



Germany and Kuwait

History from 1752 to 1992¹

In 1752, the [Al Sabah](#) family from central Arabia established a trading post in the Persian Gulf. Shortly after as-Sabah Bin Jabir was elected as the first amir in 1756, Europeans discovered Kuwait, literally “Little Fort.” The German explorer Carsten Niebuhr mapped it as “Koueit” in 1772: a township a three-day trip away [from](#) az-Zubair, الزبير.² Another German explorer, Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, mentioned a British trading post there, while the geographer Karl Ritter marked Kuwait’s land in 1818.³ Travelers also recorded religious conflict there, such as disputes in Iraqi Karbala and an-Najaf between Sunnis and Shiites, who had roots in Kuwait.

In 1821 the headquarters of the British East India Company were relocated from Basra, Iraq, to Kuwait, then part of the declining Ottoman Empire, being ruled from the governorate of Baghdad and later, 1884 from Basra.⁴ On the other hand, the [1849](#) Germany remained disunited until Otto von Bismarck became the driving force of the German unification in the German-French war 1870/[1871](#) that led to the creation of the German Empire: “das Deutsche Reich.” Meanwhile, Kuwait’s economic activities included fishing, pearls, spice and other caravan trading to the Gulf, shipping along the East African coastline—via Zanzibar to India and back, [من زنجبار إلى الهند والعودة](#)—and ship building, including dau—[دلو](#)—sailboats.

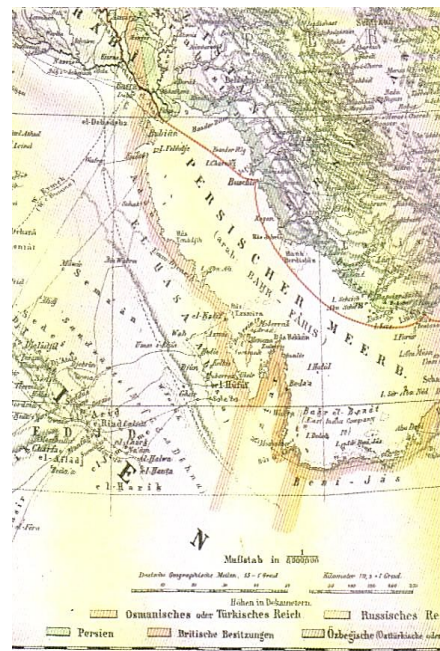
Explorer

Soon sailors also faced competition with steamboats. Steamers, for instance, transported horses from Basra to India. This was a good deal for the British East India Line, wrote the traveler Max Freiherr von Oppenheim.

Von Oppenheim, a German envoy soon posted in 1896 Cairo to report on Islamic affairs, had traveled from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, passing through Kuwait, which he called on his 1893 map just “Kuet.”

He also wrote of how members of the Saud family had taken refuge in Kuwait on numerous occasions—after Egyptians drove them out of [the](#) Wahhaby ad-Dir‘iyya, الدرعية, Makka, and Madina in 1818, and then again in 1871.⁵ German explorer Max von Oppenheim traveled from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf in [1893](#). He noted “Kuet” as a “British Territory of the Ottoman Empire.” [Map: Max von Oppenheim’s Diary, Vol. II (Berlin: [1899](#), here the reprint by Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim 2004)]

Max von Oppenheim’s Travel Route in Red





Before 1914

The opening of the Sues Canal in 1869 led to competing railway projects in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The British tried to secure their lines of communication by sea, and by taking over lands on the way. They occupied Egypt in 1882, Sudan in 1898 (Winston S. Churchill vs. “al-Jihadiyya”). In 1904, Captain Stuart George Knox became the first British political resident of Kuwait.



In the Ottoman *tanzimat* era, *تنظيمات*, provincial governments were reformed after 1839/1853/1876. Thus, “in 1870 Sheikh Abdallah as-Sabah accepted a contract as district director of Kuwait in Basra Province, with assurance of self-rule and exemption from taxes.”⁶

In 1899, the Germans began regular shipping from Hamburg to the Mediterranean with the German Levante Line, thus promoting exploration of the land bridge toward India via Iraqi Mesopotamia and Persia. Von Oppenheim’s journal also speaks of German entrepreneurs in Mesopotamia, Jewish and Christian quarters in Arab towns, Islamic fanaticism, steamers, railways, and the Europeanization of Asia. Berlin watched three decades before World War I as “German Mideast Founding Years” with intense, yet non-colonial actions.

Von Oppenheim, for example, noted that in 1884 Karl Richard established a German consulate in Baghdad, where some 50 Europeans were living. British Consul-General Colonel Edward Mockler⁷ was a political resident for the Indian government there. The Russians and Americans also had consulates in Baghdad, considered a center of the Ottoman Empire with many governmental and commercial connections to Kuwait and the Gulf.⁸

During this time, Berlin also pursued “commercial penetration” of the Ottoman Empire. Kaiser Wilhelm II visited the region twice, once in 1889 and again in 1898. With each visit, Berlin advanced obtaining rights to build railroads there.⁹ In December 1899, an agreement on the Anatolian and Baghdad railroads was concluded between the speaker of the Deutsche Bank, Georg von Siemens, and Ottoman Minister Zihni Pasha.¹⁰

The Kaiser, who had launched his “official Islam policy” in 1898, foresaw a network of railroads that connected Central Europe and the Middle East as a strategic tool, a profitable investment, and an important stabilizing factor for the Ottoman Empire (to be kept and developed in the key German perspective). London, suspicious of these advances and hoping to prevent its European rivals from penetrating India, concluded a secret agreement with the ruler of Kuwait on 23 January 1899.¹¹ The British had learned that German planners wanted to extend the railroad web from Basra, البصرة, to the Kuwaiti port of Kazima, كاظمة.

Thus, a German railway commission visited Shaikh Mubarak Ibn Sabah in September 1899. Sabah, however, opposed the line and refused to sell or rent part of his land, which, according to a previous agreement, he was not allowed to do without first consulting with the British political resident in Kuwait, Malcolm John Meade.¹² The Germans, however, were optimistic that they could get Sabah change his mind, at least through Ottoman sway:

There are 25,000 inhabitants living in Kuwait. Their Arab ruler shaikh Mubarak is only nominally a subject of the Ottomans. The locals are fisherman. A couple of thousand boats swing in the port. Many Kuwaitis are engaged in pearl-diving and Gulf trade. They make a good living and enjoy some wealth.

*The port town of Kazima belongs to shaikh Mubarak. There is no doubt that it belongs to the Ottomans. And it would be easy for them to realize their interests by force. This does not seem to be necessary though, for shaikh Mubarak recognizes the sultan not only as his godly but also as his worldly lord.*¹³

Like shaikh Mubarak, the British too opposed the railroad. While the main British concern was growing German power, Sabah's worry was that the railroad would let the Ottomans exercise more power over him.

The Ottomans in Basra had indeed made territorial claims over Kuwait, considering it part of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Kuwaitis and the British argued that it was better to transport goods via ship rather than by rail. Eventually, however, during the years preceding World War I, cooperation was established between the British and the Germans, with the latter bringing a few British into the management of the railway company.¹⁴

Meanwhile, some Germans started to think of the potential of Islam as a political **tool** or **war** ideology. Having seen the mahdi's revolt in Sudan **and** the rise of pan-Islamism following Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, these Germans thought that an "Islamic revolt" in India (also perhaps in Egypt) would lead to the downfall of the British Empire. In an extensive report from Cairo on the pan-Islamism and the jihadization of Islamism in **1898**, Max von Oppenheim advised the Kaiser that during a possible future European war, raising such "Islamist revolts" in the colonial hinterland of Germany's enemies would be a good tactic.

Burchardt

German explorer Hermann Burchardt, who was received in **1903** by shaikh Mubarak during his travels in the Gulf region, described the shaikh as "unusually well informed" and "majestic".¹⁵ As Berlin went ahead with a "peaceful penetration" of the Ottoman Empire, the British-French Entente Cordiale took actions to block these advances. In 1907, Kuwait's neighbor, Iran, was divided into a northern zone under Russian influence and a southern zone under British sway. In 1909, the British founded the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in "their" area. Four years later, the British secured potential Kuwaiti oil fields.¹⁶ That very year an Anglo-Ottoman agreement recognized Kuwait as an autonomous entity, an effort in which Sir Percy Cox, the British Persian Gulf resident, participated. He worked to block German ventures, especially in Iraq and Iran. On 3 November 1914, Great Britain recognized Kuwait as an independent state under British protection.¹⁷

Photo of Shaikh Mubarak Ibn Sabah, December 6, **1903**



On the other hand, the Germans sought no colonies in the region, instead favoring a "policy of economic penetration." They argued that there was a "natural alliance of interests" between Germans, Ottomans, and Arabs, in contrast to British imperialism.¹⁸ They felt that Kuwait's shaikh would never turn in a war against his "Ottoman masters," ask a Christian power for help in doing so, or obtain support from his subjects for any such action.¹⁹ Moreover, as British-German relations cooled, and World War I approached, the British were often able to block new relations between Germany and Kuwait.

World War I Adversaries

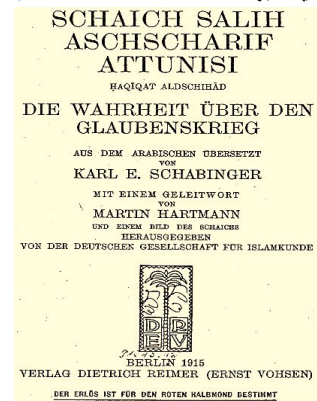
Mubarak Ibn Sabah became Kuwait's ruler in 1896. Having spent his youth in Mumbai, India, he maintained close contact with the British, with whom he sided in World War I.²⁰ The Kaiser supported the Ottomans and concluded a secret alliance with them on 2 August 1914. The Saudis, who Mubarak had helped earlier to capture the city of ar-Riyadh, الرياض, also sided with the British. Some Arab tribes, led by Sharif Husain Ibn Ali of Makka, joined forces with the British against the Ottomans and the Germans. Meanwhile, von Oppenheim warned of the "danger" the Saudis and Kuwaitis might pose to the Ottoman sultan-caliph.²¹

The Germans delivered weapons, but watched as the Ottoman Empire declined. The Kaiser's men wanted Islamic fanaticism and Islamic anti-Christian brotherhoods as "influencers and platforms" to aid the Ottomans mobilizing their subjects against the British and widely inciting some jihad revolts. Among first victims were often the "infidel minorities."

Abu Joint Jihad

Max Baron von Oppenheim forwarded to the kaiser a detailed plan for "revolutionizing our enemies' hinterland."²² Turks and Arabs were to be reunited as Muslims through Islamic war propaganda and jihad revolts in British India and Arabia, French North Africa, and Russian Asia. Von Oppenheim's secret 1914 plan also made oil installations "legitimate war targets."²³ To secure the railroad from Berlin via Istanbul to Aleppo, he lobbied to replace Syrian Christian engineers, train workers, and station officials with Germans, Turks, and Austrians to also ensure the "good behavior" of other Syrian Christian (Armenian) workers "by the threat of penalties against their family members."²⁴

1914 Interfaith Joint Jihad: حقيقة الجهاد



He set up 75 reading rooms for jihad and war guidance in and near the Ottoman Empire. The Tunisian shaikh Salih ash-Sharif at-Tunisi (1869-1920), الشيخ صالح الشرف التونسي, wrote for Enver Pasha as he demanded a new interfaith or "joint jihad" doctrine (see cover above).

Yet like Sharif Husain of Mecca, the Sabah family followed the British lead rather than the Ottoman one. In 1915, Mubarak Ibn Sabah died and his successors, first Jabir and in 1917 Salim, continued to side with the Allies, though the British were somewhat irritated by their "trading with the Ottoman enemy."²⁵ Also, Kuwait served as a refuge for fighters from both sides who entered its territory at will.²⁶

German agents arrived in Baghdad, an-Najaf, Karbala, Tehran, and Bushir, hoping to turn Shiites against the British. In 1915, men like Oskar Ritter von Niedermayer, Werner Otto von Hentig and Friedrich Klein traveled through Iraq and Iran to Afghanistan, seeking to stir revolts there, and into India. In Shiraz, southern Iran, Wilhelm Waßmuß tried to turn tribes against the British. Despite the Ottoman and German missions in Iraq and Iran from 1916 to 1918, the Kuwaitis were more concerned with border disputes.²⁷ Some of them warned that jihad was about to destroy the British empire.²⁸ London knew about this "war by revolution," reporting how von Oppenheim preached jihad in Bairut and Damascus.²⁹ After joining the war as a British ally on 6 April 1917, America gathered evidence on Berlin's Islam and Jew politics as well.³⁰

Niedermayer-Hentig expedition to Kabul's Habibullah



Interwar Era

Following its defeat in World War I, Berlin saw the Middle East as a secondary area for its foreign policy.³¹ Britain, France and Russia remained the primary concern. To get from Baghdad to Basra or Kuwait, a British visa had to be obtained. London became [even](#) suspicious of Arab alumni at German universities, as a “fifth column.”³² In 1920 and 1921, London turned into the mandatory power for Palestine and Iraq, respectively. The British made Kuwait an independent shaykhdom under their protectorate. At the 1922 Uqair Conference held by Sir Percy Cox, London’s high commissioner in Iraq, Kuwait lost part of its former land to the Saudis, and the “neutral zone” was established.

A later map of Kuwait [Wiki](#)



Within Kuwait, the Kuwaiti Council Movement called for the election of officials and for power-sharing with the ruler. Eventually, a legislative Majlis was established in mid-1938 but lasted a mere six months. In March 1939, the Consultative Council was founded. This Majlis ash-Sura, مجلس الشورى, made up of four shaykhs from the Sabahs and nine notables.³³ It too was a short-lived institution.

During [the](#) interwar era, Kuwait experienced difficult times. Tensions between the Sabah and Saudi rulers led to economic hardship. From 1923 to 1937, the Saudi amir, Abd al-Aziz, imposed a boycott on Kuwait over taxation disputes. In 1932, Iraq gained independence from the British, and Saudi Arabia became a unified kingdom. Berlin established commercial and diplomatic relations with Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. The two decades of stagnation and depression after World War I finally came to an end. The Kuwait Oil Company was established in 1934 and, four years later, explorers discovered the huge Burqan oil field,³⁴ حقل برقان, though the commercial production only began some twelve years later.

Arabs, Jews and Hitler

For Germany, however, the region remained a secondary priority.³⁵ When Adolf Hitler came to power on 30 January 1933, he left the Mideast to London, Paris, and Rome for a few years as shown in the Secret Protocol between Stalin and Hitler of [28 September 1939](#), §3, [on](#) Southeast Europe. After the fall of Moscow he would have reordered adjacent Africa and Asia beyond Turkey too. Hitler allowed 60,000 Jews in the Haavara (Hebrew, transfer, הַעֲבָרָה)-Agreement to emigrate to Palestine from 1933 to 1939. Berlin profited by the deal.

Nevertheless, contacts between Germans and Kuwaitis unfolded. Berlin’s ambassador to Baghdad and later to Saudi Arabia, Fritz Grobba, closely watched changes in Kuwait. In 1938, he reported of aspirations by some Arab tribes to establish the *United Arab Shaykhdoms* as a union of the smaller states under Saudi leadership. The idea, however, was rejected by London, much to King Abd al-Aziz’s displeasure. As the Germans received reports on the situation in Kuwait, so Kuwaitis were informed by other Arabs of changes with the Nazis. Germany and Saudi Arabia closed a “treaty of friendship” in 1929, which led to full diplomatic relations in 1939. This post was filled by Fritz Grobba, who served as Berlin’s envoy in Baghdad since [1932](#), and in parallel accredited since mid-February 1939 in Jidda.

In 1939, Hitler received the key Saudi envoy Khalid Al Hud al-Qarqani. A Libyan trader, he held ties in Arabia via Lebanon to Germany (partners also were the Druze Shakib Arslan and German Djidda consul Heinrich de Haas). On 17 June Hitler spoke of his “warm sympathy for Arabs,” and Germans had no territorial claims in the Mideast. He argued they had a mutual enemy, the Jews, whom they must fight jointly, and further clarified this view.

A 1939 German map of Arabia, marking Kuwait as a British possession, Doc. Arc. Foreign Office



Joint Goals and Methods

Hitler stressed that he would not stop until the last Jew was driven out of his country. Khalid, referring to the Prophet as a great religious leader and statesman, explained how he had driven the Jews out of Arabia. Hitler promised active support and assured his sympathy for the Saudi King. At Hitler's Berghof retreat Khalid's idea came up of what would have become of Europe if it had been conquered by Muslims [in 732] and how Islam would have flourished there, "filled with Germanic spirit and dynamism."³⁶ What Hitler did not tell his visitor was, while he liked what he called "Islamic fan-

aticism," he disliked von Oppenheim's jihad [idea](#). Hitler preferred to put his trust in his own military might and was suspicious of "oppressed people" with "racial inferiority."³⁷ As kinds of Jew hatred long existed in the Mideast, Hitler's racist antisemitism added a new dimension. The grand mufti of Palestine Amin al-Husaini and Iraq's Prime Minister Ali al-Kailani espoused it. Al-Husaini offered his services to Berlin in 1933. For his "intifada revolt" London tried to arrest him. He escaped and was on 30 September 1937 deposed as President of the Supreme Muslim Council, his Arab Higher Committee declared illegal.

The mufti's aides dealt with Nazis too. On 1 December 1937, Sa'id Fatah Imam, leader of the Arab Club in Damascus, proposed German radio broadcasts to the Mideast—two years later, Berlin began airing Arabic programs on six transmitters. Imam submitted the mufti's [draft](#) for a pact suggesting "joint propaganda centers" in the region—an allusion to von Oppenheim's 1914 to 1918 "joint jihad" [network](#). Al-Husaini expressed his readiness to spread Nazi ideology and organization in Arab regions. He also proposed jointly fighting Communism (including the "Slavs"), the boycott of Jewish goods, and "acts of terror."³⁸

In turn, Berlin would support him, recognizing the Arab liberation movement and providing means and weapons to fight a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. In addition to al-Husaini, Hitler's Nazism inspired younger Mideastern elites. In Damascus, the founders of the Ba'th party adored him like Zaki al-Arsuzi, Michel Aflaq, and Salah ad-Din al-Bitar. Sami al-Jundi wrote in his book: "We were racist admirers of Nazism and among the first to suggest the translation of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*"³⁹—Arab papers serialized it since 1933.

In 1942 Cairo, King Faruq I and officers, [also](#) Anwar as-Sadat, sided with the Nazis in order to drive out the British. Hitler was [aware](#) of the 1914 idea to create disunity in the enemy's colonial lands [through](#) media and "jihadist fifth columns." But at the start of World War II, the Mideast remained erstwhile a side theater for him. Only after the fall of Moscow did he plan to directly deal with the region (Mussolini's call for his help in Libya was not foreseen). Still, Hitler also aided the anti-British coup by Ali al-Kailani in Baghdad and the grand mufti. When the British overthrew al-Kailani, both asked to meet in Berlin with Hitler who invited them. The mufti was received with honors in Berlin's chancellery and al-Kailani in one of his East-Prussian places. On 28 November 1941, Hitler said to the mufti that he would ask every non-European people to solve "their Jewish problem" and would persecute Jews in all the Mideastern areas under British sway, and later globally. On 15 July 1942 he stressed with R. Ali al-Kailani to "jointly fight until the final victory."

World War II

In Berlin, as German troops advanced to the Sues Canal, al-Husaini called for jihad against the allied forces and the Jews. He advised an Arab Legion and enlisted Muslims for the SS troops, planned Mideastern revolts and blocked rescues of European Jews to Palestine. Since 1942 America was placed on his target list. In a “martyr speech,” he called for all Arabs to rise against the Anglo-Americans, alleging they were “puppets of Jews.” He painted them as a kind of Jewish ruled cosmic evils who are by race and nature the arch enemies of the Arabs and their liberation.⁴⁰

1942 al-Husaini, Muslim troops [Wiki](#)



Al-Kailani, al-Husaini **Trio**



Amin al-Husaini met with chief Shoah organizer Adolf Eichmann to discuss “the Jewish question in Europe.” The mufti was so impressed that he asked Himmler for an advisor, a confidant of Eichmann, to help him take care of the Jews in Palestine after the Axis victory.⁴¹ As General Erwin Rommel’s troops advanced in Egypt in mid-1942, a commando was ready to first liquidate Jews of Cairo and later of Palestine following their projected capture by the military. Ali al-Kailani formally asked in a 26 June 1942 letter to see a concentration camp to see how the methods could be applied in Iraq (with one of the oldest and largest Jewish citizen group). In mid-1942, four Arabs from al-Kailani’s and al-Husaini’s entourage visited the main Sachsenhausen camp near Berlin where several killing methods were in use (since 1943 also a gas chamber). That year both visited a side-camp near Berlin. In his radio texts the mufti mixed religious and racial hatred of Jews.⁴² He stressed that Muslims and Nazis had much in common, Arabs being the “natural allies of Germans.” Hitler agreed.⁴³ According to the grand mufti the fight was against the “world Jewry as the archenemy of Islam.” To him, Germans were also enemies of the British, French, and Soviets, and “behind all of them were Jews.” In his memoirs, see above, in mid-1943, Shoah mastermind Heinrich Himmler secretly told him that some three million of them [Jews] had already been eliminated.⁴⁴

A Bid for Partnership in the Axis 185

وقد كنت أسمع من همير كل مرة ما يدل على شدة حقه على اليهود، يتهمهم بأنهم ظالمون، ويزعمون أنهم مظلومون، ويقول أنهم موقدون نيران الحروب، وأنانيون ونحو ذلك، وبين مقدار الأذى الذي أتت به ألمانيا في الحرب الماضية، وأنهم دائماً يوقدون نار الحرب ثم يستغلونها لمصالحهم المادية، دون أن يخسروا فيها أي شيء، ولذلك فإننا صممنا في هذه الحرب على أن نذيقهم وبال أعمالهم مقدماً، فقد أهدنا حتى الآن حوالي ثلاثة ملايين منهم. (وكان حديثه هذا في صيف عام ١٩٤٣)

١٢٦

Figure 21. On page 126 of his memoirs, al-Husaini reveals Himmler’s remarks at their meeting in Zhitomir on the Jews and the Final Solution. “Every time I heard of his deep hatred of the Jews. He accused them of being offenders who allege that they are ill-treated. He said they are igniters of the fire of war. In doing so, they are selfish, as shown by the scope of harm done to Germany in the past war. They always stoke the fire of war and use it for their material interests though without injuring themselves a bit. Therefore, we have decided in this war to make them suffer and to pay attention to their activities in advance. Thus, up to now we have liquidated about three million of them (this conversation was in the summer of 1943).”

Mideastern Oil

In early 1942, the Germans began drafting war plans for Arabia, the Persian Gulf and Iran, especially hoping for a revolt by Iranian officers. After the planned fall of Soviet Russia, the strategy was to institute a “pincer operation:” one arm through Egypt and the other via the Caucasus into the Arab-Iranian area. Some tribes hated the ruling Iranian Pahlavis and the Soviets; thus Nazis took advantage of those conflicts to again instigate revolts. In Iran, they installed a network of agents under Bernhardt Schulze-Holthus to aim at a “national-Persian revolution” and a pro-Nazi regime in Tehran.⁴⁵

At the same time, the mufti called upon the Arabs to revolt against the British, explaining that if Germany was successful in seizing control of Egypt, the British would also be defeated in Palestine, Transjordan, and Syria. Ali al-Kailani had already asked that Kuwait “be made a future Iraqi territory” and secured Benito Mussolini’s consent for this annexation.⁴⁶ Berlin, however, felt that the output of the Abadan oil fields of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company should remain in Iran but that a pipeline could carry oil to Iraq and then Berlin and Rome, as with the oil of Mosul.⁴⁷

The Nazi leadership was composed of two factions concerning the Mideast. The first regarded Mideastern oil as very important for the German war machine and for their future empire. This group sent several envoys to the Middle East, including Fritz Grobba and navy commander Karl Dönitz (on 30 April 1945 Hitler’s successor as head of state until the war’s end on 8 May), as well as some officers from the ministries of warfare and economy.

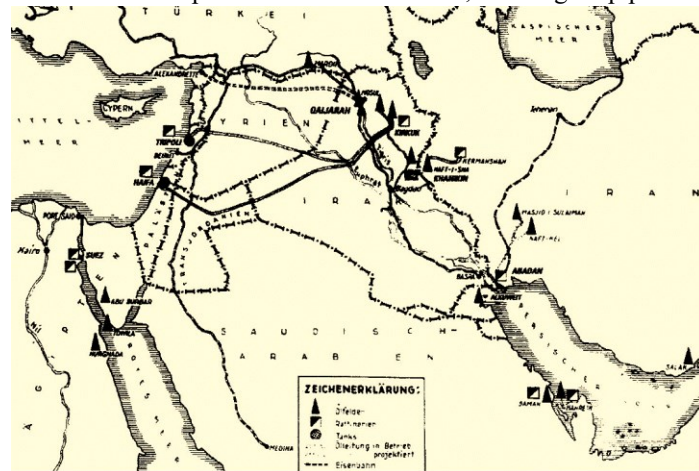
Members of the second group viewed Mideastern oil as something to be denied to the enemy, as a war target to be destroyed, but not urgent for Berlin’s warfare. Hitler, who relied on oil from Romania and hoped to obtain oil from Soviet Azerbaijan, belonged to this latter group. A special report advised blocking the Sues Canal and oil pipelines from Kirkuk via Haifa to Tripoli so that the British would have no fuel in the Eastern Mediterranean. The report noted that an oil delivery from Kuwait to this area would be nearly impossible, as the British needed it in Iraq. Rather, they would have to rely on small oil deliveries from Egypt.

Arab Union of States

On the other hand, the report claimed that Iraqi oil was only a supplemental source for the British, but it would soon become the key source for the Axis powers in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. So, military action should be taken to secure oil reservoirs.⁴⁸ But in May 1941 London crushed al-Kailani’s coup in Iraq. In the second half of 1942 came the turning point. If not for Allied forces landing in North Africa and the

Soviet victories in Stalingrad and the Caucasus, the Germans would have invaded the countries neighboring Kuwait—and Kuwait would likely have been annexed by Iraq as al-Kailani demanded. In an 11-point plan that he and al-Husaini advanced to the Germans on 24 September 1941, they proposed an “independent Arab State” comprised of 1: the Kingdom of Iraq, 2: all Syrian lands including Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and East Jordan, and 3: Arab emirates under British rule. This “Arab Union of States” was to join the Tripartite Pact Rome-Berlin-Tokyo. Had Hitler and his Axis won, chances were that Kuwait would have not come to be and then belong to Iraq [as Saddam Husain tried it in 1990]. If the Nazis were victorious, they would have built an “Arab Union of States” with Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Transjordan, and British lead Arab emirates—along the Nazi lines. Then they would have advanced the Shoah of Jews in the Mideast, as Hitler explained it to the grand mufti at the end of 1941—also backed by his Italian Axis partner Benito Mussolini.⁴⁹

1941 German map of oilfields with Kuwait, showing oil pipelines



Divided Germans

Emblems Federal & East Germany



After their victory in World War II, the Allies split Germany into two countries: East Germany (East Berlin as capital) and West Germany (Bonn as capital). This division of East and West Germany exemplified a growing global conflict between the Soviet swayed East bloc (with the Warsaw Pact) and the liberal West aligned with Nato. Kuwait gained independence on June 19, 1961. The Cold war was in full swing, as manifested by the building of the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961. East Germans trailed the Kremlin's policy, while Federal Germany followed Washington's line. Both expected Arabs to side with them, each regarding itself as "the only legitimate German actor in foreign affairs." Kuwaiti rulers decided on neutrality to keep the Cold war out of their area. Unlike before, Kuwait's foreign policy was gaining import due to its expanding economy. In 1946, shaikh Ahmad turned on the oil tap. By 1952, the land became the largest Gulf oil exporter. Kuwait attracted investments and foreign workers, among them Palestinians. In 1961, it joined the Arab League.

In the early 1960s, Egyptian President Jamal Abd an-Nasir introduced Arab socialism in Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. With the nationalization of foreign capital came a growing influence from Moscow and its allies in East Berlin on Kuwait. In 1963, diplomatic relations were established between the Sabah rulers and Moscow. Bonn had a consulate in Kuwait since 4 November 1963 and on 13 May 1965, they announced the intention to establish full diplomatic ties. East Germany started a campaign of its own. In March 1965, Abd an-Nasir received East Berlin's head of state, Walter Ulbricht, in Cairo. Ulbricht also took the occasion to establish official relations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) under Ahmad ash-Shuqairi, أحمد الشقيري. Since Bonn threatened other countries with a boycott should they establish full diplomatic relations with East Berlin, it now punished Cairo by canceling already granted economic aid and announcing the full recognition of Israel. In turn, Egypt and nine Arab states severed their ties with Bonn. Kuwait was among them.

Following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Bonn looked for alternatives to ease a threatened oil embargo by Kuwait, Iraq, Libya and others. It thus agreed on new oil deliveries from the United States and Venezuela, though at 51 cents a barrel this oil was far more expensive than Mideastern oil, only 15 cents a barrel. Syrian leaders proposed a bargain with East Germany in which it would "help in wiping out Israel" in exchange for full recognition by all Arabs. The East Germans rejected it but did supply weapons after the 1967 war.⁵⁰ Due to the Arab defeat, however, at a Warsaw Pact meeting Ulbricht successfully proposed that five Soviet satellites sever all ties with Israel. Politicians in Bonn viewed this move as the Kremlin's attempt to radicalize the Arabs and distance them from America and the West. Results? In Kuwait, a Palestinian paper—al-Hadaf of 31 October 1968—called for 14 al-Fida'iyin, الفدائيون, and 14 Kuwaiti guarantors, to blow up US Embassies in Arab states and to kill Americans, should the US deliver Phantom Jets to Israel "that would kill civilians."

Meanwhile, Kuwait employed 25,000 Palestinians, some of whom, under Yasir Arafat's leadership, belonged to his 1957 Fatah group there. East Berlin, on the other hand, denounced Israel as an "imperialist force" in the Mideast,⁵¹ scoring points in Kuwait. The first East Germans from the Chamber of Commerce visited Kuwait in 1968. In early 1970, East Berlin established a trade representation in Kuwait City, which was elevated to a Consulate General, inaugurated by Walter Issleib in April 1971. Finally, on 18 December 1972, Kuwait simultaneously established full diplomatic relations with both German states.⁵²

Duo

In October 1982, after Iran's Islamic Revolution and in the Iran-Iraq War, East German Head of State Erich Honecker visited Kuwait. That war was a big threat to Kuwait, which helped to initiate the Gulf Cooperation Council as part of its war response.⁵³ Also East Berlin now had a greater motive for tightening relations to Kuwait, since Moscow had raised the price of its oil export in 1982 to international market values. So, East Berlin looked for new sources, though as it turned out, Kuwait's oil was too rich in sulfides for East German use.

Kuwait: Arafat, Honecker 1982 Foto BStU



Erich Honecker stressed to the Kuwaitis his leadership's anti-Israel credentials. He claimed that "it was only the Warsaw Pact Organization that had saved East Germany from a similar fate to that of the Palestinians." He also had told West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt: "One cannot be friends with the Israelis and the Arabs as well." Israel, he claimed contrary to the facts, was an illegitimate state armed with money from Bonn under the guise of compensation for the Jews.

Honecker also announced to Crown Prince Sa'ad Abdallah that East Germany was raising the PLO representation in East Berlin to a full embassy. The crown prince replied that the Kuwaitis knew East Berlin was helping the Arabs and Palestinians. As a small country, Kuwait was against the use of force, with the exception of defending the rights of Palestinians. The same day, Honecker met with Yasir Arafat in Kuwait, assuring him of East Germany's continued support.⁵⁴

A year after East Berlin's diplomatic recognition in 1969, it delivered arms and ammunition for 5,000 soldiers of the pro-Syrian PLO as-Sa'iqa group.⁵⁵ There is also evidence that militants were armed by East Berlin to carry out attacks against Israelis and Jews in the following two decades, through the PLO, Syrian, and Euro-Left groups. Since meeting in Kuwait, the PLO chief and the head of the East German state cooperated in Mideastern affairs for two decades. Arafat needed weapons and broader support, Honecker also looked for Mideastern economic opportunities and loans to stabilize his country's economy.

Failed Ventures

Politicians in East Berlin viewed Kuwait as the gate to the Gulf region as well as a source of loans and investments. Kuwait gave the East German Foreign Trade Bank a \$22 million loan in 1978 and \$100 million in February 1987. In the prior year 1986, Honecker received Kuwait's 15th amir shaikh Sabah Ahmad al-Jabir as-Sabah in East Berlin.

Kuwaitis participated in the Leipzig trade fair, hoping to enter the Soviet bloc markets. East Berlin also exported machinery and medical training equipment to Kuwait in addition to offering educational programs for Kuwaiti students. Still, in the 1980s, Kuwait-East German trade remained one-quarter of that between Kuwait and Federal Germany.

Moreover, the attempts to establish joint ventures failed. There were problems regarding ownership, profit sharing, and currency transfer from the closed East German market to the world markets. Following Honecker's visit to Kuwait, his ambassador there from 1982 to 1987, Arne C. Seifert, complained about the many bureaucratic hurdles. According to this envoy, the Kuwaitis felt that East Germans did not know enough about the world market and vice versa those Arabs considered the East German market still as fairly insecure.

As the Soviet Union and Soviet bloc simultaneously opened up and declined in the late 1980s, there were new efforts at economic cooperation, including joint ventures. One idea was for Kuwait to replace Soviet oil deliveries to India, South Asia, and Yemen, while Moscow was to take over Kuwaiti oil deliveries to Western Europe. None of these projects came to fruition. Meanwhile, Kuwait was gaining a large surplus of currency from its successful economic relations with Bonn. Some money was used to invest in Volkswagen and other big companies in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Despite their turbulent relationship, Bonn grew to Kuwait's third largest trade partner (after America and Great Britain). The economic and other ties, including political and cultural, were established on a wide scale. While the Kuwaitis also cultivated their narrow relations with East Berlin, inter-German competition in Kuwait continued to demonstrate the potential of an open, democratic society in Bonn, versus the limits of a closed dictatorial order in East Berlin. The "twofold Germans and Kuwait" remain a worthwhile historical topic with an eye on ties between America, Mideast and Europe—[AME](#).

After the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 (liberated in the second Gulf war by America's coalition on 27 February 1991), East and West Germany became once again unified since 3 October 1990 under the leadership of George H.W. Bush, Helmut Kohl, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, and many others until 1992. Those lucky and more liberal Germans did not hesitate to side with Kuwait during the coalition war against Iraq shortly thereafter to liberate Kuwait as the independent, fully sovereign state.⁵⁶ Unlike in the Nazi era, this time they all helped to rescue what truly needed to be liberated.

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