



# Integrated Country Strategy

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Kuwait

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## 1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Kuwait continues to be among the United States' closest and most important partners in the Middle East. Our close political and defense relationship is underpinned by the U.S. role in liberating Kuwait almost 30 years ago, and the United States military continues to enjoy ample access in Kuwait to pursue U.S. military and security priorities across the region. As Kuwait plays a role as a mediator and leader in the region, our close bilateral relationship is and will remain vital for advancing U.S. strategic interests both regionally and globally.

However, we cannot become complacent in managing our close relationship, and much work remains in the next few years to ensure that Kuwait remains a strong and stable partner, particularly as a new generation of youth rise up through the ranks with no memory of the U.S. role in liberating Kuwait.

Surrounded by Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait has long relied on extra-regional strategic partners for its security and independence. This country faces serious challenges to long-term stability, including diversifying the economy away from oil, protecting the country's traditions of relative openness and tolerance, and the impending succession of the 90-year-old Amir, providing opportunities for youth, preventing terrorist threats, and marginalization of a large expatriate population.

Maintaining depth and longevity in the bilateral relationship will require employing the full range of diplomatic tools to: protect U.S. citizens; counter support for extremists, improve regional stability and security, deepen economic ties, and strengthen Kuwait's domestic stability and security. Since October 2016, we are using our annual Strategic Dialogues to achieve tangible results on all of these priorities and more.

### **Protecting U.S. Citizens**

The primary mission of the Embassy is to protect U.S. citizens living in Kuwait. This includes over 45,000 private U.S. citizens working in Kuwait as military contractors, teachers, and private businessmen and women, and roughly 25,000 U.S. government and military personnel stationed in Kuwait. In the coming years, we will engage with the Government of Kuwait (GoK) to improve bureaucratic hurdles and challenges impacting the lives of private U.S. citizen residents in Kuwait. The Embassy also aims to work with the U.S. military and GoK to improve information sharing and training in order to bolster emergency preparedness.

### **Improving Regional Stability and Security**

A deep and enduring defense partnership with Kuwait is essential for stability and security in the Middle East, a region of utmost importance to U.S. national security. Kuwait hosts the fourth largest deployment of U.S. military personnel overseas, and it continues to provide extraordinary access, basing, and overflight permission in support of U.S. military operations in the region, including those against ISIS and al-Qaeda. Kuwait is also an important partner in dealing with Iran's malign activities in the region.

### **Strengthening Kuwait's Domestic Stability and Security**

Kuwait's tradition of constitutional, participatory governance makes it unique in the region, and its National Assembly is the only functioning elected parliament on the Arabian Peninsula. Kuwait's space for political expression and independent media is classified as "partly free" in a mostly "not free" region. However, tribal and sectarian tensions persist among the Kuwaiti population, and tensions between the National Assembly and the government translate into frequent "grillings" of government ministers. Ensuring domestic stability requires addressing public perceptions of corruption and nepotism and increasing diversity and participation in broader sectors of the Kuwait economy. The Mission will advocate for the civil and legal rights of marginalized or un-empowered populations, including women, stateless Arab Bidoon, and an increasingly alienated expatriate labor force. As memory of the U.S. role in Kuwait's liberation in 1991 fades, we will endeavor to expand and deepen our educational and research ties to reach out to future generations of Kuwaitis. Over 12,800 Kuwaiti students studied in the United States in 2018, mostly through Government of Kuwait scholarships, spending \$1.2 billion per year on education.

### **Countering Support for Extremists**

Counterterrorism cooperation remains a focal point of our bilateral relationship, and the United States will continue to help Kuwait develop its capabilities at combating terrorist financing. While the general public has a favorable view of the United States, not all Kuwaiti citizens and government leaders agree with U.S. policies or support our close relationship. The Mission will continue outreach and engagement with political leaders and influencers to reduce support for extremist ideology. We plan to enhance information sharing agreements with GoK law enforcement and customs authorities so that we can improve the safety of both our countries.

### **Deepening Economic Ties**

Holding six percent of the world's known oil reserves, Kuwait invests hundreds of billions of dollars of their oil wealth in the United States. Kuwait's enormous U.S. investments and its imports of American goods create American jobs. Defense sales to Kuwait have generated \$24.5 billion and support 141,000 U.S. jobs. Legal restrictions and a cumbersome and opaque

bureaucratic process are barriers to a better business climate in Kuwait. The Mission will also encourage the Kuwaiti government to strengthen its commitment to countering the financing of terrorism, to include improving oversight of the charitable sector. The Mission will advocate for a more transparent bureaucratic process and favorable regulations to encourage U.S. companies to increase and broaden investment in Kuwait across more sectors.

### **Staffing, Resources, and Security for Mission Personnel**

None of the Mission goals can be accomplished without adequate staffing, resources, and security for our Mission personnel, particularly in light of the expanding regional role of the Mission. As a historically difficult-to-staff Post, the Mission will endeavor to fill vacancies and staffing gaps and will also explore ways to improve compensation and benefits to recruit and retain the most qualified locally employed staff. We will prioritize the importance of exercising and training Mission staff to respond to security threats and emergencies, as well as to complete upgrades to our security infrastructure on the compound. The Mission also plans to secure permission from the Kuwaiti government to expand the boundaries of the Embassy compound to accommodate new building and construction plans.

## 2. Mission Strategic Framework

**Mission Goal 1:** Improve the safety and welfare of U.S. citizens in Kuwait so that it is a more attractive and safer place to live and work.

**Mission Objective 1.1:** U.S. citizens receive improved consular services and the Mission engages the Government of Kuwait to improve its policies affecting U.S. citizens.

**Mission Goal 2:** Strengthen and broaden U.S.-Kuwaiti bilateral cooperation to improve regional stability and security.

**Mission Objective 2.1:** The U.S. military's changing needs for access, basing, and overflight in Kuwait are met and joint and combined military capacity, including interoperable missile defense, increases.

**Mission Objective 2.2:** Critical infrastructure, capacity, and communications networks are in place to deter and defend against threats to the security of Kuwait and the region.

**Mission Objective 2.3:** Increase key leader engagements, exercises, and professional development opportunities to support the U.S.-Kuwait security relationship for the next generation.

**Mission Goal 3:** Strengthen national stability and security in the face of extremism and sectarian division through political reform, economic development, and an improved legal framework.

**Mission Objective 3.1:** Political reforms strengthen national stability and security while reducing sectarian division and countering extremism.

**Mission Objective 3.2:** Economic development in Kuwait strengthens its ability to play a constructive economic role in the region while promoting trade and enhancing political stability.

**Mission Objective 3.3:** Law Enforcement cooperation improves Kuwait's capacity to counter extremism and improves national security.

**Mission Goal 4:** Deepen bilateral economic ties and encourage Kuwait to improve its business and investment environment by streamlining government processes, promoting bilateral trade and investment, and diversifying its economy.

**Mission Objective 4.1:** An improved business environment encourages the development of the private sector, fosters confidence in Kuwait for U.S. businesses and professionals, levels the playing field for U.S. participants, and creates trade and investment opportunities for U.S. business.

**Mission Objective 4.2:** Increased trade-related security encourages U.S. goods and services enterprises to trade with and invest in Kuwait.

**Management Objective 1:** Ensure staffing levels are adequate to meet Mission needs.

**Management Objective 2:** Expand and build Embassy facilities to meet Mission needs.

**Management Objective 3:** Mission staff and family members enjoy a secure environment both on and off the Embassy compound.

### 3. Mission Goals and Objectives

**Mission Goal 1:** Improve the safety and welfare of U.S. citizens in Kuwait so that it is a more attractive and safer place to live and work.

**Description and Linkages:** The Mission will strive to enhance the security of U.S. citizens in Kuwait through outreach, capacity building, crisis coordination and response, and reciprocal treatment. All U.S. citizens should receive needed consular services and protections through the development and strengthening of Mission relationships with U.S. military, interagency and Kuwaiti officials, and through information sharing, training, and briefings tailored to bolster emergency preparedness and security and cultural awareness. Interagency engagement with the Government of Kuwait improves the transparency and accessibility of processes affecting U.S. citizens. This Mission Goal supports the first pillar of the National Security Strategy to defend and put the safety of the American people first.

**Mission Objective 1.1:** U.S. citizens receive improved consular services and the Mission engages the Government of Kuwait to improve its policies affecting U.S. citizens.

**Justification:** Our top Mission priority is the well-being and protection of the over 45,000 private U.S. citizens in Kuwait through prompt and efficient consular services. While Kuwait is a relatively safe and stable country, it is situated in a dangerous region in which the threats to private Americans, Mission personnel, and deployed U.S. military service members are very serious.

**Mission Goal 2:** Strengthen and broaden U.S.-Kuwaiti bilateral cooperation to improve regional stability and security.

**Description and Linkages:** A longstanding defense partnership with Kuwait makes possible unique strategic access for U.S. forces in the Arabian Gulf, a region of enduring importance to U.S. national security. Generational and technological changes require continued investment in the relationship, in order to keep it strong against emerging threats. As Kuwait hosts the fourth-largest U.S. military presence overseas, this Mission Goal supports the National Security Strategy priority to retain the necessary American military presence in the Middle East Region to protect the U.S. and our allies from terrorist attacks and preserve a favorable regional balance of power.

**Mission Objective 2.1:** Meet the U.S. military's changing needs for access, basing, and overflight in Kuwait and increase joint and combined military capacity, including interoperable missile defense.

**Justification:** Kuwait's generous access, basing, and overflight grants are crucial for supporting enduring and contingency U.S. posture in the region.

**Mission Objective 2.2:** Critical infrastructure, capacity, and communication networks are in place to deter and defend against threats to the security of Kuwait and the region.

**Justification:** Kuwait hosts the largest U.S. military presence in the region.

**Mission Objective 2.3:** Increased key leader engagements, exercises, and professional development opportunities to support the U.S.-Kuwait security relationship for the next generation.

**Justification:** Fewer and fewer Kuwaitis remember the liberation of Kuwait by coalition forces led by the US back in 1991. Public polling shows that U.S. favorability ratings in Kuwait are low compared to other GCC countries, while China's favorability rating in Kuwait is the highest among eight Arab nations surveyed by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in a July 2019 report.

**Mission Goal 3:** Strengthen national stability and security in the face of extremism and sectarian division through political reform, economic development, and an improved legal framework.

**Description and Linkages:** This goal seeks to build the counterterrorism capacity of the Government of Kuwait to a level that can limit the number of terrorist incidents and the rate of terrorist recruitment among citizens and expatriates to levels low enough they would not interfere with domestic economic development or hamper Kuwait's ability to function as an effective regional stabilizer and mediator.

**Mission Objective 3.1:** Political reforms strengthen national stability and security while reducing sectarian division and countering extremism.

**Justification:** Kuwait's multi-sectarian population is potentially vulnerable to radicalization and terrorist recruitment. The GoK is committed to combating domestic and international terrorism, but its capabilities to interdict, intercept, and abort terrorist plots while effectively countering radicalization is limited. Improving Kuwait's adherence to the rule of law, economic

development, and political reform will aid in strengthening national stability and the ability of the GoK to recognize and address violent extremism.

**Mission Objective 3.2:** Economic development in Kuwait strengthens its ability to play a constructive economic role in the region while promoting trade and enhancing political stability.

**Justification:** A strong economy and trade profile position Kuwait to continue to be a positive and stabilizing presence in the region. Economic diversification will make Kuwait more fiscally resilient during times of decreased oil revenues.

**Mission Objective 3.3:** Law Enforcement cooperation improves Kuwait's capacity to counter extremism and improves national security.

**Justification:** Kuwait's long and uninhabited borders make for a challenging patrol and interdiction; its developed democratic system paradoxically limits its ability to resort to the arbitrary measures oft-used by other countries to crack down on suspected extremists. This makes Kuwait more dependent on the development of quality legislations and the introduction of sophisticated law-enforcement methods.

**Mission Goal 4:** Deepen bilateral economic ties and encourage Kuwait to improve its business and investment environment by streamlining government processes, promoting bilateral trade and investment, and diversifying its economy.

**Description and Linkages:** As outlined in our National Security Strategy, this Mission Goal supports our role in the Middle East to catalyze positive developments by engaging economically, supporting reformers, and championing the benefits of open markets and societies.

**Mission Objective 4.1:** An improved business environment that encourages the development of the private sector, fosters confidence in Kuwait for U.S. businesses and professionals, levels the playing field for U.S. participants, and creates trade and investment opportunities for U.S. business.

**Justification:** A stronger, more diversified economy will make Kuwait a more attractive market for U.S. goods and services, a stronger contributor to the development of the region, and a better partner for positive social, economic, and political change in an otherwise volatile region.

**Mission Objective 4.2:** Increased trade-related security encourages U.S. goods and services enterprises to trade with and invest in Kuwait.

**Justification:** Increased border, port, and cyber security will promote confidence in Kuwait as a destination for commerce and investment by U.S. companies. Adequate security measures will contribute to the economic stability of the country and allow Kuwait to diversify its petroleum-reliant economy.

## 4. Management Objectives

**Management Objective 1:** Ensure staffing levels are adequate to meet growing Mission needs.

**Justification:** Embassy Kuwait accomplishes the work of a large mission on the resource footprint of a medium-sized post, serving as a regional platform to support many U.S. government programs. U.S. military engagement in the region and requests for additional regional positions based in Kuwait require the Mission to make trade-offs to meet the increasing demand for support and inter-agency collaboration. Embassy Kuwait relies heavily on the experience, expertise, and long-term dedication of its Locally-Employed (LE) staff. Many senior local employees are beginning to plan to apply for and utilize SIVs; their departure will leave a vacuum of experience and institutional memory in the Embassy. All of Embassy Kuwait's LE staff are third country nationals who receive no benefits from the Kuwaiti government and are hit particularly hard by the rising cost of living, especially in housing, education, and healthcare. An expected VAT implementation will have a significant impact on LE staff buying power and their ability to maintain their current standard of living. Although the VAT implementation has been approved, its implementation date continues to slip.

**Management Objective 2: Expand and build Embassy facilities to meet Mission needs.**

**Justification:** Mission Kuwait has been approached by multiple agencies about taking on increasing regional responsibilities, especially as circumstances in the region require realignment of regional functions. Post is unable to entertain these requests or to provide adequate space to meet current needs due to a shortage of office space. The Mission is engaging the Government of Kuwait to obtain formal ownership of land surrounding the Embassy compound. Obtaining use of this land will allow us to construct a new office building to house the consular operation and free additional office space in the chancery building. Additionally, utilizing this land to build government-owned residential properties will save the USG millions of dollars annually once the units are built, as the cost of short-term leases in Kuwait continues to skyrocket. Embassy Kuwait is a hard to fill Post, and this housing would make the Post more attractive to bidders.

**Management Objective 3:** Mission staff and family members enjoy a secure environment both on and off the Embassy compound.

**Justification:** While Kuwait is a relatively safe and stable country, it is situated in a dangerous region in which the threats to Mission personnel are real. Vigilance in protecting Mission staff and their families is paramount. Exercising emergency response plans and upgrading security infrastructure allows diplomatic, military and other personnel to perform the essential functions they are here to carry out.