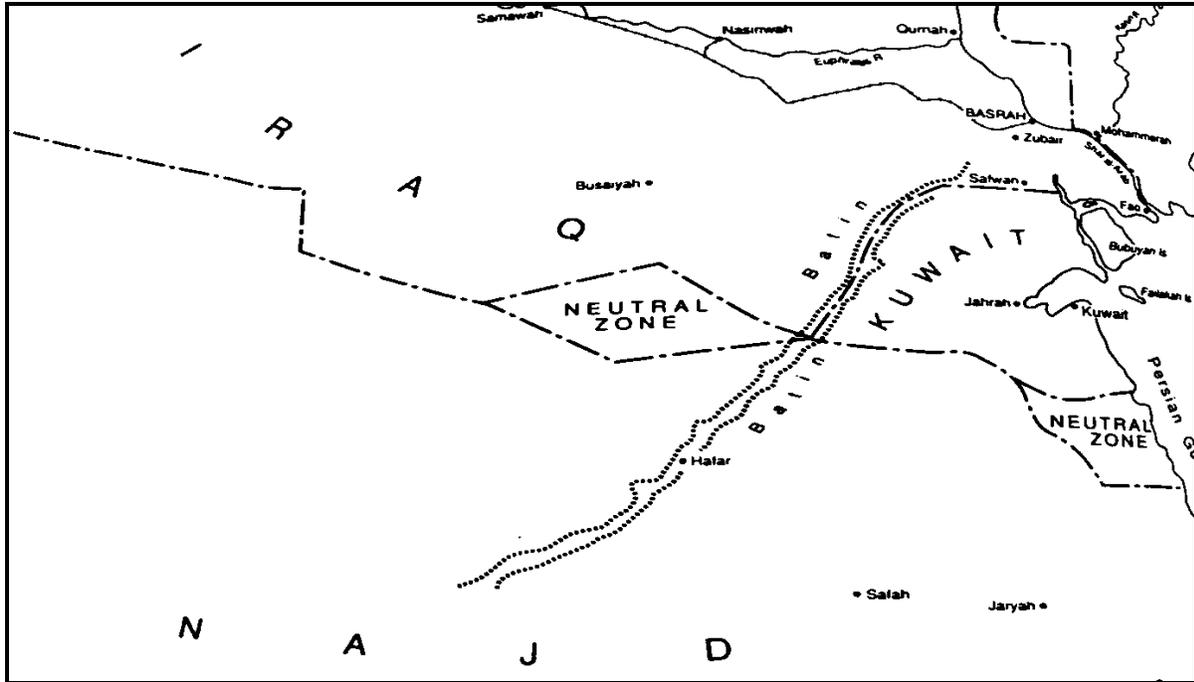
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<sup>531</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 98.

However, Ahmad al-Jabir's confidence and the absence of any national support for the Kuwait's rights in terms of its entitlement to determine the boundary dispute with its neighbours at the conference, led to Kuwait losing 2/3 of its territory to Saudi Arabia, based on the un-ratified Anglo-Ottoman Convention of 1913. In this case, Kuwait lost more than half of its estimated area in the south to Saudi Arabia, while another part was distinguished as a Neutral Zone (see Appendix 2). Despite this loss, the delegates at the conference were able to determine Kuwait's northern boundary with Iraq, as stated in the 1913 Convention. After the conference, Ahmad al-Jabir expressed his approval of the planning map of Uqair to the Political Resident but insisted on the expedited demarcation of Kuwait's northern frontiers with Iraq.<sup>532</sup> This recognition of Kuwait's boundary with its neighbours was the foundation for Ahmad al-Jabir's next strategy that was to demarcate the border with Iraq.

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<sup>532</sup> Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwait al-Siyasi*, Vol. 5, 132-52.



**Figure 6:** Map of Kuwait's border with Iraq and Najd (Saudi Arabia) after Uqair conference in 1923.<sup>533</sup>

Ahmad al-Jabir continued his treaty-bound strategy on the basis of the British advice on managing relations with Iraq. In 1932, Iraq had exchanged letters with Ahmad al-Jabir, through the British, to resolve the boundary issue. Through this exchange of letters, Ahmad al-Jabir expressed Kuwait's wish to recognise the 1913 and 1923 border with Iraq. This event was an important addition to the border resolution strategy. The government of Iraq was impatient to enter the League of Nations. Despite Ahmad al-Jabir's efforts to resolve the problem, the results of the 1932 agreement on the boundary matter failed to be sufficiently precise to establish the

<sup>533</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 60.

border itself. The parties had to complete the procedures by demarcating the boundary on the ground.<sup>534</sup> After 1932, boundary negotiations did not resurface until the late 1930s.

After Ahmad al-Jabir had recognised the delimitation of the boundary in 1932, although it was not precisely interpreted, he embarked on a new strategy towards Iraq. This new policy was to protect the Kuwaiti border from Iraqi violations of the boundary alignment carried out in 1932. In the ensuing years, Iraq's interventions in Kuwait's internal affairs intensified. During the 1930s, Kuwait and the ruling family had suffered a series of Iraqi interventions. For example, in the early 1930s, Iraqi newspapers attacked Kuwait's system of internal rule under Ahmad al-Jabir's control. The purpose of this campaign was to discredit Kuwait's ruler and destabilise the ruling system.<sup>535</sup>

Radio broadcasting was active during the period of the Legislative Council in 1938-39 from the palace of the Iraqi King, Ghazi, which contributed to opposition against Ahmad al-Jabir's administration.<sup>536</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir also had to face incursions by the Iraqi custom guards into Kuwait's territory and against Kuwaiti nomads and other personnel, which occurred particularly in the north and west of the country. The raids were carried out under the pretext of Kuwaiti nationals having participated in exposing Iraq's financial treasury to heavy losses as a result of tax evasion. In response, Ahmad al-Jabir sent letters of protest to the British authorities and with their cooperation made strenuous efforts to solve the problem of the Iraqi custom guards' incursion.<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> Pasha. *Kuwait: Strategies of Survival*, 38-40.

<sup>535</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bushire, 20 April 1939, IOR: R/15/5/127 (British Library, London).

<sup>536</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, from 13 February to 9 March 1939, IOR: R/15/5/126 (British Library, London).

<sup>537</sup> Kuwaiti Government Secretariat to PA, Kuwait, 5 March 1949, IOR: R/15/5/226 (British Library, London).

In 1940, the issue of the demarcation of the border between Kuwait and Iraq re-emerged at the forefront of the political scene as it was accompanied by Ahmad al-Jabir's adoption of another new strategy in managing his country's relations with Iraq. A British team had identified a flaw in the 1932 map while selecting a site for Iraq's proposed port of Umm Qasr, and wished to know whether the port would be in the area between Kuwait and Iraq, or within the territory of Iraq, or Kuwait. During British discussions of the issue, Ahmad al-Jabir added a new direction to the previous strategy of reliance on the British by demonstrating his inflexibility when attempts were made to resolve the problem of the frontiers with Iraq. This new strategy began when Ahmad al-Jabir denounced the British decision to nominate the Umm Qasr site for the Iraqi government to optimise a proper port on the Gulf. He flatly rejected Iraq's plan to cede or lease the islands of Warbah and Bubiyan.<sup>538</sup> The reason why the question of the Kuwaiti islands had been raised was to satisfy Iraq's wish to ensure the safety of their maritime transport to and from the planned port of Umm Qasr.<sup>539</sup>

These issues strained Kuwait's relationship with Iraq; and they reached a deadlock in the border negotiations. In the early summer of 1940, the British arrived at a new interpretation of Kuwait's border with Iraq that placed the port of Umm Qasr in Iraq's territory. However, this new interpretation came without a serious decision to form a joint committee to set the frontiers on the ground. Ahmad al-Jabir's unwillingness to meet the Iraqis and his inflexibility concerning the British contributed to widening the gap in the resolution of the issue of the boundary between Kuwait and Iraq. Ahmad al-Jabir's final demand to the British about the need to form a committee to demarcate the border with Iraq came shortly before his death in January 1950.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> PR, Bushire to Secretary of State for India, New Delhi, FO 371/24559 (TNA, London).

<sup>539</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 76-82.

<sup>540</sup> Ahmad al-Jabir, ruler of Kuwait, to PA, Kuwait, London: FO 1016/118 (TNA, London).

His decision had resulted from renewed Iraqi demands a year earlier for the port of Umm Qasr to be constructed on the Khor of Zubair near Kuwait's northern border.<sup>541</sup>

Ahmad al-Jabir's strategies that affected Kuwait's relationship with Iraq included his efforts to address the issues of the al-Sabah's estates in Iraq and his strategy to solve Kuwait's urgent need for fresh water from the Shatt al-Arab. In addressing the first issue, Ahmad al-Jabir appointed lawyers to defend the ruling family's rights to its date plantations and its exemption from taxes. He made a friendly but unsuccessful visit to Iraq in 1935 to settle these matters. The lawsuit over the date plantations had dragged through the courts in Iraq and continued well into Abdullah's reign; and in turn he not only continued to defend the ruling family's property in Iraq but also asked the British for assistance with the problem. The invitation to the British to intercede was based on the pledge that Britain had made to Mubarak al-Sabah in 1914 to exempt the al-Sabah date plantations from taxation.<sup>542</sup> However, as the Iraqi government seriously sought to impose taxation on the al-Sabah's date plantations the British failed to keep their promise. By 1958, most of the al-Sabah's date plantations in Iraq had been confiscated but later the British Government compensated the ruling family.<sup>543</sup>

The water question was one of the most important problems that Ahmad al-Jabir wished to solve. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Kuwait had wanted to highlight its independence from the Ottoman and then the Iraqi authorities, but its dependence on fresh water from Shatt al-Arab was an obstacle. Having Iraq as the main supplier of fresh water constituted a threat to the independence and long-term stability of Kuwait. Kuwait's rulers also understood

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<sup>541</sup> British Embassy, Bagdad to Clement Attlee (Foreign Office, London), IOR: R/15/5/210 (British Library, London).

<sup>542</sup> Summary of negotiations over al-Sabah date gardens, 1914-1952, London: FO 371/109897 (TNA, London).

<sup>543</sup> R S Crawford (British Embassy, Baghdad) to Foreign Office, London, 16 August 1958, FO 371/132839 (TNA, London).

that the Iraqi government could use water as a bargaining chip at any time. Indeed, one of the first threats occurred in 1935; Kuwait suffered a severe water shortage when the Iraqi customs authorities in Fao prevented Kuwaiti water carriers from importing water to Kuwait City for three days.<sup>544</sup>

Water shortage crises in the 1930s forced Ahmad al-Jabir to make every effort to find a solution to this problem. The easiest answer for him was to consult the British through the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), which duly recommended a nationwide survey to find local sources of fresh water. The KOC's second recommendation was to construct a huge storage tank for the water imported from Iraq. The third recommendation was to build a desalination plant near Kuwait City. Hoping for a fast and easy alternative to dependence on Iraq, Ahmad al-Jabir agreed to the first and second recommendations.<sup>545</sup>

Ahmad al-Jabir supported the oil company's efforts to discover local sources of water, and to build a water tank near Kuwait City, but a survey study for alternative local sources of water by the oil company proved that the areas surrounding the City of Kuwait lacked fresh water. Therefore Ahmad al-Jabir built a water storage tank near Kuwait City and by the end of the 1940s had also expanded the fleet of Kuwaiti water carriers. In addition he was studying a commission to construct a small desalination plant similar to one that the oil company was building in the City of Ahmadi in 1949.<sup>546</sup> In 1948, Ahmad al-Jabir also looked into the

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<sup>544</sup> From the Acting Ruler, Abdullah al-Salim, Kuwait to PA, Kuwait, 16 July 1935, IOR: R/15/5/131 (British Library, London); Al-Ghunaim, *Tarsiym al Hadud al Kuwayityyah*, 44-5.

<sup>545</sup> Report on fresh water supplies at Kuwait, undated, London: FO 371/68324 (TNA, London); Hatim. *Min Huna Bada'at al-Kuwayyt*, 156-9.

<sup>546</sup> C A P Southwell (Kuwait Oil Company, Kuwait) to Mr Pyman (Foreign Office, London), 4 October 1948, London: FO 371/68324 (TNA, London).

feasibility of granting a concession for a joint venture between Kuwaiti and Iraqi traders to transport water from Shatt al-Arab to Kuwait City.<sup>547</sup>

Unfortunately, most of Ahmad al-Jabir's efforts to solve the problem of water shortages in Kuwait were not entirely successful, and Kuwait remained dependent on water imported from Iraq, since Ahmad al-Jabir's decisions had failed to rid Kuwait of links with Iraq. However, Ahmad al-Jabir's solutions to the water shortage problem in Kuwait were only temporary and Kuwait remained dependent on Iraqi water from the Shatt al-Arab.

After Ahmad al-Jabir's death in 1950, his successor Abdullah was left with many problems. There were two reasons why Ahmad al-Jabir had been unable to solve Kuwait's problems. One was his overconfidence in the British, a problem that was exacerbated by the political differences between the British representatives in Kuwait and Iraq, as already noted. The other reason was his failure to implement initiatives that would settle these problems. Most of the solutions had been initiated either by Britain or Iraq. Ahmad al-Jabir did take a hard-line position on defending Kuwait's rights, and always refused to accommodate Iraq, but his inability to successfully advance his country's mutual interests with Iraq to the British authorities prevented any chance of solving the problems. Ahmad al-Jabir always listened to British advice and tried to resolve the issues posed by the Iraqis but did not seek to create initiatives to solve those problems. Thus, although Ahmad al-Jabir's rule lasted for 30 years, he left all of his country's disagreements with Iraq unresolved.

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<sup>547</sup> Translation of the application to the Ruler of Kuwait for supplying water to Kuwait, 26 June 1948, FO 371/68324 (TNA, London).

#### **7.4. Abdullah's Strategies, 1950-65**

This section highlights the significant role that Abdullah played in changing the direction of Kuwait's foreign policy in order to resolve the most important outstanding issues between Kuwait and Iraq during his reign from 1950 to 1965. The issue of improving the Kuwaiti-Iraqi relationship had been one of the dominant concerns in Ahmad al-Jabir's political decision-making and continued to be so for his successor Abdullah. Based on the high levels of tension in the relationship between Kuwait and Iraq during Abdullah's era, especially during the crisis in 1961, this section analyses Abdullah's strategies before and after this event, in order to illustrate their impact on Kuwait's stability and the overall status of the relationship between Kuwait and its northern neighbour. The discussion also focuses on the type of relationship Abdullah created with Iraq and the effects of the solution to the outstanding problems by the end of 1965.

In order to redefine Kuwait's strategies concerning outstanding problems with Iraq, Abdullah's first decision, in the initial months of his rule, (particularly during April 1950), was to ask the British to reopen the process of resolving the issue of Kuwait's boundary with Iraq. Abdullah also sought to take advantage of the opportunity provided by efforts to solve Kuwait's boundary issues with Saudi Arabia, which had emerged in the late 1940s. In 1948, Kuwait had reached an agreement regarding the boundary that gave oil exploration concessions in the neutral zone between the two countries to the American Independent Oil Company in connection with Kuwait's rights and to the Pacific Western Oil Corporation in connection with Saudi Arabia's rights. This agreement significantly improved relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia since the rights in the Neutral Zone became divided equally between both countries in any oil or gas

product. That is, each had the right to one half.<sup>548</sup> This improvement in the status of the Kuwaiti–Saudi boundary encouraged Abdullah to try to resolve the issue of his country’s boundary with Iraq as quickly as possible.

Abdullah’s request met with a positive reaction from the British authorities in the Gulf and also the Foreign Office in London. The Political Agent showed Abdullah the explanatory map of 1940, which was discussed by the British and presented to the Iraqi government, as the starting point for discussing Kuwait’s rights. For Britain, the key motivation for reopening the discussion regarding the Kuwaiti–Iraqi boundary issue was the lack of any interdepartmental dispute in its administration, since by 1948, the responsibility for its relations with the Gulf Arab states had been transferred from the British Government of India in Delhi to the Foreign Office in London. This transition removed all previous disputes between the British departments on the issue of the Kuwait–Iraq boundary.<sup>549</sup>

Unlike Ahmad al-Jabir’s hard-line stance on the status of his country’s boundary with Iraq, Abdullah was willing, initially, to take a different position, and accept the map of 1940, when he agreed to the port of Umm Qasr being positioned within Iraqi borders. However, he made some observations about the second point of contention concerning the border between Kuwait and Iraq with regard to the location of the Kuwait border south of Safwan, pointing out that that at this point Kuwait’s boundary would be no more than a mile south of the Safwan oasis. The British authorities had already taken this consideration into account, and added it to the new interpretation of the interval boundary between Kuwait and Iraq. In the light of

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<sup>548</sup> Memorandum written in Jidda, Saudi Arabia, 23 March 1953, US National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59: Political Affairs: Government—Trusteeship, 1950-54, Kuwait. The document was extracted from *Confidential U.S.*, 140-4.

<sup>549</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 95-6.

Abdullah's demand to speed up the process of finding a solution to his country's problem with Iraq in July 1951, the British reaffirmed the boundary. In addition, through its Consulate in Baghdad, the British submitted the new map to the Iraqi government in December 1951 and identified the point of the border south of Safwan to be one thousand metres south of the old Iraqi customs hut.<sup>550</sup>

The Iraqi government's reaction to the new amendments was positive at least in terms of the points of contention south of Safwan and south of the port of Umm Qasr. However, recognition of the new map was pre-conditional. In order to continue the Iraqi policy from 1938 to build the port of Umm Qasr and secure its path to the Gulf, Iraq demanded that Kuwait cede or lease the islands of Warba and Bubiyan, or land in another area of the boundary between Kuwait and Iraq, in exchange for financial compensation. However, the Iraqis argued with the British, pointing out their right to a safe corridor for their port into the Persian Gulf. The Iraqis also stated that their offer was based on the British recommendation during the 1938 boundary discussion for the need to solve this problem personally with the ruler of Kuwait by compensating him financially or materially. Thus, the Iraqi government's reaction did not contribute to solving the issue, but rather further extended the tense relations with Kuwait.<sup>551</sup>

In the spring of 1952, Abdullah paid a visit to Iraq. Abdullah, King Faisal II, and Crown Prince Abdul Ilah discussed the property of the al-Sabah in the Fao peninsula and the water question. In general, the discussions seemed cordial, especially at the end of the visit when the Iraqi government expressed its willingness to supply Kuwait with all the fresh water that it needed from Shatt al-Arab, as long as Kuwait paid for the pipeline and the cost of transporting

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<sup>550</sup> Ibid, 90-2.

<sup>551</sup> British Embassy, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 21 August 1952, London: FO 1016/39 (TNA, London).

the water.<sup>552</sup> This official statement was the beginning of the Iraqi government's use of the issue of supplying fresh water to Kuwait to pressurise the Kuwaitis into marking the boundary between their countries.

One of the most important results of Abdullah's visit to Iraq was the calming of tensions over the boundary. Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations were at their best in 1953, when the Iraqi government sent a letter to the British authorities announcing the withdrawal of its demands to cede or lease the islands of Warbah and Bubiyan as a condition for the boundary settlement. This statement encouraged Britain to resolve the boundary dispute between Kuwait and Iraq once and for all. They therefore contacted the Iraqi government to begin the process of expediting the final demarcation of the boundary. Unfortunately, the Iraqi government's stand on the issue did not last long, since it failed to respond to the British correspondence calling for the formation of a joint demarcation committee with Kuwait in 1953. To date, no one has been able to interpret this trend in Iraq, but the result was that the Iraqi government put its disagreement with Kuwait into an open political field in order to achieve its objectives and conditions on the issue of the border demarcation. In fact, these goals had not appeared on the political scene between Kuwait and Iraq until the mid-1950s.<sup>553</sup>

In April 1955, the Iraqi government made a new offer to resolve the boundary dispute with Kuwait: it would extend its boundary four kilometres into Kuwait's territories starting from south Safwan to south Umm Qasr to the south of Warba Island, thereby taking all of Khor

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<sup>552</sup> Foreign Office (1953), *Historical Summary of Events in the Persian Gulf* (PG), 93.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

Abdullah. The Iraqis offered to rent these spaces from Kuwait for 99 years as a major condition of a recognition of the boundary map of 1951 (see Figure 7 below).<sup>554</sup>

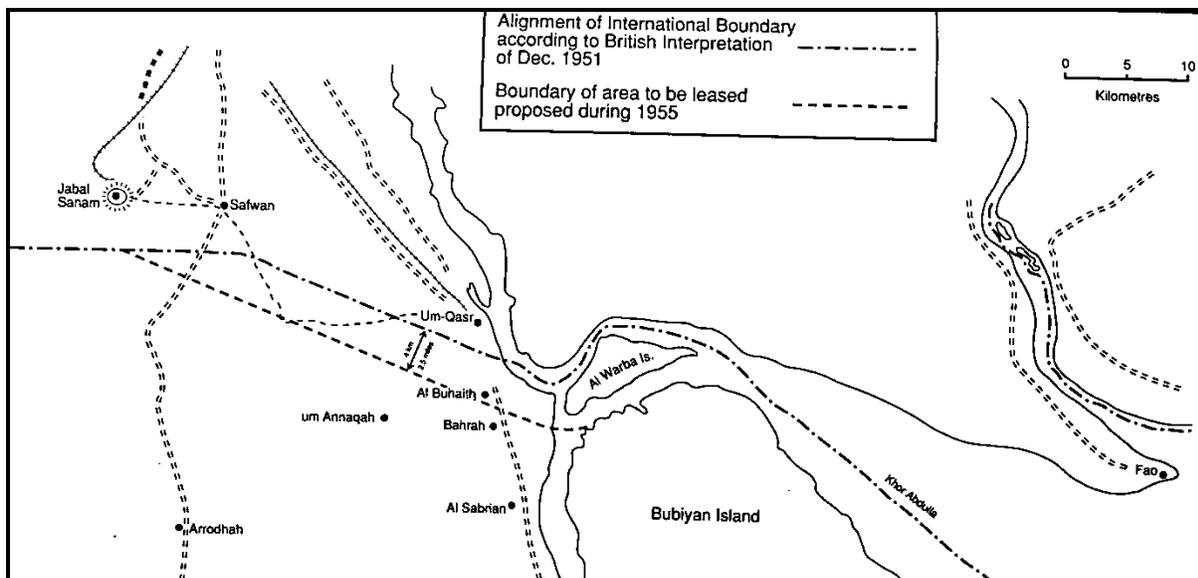


Figure 7: Map showing the Iraqi offer to lease Warba Island and a four Kilometre strip of Northern Kuwaiti land territory.<sup>555</sup>

The Iraqis' 1955 offer was not a coincidence, rather it was the result of the verification of a set of events. The first event was the occurrence of an armed clash between the Kuwaiti and Iraqi border customs guards stationed in the centre of both Umm Qasr and al-Qashaniah in May 1954.<sup>556</sup> This led to the death of an Iraqi customs guard and sparked resentment within the Iraqi newspapers and public opinion, thereby pressurising the Iraqi government to resolve the boundary issue with Kuwait quickly. Secondly, this offer coincided with both countries reporting significant oil discoveries near their border zone. Iraq discovered the Rumaila oil field in southern Zubair in 1954, and Kuwait discovered the Raudhatain oil field in 1955. These

<sup>554</sup> British Embassy, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 24 May 1955, FO 371/114644 (TNA, London).

<sup>555</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 95.

<sup>556</sup> Iraq-Kuwait frontier Incidents, 1954, FO 1016/364 (TNA, London).

discoveries led experts to believe that more discoveries would be made in the border zone between Kuwait and Iraq, which caused both countries to review their rights on both sides of the border, based on earlier exchanges of letters in 1932 and subsequent interpretations in 1940 and 1951.<sup>557</sup>

At the end of 1955, the British authorities sent Abdullah the Iraqi offer regarding the demarcation of the border, with the addition of a project to supply Kuwait with fresh water from Shatt al-Arab. This British decision aimed to resolve the boundary issue once and for all by achieving a balance of interests for the two parties involved: the Iraqis would provide fresh water to Kuwait in return for Kuwait leasing its territories to Iraq.<sup>558</sup>

Initially, Abdullah accepted the British proposal while referring the Iraqi offer to a committee of fifty senior Kuwaiti notables headed by Yousef bin Isa to review and vote on it. This committee of notables approved the offer by 35 votes to 15.<sup>559</sup> Abdullah not only wanted to hear the Kuwaiti notables' opinion, but he also wished to know the views of his senior officials; therefore he discussed this latest offer at the Supreme Council, which in 1956 was composed entirely of members of the ruling family. In principle, The Supreme Council refused to link the water supply project from Shatt al-Arab and lease Kuwaiti territory to Iraq. Faced with this difference of opinion, Abdullah formally rejected the Iraqi offer.<sup>560</sup>

The main reason for this rejection was Kuwait's desire to impose conditions on the government of Iraq. The chance came in 1955 when Abdullah received a proposal from the Iraq Petroleum Company to extend an oil pipeline from the southern Iraqi fields to the port of

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<sup>557</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 96-7.

<sup>558</sup> British Embassy, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 24 May 1955, FO 371/114644 (TNA, London).

<sup>559</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 30 December 1955, FO 371/120598 (TNA, London).

<sup>560</sup> PR, Bahrain to Foreign Office, 24 May 1956, FO 371/120638 (TNA, London).

Ahmadi in Kuwait,<sup>561</sup> which enabled him to strengthen his country's position in the border discussions. Meanwhile, in 1956, Kuwait managed to achieve a local strategy for water sufficiency. In 1953, Kuwait had opened one of the largest seawater desalination plants in the world, in Shuwaikh.<sup>562</sup> With this achievement, the Shatt al-Arab fresh water project lost its national security importance, leaving only the political necessity for Kuwait and Iraq. Abdullah insisted on stressing the importance of balance in the agreement with Iraq, and added a condition to the Iraqi offer by proposing to export the Iraqi oil in Kuwait, rather than leasing Kuwait's islands, in exchange for fresh water from Iraq.<sup>563</sup>

Abdullah's ability to add this condition highlighted the failure of the British solution to the boundary dispute; British efforts had lacked the most important factors for creating a balance between Kuwait and Iraq, and this was clear not only to Abdullah, but also to the Iraqi authorities. The Iraqis refused to link the Shatt al-Arab fresh water project to the border demarcation, and<sup>564</sup> Abdullah showed his ability to prioritise his country's interests by adding his own terms to the issue of importing fresh water from the Shatt al-Arab, not just to the British, but also to the Iraqi government. Abdullah's decision on the agreement created a political balance of interests as the Iraqis were no longer the only ones to have the upper hand. Since Kuwait had agreed to export Iraqi oil through the port of al-Ahmadi, it was able to put pressure on the Iraq government. Abdullah submitted his adjustment to his offer to the Iraqi government and in return, the Iraqis refused to go further with the discussion over the 1955 settlement of the border

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<sup>561</sup> British Embassy, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 4 October 1955, FO 371/114644 (TNA, London).

<sup>562</sup> PA, Kuwait to PR, Bahrain, 23 January 1956, FO 371/120598 (TNA, London).

<sup>563</sup> PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 16 August 1955, FO 371/114645 (TNA, London).

<sup>564</sup> British Embassy, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 4 July 1955, FO 371/114644 (TNA, London).

issue.<sup>565</sup> Had the Iraqi government agreed to Abdullah's terms, this situation would have made a radical change in the relations between Kuwait and Iraq.

Iraq and Kuwait's difference of views together with the duration of their inflexible discussions in 1956, poisoned their relations. The Iraqi government adhered to the terms of its offer in 1955 while Kuwait insisted on adding its adjustment to that offer. This dispute contributed to the delay in the effort to find a final formula of understanding, in 1956 and this situation also confirmed the British authorities' failure to find a solution for the long-standing border issue.

The tension between Kuwait and Iraq lasted until 14 July 1958, the date of the Iraqi coup against the Hashemite monarchy. A year earlier, Abdullah had asked the British Government to appoint a joint committee to mark the line between his country and Iraq as soon as possible.<sup>566</sup> One of the main reasons behind the renewal of Abdullah's demand, after the commotion of 1956, was the arrival of a new government in Iraq, headed by the Prime Minister, Nuri al-Saeid. Abdullah believed in Nuri al-Saeid's ability to resolve the boundary dispute as he had a strong relationship with the British and had signed the exchange of letters in the agreement of 1932.<sup>567</sup>

In spite of his confidence in Nuri al-Saeid, Abdullah's request in 1957 once again failed to elicit a positive reaction from the Iraqi government, which continued to delay all efforts to resolve this issue. The Iraqi government had always made it clear that they could not accept frontier demarcation as a pre-condition of an agreement over the Iraqi oil pipeline to Ahmadi. This statement and other previous endeavours by Iraq had contributed to delaying the settlement

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<sup>565</sup> British Embassy, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 2 July 1957, FO 371/126961 (TNA, London).

<sup>566</sup> PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 14 March 1957, FO 371/126960 (TNA, London).

<sup>567</sup> Note by Foreign Office entitled Kuwait Water and Pipeline Schemes by Mr A R Walmsley, 18 March 1957, FO 371/126960 (TNA, London).

of the boundary issue.<sup>568</sup> However, this effort did not compare in scale to the demands of the Iraqi government in April 1958 for the annexing of Kuwait. This claim was the product of the failure of the monarchy to resolve its problems with Kuwait from 1932 to 1958.

In February 1958, Iraq and Jordan founded the Hashemite Union to counter the spread of Arab nationalism and Nasserism in the region. The Hashemite Union was a reaction to the formation of the UAR (Egypt plus Syria) in February 1958. At this point, Iraq tried to convince Abdullah to join the Hashemite Union, and to accept Iraqi military protection from danger posed by the Arab nationalists. However, Iraq's effort failed due to Abdullah's resistance.<sup>569</sup> It was the Iraqi regime's failure that was one of the most important factors behind its claim on the whole of Kuwait on the grounds that it was an integral part of Iraq. Iraq hoped that this claim would demolish all the solutions proposed by Kuwait and Britain. Thus Abdullah had only to wait for a better opportunity.

Abdullah did not have to wait long before trying again to resolve the boundary issue and improve his country's relationship with Iraq through a new policy. A fierce coup against Iraq's monarchy was carried out by a group of Army officers known as "the Free Officers". Abdul Karim Qassim led the coup and took over the leadership of Iraq thereby eliminating any chance of a solution based on the efforts of the British to serve as an intermediary between Kuwait and Iraq, since the fall of the pro-western regime in 1958 had given rise to an anti-western government which now worked to eliminate the British influences in Iraq's external and internal

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<sup>568</sup> Foreign Office note by Mr Ormsby Gore, 10 October 1957, FO 371/126938 (TNA, London).

<sup>569</sup> British Ambassador, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 14 May 1958; British Ambassador, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 16 May 1958, FO 371/132775 (TNA, London).

affairs.<sup>570</sup> So with this development, it was Abdullah's duty to introduce a new policy in connection with his country's relations with the new regime in Iraq, this time without the help of the British.

The first signs of change in Abdullah's strategy came only days after the Iraqi coup. Abdullah refused to allow British forces to dispatch troops to his country as a precautionary strategy against any probable chance of a repeat of the Iraqi coup in Kuwait. This reaction was contrary to the evolution of events in the wider Arab region, where British troops had been sent to Jordan and American forces had been deployed to Lebanon to contain the expansion of Soviet influence in the region.<sup>571</sup> In contrast, Abdullah, like his predecessors since 1899, was proud that he had never asked for military aid from the British. Since Abdullah was able to demonstrate the strength and durability of his internal security when Kuwait was not exposed to any disturbances, he established political relations with the other Arab countries, thus avoiding Britain's control over the management of his country's foreign affairs, and in October 1958, Abdullah had gained control of his country's foreign affairs with Iraq.<sup>572</sup>

In the first days of the Iraqi coup Abdullah had shown his willingness to visit Iraq with the aim of improving relations with its new regime. Following his visit to Iraq there was a period of exchanged messages and official correspondence with the new Iraqi regime. Through

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<sup>570</sup> PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 31 July 1958: Ruler of Kuwait's views of membership of Arab League, and response of PA, FO 371/132555 (TNA, London).

<sup>571</sup> Foreign Office, London to PR, Bahrain, 27 June 1958, FO 371/132764 (TNA, London).

<sup>572</sup> Extract from Persian Gulf monthly report covering period 3 July to 6 August 1958, FO 371/132757 (TNA, London).

this correspondence the new regime in Iraq recognised the sovereignty of Kuwait by asking for a Consulate to be set up.<sup>573</sup>

Another indication that relations between Kuwait and Iraq were improving by the end of the 1950s was the support given by Iraq's new regime to Abdullah's efforts to move Kuwait toward independence. Iraq's new regime also backed the nomination of Kuwait to a number of international institutions and organisations. Such developments made Abdullah and the Kuwaitis keen to receive the new Iraqi regime's support for Kuwait's independence from the treaty of 1899 that tied them to the British.<sup>574</sup>

Despite these signs of improvement in relations between Kuwait and Iraq during the first years of Qassim's regime, Abdullah sensed that Iraq had become apprehensive early in 1961. In the context of Foreign Office discussions on Kuwait's status after independence in February 1961, concern was raised about the possibility of enrolling Kuwait in the Commonwealth. In fact, Abdullah had expressed his interest in joining the Commonwealth to the British, but in the end he decided not to pursue the matter. Overall, a summary of a British Government's cabinet discussion was leaked to the Arab media, with a series of rumours emphasising the British plan to put Kuwait under the umbrella of the Commonwealth immediately after it had gained independence. This provoked an aggressive reaction from the new Iraqi government, which in April 1961 voiced its profound condemnation of the survival of aspects of imperialism in Kuwait at the point of its acquiring independence. Inside Kuwait, Abdullah hastened to issue a formal declaration to the people denying any idea of putting Kuwait under the umbrella of the

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<sup>573</sup> Al-Ghunaim, *Tarsiym al Hadud al Kuwayityyah*, 53-5.

<sup>574</sup> M.M. Alani. *Operation Vantage: British Military Intervention in Kuwait*, 1961 (Surbiton:LAAM, 1990), 53; Government of Kuwait, *The Kuwaiti-Iraqi Crisis and The Truth about the Crisis between Kuwait and Iraq* (Kuwait: Printing and Publishing Department, n.d), 11; Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965*, 95.

Commonwealth countries and that Kuwait would be an independent, Islamic, and Arab state beyond the imperialist sprawl in the region.<sup>575</sup>

Upon Kuwait's independence, Abdullah sensed the importance of taking safety measures against any further Iraqi hostility and intervention. In his exchange of letters with the British on 19 June 1961, Abdullah terminated the 1899 treaty and declared Kuwait's independence while calling for a new friendship agreement with them. The new agreement maintained Britain's readiness to intervene to protect Kuwait whenever its ruler requested.<sup>576</sup> In practice, this term soon proved to be useful with the emergence of the Iraqi government's ambitions to threaten the security and stability of Kuwait in the summer of 1961.

A few days after Kuwait's independence, the Iraqi Prime Minister, Qassim gave a speech in which he claimed Iraq's historical right to annex Kuwait. On 25 June 1961, the Iraqi prime minister pointed out Kuwait's dependency on the Basra province, and therefore on all of Iraq. Qassim argued that Kuwait's rulers had excluded this part of Basra province after Mubarak al-Sabah had signed the treaty of 1899 with the British authorities without the knowledge of the Ottoman authorities.<sup>577</sup> Qassim's claim to Kuwait as an integral part of Iraq was a reiteration of the efforts of previous regimes in 1938 and 1958. However, in this case, the question was: were Iraq's ambitions serious enough for it to actually use the power of its armed forces against Kuwait?

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<sup>575</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 104.

<sup>576</sup> 'Anglo-Kuwaiti', Minute by Beaumont, 17 April 1961; Foreign Office, London to PR, Bahrain, 28 April 1961, London: 371/156835 (TNA, London).

<sup>577</sup> Muhammad al-Adhami. *Al-Kuwait w Muhawalat 'Awdat ha Ela al'Araq fi al Tarikh al-Hadith w al-Mu'aser*. In *al-Haqiqah al-Trarikhiyah li 'Araqiat al-Kuwait* (Bagdad: Wazarat al-thaqafah w al-e'alam, 1990), 89-124.

Although Qassim had stated in his announcement that Iraq's right to annex Kuwait would only occur through peaceful means, Abdullah and the ruling family had interpreted it as seriously threatening Kuwait with military occupation. Rumours that Iraqi forces were moving to Basra contributed to an increase in the ruler's and the Kuwaiti's fear of occupation.<sup>578</sup> In the light of this series of events, Abdullah did not hesitate to request the British to protect Kuwait from an imminent military threat from its northern neighbour, Iraq. In July 1961, approximately 5,000 British troops arrived in Kuwait to secure its northern and western borders with Iraq.<sup>579</sup>

The Iraqi threat and the arrival of the British forces had created a major political problem for Kuwait in the regional and global arenas. As a consequence of the crisis in 1961 created by the Iraqi claim, Kuwait faced a problem in the world's recognition of its independence and liberation from Britain. As the main ally of the Iraqi regime under the control of Qassim, the Soviet Union questioned the extent of Kuwait's independence and its isolation from British imperialist control. This was clear from the Soviet veto rejecting Kuwait's request to become a candidate to the United Nations in 1961. The Arab league also condemned the landing of British troops in Kuwait, but the UAR and Saudi Arabia hastened to support Kuwait as an independent state. The Arab League promised to support Kuwait's rights against Iraq and its candidacy in the international arena, albeit with conditions. To ensure their full support, the Arab League demanded that Kuwait, (1) join the Arab League, (2) solve its problem with Iraq within the framework of the efforts of the Arab League, and (3) withdraw British troops from Kuwait's territories as soon as possible.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> British Consulate, Basra to Foreign Office, London, 27 Jun 1961, DEFE 11/411(TNA, London).

<sup>579</sup> PA, Kuwait to Foreign Office, London, 30 June 1961, FO 371/156874 (TNA, London).

<sup>580</sup> Al-Ghunaim, *Tarsiym al Hadud al Kuwayityyah*, 55-9.

Facing this situation, Abdullah hastened to support the efforts of the Arab League to resolve the problem through the achievement of all these conditions. Kuwait joined the Arab League in July 1961, while the Arab League decided to send joint forces to protect the Kuwaiti border with Iraq. These Arab forces arrived in Kuwait without delay, thereby coinciding with the start of a gradual withdrawal of British forces that ended their final mission in November 1961. The arrival of the Arab forces as an alternative to the British garrison was no longer perceived as political support for Kuwait as a new independent state. The Arab forces in Kuwait were led by a Saudi general and numbered no more than 2,500 fighters from UAR, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Sudan.<sup>581</sup>

Many recent studies have minimised the effect of Iraq's desire to occupy Kuwait, based on the lack of any Iraqi Army forces or customs guards along the boundary zone. Such studies argue that the Iraqi government sought to prevent any clashes between them and the British or the Arab forces by withdrawing all their border guards to Basra. Thus, there were no forces or customs guards along the border with Kuwait to support the ambitious tone of the Iraqi president. In light of the lack of any disturbances or armed clashes along the border, after a brief period the Arab troops gradually withdrew from Kuwait.<sup>582</sup>

In fact the tension between Kuwait and Iraq lasted until the fall of Qassim's regime in a coup led by Abdul Salam Arif in 1963. For two years before this coup, Abdullah had worked seriously to install and fortify the institutions of the state of Kuwait, while resolving the outstanding problems with neighbouring countries and the world. The first Constitution in the Gulf that was introduced as a compromise between the political movements and the ruling

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

<sup>582</sup> Alani. *Operation Vantage*, 107-9; Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 107-8; al-Adhami. *Al-Kuwaitiyat w Muhawalat*, 89-124.

family, was separated into the three authorities in the country: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial. Abdullah was also able to advance a regional and global diplomatic staff for Kuwait after independence, which sought to discuss and demonstrate the country's foreign issues with the Arab countries and the world. Thus, he presented an improved picture of Kuwait's status as an independent State, with a clear system governed by its constitution. With such achievements, he had brought Kuwait to a position that elicited respect and appreciation from the local people, the Arabs, and the world.<sup>583</sup>

By 1963, Abdullah had managed to build a new regional and global status for Kuwait. He was able to separate Kuwait gradually from the British orbit to enable it to merge into the Arab and Islamic spheres. Abdullah's ability to change Kuwait's status had reflected positively on his winning new regional and global friends and allies. After the Soviets had used their veto to reject Kuwait's application to the UN, Abdullah focused on building a strong relationship with this entity, and in 1963 Kuwait became the first country in the Gulf to establish a relationship with the Soviet Union. Kuwait was therefore recognised as the 111th applicant to the UN organization. Abdullah also benefited from his country's oil wealth in achieving his political goals. He reinvested the Kuwaiti oil profits abroad, which contributed to garnering the support of several Arab States to Kuwait's rights in its issues with Iraq. As noted before, Abdullah also managed to establish the Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Economic Development, which became the most important active factor in Kuwait's foreign policy. This fund created new political and economic relations with the Arab countries through Kuwait's support for both large, and small-scale development projects in the Arab countries by awarding grants and low-interest loans.<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> Malchomian, *Derasat fi Tarikh Al-Kuwait*, 176-7.

<sup>584</sup> Mansfield, *Kuwait Vanguard*, 63.

After Abdullah had strengthened Kuwait's image he concentrated on enhancing Iraq's recognition of Kuwait's independence. Abdullah's opportunity came in 1963, when a fierce coup announced the end of the Qassim's threat, and the advent of a more tolerant rule and relations with the West and the Arab countries led by Arif.<sup>585</sup> During the first period of the new regime, Abdullah managed to sign an agreement with Iraq that recognised Kuwait's independence and the nature of its northern and western boundary. This agreement reaffirmed the boundary based on the exchange of letters in 1932. This agreement was an improvement in the relations between Kuwait and Iraq. The Iraq government would withdraw its claim to the islands of Warbah and Bubiyan, and its claim over Kuwait.<sup>586</sup>

Unfortunately, during Kuwait's 1963 discussions with Iraq, the main concern for Abdullah's delegate, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Kuwait Sabah al-Salim, had been to ensure the recognition of Kuwait's independence and its borders. This limited debate succeeded in building a regional and global status for Kuwait by earning Iraq's recognition and avoiding the Soviet veto in Kuwait's enrolment into the United Nations. However, the Kuwaiti-Iraqi discussion failed to build a unified political decision between Kuwait and Iraq to demarcate the border, or to find a consistent basis for the formation of a joint committee between Kuwait and Iraq that would aim to demarcate the boundary on the ground, based on their previous agreements.<sup>587</sup>

The inability of Kuwait and Iraq to set the boundary became Abdullah's main concern in his last period of rule in the mid-1960s. When he died in 1965, so did the idea of resolving the remaining issue with Iraq. As one of the last major decisions in his final year, Abdullah sent a

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<sup>585</sup> Khadduri, *Republican Iraq*, 250-1.

<sup>586</sup> Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 107-8.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

high-level diplomatic delegation to Iraq to establish a joint committee to demarcate the border between Kuwait and Iraq. The main reason for this was Kuwait's great success in improving its relations with Saudi Arabia. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia set up a joint committee to demarcate their frontiers once and for all at the end of 1964. Unfortunately, in contrast to the Saudis' efforts to eliminate their outstanding problems with Kuwait, the Iraqis were dubious of Abdullah's offer and would not cooperate. The Iraqi government attached a condition to the demarcation of the border to the effect that Kuwait must cancel its protection agreement with the British, since this went against the efforts of the Arab countries to ensure unity and cooperation.<sup>588</sup>

## **7.5. Conclusion**

This chapter examined Abdullah's efforts to deal with the unsolved political cases between Kuwait and Iraq from 1950 to 1965. It showed how and why in contrast to his predecessors, Abdullah introduced his policies with caution, in order to improve Kuwait's relations with Iraq. Among the most serious political problems that Abdullah faced during his reign was the demarcation of the border between his country and Iraq. Also there were the outstanding problems of the al-Sabah date plantations in Iraq and Kuwait's water shortage and dependence on water from the Shatt al-Arab. These matters had surfaced as problems between Kuwait and Iraq after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in World War I and worsened significantly during the reign of Ahmad al-Jabir from 1921 to 1950.

From his first days in office Abdullah aimed at solving his country's outstanding problems with Iraq by following a different path from that of his predecessor. He was much more flexible in dealing with the Iraqis and with British offers for solutions to the problems.

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid, 112-3.

However, Iraqi procrastination in all the efforts to reach appreciable solutions to the problems with Kuwait produced many setbacks in the two countries' relations.

Even though Abdullah's new direction had apparently improved Kuwaiti-Iraqi political relations during the first five years of the 1950s, this relationship did not last long, and after 1955 ended in deadlock. In this year, the monarchical regime in Iraq endeavoured to force Kuwait to accept its offer regarding the border problem. Also, in 1958 the monarchical regime in Iraq demanded that Abdullah join the Hashemite Union and impose Iraqi military protection on Kuwait. The discovery of oil in the border zone, plus Iraqi intentions to annex Kuwait played a major role in the deterioration of political relations. Nevertheless, the fall of the monarchy in July 1958 eased the tense relations between Kuwait and Iraq.

The good relation between Kuwait and Iraq was short lived in the late 1950s. When Abdullah announced his country's intention to proceed towards full independence from Britain in 1959, the new republican regime led by Colonel Qassim in Iraq revealed an ambitious idea to annex Kuwait. This ambition was followed by a serious threat to Kuwait's existence, just a few days after its independence in June 1961. During this Crisis, Abdullah showed his ability to channel the Iraqi Prime Minister Qassim's claim into a dead end by gathering the political support of the British and key Arab countries to isolate Iraq's political stand.

Abdullah's opportunity to solve Kuwait's Crisis with Iraq came in 1963 with the overthrow of the Prime Minister Qassim in Iraq. The coup brought in a new regime that was more tolerant towards the Kuwaiti-Iraqi political disagreements. At this moment, Abdullah was able to use his country's massive oil surplus to pay off the new Iraqi regime with a KD 30

million loan. The loan was part of an agreement between Kuwait and Iraq that ensured recognition of Kuwait's independence

Even though this agreement also failed to reach a practical solution to the border problem. Abdullah's determination to gain Kuwait's recognition in 1963 undermined the search for a final solution to the main problem of disagreement with Iraq, 'the demarcation of the border'. This case remained open until the final phase of Abdullah's reign and even continued after his death in 1965. Therefore, it is regarded as one of the failures in Abdullah's political life.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **Conclusion**

This thesis is the most extensive academic study of Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah's political career in English. It argues that Abdullah, one of Kuwait's most important rulers, left behind an important legacy of achievements. Because of this, Kuwaitis have bestowed many titles of honour on him: the Father of Independence, the Father of the Constitution, the Father of the People, and the Architect of Modern Kuwait. This thesis offers new observations about Abdullah's political life, based mainly on the rentier state theory and other political factors and challenges in Kuwait's history between 1895 and 1965. It concludes that Abdullah sought to carve out a new direction for Kuwait, transforming it from a tiny quasi state into a modern welfare, rentier state.

The thesis examined six political challenges that Abdullah overcame in his life in order to achieve his ultimate goal of transforming Kuwait. It analysed all Abdullah's efforts to maintain and stabilize Kuwait's ruling system during a period of great upheaval in the Middle East from 1950 to 1965. Chapters Two to Seven covered the six most important factors and challenges in his political life. Chapter Two examined the influence of Abdullah's childhood and early years of political participation on his political ideas and strategies before his accession in 1950. Chapter Three discussed the tradition of succession in Kuwait as a dominant concept in Abdullah's early political life (1917-50). Chapter Four delineated the domestic obstacles that stood in the way of Abdullah achieving his ultimate goal of transforming Kuwait into a welfare

state that was based on rentierism principles during 1950-65. Chapter Five analysed Abdullah's stabilisation and regulation of the ruling family's power in Kuwait's administration, while Chapter Six discussed the impact of Arab nationalism and Britain on Abdullah's decisions. Chapter Seven covered the impact of Iraq's political problems with Kuwait on Abdullah's decisions during his reign.

The thesis has arrived at a number of conclusions over the course of examining Abdullah's political life. The first conclusion is that Abdullah always believed in assuming power peacefully, as shown in his failed bid for succession in 1921 and in his subsequent successful bid in 1950. Prior to 1962, Kuwait had followed a somewhat unpredictable tradition for succession, that is: the 'most capable person' (*al-Arshad*) of eligible age from a ruler's immediate family that satisfied certain criteria would assume charge of the government after the death of the ruler. In reality, the political balance of power between the candidates for succession played a key role in the successor's assumption of power since the ruler did not name his successor. Abdullah was not eligible for succession until his father, Salim al-Mubarak, became ruler in 1917. Prior to that, Abdullah had been excluded from the line of succession on the grounds that only the children of a ruler can become ruler. From then on, Abdullah passionately believed in his right to become ruler of Kuwait one day. With the help of his father he worked to improve his chances of succession. However, his father's early death in 1921, after ruling for only four years, combined with Abdullah's relatively young age at the time (he was 26 years old), meant that he was not the most capable candidate for succession at the time, which forced him to concede to his cousin, Ahmad al-Jabir (the son of Jabir al-Mubarak, ruler of Kuwait 1915-17), who was older and more experienced.

Had Abdullah assumed power in 1921, he would not have been any different from his predecessors: he would have continued the traditional autocratic system of rule. In the absence of oil revenues before 1946, Abdullah would not have been able to achieve significant change in Kuwait's development, its status, its society, or its ruling system. Abdullah's failure was of a great benefit to his future political life as it had the effect of maturing his political thinking and enriching his knowledge and experiences of the world around him.

Abdullah's failure in his 1921 succession bid did not stop him from asserting his position among the ruling family, particularly in the early years of Ahmad al-Jabir's reign, 1921-23. But Abdullah was unduly hasty in his endeavours to secure himself the best position for succession, a situation that forced him to engage in an asymmetrical dispute-cum-rivalry with Ahmad al-Jabir and the ruling family. This asymmetrical dispute resulted in Abdullah's withdrawal from Kuwait's political life between 1923-35.

During this time, Abdullah was able to improve his relationship with key members of Kuwaiti society as well as his knowledge of the world around him. Abdullah's close relationship with Kuwaiti elites outside the ruling family was probably why he was appointed President of the Legislative Council during 1938-39.

Abdullah returned to the succession question in 1935 mainly due to the dawn, or pre-dawn, of the oil era in Kuwait, when oil prospecting began and hopes of oil were in the air. The start of this new phase in Kuwaiti history, as well as the Kuwaitis' demand for reform in the late 1930s, created an opportunity for Abdullah to return to politics. The Legislative Council of 1938-39 offered the ideal platform for Abdullah's reengagement with politics by championing, indeed

leading, a popular reform movement. The Council enabled Abdullah to persuade the ruler, Ahmad al-Jabir, to delegate some governmental powers.

The second conclusion of this thesis is that Abdullah was the ultimate beneficiary of the reform movement of 1938-39 when Ahmad Al-Jabir dissolved the Legislative Council. The popular protests that followed the dissolution of the Council forced the ruler to delegate a number of his governmental powers to other members of the ruling family. In this way, Abdullah obtained a prominent role in government administration thus eventually securing a strong position from which to bid for the rulership of Kuwait.

Abdullah's new role in government administration between 1939 and 1950 effectively made him deputy ruler and next in line to the throne. There were no longer any major obstacles in his path to assuming power in the future, although he had to earn and maintain the trust and respect of the ruling family and society during this time, which he did with care and patience. When Ahmad al-Jabir died in 1950, there was no opposition to Abdullah's ascendancy to the rulership, although British officials in Kuwait were worried about possible disturbances during the succession process.

The third conclusion is that the groundwork for Abdullah's great political achievements during 1950-65 had, in fact, been laid during 1935-49. For this reason, Abdullah was able very early in his reign to initiate a massive development plan with the help of British experts appointed to the Kuwaiti government. Abdullah started implementing a development plan as early as his first year of rulership in 1950. He managed to overcome most of the obstacles in his path to achieving a complete transformation and modernization of the country by 1963. During

this time, he exhibited his great skill, vision, and care in overseeing Kuwait's development and march towards modernity.

Although Abdullah greatly advanced the development of Kuwait during the first three years of his reign, many Kuwaitis considered his efforts to have been 'rushed'. Kuwait had to face many problems during this period, over and above the ones inherited from Ahmad al-Jabir's reign. For example, during 1953-54, Kuwait faced high levels of corruption, mal-administration, and struggles between the department heads and British experts, a situation that led Abdullah to announce his intention to abdicate twice, in 1953 and again in 1954. Abdullah's desire to abdicate could either be regarded as a weakness or a tactic to reverse his deteriorating control over the course of Kuwait's development. It was most likely the latter; that is, it was an attempt to counter the increasing British influence over Kuwait's administration. The tactic worked, for Abdullah regained and consolidated his control, with the help of the younger generation of the ruling family.

After this episode, the development of Kuwait's administration went through four major stages of improvement, in 1954, 1956, 1959, and 1961. By 1961, Abdullah had succeeded in creating both the necessary infrastructure and the legal structure for Kuwait to become independent. On 19 June 1961, he signed and exchanged letters with the British Government that granted Kuwait full independence. He then built on this achievement by channelling Kuwaiti demands for popular political participation by drafting a national constitution enshrining a new social contract or, 'grand bargain' between the rulers and the ruled in Kuwait. It was the first national constitution in the Gulf.

Kuwait's independence, together with the constitution, enabled Abdullah to regulate the duties and services of the government's institutions for the benefit of all Kuwaitis. Although the constitution was a great achievement for Kuwait, in fact Abdullah had laid the foundations of the welfare state a decade earlier. Although the introduction of the welfare state in Kuwait, the first in the Gulf was regarded as a great achievement domestically and internationally, and had become the model on which the other GCC states would later follow, its implementation did have many shortcomings.

From the beginning of Abdullah's reign, the administrative departments' duties were focused on providing a high standard of social services and distributing the nation's oil wealth to Kuwaiti society. By the end of Abdullah's reign in 1965, the Kuwaiti government was providing: free healthcare, free education, free housing, heavily subsidized utilities, and guaranteed employment for all citizens. It was also distributing a large percentage of the oil revenues within the domestic economy through a policy of land acquisition (introduced in the 1950s), which transferred millions of dollars from public into private hands. These policies created a new form of state in the Gulf: a modern welfare, rentier state, which Kuwaitis were both dependant on and beholden to.

Despite the positive legacy of these reforms, their implementation was anything but perfect, and had a negative impact on Kuwait's development over the long term. The main issue was the State's ability to continue the higher expenditures on the extensive welfare system without extracting taxes from society. The increase in the population and the reduction of oil production to 3 million barrels per a day will push Kuwait to the verge of deficit by 2018. The welfare state system also created two separate classes in Kuwait: the upper and the middle

classes. It created an asset society in the middle class who relied on the State for fiscal support. It created an expectation of guaranteed government employment, which was only sustainable for a few generations; the government's present inability to provide jobs for everyone has resulted in increased popular dissatisfaction with the system and the 'grand bargain' that was enshrined in the constitution. Finally, it increased the State's expenditure on public services and utilities, which, by 2018, will become unsustainable. All of these negative impacts originated from Abdullah's policies in the 1950s.

The fourth conclusion of this thesis is that, in addition to Abdullah's efforts to transform Kuwait, he aimed to stabilise and regulate the power of the ruling family in government administration. Abdullah always believed in the ruling family's right to control the largest portion of power in Kuwait's administration, as evidenced from his activities during his early years of political participation, from 1917 to 1923 and from 1935 to 1950. During these periods, Abdullah engaged in numerous struggles with Ahmad Al-Jabir over power sharing. These struggles ultimately divided the ruling family, since some backed Ahmad al-Jabir, and others backed Abdullah. Although Abdullah's initial attempts in the early 1920s failed, he managed to succeed in the late 1930s when he led a popular reform movement, culminating in the establishment of the Legislative Council of 1938-39. Thereafter, Abdullah always had a share in government power.

After the Legislative Council, Abdullah and his supporters within the ruling family controlled the largest number of appointments in government administration, even larger than Ahmad al-Jabir and his supporters. Over time, departments became the personal fiefdoms of individual shaikhs. When Abdullah himself became ruler in 1950, he sought to address this

problem by appointing British advisors and better regulating the family's role in government. He aimed at increasing his control over the government administration and, to this end, his first decision was to appoint British experts directly accountable to him to ensure that control of the department moved away from the ruling family. However, this tactic proved to be unwise when, in 1952, the British advisers tried to exclude Abdullah himself from administering Kuwait. In the light of this situation, Abdullah had to decide whether to leave the British experts in place, or to subordinate them to the department heads from the ruling family.

By 1954, Abdullah was clear in his objective of banishing the British experts in order to strengthen and expand the role of the ruling family in Kuwait's government administration. The ruling family's opposition to the increasing role of the British experts in the government administration had led Abdullah to take its side and in 1954 he managed to support a group of the younger generation sheikhs in the family to take charge of the newly-established Higher Executive Committee. The aim of this committee was to cut off the extravagant expenditures in the country's budget and to curb the power of senior shaikhs, mainly Fahad al-Salim al-Sabah and Abdullah al-Mubarak al-Sabah, in the administration.

The absence of participation among the senior ruling family shaikhs in this new experimental committee had put the younger generation of shaikhs in the difficult position of being unable to implement the reforms in the country, since the senior shaikhs controlled most of the important departments and refused to cooperate with the committee's decrees for reform. This led Abdullah to create the new Supreme Council for the administration of the country in 1956, which included the senior shaikhs. The Council operated effectively, except for some

disputes over its chairmanship, and was a manifestation of Abdullah's vision of sharing the governorship of the country with the ruling family.

Despite Abdullah's formation of the Council and sharing government with his wider family, he did not in the mid-1950s, believe in sharing government with the people, since he did not believe that Kuwaitis should have a say in the ruling family's management of government. His response to popular demands for a say in government was to crack down on those who demanded it. In turn, this led to an increase in popular grievances against his decisions and his government. In 1959, Arab nationalists held a rally at Shuwaikh High School (now Kuwait University) that was attended by various departmental representatives. At the rally, Jassim al-Qutami delivered a speech on the first anniversary of the United Arab Republic (UAR) of Egypt and Syria, including a part focused on the, 'out dated' shaikhly rulership of Kuwait. This critical speech forced Abdullah to take a revised stand, and defend his family's historic right to rule Kuwait, but making some concessions to the nationalists. He arrested the main nationalist opposition leaders while simultaneously announcing his intention to move the country towards full independence. He also ordered a departmental reshuffle that resulted in the resignation of Fahad al-Salim al-Sabah, one of Abdullah's opponents in government. Later, in 1961, he managed to encourage the resignation of his other main critic in government, Abdullah al-Mubarak al-Sabah.

By 1962, Abdullah had managed to lay the most important foundation for stabilising and regulating the ruling family's power in Kuwait's administration. He ratified Kuwait's constitution, which enshrined the authority of the Amir (as the ruler was now termed) to delegate the executive power, including the appointment of all ministers and the prime minister. Although

some members of the ruling family opposed the constitution, the main opponents, Muhammad al-Ahmad al-Sabah and Mubarak al-Abdullah al-Ahmad al-Sabah eventually left the country. By the end of 1965, therefore, Abdullah had managed to establish a prominent role for the ruling family in Kuwait based on the constitution instead of established tradition. This achievement secured the ruling family's hold on power in Kuwait for generations to come.

The fifth conclusion of this thesis is that Abdullah was a pragmatic believer in Arab unity. Despite this, Arab nationalists in Kuwait and abroad challenged Abdullah on many fronts during his reign. Abdullah had known since the 1920s, that Arab nationalism would eventually gain a popular following in Kuwait. The Arab World's post-war struggle for independence against European colonial powers, together with the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 over Palestine, had greatly affected Kuwaitis. Throughout his reign, Abdullah had to face the constant challenge of balancing his need to accommodate the Arab nationalists' demands for reform and independence with his continuing dependence on British protection, a challenge he largely succeeded in meeting.

At the beginning of the 1950s, Abdullah was very flexible in his decisions regarding Arab nationalist activities. He permitted a number of social clubs to open and newspapers to be established, knowing full well they would make it easier for the nationalists to debate political issues in Kuwait. He also accepted the recruitment of a large number of Egyptian teachers for Kuwait's schools although he was fully aware of their Arab nationalist beliefs, which would influence the thinking of young Kuwaitis. However, the Suez Crisis in 1956 posed Abdullah's biggest domestic challenge. On the one hand, he sympathised with the Arab nationalist cause while, on the other, there was only so much he could do since Kuwait was still under British

protection. Abdullah's response was to permit the police to suppress Arab nationalist demonstrations and strikes while simultaneously condemning Britain's seizure of the Suez Canal. In this way, he found a middle ground, between the nationalists and the British, thereby containing the threats they both posed to his position.

The turning point for Abdullah in his dealings with the Arab nationalists in Kuwait came after a rally in Shuwaikh in 1959. Following the rally, a widespread domestic disturbance broke out in Kuwait city following a clash between the supporters of President Gamal Abdul Nassir (the leader of the Arab nationalist cause) and the supporters of the new Iraqi Prime Minister, Abdal Karim Qassim. At that moment, Abdullah applied repressive measures against the Arab nationalists, first by addressing the nation about the need to move the country towards independence and a brighter future, and then by showing his displeasure with the Arab nationalists by ordering the arrest of its leaders. Two years later, in 1961, following Kuwait's independence, Abdal Karim Qassim asserted Iraq's claim to Kuwait, threatening to annex it. Abdullah joined forces with the Arab nationalists in Kuwait in his defence of Kuwait's independence. This meeting of minds defused the old tensions between the two, improving relations between them and building trust. This paved the way for eventual cooperation. In 1962, Abdullah invited the Arab nationalist leaders to participate in elections for a soon-to-be-established parliament, which would become the National Assembly, as set out in the constitution.

The elections took place in 1963. After the election and the formation of the National Assembly, Abdullah remained a firm supporter of parliament. Despite opposition from an important segment of the ruling family (including Muhammad al-Ahmad and Mubarak al-

Abdullah al-Ahmad), parliament lasted for four years until the end of its elected term in 1967. Abdullah's support for parliament and his defence of the principles of the constitution defined the new order in which all political debate was to take place, and provided much needed stability for the country over the long term.

Internationally, Abdullah had to deal with a very complicated situation, and he also had to find a middle path between the Arab nationalist movement struggling for independence against European colonial control of the Middle East and Britain's protection of Kuwait, which Abdullah still needed. Since the 1920s Kuwait's ruling family had supported various Arab unity causes, although their first engagement with the movement at governmental level was in 1944, a year before the establishment of the Arab League, while their first engagement at a governmental level with a Kuwaiti nationalist movement would have been in 1938, with the formation of the Legislative Council.

As early as 1952, Abdullah announced his intention to collaborate in joint ventures with other Arab countries in fields such as education, health care, and social assistance, the activities that would not harm Kuwait's defence relationship with Britain. That year marked the beginning of Abdullah's efforts to reach rapprochement with Arab nationalists in Kuwait and abroad. He wanted to be more engaged with the Arab world and to demonstrate solidarity with it, lest he be portrayed in the Arab nationalist media as a despot that had been propped up by the British Empire, which would seriously undermine his legitimacy in Kuwait. In seeking this new direction, he had to convince the British Government to change its fifty-year-old policy of isolating Kuwait from the outside world. His initial efforts in the early 1950s met with limited success, and by the late 1950s, the tide had turned and the British Government was convinced it

should relinquish its control of Kuwait's foreign affairs incrementally, in stages, until it reached full control in 1961.

Since the Suez Crisis of 1956, Kuwait had taken a new direction in its relations with the Arab nationalist leaders in the Middle East, especially the President of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser had a significant impact on the evolution of Abdullah's decisions during his reign. Abdullah's new direction prompted a re-evaluation of Kuwait's right to conduct its own relations with Arab states like Egypt in the light of its treaty obligations to the British Government, which gave Britain complete control of Kuwait's foreign relations. Britain's management of Kuwait's foreign affairs had resulted in Kuwait becoming isolated from the Arab world, a situation Abdullah was keen to change due to the increasing popular support for Arab nationalism amongst Kuwaitis.

Although Abdullah understood the importance of Britain as a protector and adviser, he looked for opportunities to reduce Britain's control over Kuwait. He used the Arab nationalists' pressure on him to convince the British Government to concede, lest he and his family be ousted by the nationalists, and replaced by republicans unfriendly with Britain.

Prompted by the Suez Crisis in 1956, Abdullah worked diligently to revise Kuwait's relationship with Britain. A number of Britain's Middle Eastern policies adversely affected Kuwait's internal stability. Although Abdullah valued his country's relationship with Britain, the British Government's policies made Abdullah's position increasingly difficult. For instance, Britain pressed Abdullah to join the Hashemite Union and put Kuwait under Iraqi military protection, and to permit the dispatching of British military troops in the country just after the

Iraqi coup in 1958. Following this pressure from Britain, Abdullah began to question the feasibility and desirability of continuing the status quo with Britain.

In the weeks after the Iraqi coup in July 1958, Abdullah decided he needed to improve his relations with the Arab nationalists. On 23 October 1958, he managed to break the British-imposed political isolation that had kept Kuwait from direct contact with the Arab world. Britain agreed to permit the Kuwaiti government to conduct certain aspects of Kuwait's relations with Arab countries, while it also permitted Kuwait to join a number of international organisations. With these achievements, Abdullah was able to move Kuwait slowly towards full independence in 1961.

Although Abdullah had managed to win Arab support for his country's application to the Arab League in 1961, he failed to achieve the same backing internationally. Iraq interfered with the Soviet veto to reject Kuwait's application for United Nations membership in 1961. Abdullah's response to this setback, after receiving the report of the recommendations from the Kuwaiti delegation to the Arab World's capitals, was to establish the Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) with a KD200 million annual budget. KFAED played a significant diplomatic role in ensuring Kuwait's political recognition by the Arab League and eventually the UN. In 1963, Kuwait finally achieved recognition as a sovereign state by Iraq.

The sixth conclusion of this thesis is that Abdullah paid special attention to his country's poor relationship with Iraq during his reign and he endeavoured to find a solution. He had inherited the on-going border dispute upon becoming ruler; but, this dispute was about more than the delineation of the border, it included issues such as: Kuwait's dependence on the fresh water

supply from Shatt al-Arab (Iraq), the problem of the construction of the Iraqi port of Um Qasr in the disputed border location, and the status of the al-Sabah's date plantation in Fao.

The history of Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations was complicated. Between 1871-1914, Kuwait had been a nominal district of the Ottoman province of Basra. During the British occupation of Iraq (1914-1932), Kuwait had little to fear regarding Ottoman or Iraqi claims of sovereignty over Kuwait, since both territories were under British protection. After Iraqi independence in 1932, however, Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations entered a new phase. That year, the two countries exchanged official letters intended to start the process of delineating the Kuwait-Iraq border and to permit the continuation of Iraqi water supplies to Kuwait. Later, Iraq retreated from these agreements, causing water shortages and delaying efforts to demarcate the border.

When Abdullah assumed power in 1950, he asked Britain to mediate a border settlement with Iraq. Britain agreed and, in 1951, it made some progress in defining the border, although it was unable to persuade the two countries to form a joint border demarcation committee. Abdullah also had to face Iraqi endeavours to blackmail Kuwait repeatedly during the 1950s and 1960s. Iraq used the border dispute and other issues to advance its own interests in gaining territorial and other concessions, as well as secure free maritime passage for its planned port of Um Qasr to the Gulf.

Abdullah did everything he could to secure Kuwait's northern border with Iraq. In 1955, he offered Iraq a proposal to resolve all outstanding political issues. In return for guaranteed fresh water from Iraq, Kuwait would permit the export of its oil through Kuwaiti ports, thereby forming an arrangement of mutual dependency. But Iraq did not trust Kuwait and so declined

the offer, wanting complete control over its oil exports. This refusal remained a stumbling block to improving political relations.

By 1958, Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations had deteriorated considerably. The monarchical government in Iraq put pressure on Abdullah, through the British Embassy in Baghdad, to join the Hashemite Union and to accept Iraqi military protection of Kuwait. Such protection was clearly intended as a counter-measure to the spread of Arab nationalism under the leadership of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was calling for the overthrow of all Arab monarchies.

Abdullah rejected the offer, believing that the Hashemite Union might easily subordinate Kuwait to its own interests, and he cut his relations with Iraq to a minimum by mid-1958. The Iraqi government's response, through a memorandum submitted to the British Government, was to claim the entire territory of Kuwait as an integral part of its own territory, being the successor state to the Ottoman province of Basra, of which Kuwait had been a nominal district.

The July 1958 coup in Iraq temporarily ended the monarchical regime's threat to Kuwait as a sovereign state. Following the coup, Abdullah sought to improve Kuwait's relationship with the new regime in Baghdad, by visiting Iraq personally later that year to view the situation for himself. Following his visit, relations between the two countries improved. The new regime under Prime Minister Abdul Kareem Qassim supported Kuwait's wishes to achieve independence from Britain as well as its desire to join many international organisations.

Early in 1961, however, relations took a turn for the worse. Upon hearing that Kuwait was considering an application to join the British Commonwealth of Nations after independence, the Iraqi government responded aggressively. Abdullah tried to diffuse the situation by denying

the rumour, although it was, in fact, true. Iraq's response made it clear to Abdullah that Kuwait would need outside protection after independence. He therefore negotiated a defence agreement with Britain, to be signed upon independence, in which Britain promised to keep Kuwait under its protective defence umbrella under which the remaining Gulf Arab states remained until 1971. It was a strategy that proved to be one of the most significant decisions of Abdullah's reign because, six days after Kuwait's independence on 19 June 1961, Abdul Kareem Qassim publicly proclaimed Kuwait to be an integral part of Iraq. After hesitating for five days, Abdullah decided to activate the defence treaty and formally request British assistance. The first British troops arrived in Kuwait the following day.

Abdullah's next step was to appeal to the Arab League to intervene in order to resolve the dispute. The problem was that Kuwait was not yet a member and Egypt and Iraq were blocking its membership application. After careful negotiations, Abdullah managed to secure Kuwait's membership in the Arab League by July 1961 and to politically isolate Iraq. He also succeeded in convincing the Arab League to send a military force to replace the British troops by November 1961. After the arrival of the Arab League force, tensions eased along the border with Iraq. Political relations with Iraq were not normalised until 1963, when Abdul Kareem Qassim was overthrown in a coup and the new government recognised the existing border zone with Iraq, which had originally been agreed back in 1932 through an exchange of letters.

With the arrival of a new and more 'friendly' regime in Iraq, Abdullah was able to win the world's support for Kuwait's status on the international stage. He also managed to sign an agreement in 1963 with the new Iraqi government that included the recognition of Kuwait as an independent state. In return, however, Abdullah had to grant the new Iraqi government an

interest-free loan of £30 million. The 1963 agreement guaranteed Kuwait's independence and sovereignty over its territories, based on the 1932 exchange of letters with Iraq. However, Abdullah regarded this agreement as a limited solution since it had no provision for a joint border demarcation committee, like the one he tried to establish in 1951. With the end of 1965 and the death of Abdullah, Kuwait's border problem with Iraq continued, since Abdullah had endeavoured to resolve them solely at the level of guaranteeing Kuwait's independence and sovereignty, and not on the level of closing all the pending political files with Iraq.

An examination of Abdullah's efforts to manage Kuwait's relations with Iraq, results in an impression that overall, he had done extremely well in a difficult situation, and that he changed what he could. His failure to resolve all the outstanding issues with Iraq was not due to the lack of trying; the main stumbling block had been Baghdad's belief that historically, Kuwait belonged to Iraq. Most of the issues he left unresolved remain unresolved to this day, as most dramatically witnessed in the 1990-91 Iraqi occupation of Iraq and its ongoing legacy of mutual distrust.

The thesis advances and explores many different facets of Abdullah's political thoughts all of which are deduced from the way he made decisions regarding the six main factors and challenges in his political life from 1917 to 1965. Abdullah was a highly ambitious politician who, even during the years of political exile (1923-35), always aspired to be ruler of Kuwait one day, and he always seized opportunities to achieve this ultimate goal. He was a generous person who aimed to win over all around him, whether members of the ruling family, merchants, notables, or the general public. He was open-minded and liberal rather than conservative in nature. He did not accept criticism, but he was nonetheless flexible and willing to change his

decisions in the best interests of his country and family. As a modest person, he believed in the benefits of consultation on important matters, whether with the British Government or with Kuwaitis, but would not accept directives imposed on him (mainly by Britain) unless they were necessary for the safety and stability of his country. He was very cautious and pragmatic in his relations with Britain, Iraq, and the Arab world. He was a sensitive person, attune to popular opinion, but intolerant of disloyalty to the ruling family. He entrenched the al-Sabah's hold on power, placing family members in all the key positions in government. He was popular with Kuwaitis because of his egalitarianism and belief that all Kuwaitis should benefit from the nation's oil wealth, and not just the ruling family. He was the first Gulf Arab ruler after King Abdulaziz al-Saud to achieve independence for his country and Kuwait was the first country in Eastern Arabia to become a welfare, rentier state. He is regarded as the Architect of Modern Kuwait and his reign is regarded highly to this very day.

Abdullah's early years of struggle for succession from 1917 to 1950 set an example for other members of his ruling family to follow in their own struggles for succession. Thus, potential questions for further studies might be: what was the nature and consequence of these succession struggles after Abdullah's reign? Who were the candidates to succeed Abdullah and how was the successor chosen? What impact did Abdullah have on his succession and that of all his heirs to the present day? Does the constitution help or complicate the succession process?

Various questions also remain regarding the development of Kuwait as a welfare, rentier state after Abdullah's reign. The thesis showed that, when Abdullah died in 1965, Kuwait was one of the most advanced countries in Eastern Arabia and one of the wealthiest and most prosperous in the Arab World. This achievement leads us to ask many questions: How has the

process of development continued under Abdullah's successors? How do they compare with Abdullah? What was the long-term impact of his reforms and how many of them still remain in place?

Much work also remains to be done on Abdullah's expansion of the ruling family's involvement in the governance of Kuwait. While Abdullah founded a new structure, underpinned by the constitution, for the ruling family's role in government, questions arise about the effectiveness of the structure. How did the ruling family perform in its new role after 1965? Finally, how have Abdullah's successors modified the new structure, particularly the distribution of roles in government among the members of the ruling family and the public?

Another avenue for future research would be an evaluation of the results of Abdullah's containment of, and compromise with, the Arab nationalists in Kuwait. While Abdullah managed to constrain the Arab nationalists through the constitution, questions remain about how the nationalists fared under the new constitution after 1965. Did the balance / alliance Abdullah struck between the government and the nationalists continue after his death? Did the nationalists lead the opposition in parliament? How have they performed in Kuwaiti politics? What was the basis of their opposition after Kuwait's independence in 1961? Has the government lived up to the constitution or has it ignored it?

There are also questions about the legacy of Abdullah's resolution of Kuwait's political issues with Iraq. Abdullah left Kuwait's relations with Iraq in good order when he died in 1965, but the old problems soon resurfaced. How did Abdullah's successors fare in their attempts to resolve these problems? In hindsight, is there anything that Abdullah could have done to resolve

the problem for his successors? Or was it the case that the outstanding issues were not resolvable?

Finally, this thesis presents Abdullah's political career as one of the most distinguished in the history of Kuwait. Abdullah is justly ranked as one of the three most important rulers of the country. Had another shaikh been ruler during the first years of oil, Kuwait's development might have taken a very different path. It was Abdullah's timing and his decisions that made him important: he was the right man at the right time. Without him, it is possible that Kuwait might not exist at all and, if it did, it might not be the prosperous welfare state that it is today. He provided the model for the other GCC states to follow. In this respect, he can be regarded as the father of the welfare, rentier state in the GCC, making him perhaps one of the most important Gulf Arab rulers of the past two hundred years.

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