



The Australia and New Zealand Association of Kuwait

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The Kuwaiti Resistance

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It is difficult to find words that do justice to the Kuwaiti Resistance of 1990-91, the remaining untold story of a great international crisis. While the Western media perpetuated easy clichés about Kuwaitis' being five-star refugees who paid the Americans and British to liberate them, the real story was quite different. Men and women, youth and elderly, bravely risked (and in some cases lost) their lives in an effort to thwart the occupation of Saddam Husayn's forces. In the end, the Resistance's casualty rate far exceeded that of the coalition military forces or the Western hostages. Its deeds are all the more remarkable for having been carried out by ordinary people. And it provided invaluable services to the coalition forces.

The Resistance had four main areas of activity: (1) civil disobedience, which initially included public demonstrations and the boycott of most work but then narrowed in scope to just the latter; (2) maintaining morale through the provision of essential services and other forms of support; (3) preventing destruction in the oil fields; and (4) military operations, both attacking Iraqi troops and gathering intelligence for the allies.

STRUCTURE

The Kuwaiti Resistance never had a sole chief nor a central command; indeed, it had almost no formal organizational structure. Key figures emerged, and the Resistance became more organized and interconnected with time, but it always remained an essentially grassroots movement.

The shape of the Resistance grew out of the family and religious groups that predominate in Kuwaiti life. People formed cells of a dozen or so family members, friends, or colleagues, and these constituted their own authority. In a situation where

betrayal could mean death, the members of these units could trust each other completely. This structure sacrificed efficiency in favor of security: if one cell was compromised, the others continued without interference. The more successful Resistance leaders were those who coordinated activities between the cells and kept a low profile. Cells differed on the best way to defy the Iraqis, with the result that they usually engaged in complementary efforts.

The Resistance effort had some outside help, mostly from the Kuwaiti authorities, but individuals within Kuwait itself initiated, planned, and executed nearly all the activities. It comprised almost every type of person, including some military personnel and policemen but mostly ordinary working men and women who chose to stay behind and fight for their country. Some Islamist groups created problems, playing politics by not cooperating with other groups, especially in military activities. The Islamists' behavior may have something to do with the fact that they lacked much authority in peacetime, so they took advantage of the crisis to assert themselves. Also, some more devoted Islamists had to struggle with the theological problem of calling on non-Muslims to help against a Muslim invader.

Looking back, Ahmad ar-Rahmani, a lieutenant colonel in the Kuwaiti army, correctly characterizes his countrymen's efforts as among the most impressive resistance of the century. "In Kuwait, everyone from children to old men resisted. There were no Kuwaiti puppets which Iraq could use to form a Government. Every Kuwaiti was in the Resistance."

I. CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Captured documents show that in the early days of the occupation, Iraqis were genuinely surprised at the depth of feeling against them, leaving ordinary soldiers confused, for they had been told they had come to liberate Kuwait.

Anti-Iraqi graffiti, including derisory comments about the so-called Provisional Free Kuwait Government, appeared on walls all over Kuwait from the first morning of the occupation. The first public acts against the occupation were demonstrations, mostly with women and children carrying banners and photos of the amir and crown prince. Several of these public demonstrations took place during the first week, with the earliest occurring on August 3, 1990, one day after the occupation began.

Widespread civilian resistance began on the fourth day of the occupation, when the Iraqi authorities ordered everyone to return to work. Kuwaitis stayed away in droves, except for those needed for essential services or those who went to take back-ups of computer data. Within days, the Kuwaitis were printing leaflets and newsletters on their home computers, photocopying them, and passing them around by hand or fax. English-speaking Kuwaitis monitored the most reliable sources of news--the BBC, Voice of America, and CNN--then transcribed the main points onto newsletters for those unable to understand English. When these acts became a capital offense in mid-September, the newsletter campaign fizzled out.

On the night of August 11, most Kuwaitis went onto the roofs of their houses and called "Allahu Akhbar" (God is Great) from the Islamic call to prayer for a full half-hour. This exercise was repeated on the night of September 1. It was a spine-chilling experience to hear thousands of voices rising out of the darkness like the keening of damned souls, and unnerved the Iraqis so much that they fired assault rifles and machine guns over the

rooftops to stop it. The combination of the green and red tracers arcing low over the city and the crackle of the weapons over the chanting was a terrifying inspiration. Voices against bullets.

II. ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Area committees based in the suburbs of Kuwait City maintained essential services and support in cooperation with the cells.¹

Food. The Resistance worked hard to maintain food supplies. Initially, this was not a problem, as many Kuwaiti households stock at least a month's supply of drygoods and Kuwait's warehouses held enough supplies to sustain the country for well over a year. Also, because of high food prices in Kuwait supplies flowed into the country from Jordan and Iraq.

The local cooperative societies, which provide most groceries in Kuwait, continued running, with difficulty, during most of the occupation. Some privately owned major supermarkets, such as The Sultan Center, survived the occupation. Others--for example, the Americana Safeway--did not, having been burned out in the first days of the occupation. The Iraqis initially seemed happy to allow the food stores to operate and even posted guards on the doors to maintain order. But after a few weeks, when the mukhabarat (Iraqi intelligence service) came to suspect the assistance the stores provided to the Resistance, they began harassing the store managers, even imprisoning them, though they did not shut the stores.

Main tasks at hand included avoiding the hoarding of food, providing Kuwaitis with money, and getting food into Kuwaiti (as well as allied) hands. Toward these ends, co-ops rationed purchases and only allowed people living in their area to shop at their outlet. Neighborhood bakeries continued to operate, using volunteer Kuwaiti and Palestinian workers to replace the departed Asians. Kuwaiti women baked at home and planted vegetable gardens. Some Kuwaitis moved sheep, cattle, and chickens into their gardens, either from their own farms or from purchases made in Iraq. Elegant residential suburbs began to sound like farmyards.

Money. Major food outlets used the money they received more as a means of rationing supplies and financing replacement staple goods from Iraq than to make profits. The main dairy sold its goods at the same price in Iraqi dinars as it had in Kuwaiti dinars, or for about one-tenth their real value. In other words, it virtually gave its stock away.

But the greatest need for money was to bribe captured Kuwaitis out of custody. This could be very expensive, with ransoms ranging from 1,000 to 100,000 Iraqi dinars (at the official exchange rate, an Iraqi dinar was worth about \$3; on the black market, it came to about thirty cents).

Kuwaitis could bring money in from Saudi Arabia with relative ease during the first two weeks, before the Iraqis sealed the border. Substantial sums of Kuwait government money continued to come in this way, with difficulty, until October. After that, the Kuwaitis got Palestinian friends to carry funds in via Jordan and Iraq, and found their own sources within Kuwait. They could sell gold and dollars stored in Kuwaiti homes, but this supply was limited. On one occasion, the Resistance staged a hold-up of a branch of the National Bank of Kuwait, but the amount this netted, reportedly about 15,000 Iraqi dinars, was hardly worth the risk.

Health. Neighborhood committees also looked after health issues. Most committees grew out of membership in the cooperative food stores and local Islamist organizations. An executive committee usually met every evening, with a full meeting in the local mosque on Friday after midday prayers. The committees' duties involved maintaining basic services such as garbage collection and water distribution. By September, the regular system ground to a standstill: the Iraqis had stolen most of the garbage trucks and the Asian garbage collectors had mostly left the country. Kuwaiti businessmen and civil servants more used to driving a Mercedes took to operating the few remaining garbage trucks to collect the neighborhood refuse for burning. What could not be used as compost for the vegetable gardens Kuwaitis burned on waste ground.

Iraqi security at hospitals generally prevented wounded Resistance members from being brought there for treatment, so Kuwaiti doctors set up three underground hospitals in the suburbs using equipment smuggled out of the main hospitals. The head of the Kuwait Blood Bank set up a mini-hospital in the basement of his premises, near the giant Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital. The Iraqis had virtually sealed off the hospital but were not as concerned with the blood bank.

On some occasions, Kuwaitis had no choice but to take severely wounded Resistance fighters to the hospitals, sometimes only steps ahead of the Iraqis. In one incident, a youth shot in the head was admitted as a traffic accident victim. The Iraqis knew that someone had been wounded and would end up in a hospital, so they searched the operating rooms just as he was about to undergo surgery. The patient was obviously in a bad way but the Kuwaiti doctor could not risk telling the cause of his wound. The patient's x-rays would clearly show the bullet in his head, so the Kuwaiti doctors played a trick: One of them left the room, ostensibly to get the images that were just then being developed, but actually x-rayed his own head and showed the film to the Iraqi, who was satisfied by this ruse and left the hospital staff to get on with its work.

Close cooperation bonded many of the Kuwaitis in a way they had not experienced since before the easy wealth of oil. "We were like this in the old days!" was the comment of one old Kuwaiti lady I spoke to. "At least the Iraqis have taught us the value of life, and reminded us what it was like to struggle in the old days," she said with optimism. "I hope it continues when they are gone."

III. OIL SECTOR RESISTANCE

The Resistance sought to preserve Kuwait's precious petroleum assets even as they helped the coalition forces fight the Iraqis. Members of what became known as the oil sector Resistance had therefore to work alongside the Iraqis to influence them instead of confronting them directly.

Management and control. In the apparent expectation that they would keep Kuwait, the Iraqis initially tried to take over the Kuwaiti oil industry. They brought with them Iraqis who had previously worked on such joint Kuwait-Iraq oil projects as a pipeline, and immediately placed them in supervisory roles. When they tried to call in all oil sector employees, they were faced with a boycott of everyone except a few Palestinians and those emergency workers who had to stay on the job to prevent damage to the installations. The Iraqis then brought in executives and engineers from the South Basra Oil company and the Iraqi National Oil Company to take over Kuwaiti oilfields and refineries.

The Kuwaitis responded by forming their own underground management team. This team by satellite phone asked for permission from the Kuwaiti government-in-exile in Ta'if to work alongside the Iraqis in the interests of preserving the oil sector without being labelled as collaborators. Permission received, they went to work--on the Iraqis. Relations between Iraqis and Kuwaitis were tense, but the former knew they lacked the capabilities to run the oil industry² and so gave the Kuwaitis a reasonably free rein. Then, in the beginning of October, the Iraqis tried to establish direct control. They put more of their own men in, drew up a new organization chart, and shunted the Kuwaitis to lesser positions. With this move, the Kuwaitis risked losing much of their influence.

The underground management team feared that if the Iraqis identified their real roles, they would simply be removed. They had to find a way to protect themselves from the Iraqis, yet still influence the operation. They therefore nominated certain members of the official management to act as a buffer between themselves as the real Kuwaiti management and the Iraqis. The official management would ostensibly take instructions from the Iraqis and then pass them on to the real management, who would consider how they served their own interests at the time. The official management would then go back to the Iraqis with various reasons why things could or could not be done. While it was impossible to control everything, the fact that the Iraqis were a whole generation behind the Kuwaitis in oilfield technology resulted in their inclination to believe the bluff. In reality, the Kuwaitis ran parts of the oil operation but let the Iraqis think they were in charge.

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The Kuwaitis also did their best to safeguard the sector's engineering stores and records. The oilfield equipment was worth millions of dollars and could be used in Iraq's own oilfields. The Kuwaitis had to bribe the Iraqis to prevent them from stealing these items. They could never secure everything but much of the equipment was saved, allowing the oilfields to resume production months before they might otherwise have.

Reporting and sabotage. Throughout the occupation, the Kuwait underground management reported on the local state of affairs in the oil sector to the government-in-exile by faxing reports produced on a home computer to Ta'if using a satellite telephone. During the second week of August, the oilmen advised the government that the well-heads were being mined. The government promptly broadcast this as part of their propaganda campaign to demonstrate that Iraq was prepared to destroy their country. This caused great concern on the part of the underground management and the Iraqis who were helping them, for it would be obvious from where the reports had come. Only a limited number of Kuwaitis were allowed into the oilfields for technical reasons, and a limited number of Iraqis had the authority to let them go there. But Iraqi intelligence did not pick up on the broadcast.

In any event, it suited everyone involved: the Iraqis wanted to have the coalition aware of their preparedness to blow the fields, as they eventually did; and the early information allowed the government to begin plans to bring in firefighting teams after liberation and the coalition forces to plan for the effects of oilfield smoke on their operations.

The Resistance developed a plan to save as many of the oil fields as it could from destruction. The Kuwaiti oilmen smuggled Kuwaiti National Guard ordnance specialists into the oilfields disguised as engineers, complete with Kuwait Oil Company identification papers. They even put them on the payroll in case the Iraqis checked these

records. The guardsmen were able to identify the type of explosive and the detonation wiring systems, which had been dug into trenches to protect them from being cut by Allied bombing and allow several wells to be blown from one detonation point.

The Kuwaitis apparently then bribed Iraqis to remove the detonators from the well-heads and rewire the detonation wires so that whenever the circuit was tested at the detonation point, it would show up as complete. They concentrated on high-pressure wells, which would cause the greatest trouble if they were blown. The role of the guardsmen here was essential, for other Kuwaitis were not explosive specialists and their access to the fields was limited. But the most incredible aspect of this operation was the fact that Iraqis, suitably bribed, sabotaged their own sabotage.

About ten days before the land war, in late February 1991, another gaffe outside Kuwait may have undone much of their good work. The Resistance informed the government-in-exile that it had sabotaged the Iraqi mining of the oilfields, and that most of the wells apart from the Wafra field and a few others were safe. An official apparently foolishly broadcast news of this accomplishment. The Iraqis may have heard the broadcast or may have simply decided on their own that they had to test the circuits for real. In any case, they tried to blow up a number of wells at Rawdatain, in the north of Kuwait, as a test. They failed to explode. The Iraqis then checked the charges and discovered the sabotage. Over the next few days, Iraqi army engineers frantically reset the detonators, and then blew the wells. Overall, the operation was still a victory for the Resistance, for while about 720 wells were destroyed, the Iraqis did not have time to reset and blow the other 300.

Other pieces of intelligence from the oil sector Resistance, which the Kuwaiti government passed on to the Americans, had more direct military relevance. The Kuwaitis in the oilfields identified the Iraqi units deployed there and faxed details on their combat readiness, and even the names and ranks of many of the Iraqi officers they met in some sectors. The Iraqis had built a decoy tank workshop in an industrial area near south Ahmadi. Details of the number of decoy tanks produced and where they were seen heading went out.

This information supplemented the coalition radio, satellite, and aerial reconnaissance, and provided information that the electronics or cameras could not detect. It was the priceless human intelligence that the coalition forces could get nowhere else other than from the rare Iraqi defector. Thanks in part to this information, when the U.S. Marines attacked southern Kuwait on February 24, 1991, they knew almost exactly which Iraqi units they were up against, their location, strength, and the boundaries between them.

The Kuwaitis found other means of sabotage. The Iraqi army in Kuwait drew fuel for its vehicles from the Kuwaiti refineries, which were within a few kilometers of where the bulk of the Iraqi forces were stationed. It made no sense for the Iraqis to haul fuel from Basra. To run efficiently, the Iraqi vehicles needed fuel with specific octane ratings. So the Kuwaitis switched the octane ratings at the point of production and caused engine parts to fail, resulting in the Iraqis' having to continually clean and strip their engines. Alas, they were not the only ones who paid the price of this subterfuge, for this author too had great problems with his carburetor during the occupation. It was extremely annoying at the time but not so much later when the reason became known.

Preventing oil pollution. The Kuwaitis long knew that the Iraqis intended to pour crude oil into the Persian Gulf to foil a coalition amphibious attack. Unable to prevent this, they worked to minimize the flow of oil.

The refineries and crude oil shiploading points in Kuwait are fed from two huge tank farms, one on the north side of Ahmadi with a capacity of 8 million barrels, and one on the south side holding 6 million barrels. Prior to the dumping, the tanks held an estimated 10.7 million barrels, with almost unlimited reserves in the nearby oilfields. The crude is pumped out of each tank farm to the ports through a valve system known as a loading manifold. The two manifolds are therefore key choke-points that control the main flow of crude from the fields to everywhere else. The Iraqis planned to dump oil into the Persian Gulf from a wide range of sources, including an offshore loading terminal, piers, and three oil tankers.

To stop the flow of oil from the land, the Kuwaitis surreptitiously had to close the valves in the pipeline system leading from the two tank farms. Unable to get access to the tank farms or to the two loading manifolds, they concentrated their attention on a four-foot undersea pipeline leading to the island terminal. Ingenious Kuwaiti engineers changed the indicator plate on the coastal manifold feeding the four-foot pipe to read "open" when it was in fact closed, and rewired the feedback loop to the control room so that it would read similarly. When the taps on the terminal were opened, oil in the pipe would spill into the Gulf under back-pressure but, unknown to the Iraqis, the pipe would not refill. The Iraqis apparently never discovered the reversed plate.

Water and electricity. Power generation and water desalination, although essential civil services, were integrated with and entirely dependent on the oil industry. In other words, no oil would mean no power or water. Residents of Kuwait could not long have survived the heat of summer without fresh water. The Kuwaiti power generation system and water desalination network is dependent on oil and gas as feedstock. The Kuwaitis produced about 200,000 barrels per day, or just enough to keep people alive and maintain essential services.

There was another critical need for gas. One of the Kuwaiti national companies, Petrochemical Industries Company (PIC), produces urea from ammonia. They had large, potentially dangerous supplies of ammonia, and so had to produce gas to convert the ammonia into urea. The refineries also had large stocks of particularly flammable propane and butane ready for shipment. These were reduced to a safe level by piping them to the power stations.

IV. MILITARY

The military resistance had its greatest impact during the first six weeks. After that time, savage Iraqi retribution, the capture of several key individuals, and an Iraqi policy of depopulating the country of Kuwaitis stymied efforts to the point that Kuwait's Minister of Planning Sulayman al-Mutawa broadcast an appeal in October urging the Resistance to cease its military activities.

In the first hours of the invasion, when Kuwaiti policemen realized that Iraqi forces had won the upper hand, they cleared out their station armories, handing out guns and ammunition to citizens or hiding them. Over the next two days, Kuwaiti police and military officers took great risks to retrieve weapons, ammunition, explosives, and even a

few shoulder-launched SAM-7 "Strella" anti-aircraft missiles from army stores. They also bought other weapons--especially rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs)--from Iraqi troops.

In the first weeks of the occupation, the Iraqis were so poorly supplied with transport and rations that they regularly asked Kuwaitis for rides, as well as for food and water. Kuwaitis would oblige with characteristic Arab grace but sometimes insisted on making a brief detour to visit a sick mother. Once at their "mother's" house, they invited the soldiers in for tea, in the usual gesture of Arabic hospitality. Once inside, the soldiers who fell for this were overpowered and killed. A different version of this ploy apparently involved Kuwaiti girls enticing the troops into an ambush, where they would be similarly dealt with.

Special operations. A few Resistance leaders tried to coordinate activities between cells to concentrate on high-value targets such as police stations, schools housing Iraqi troops, isolated vehicles and troops, and senior officers. On September 27, they fired four RPGs at the Iraqi embassy, which served as the main Iraqi administrative base. Several attempts were apparently made on the life of the first Iraqi governor of Kuwait, `Ali Hasan Majid. A favorite technique using a two-man team was to drop grenades or Molotov cocktails onto trucks or armored personnel carriers passing under flyovers. One man dropped the explosive and a second drove the getaway car.

The military Resistance filmed such attacks whenever it could, aware of the propaganda value of footage showing civilians armed with homemade weapons harassing the largest army in the Middle East. One clip clearly shows a Molotov cocktail hitting the road near a truck passing under a bridge, then a second exploding in the rear of the vehicle, setting it ablaze. Home videos that showed burning tanks, trucks, and armored personnel carriers on Kuwaiti streets made a substantial contribution to the Western public's eventual realization that the Kuwaitis were fighting for their own country, and not lounging in luxury hotels.

In the first week of October, one Resistance group used a SAM-7 missile to attack an Iraqi transport aircraft operating from Kuwait International Airport, forcing the Iraqis to move their air operations to a captive Kuwait air force base in the desert outside the city. This group also took the fight into Iraq itself by staging several car bomb attacks in Basra and Zubair, just north of the Kuwaiti border. In another incident, the Resistance reportedly attacked a camp holding Kuwaiti prisoners near Basra, releasing many of them. Probably the most widely known Resistance attack was a car bomb on October 6 against the Kuwait International Hotel, where senior Iraqi officers and civilian officials stayed. This hotel being across the road from the U.S. embassy, eyewitness accounts reached Washington within hours. Two of the group worked in the hotel (as a cashier and in the telephone department) and so knew about the arrival of a particularly senior Iraqi delegation. The bomb missed the delegation but killed two Iraqi soldiers and brought the Resistance to the doorstep of some of the most senior Iraqis in Kuwait.

The attacks on Iraqi vehicles became so serious that Iraqi commanders issued orders, copies of which were captured after liberation, that the officer responsible for any piece of destroyed equipment would personally have to pay for it.

Satellite telephones. Satellite telephones (cost per unit: about \$50,000) were perhaps the greatest military tool of the Resistance, even more so than explosives or guns. When the Kuwaiti government reestablished itself in exile in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia within a week of the invasion, Resistance elements began communicating with it and with the Kuwaiti

embassy in Washington through a clandestine satellite telephone system retrieved from the Ministry of Communications by Sheikh `Ali Salim al-`Ali, the eldest son of the chief of the National Guard. During early September, the Kuwait Oil Tanker Company acquired four more satellite phones and others smuggled them in, concealing them in the body panels and fuel tanks of Chevy Suburbans or pick-ups; the Kuwait security services later smuggled in another two. These links to the authorities conferred a measure of de facto authority on the holders of the telephone sets.

Each telephone served as more than just a telephone with a satellite dish. It could send faxes and telexes as well as voice transmissions, and so was used to send out written reports, maps, even copies of photographs. It enabled the leaders to maintain direct contact with the outside world to coordinate actions, arrange for funds and ammunition, identify the intelligence needs of the coalition military planners, and communicate with Western media to keep the plight of Kuwait in the public eye. Its main use, however, was to pass messages between families. Several Westerners still in Kuwait during Christmas 1990 even managed to call their families with holiday greetings.

For security reasons, most of the sets had predetermined times during which they were used. If the Government-in-exile needed the Resistance inside Kuwait to open up outside these times, they took a leaf out of the BBC's World War II ploy against the Germans and arranged for a certain song to be played over Kuwait Radio, which was broadcasting into Kuwait from Saudi Arabia.

A number of the systems either broke down or were captured, so that by the end of the occupation, only two sets remained operational. During the war, one of the surviving satellite phones directed coalition air strikes. The Iraqis hid their vehicles under road bridges to place them beyond aerial or satellite reconnaissance. But Kuwaitis on the ground could see the vehicles, so they identified the location and nature of the target to the U.S. Air Force in Riyadh. The Americans would warn the Resistance when to keep Kuwaitis from the area; and, sure enough, right on the dot an aircraft would roar up the highway at low altitude and destroy the vehicles--without seriously damaging the bridge. So precise were these attacks that several Kuwaitis took to creeping within sight of the intended target with a video camera and recording the vehicles' disappearance in a flash of flame and smoke.

Ham radios. Satellite phones were the most secure means of communication the Resistance had with the outside world but they could not cope with the demand for messages, and were kept secret because of the security risk to their operators. Kuwait's ham radio fraternity stepped into the breach and maintained a message service throughout the occupation for Kuwaitis and others.

One of those was `Abd al-Jabir Ma`rafi, a retired Ministry of Communications engineer and father of eight. From his suburban basement, Ma`rafi used a Bahraini call sign instead of his own 9K2DZ, which would have identified him as a Kuwaiti station. He has been credited by his U.S. contacts and various international ham radio organizations with helping shape U.S. public opinion in support for military action. At the suggestion of one of his American ham contacts, Frank Moore of Indiana, he started sending out descriptions of day-to-day life under the occupation, which Moore sanitized and passed to the State Department and media sources.

Ma`rafi eventually sent out military intelligence, too. For example, he reported that the Iraqis had built dummy tanks from steel plate and six-inch pipes, then placed them in

the desert in camouflage to fool U.S. reconnaissance. These outgoing messages were initially passed through a fellow ham in Holland, and then from the beginning of September through Scott Ward, the chief radio operator on the USS John F. Kennedy in the Red Sea. This simplified matters, as the aircraft carrier was closer to Kuwait and could get better reception. Ward continued to communicate with Ma`rafi until his ship had to maintain radio silence with the onset of military action against Iraq. He could not transmit, but did still receive. Other contacts in Ma`rafi's vast network included the Kuwait embassy in London and fellow hams in Guatemala, Egypt, Germany, Lebanon, Pakistan, Sweden, and Switzerland.

Inexplicably, the Iraqis did not once tell Ma`rafi to take his aerial down, although it was in plain view. They may have mistaken it for a large television aerial.

KUWAITI WOMEN

Many Kuwaitis consider women to have been the backbone of the Resistance. Among their valuable services were carrying weapons and forging papers, as well as providing many of the organizational skills required to run a complex campaign.

At first, the Iraqis tended to treat Kuwaiti women driving alone with respect and restraint. Most of the troops had obviously been given orders to behave with women. Recognizing this, the Kuwaiti women played the Iraqis for all they were worth by carrying concealed weapons and ammunition through checkpoints where men would have been searched. It was an incredibly dangerous task requiring great courage, for they were completely on their own if the Iraqis discovered their cargo.

A number of young women stood out for their courage, including Wafa al-`Amir, Khalud al-Khamis, Amy Burhan, and Asrar al-Qabandi. Wafa, a 23-year-old radiographer, took part in the bombing of the Kuwait International Hotel and at least two other bombings, including restaurants catering to Iraqi soldiers in the Kheitan and Hasawi areas. She also provided many Kuwaitis with false identification cards. Eventually, she was captured and killed.

Khalud, a journalist, took an active part in several Resistance attacks and her story has a particularly happy ending. She and a young man in her Resistance cell fell in love during the occupation and were married after the liberation.

Amy, the pretty teenage daughter of a deceased Kuwait Airways pilot and an Englishwoman, was alone in Kuwait at the time of the invasion, for her mother was abroad and unable to return. Amy turned her house in a quiet backstreet of the exclusive suburb of Mishref into a Resistance meeting place. Taking full advantage of her diminutive size and striking good looks, she bluffed her way through Iraqi checkpoints with weapons. Still today, Amy shivers when recalling the danger involved, the almost paralyzing fear she dealt with as she approached the checkpoints still evident. The charm worked every time but one, when the Iraqis told her to pull over and wait beside the road. Then, to her good fortune, another car came through behind her and the soldiers told her to drive on.

But Asrar al-Qabandi was the great heroine of the Resistance.³ Indeed, mention the name Asrar in Kuwait today and every Kuwaiti will know whom you mean. Hailed as Kuwait's Joan of Arc, the comparison is not overstated. At thirty years of age, Asrar was a woman years ahead of her time. Although from a typical, conservative middle-class

Kuwaiti family, she had studied in the United States, preferred jeans and t-shirts to traditional dress, sported large spectacles, and had an American accent and habits. She exuded drive and confidence; life was too short for all she had to do. Naturally headstrong, she was absolutely convinced that her way of doing things was right. With a fiery temper and sharp tongue, she had no time for fools, shirkers, or churls. She was a five-foot powerhouse of energy, stoutly built, with a feisty sense of humor and an utter contempt for the Iraqis. This last quality was to lead to her capture in early November, and to a terrible death.

Her first mission in early August, with her friend, Hind al-Bahar, had been to find a secure haven for members of the ruling Sabah family and to get fifteen Sabah children--prime targets for the Iraqis--out of the country. In this effort, Asrar's group teamed up with Hashim Behbehani, the distinguished political science lecturer at Kuwait University. Asrar's subsequent activities included forging driver's licenses for Kuwaitis, Americans, and British in hiding (to identify them as safe nationalities), forging car registration books, supporting Kuwaitis and Westerners in her immediate area, setting up safe houses, and assisting the Bahraini ambassador in issuing passports to Kuwaitis who were particularly vulnerable to the Iraqis. She and others arranged for the distribution of tens of thousands of Iraqi dinars of smuggled Kuwaiti government money to Westerners in hiding through other Westerners who were free to move around. On one occasion, using her dark skin to her advantage, she disguised herself in a sari as an Indian and smuggled vital data on computer disks out of a ministry building.

When orders came from Ta'if for the Resistance to cease military operations in urban Kuwait because the Iraqi reprisals were killing too many Kuwaitis, she and a friend scouted targets in Basra for car bomb attacks in Iraq itself. She also organized interviews using the satellite phone with American, British, and French television networks to keep Kuwait in the public focus. The young woman seemed to be everywhere, with an unshakable belief that Kuwait would be liberated. Her motto, and that of the Resistance as a whole, became "Allah, al-watan, al-Amir!" (God, the country, the Amir). A video survives of her spray-painting this on a wall.

Asrar's Achilles' heel was that she felt the Iraqis were too stupid to catch her. She was so contemptuous of them that she seemed oblivious to the risks she was taking. Her one concession to security was to assume the false identity of Sarah Mubarak, named after her paternal grandfather, and arrange a cover story with her father that she had left home two years earlier.

In late October, Asrar left Kuwait for Saudi Arabia through the Nuwaisib border post, which the Iraqis had opened to Kuwaiti women, children, and older men in mid-September. She stayed overnight at Khafji with her brother Bassam. The plan at the time was for her to travel to Ta'if, then to the United States to testify before Congress. However, from the hotel balcony in Khafji, Asrar could see the lights of Kuwait just across the border. She decided to return, even though she suspected that the Iraqis by now knew both her real name and her false identity. Bassam pleaded with her not to go, saying she had done more than her fair share already. She would not hear of it. It was the last time he saw her. Asrar found a lift back into Kuwait on a pick-up that was smuggling money concealed in the vehicle's bodywork. The driver knew the desert and travelled quickly, outwitting the Iraqi defensive line along the border. Within hours, Asrar's brother Adnan in Ta'if got a call from her saying: "Guess where I am?" He thought she was in Riyadh or even the United States, but she laughed, saying, "No, back in Kuwait!"

Asrar's luck ran out in the first week of November. The capture of several leading members of the Resistance convinced her that her false identity had been compromised, so she went on November 4 to her uncle `Abdullah to pick up identification papers of his daughter, who was about her age. Some time thereafter, Asrar was stopped at an Iraqi roadblock and arrested. That night, as the curfew fell at 11:00 p.m., twenty mukhabarat men raided her family home and arrested her father, uncle, and brother. Desperate efforts to get Asrar released failed, for the Iraqis had apparently learned the full extent of her activities by torturing a captured colleague.

Asrar's father was questioned in front of her but stuck to his story of not having seen his daughter for two years. When the Iraqis played a tape of a telephone conversation between the two of them, Mohammed understood that they knew almost everything and that his daughter was likely to die. At one point the Iraqis beat Asrar in front of him, throwing her between two large men. When they threatened to rape her in front of him, she jumped up, spitting at them, yelling that they were not men enough to do so. In the end, the Iraqis tired of this game, for Asrar had told her father little of her activities, and he along with Asrar's brother and uncle were bribed out of custody on December 29.

Scattered details of Asrar's captivity are known. She was chained to a desk for at least the first seventeen days, not even allowed to use the toilet. She was then moved into a room with other girls, where they were allowed to use the toilet and sleep on the floor with thin blankets. The beatings lessened when the Iraqis began having the women cook for them and wash their clothes. Asrar eventually earned the respect of her captors, and used this to bargain for warm clothes for the prisoners.

Asrar was murdered on January 13 or 14, just a day or two before the air war began, shot with four bullets to the chest and one to the head. Her head was then sliced in two with an ax, and her body was dumped outside her family's abandoned home, still dressed in the jeans and button-down shirt in which she had been captured. Her face was unrecognizable, and in her pocket was a bloodstained folded page with handwritten Koranic verses and her trademark spectacles. As a final insult to the family, the Iraqis required that a death certificate be obtained from the local police station before allowing burial, on which they listed the place of death as a hospital rather than a torture center.

WESTERNERS

The Resistance included non-Kuwaitis, too. Foreign Arabs resident in Kuwait, especially Egyptians, Palestinians, Saudis, and biduns (stateless Arabs) joined the effort. Westerners too felt a bond of shared suffering with the Kuwaitis. Their country had not been invaded but their homes had, and they felt as much cold rage as many Kuwaitis. , so some of them took part in minor Resistance operations and provided technical advice. A group of Germans taught the Resistance how to build timers for explosives; Don Latham, an American Vietnam veteran, helped them build a better car bomb using nitrate fertilizer and diesel, as did Ray Washer, an ex-British army ordnance specialist who himself was held hostage for a time in Kuwait.

This warden group, which included several ex-military men, became the proposed contact point for British Special Forces, which were to infiltrate into Kuwait and serve as the local coordinators for any operation to rescue those in hiding, as well as diplomats in the embassies. The Allies could not communicate through the British Embassy, as its voice link to Abu Dhabi was insecure, but they needed to link up with the Resistance, which would then take them to Command Central where they could be hidden.

To establish this link, the Allies had to prove to Command Central that their initial message was not a hoax. An officer in England visited Lesley Devey, the wife of Mike Devey, and asked her for suggestions on how they could prove to Mike that the message had come from her. She came up with the expression "Thora Third has gone greenroading," explaining to the puzzled intelligence officers that "Thora Third" was Mike's Land Rover in England, and "greenroading" was the family expression for taking it driving in the backwoods, or the "green roads." Sure enough, the message found its way through to Mike via a satellite phone, and established the Allies' identity.

For its part, the Resistance looked after the many Westerners hiding from the Iraqi forces, supplying them with food and cigarettes. Kuwaitis sheltered Americans, British, French, and Germans in safe houses and in their own homes, at great risk to the Kuwaitis and their families. Fortunately, there are no confirmed cases of Kuwaitis' being killed for hiding Westerners, but several had very close escapes.

Perhaps the Resistance's most widespread aid to Westerners came in the form of forged driver's licenses identifying them as safe nationalities (such as Australian, Danish, Irish, New Zealander, and Canadian) and the alteration of car registration books so that vehicles could be used without confiscation. A number of the Westerners who were in hiding in Kuwait are convinced they owe their lives to the Resistance. During demonstrations in London during early 1991 in support for military action, some of these people carried signs saying "I am alive because of a Kuwaiti."

CASUALTIES AND DEATHS

Some 300 Kuwaitis died as a direct result of the invasion and occupation. Of these, 9 were women. Around 190 Kuwaitis died in the invasion itself, especially the battles fought on August 2, or as a result of the air war and ground war, unexploded ordnance, or lack of medical care. The other 110 individuals were killed as a result of Resistance attacks or retribution. Of these, some 62 people were executed and 13 are thought to have died under torture. A further 22 were killed during civilian resistance (such as anti-Iraq demonstrations) and 13 during armed resistance.

One hundred and ten individuals killed as a result of Resistance attacks or retribution may not seem large. However, the numbers hide some chilling facts. First, many of those deaths were often barbaric, and followed days or weeks of brutal torture. Secondly, the average population of Kuwaitis in Kuwait for most of the occupation was about 300,000; this means that proportionally, twice as many Kuwaitis died in the seven-month occupation as Americans died in the decade-long Vietnam War. Thirdly, the number of dead does not reflect the trauma of hundreds, perhaps thousands of rapes and other assaults on Kuwaitis. Fourthly, this figure does not include the 564 Kuwaitis who remain unaccounted for, either because they are prisoners in Iraq or their bodies were destroyed or cannot be found. As the years go by, hope for those missing citizens is fading.

ASSESSMENT

Resistance attacks on Iraqis made a significant difference. They kept the occupying forces off balance, maintained the honor of the country, provided real leverage to the coalition forces, and reduced the environmental damage that Saddam tried to wreak on the region. The Resistance helped the coalition forces by providing important information on the morale and combat effectiveness of Iraqi troops and by pinpointing targets. In a glowing letter of tribute to the Kuwaiti Resistance dated March 8, 1991,

Lieutenant General Charles A. Horner of the U.S. Air Force noted the "ingenious and innovative methods for communicating vital intelligence about enemy dispositions and intentions in the Kuwaiti theater of operations." He also declared American gratitude

For pinpointing locations of deployed enemy forces, ammunition depots, and chemical/biological ordnance storage areas. It is not at all inconceivable that the struggle to liberate Kuwait might have proven much more costly to both the coalition forces and the people of Kuwait had we not received precise and timely information about these facilities from the brave soldiers of the Kuwaiti resistance.

The number of Iraqis killed or wounded by Resistance attacks probably never exceeded a thousand but conveyed the clear message that the invaders were unwelcome. In all, the Kuwaitis killed or wounded many more Iraqis than they lost in the Resistance. More important, the military effort may have tied down some thirty thousand Iraqi troops, or more than 10 percent of their army in Kuwait. Further, many of these were Saddam's best forces.

The contribution of the Resistance to the political will to go to war was at least as important. The accounts of life under occupation, the atrocities, and the courage of the ordinary Kuwaitis transmitted by people like `Abd al-Jabir Ma`rafi and Asrar al-Qabandi were critical in keeping Western public opinion focused on the issue of human rights. The actions of the Kuwaiti Resistance helped to retain the moral high ground for Kuwait in a way that politicians, diplomats, and public relations consultants could not.

Appendix: Research Methodology

This article derives from a much longer study of Kuwait during the Iraqi occupation, for which the author conducted several hundred interviews in Kuwait. At least fifty of those interviews concerned the Resistance. The interviews took place mainly in 1993, with some in 1994. They were conducted primarily in English and in some cases in Arabic with the aid of a translator. The author also held many discussions that were not formal interviews but less structured conversations. This was necessary because the most genuinely heroic individuals were also the most reluctant to talk. In addition, part of the article reflects the author's personal experience during the occupation.

¹ Neighborhood committees were able to react so quickly because they are the bodies that run the local cooperative societies, even in peacetime. They therefore already had a structure in place before the invasion.

² Kuwaiti oil continued to be produced, at a reduced level, for Iraqi military purposes, civilian vehicles, power stations, and desalination plants.

³ For a more detailed account, see John Martin Levins, "The Secret War of Asrar Qabandi," Arab Times, Jan. 13-14, 1994.