

Kuwait: Extremism and Terrorism

Following the death of Major General Qassim Soleimani by a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on January 3, 2020, the Pentagon readied 4,000 troops for a security mission to Kuwait. According to a spokesperson at the U.S. Department of Defense, the brigade was deployed in anticipation of retaliatory attacks against U.S. personnel and facilities in the Middle East by Iranian forces and militants sympathetic to Iran. (Source: [New York Times](#))

In late March 2017, Philippine authorities, with the help of U.S. and Kuwaiti officials, arrested a Kuwaiti couple in Manila with suspected links to ISIS. Philippine authorities believe the couple had been plotting an attack in Kuwait and possibly the Philippines. The March 2017 arrests followed the August 2016 arrest by Kuwaiti authorities of a Filipino woman with suspected ties to ISIS. The Filipino woman was later convicted of supporting ISIS and sentenced to 10 years in a Kuwaiti prison to be followed by deportation. (Sources: [Al Arabiya](#), [ARA News](#), [Associated Press](#))

Kuwaiti authorities have carried out multiple arrests of ISIS-linked suspects since at least 2015. That year, on June 26, Kuwait experienced its first ISIS attack and the worst terrorist attack in the country's history when a suicide bomber targeted Kuwait City's Imam Sadiq mosque after midday prayers. The attack left 27 people dead and wounded 227 others. (Sources: [CNN](#), [BBC News](#))

Overview

Kuwait is a Sunni-majority constitutional emirate. The country has seen little-to-no violence between its Sunni and Shiite communities, which constitute approximately 70 and 30 percent of the Muslim population, respectively. Nonetheless, Kuwait has been vulnerable to extremist ideology promulgated by its domestic [Muslim Brotherhood](#) arm, and to terrorist attacks perpetrated by nationalist Palestinian, Shiite, and Sunni fundamentalist groups—including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), [Hezbollah](#), [al-Qaeda](#), and [ISIS](#). The country experienced the worst terrorist attacks in its history on June 26, 2015, when an ISIS suicide bomber killed 27 worshippers in a Shiite mosque in Kuwait City. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [BBC News](#), [American Foreign Policy Council](#))

Since mid-2011, individuals and groups inside Kuwait have worked to raise and funnel funds to terrorist organizations fighting Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, including the Nusra Front and ISIS. In March 2014, then-Treasury Undersecretary David Cohen warned that Kuwait was "the epicenter of fundraising for terrorist groups in Syria." Separately, a network of Kuwait-based operatives is believed to help smuggle jihadists from various Gulf countries to the Afghanistan-Pakistan region to join extremist groups there. Kuwaiti citizens have also left the country to fight in jihadist conflicts abroad. As of January 2015, approximately 70 Kuwaitis have left the country to join ISIS, the Nusra Front, and other jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. (Sources: [American Foreign Policy Council](#), [Associated Press](#), [Soufan Group](#))

In recent years, in order to reduce the threat from terrorist activity within the country, the Kuwaiti government has passed legislation that: criminalizes the online fundraising and propagandizing for terrorist organizations; requires citizens to surrender unlicensed weapons and explosives; and compels Kuwaiti business owners to install surveillance devices. Most notably, following the June 26, 2015, ISIS attack, the Kuwaiti government passed a law requiring all Kuwaiti citizens, foreign residents, and tourists to provide DNA samples to a database controlled by the Interior Ministry. In addition to relevant legislation, the Kuwaiti government runs a number of domestic programs to counter violent extremism, including an ongoing television and radio campaign offering alternative messaging to extremist ideology. The government also monitors the country's prominent clerics for extremist or incendiary sermons. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Library of Congress](#), [Al Bayan](#), [Gulf Business](#), [Arabian Business](#), [Arabian Business](#), [Reuters](#))

Internationally, Kuwait participates in several intergovernmental organizations related to counterterrorism including the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. Kuwait is also a member of the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, as well as Saudi Arabia's "Islamic military alliance," which the kingdom formed in December 2015. According to polling conducted by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in 2015, 3 percent of Kuwaitis view ISIS positively, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas receive positive ratings from 31 and 42 percent of the Kuwaiti population, respectively. (Sources: [Global Coalition](#), [Reuters](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Washington Institute](#))

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Terrorism and extremist ideology is less prevalent in Kuwait than in other Gulf countries—though the emirate has faced a variety of terrorist and extremist threats. Since 1952, a domestic Muslim Brotherhood branch has sought to instate a hardline version of sharia as the country's primary

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source of legislation. Beginning in the 1970s, the emirate experienced attacks by nationalist Palestinian groups and Hezbollah-aligned fighters. Then, in the 1990s and 2000s, Kuwait experienced terrorism perpetrated by al-Qaeda-linked militants, and later, ISIS cells in the country. Kuwait continues to face several challenges in this area, including the country's use by jihadists as a transit point between Gulf countries and the Afghanistan-Pakistan region; the flight of foreign fighters to join jihadist conflicts abroad; the dissemination of radical Islamist ideology by prominent religious scholars; and the financing of international jihadist groups by some of those scholars, as well as other individuals within its borders. (Sources: [Foreign Policy](#), [Reuters](#), [American Foreign Policy Council](#))

Kuwait is used as a transit point for operatives traveling from the Gulf to the Afghanistan-Pakistan region to partake in jihad there. To that end, a fairly well-organized network of Kuwaiti smugglers is believed to aid those jihadists in reaching their destinations. Kuwaiti citizens have also traveled abroad to fight alongside extremist groups. In the mid-2000s, for example, a small contingent of Kuwaitis fought alongside al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)—the precursor to ISIS—against the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. More recently, as of January 2015, approximately 70 Kuwaitis have left the country to join ISIS, the Nusra Front, and other jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. (Sources: [American Foreign Policy Council](#), [Associated Press](#), [Soufan Group](#))

Extremist sentiment within Kuwait may be exacerbated by the hateful rhetoric and open support for jihadist groups expressed by some Kuwaiti clerics. Prominent cleric Shafi al-Ajmi, for example, has regularly voiced support for Syrian jihadists, calling on the Kuwaiti public in May 2013 to donate “missiles, anti-aircraft missiles, bombs, and RPGs” to the “mujahideen” in Syria. The following month, Ajmi declared in a speech, “We will arm the mujahideen from here, as well as from the Arabian Peninsula, from the Gulf states, from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey.” That August, the Kuwaiti government barred Ajmi from delivering Friday sermons and banned his television show. One year later, Ajmi was designated as a terrorist by the U.S. State Department for fundraising for the Nusra Front on social media platforms. He was designated alongside fellow Kuwaiti cleric Hajjaj al-Ajmi, who was similarly sanctioned for funneling money to the Nusra Front. Following their designation, the men were briefly detained by Kuwaiti security forces, but swiftly released. (Sources: [MEMRI](#), [Reuters](#), [Gulf News](#), [U.S. Treasury](#), [Reuters](#))

Another prominent Kuwaiti cleric, Hamid al-Ali, regularly comments on a variety of social and political subjects, and is believed to heavily influence Muslim opinion. He has issued fatwas approving suicide bombings and the attack tactic of crashing airplanes into buildings. Ali was designated as a terrorist by the U.S. Department of the Treasury in December 2006 for providing financial support to al-Qaeda-affiliated groups “seeking to commit acts of terrorism in Kuwait, Iraq, and elsewhere.” (Sources: [American Foreign Policy Council](#), [Jamestown](#), [U.S. Treasury](#))

Financing of Jihadist Groups

In the 2000s, Kuwait-based individuals and institutions supported and financed al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-affiliated groups. Hamid al-Ali, for example, designated by the Treasury in 2006, recruited and facilitated the travel of Kuwaitis to fight in Iraq alongside al-Qaeda in Iraq. He also led and financed a Kuwait-based, al-Qaeda-linked terror cell that plotted to attack U.S. and Kuwaiti targets in 2005, according to the U.S. Treasury. Ali had previously been arrested by the Kuwaiti government in 1999 for publishing a fatwa labeling the Kuwaiti government kuffar. There are no reports suggesting Ali was arrested following his 2006 Treasury designation. (Sources: [U.S. Treasury](#), [Jamestown](#))

In 2008, the Treasury designated the Afghan and Pakistani branches of a Kuwaiti charity, the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS). According to the Treasury, the branches had provided financial and material support to al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, including the Southeast Asian group [Jemaah Islamiyah](#), the Pakistan-based [Lashkar e-Tayyiba](#), and the Somali-based al-Itihaad al-Islamiya. The Treasury noted, however, that “there was no evidence that the Kuwait-based RIHS headquarters” knew that the Afghan and Pakistani RIHS branches were funding al-Qaeda. (Sources: [U.S. Treasury](#), [U.S. Treasury](#))

The charity Kuwait Scholars' Union (KSU) held several largescale fundraisers for rebel fighters in Syria throughout 2013, ultimately sending those funds to both the Nusra Front and ISIS. In June of that year, the KSU's president, Dr. Nabil al-Awadi, said that the charity had “[prepared] 8,700 Syrian mujahideen,” and that it would continue to fundraise until it had equipped 12,000 jihadists. Later in 2013, the KSU helped to raise funds for a massacre by Sunni jihadists against Shiite civilians. Shafi al-Ajmi, the U.S.-designated cleric, tweeted that donations to KSU would go “to buy what is needed to expel the Safavids,” using a derogatory term for Shiite Muslims. (Sources: [U.S. Treasury](#), [Telegraph](#), [Human Rights Watch](#))

In March 2014, then-Treasury Undersecretary David Cohen [referred](#) to Kuwait as “the epicenter of fundraising for terrorist groups in Syria.” Cohen also disparaged Kuwait's newly-appointed Minister of Justice and Minister of Islamic Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Nayef al-Ajmi, warning that Ajmi had a “history of promoting jihad in Syria.” (Ajmi ultimately resigned in May 2014, citing health reasons.) In April 2014, administration officials of then-U.S. President Barack Obama revealed that Kuwaiti individuals and charities were responsible for supplying hundreds of millions of dollars to al-Qaeda-linked terrorists in the Syrian civil war, comprising the biggest source of funding to those militants. These funds were raised

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not only by registered charities, but by mosques, private groups, and individuals, according to regional journalist Elizabeth Dickinson. (Sources: [U.S. Treasury](#), [National](#), [Washington Post](#), [Telegraph](#), [Brookings Institution](#))

In August 2014, the U.S. Treasury designated Shafi al-Ajmi, Hajjaj al-Ajmi, and terrorist financier Abd al-Rahman Khalaf Ubayd Juday al-Anizi. According to the Treasury, Anizi had worked with senior al-Qaeda in Iraq and then ISIS leaders to transfer funds from Kuwait to Syria. He had also financed and facilitated the travel of ISIS foreign fighters from Syria to Iraq. Anizi is also believed to have smuggled foreign fighters from Kuwait to Afghanistan to fight with al-Qaeda there, and to have facilitated the movement of al-Qaeda associates from Iran to Afghanistan. Later in August, the U.S. Treasury sanctioned Kuwait-based facilitator Hamid Hamad Hamid al Ali, (distinct from Hamid al-Ali designated in 2006), for funding and recruiting for the Nusra Front. According to the Treasury, Ali raised tens of thousands of dollars “to help [the group] purchase weapons and supplies;” traveled to Syria to deliver those funds; and provided Kuwaiti foreign fighters with funds to give the Nusra Front when in Syria. (Sources: [U.S. Treasury](#), [U.S. Treasury](#))

The Kuwaiti government arrested Shafi al-Ajmi and Hajjaj al-Ajmi in August 2014, briefly detaining and then releasing them following their designation by the U.S. Treasury. (Source: [Reuters](#))

The Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait

The [Muslim Brotherhood](#) in Kuwait has had several different names since its founding in 1952. Today, it is represented by the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), a minority political party that seeks to instate sharia as the country’s primary source of legislation. The Kuwaiti Brotherhood also operates a charitable arm known as the Social Reform Society (SRS), sanctioned as a terrorist organization by Russia and Kazakhstan and accused by the latter of engaging in terrorist activity and financing. (Sources: [Carnegie Endowment](#), [Al-Monitor](#), [Kazakhstan Ministry](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

While the Kuwaiti government has long tolerated its domestic Brotherhood arm, tension has mounted in recent years between the government and the ICM, particularly during the Brotherhood’s reign in Egypt between 2012 and 2013. The ICM publicly criticized the Kuwaiti government’s anti-Brotherhood messaging during [Mohammed Morsi](#)’s 13-month tenure as president. Following Morsi’s July 2013 ouster, Kuwaiti politicians accused the ICM of taking orders from the Egyptian Brotherhood, as well as engaging in a number of criminal activities, including terrorism, money laundering, and plotting a coup against the Kuwaiti government. In turn, the ICM castigated the Kuwaiti government for its public statements supporting Morsi’s removal, as well as its move to welcome interim Egyptian President Adly Mansour on an official state visit. (Sources: [Foreign Policy](#), [Carnegie Endowment](#))

The ICM boycotted Kuwaiti parliamentary elections held in 2012 and 2013, protesting changes to Kuwait’s electoral laws. In November 2016, however, the ICM ended its boycott, fielding six candidates in Kuwaiti parliamentary elections and winning four of fifty seats. The SRS has meanwhile retained its status as a charitable nongovernmental organization in Kuwait, though the organization was designated as a terrorist organization by the Kazakhstani and Russian governments in 2005 and 2006, respectively. According to the Kazakhstani government, the SRS engages in terrorist activities, including “armed jihad” and terrorist financing. (Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#), [Kazakhstan Ministry](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

The Peninsula Lions and the Mujahideen of Kuwait

In 2005, the domestic jihadist group Peninsula Lions waged violent attacks in Kuwait. Authorities claim the group had ties to the al-Haramain Brigades, a subgroup of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Peninsula Lion members carried out attacks against Kuwaiti security forces and U.S. personnel, including through ambushes and roadside IEDs. In addition, authorities allege the group plotted to stage suicide attacks and had planned a coup against the Kuwaiti government. Peninsula Lion militants clashed with state security forces on four separate occasions in January 2005, resulting in the death of four security officials and nine militants. In December of that year, the Kuwaiti government convicted 37 Peninsula Lion members of murder, attempted assassinations, and other terror related crimes. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#), ‘[Scoop](#)’ [Wikileaks](#), [Washington Institute](#), [BBC News](#), [Trac](#), [Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars](#))

A lesser-known domestic jihadist group in Kuwait, the Mujahideen of Kuwait, claimed responsibility for a number of attacks on Kuwaiti and U.S. forces in 2005. That year, the group is also believed to have facilitated the transfer of Kuwaiti fighters to Iraq and Syria. (Sources: [Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars](#), [Jamestown](#))

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ISIS

Kuwait has remained relatively resilient to a domestic ISIS presence compared to neighboring countries Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, ISIS has managed to wage attacks within Kuwait, including the June 26, 2015, suicide bombing of a Shiite mosque in Kuwait City that killed 27 people and injured more than 227 others. Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber al-Mubarak al-Sabah warned that the bombing was an attempt by ISIS to threaten national unity. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [Reuters](#))

Kuwaiti authorities have conducted raids resulting in the arrest of ISIS militants. In November 2015, officials arrested six men—two Kuwaitis, three Syrians, and one Egyptian—suspected of belonging to an ISIS terror cell. One of these men, a Syrian named Osama Mohammed Saeed Khaiyat, admitted to having transferred funds to ISIS-related bank accounts in Turkey and Syria, according to the Interior Ministry. He also confessed to having made a deal in the Ukraine to purchase rockets and ammunition to be shipped to ISIS in Syria via Turkey. In July 2016, the Interior Ministry announced that security forces had carried out “three pre-emptive operations in Kuwait and abroad that led to derailing a number of [ISIS] plots targeting Kuwait.” The Interior Ministry also noted that security forces had arrested “several [ISIS] members.” (Sources: [CNN](#), [Reuters](#))

In August 2016, Kuwaiti authorities arrested a Filipino woman with alleged ties to ISIS, later convicting her of supporting ISIS and sentencing her to 10 years in Kuwaiti prison. That October, an ISIS supporter drove a garbage truck loaded with explosives into a truck carrying three U.S. soldiers, injuring only himself. In March 2017, Philippine authorities, with the help of U.S. and Kuwaiti officials, arrested a Kuwaiti couple with suspected links to ISIS. Philippine authorities believe the couple had been plotting an attack within Kuwait and possibly the Philippines. (Sources: [Chicago Tribune](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [ARA News](#), [Associated Press](#))

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Kuwait experienced terrorist attacks—including hostage-takings, bombings, and airplane hijackings—perpetrated by both nationalist Palestinian groups and Shiite militants aligned with Hezbollah. In 1974, militants belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) attacked the Japanese Embassy in Kuwait, taking the Japanese ambassador and seven others hostage. Ultimately unsuccessful, the attack was carried out in coordination with the Japanese Red Army—a Lebanese-based militant communist group—as well as the underground militant Arab organization Sons of Occupied Arab Territories. (Sources: [Washington Institute](#), [New York Times](#))

In December 1982, Hezbollah militants and members of the Shiite militant group Islamic Dawa Party carried out coordinated bombings against several high-profile targets including the French and U.S. embassies, killing six people and wounding 86 others. In the wake of the bombings, Kuwaiti authorities convicted 17 terrorists, who came to be known as the “Kuwait 17.” In the following years, Shiite militants linked to Hezbollah carried out terrorist attacks in order to pressure the Kuwaiti government to release the “Kuwait 17”—including the hijacking of Kuwait Airways Flight 221 in December 1984; the failed assassination attempt of Kuwaiti Emir Sheik Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah in May 1985; and the hijacking of Kuwait Airways Flight 422 in April 1988. (Sources: [Sacred Rage](#), [Robin Wright](#), [New York Times](#), [Washington Institute](#))

In the early-mid 2000s, Kuwait experienced a string of terrorist attacks, many of them perpetrated by Sunni Islamic extremists. In October 2002, two al-Qaeda-tied gunmen attacked U.S. Marines during a training exercise on Kuwait’s Failaka Island, killing one Marine and wounding one other. That attack was followed by the January 2003 shooting of U.S. military contractors by a Kuwaiti civil servant who reportedly subscribed to Islamic fundamentalist beliefs. In March 2003, U.S. Army sergeant Hasan Akbar killed two fellow soldiers and wounded 14 at a U.S. army base in Kuwait in an attempt to stop U.S. troops—who were to be deployed to Iraq—from killing Muslims there. In 2005, two homegrown domestic extremist groups, the Peninsula Lions and the Mujhaideen of Kuwait, claimed responsibility for several attacks against Kuwaiti security forces and U.S. personnel. Kuwaiti authorities allege the Peninsula Lions group was linked to the al-Haramain Brigades, a subgroup of AQAP in Saudi Arabia. (Sources: [New York Times](#), [BBC News](#), [Washington Post](#), [Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars](#), ‘Scoop’ Wikileaks, [Al Jazeera](#))

Within the past decade, Kuwait has dismantled al-Qaeda and ISIS cells, including in August 2009 when security officials arrested six al-Qaeda-linked suspects accused of plotting attacks on U.S. troops stationed at Camp Arifjan, south of Kuwait City. Authorities have also arrested ISIS-linked suspects since at least 2015. That year, on June 25, 2015, Kuwait experienced the largest terror attack in its history, carried out by ISIS. (Sources: [New York Times](#), [CNN](#), [Reuters](#))

June 2015 ISIS bombing of a Shiite Mosque

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On June 25, 2015, a suicide bomber targeted Kuwait City’s Shiite Imam Sadiq mosque, killing 27 people and wounding 227 others. In its claim of responsibility, ISIS referred to the suicide bomber, Saudi national Abu Suleiman al-Muwahed, as “one of the knights of the Sunni people”—and praised him for killing Shiite Muslims. Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber al-Mubarak al-Sabah warned that the attack was an attempt by ISIS to threaten Kuwait’s national unity. The attack came three days after ISIS released a speech by then-spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, in which he called on followers around the world to step up attacks during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, and to target Shiite Muslims in particular. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [Reuters](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [Fox News](#), [New York Times](#), [Long War Journal](#))

Investigations into the attack revealed that an organized network of ISIS operatives in Saudi Arabia had plotted the bombing. According to Saudi officials, the operatives had overseen and facilitated a number of details including the bomber’s flight from Saudi Arabia via Bahrain, the driver within Kuwait, a place to prepare, the explosives vest, and even the Kuwaiti-style robes worn by the bomber. (Source: [Reuters](#))

- The Court of appeals upholds the sentences of seven defendants—one Lebanese national, two Saudis, one Syrian, one Egyptian and two Kuwaitis—convicted of funding ISIS and training ISIS members to use arms. Other than the Lebanese national who was sentenced to 15 years in prison, the other six defendants receive 10 year terms. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#)
- Philippine authorities, with the help of U.S. and Kuwaiti officials, arrest a Kuwaiti couple in Manila with suspected links to ISIS. Philippine authorities believe the couple had been plotting an attack in Kuwait and possibly the Philippines. Source: [Associated Press](#)
- **October 8, 2016:** An ISIS sympathizer drives a garbage truck loaded with explosives into a truck carrying three U.S. soldiers, injuring only himself. The perpetrator, identified by Kuwaiti officials as Egyptian national Ibrahim Sulaiman, had on him a hand-written note expressing support for and pledging allegiance to ISIS. Kuwaiti authorities arrest Sulaiman following the failed attack. Sources: [Chicago Tribune](#), [CBS News](#), [Al Arabiya](#)
- **August 5, 2016:** Kuwaiti authorities arrest a Filipino woman with alleged ties to ISIS. She is convicted of supporting ISIS and sentenced to 10 years in Kuwaiti prison in December 2016. Sources: [Al Arabiya](#), [ARA News](#)
- **June 27, 2016:** The Interior Ministry announces it has foiled three ISIS attacks after conducting raids resulting in the arrest of ISIS militants. Source: [Reuters](#)
- **November 19, 2015:** Kuwaiti authorities arrest six men—two Kuwaitis, three Syrians and one Egyptian—suspected of belonging to an ISIS terror cell. At least one of the suspects admitted to transferring funds to ISIS-related bank accounts in Turkey and Syria, according to the Interior Ministry. That suspect also confessed to making a deal in the Ukraine to purchase rockets and ammunition to be shipped to ISIS in Syria via Turkey. Source: [CNN](#)
- **June 26, 2015:** In the worst terrorist attack in Kuwait’s history, an ISIS suicide bomber targets the Shiite Imam Sadiq mosque in Kuwait City after midday prayers, killing 27 people and wounding 227 others. ISIS swiftly claims responsibility. Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber al-Mubarak al-Sabah says the attack is an attempt to threaten national unity. Sources: [BBC News](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [Fox News](#)
- **August 11, 2009:** Kuwaiti authorities reveal that they have arrested six individuals accused of plotting attacks on U.S. troops stationed at Camp Arifjan, south of Kuwait City. The six men allegedly belonged to a terrorist group with links to al-Qaeda. Source: [New York Times](#)
- The Peninsula Lions and the Mujahideen of Kuwait claim responsibility for a number of attacks against Kuwaiti security forces and U.S. personnel. Most notably, in January 2005, Peninsula Lion militants clash with state security forces on four separate occasions, resulting in the death of four security officials and nine militants. The Kuwaiti government later convicts 37 Peninsula Lion members of murder, attempted assassinations, and other terror related crimes. Sources: [Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars](#), ‘Scoop’ Wikileaks, [Al Jazeera](#)
- **December 15, 2033:** Kuwaiti gunmen not affiliated with a specific terror group open fire on a bus they believe to be carrying U.S. servicemen. Instead, victims of the attack include three Indian and two Egyptian workers, who are left wounded. The gunmen are arrested and Kuwaiti officials seize weaponry from the perpetrators, including rocket-propelled grenades. Source: [Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars](#)
- **March 23, 2003:** U.S. Army sergeant and convert to Islam Hasan Akbar throws four hand grenades into tents at Kuwait’s Camp Pennsylvania U.S. military installation, killing two soldiers and wounding 14. According to prosecutors, Akbar carried out the attack in order to stop U.S. troops—who were to be deployed to Iraq—from killing Muslims there. Akbar is later sentenced to death. Sources: [Washington Post](#), [Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars](#)
- **January 21, 2003:** A Kuwaiti civil servant opens fire on two U.S. military contractors in a car at a traffic light near the Camp Doha military base, north of Kuwait City. One man dies and the other is seriously wounded. Kuwaiti police arrest the perpetrator—who is reported to be an Islamic fundamentalist—and sentence him to 15 years in prison. Sources: [BBC News](#), [CNN](#), [Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars](#), [Associated Press](#)
- **November 21, 2002:** A Kuwaiti police sergeant shoots two U.S. soldiers at close range after pulling the men, driving a civilian vehicle, to the side of the road. The policeman—who is reported to have mental health problems—is arrested and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Sources: [CNN](#), [Los Angeles Times](#), [Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars](#)

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- **October 9, 2002:** Two Kuwaiti gunmen with ties to al-Qaeda attack U.S. Marines during a training exercise on Failaka Island, a Kuwaiti Island in the Persian Gulf.
The gunmen kill one Marine and wound one other. Source: [New York Times](#)
- **April 5, 1988:** Six Shiite gunmen hijack Kuwait Airways Flight 422 en route from Bangkok to Kuwait, demanding the release of the “Kuwait 17.”
The hijacking results in a hostage crisis that lasts 15 days, during which the militants fly the plane to Meshed, Iran, then Larnaca, Cyprus, and finally to Algiers, Algeria. The gunmen murder two passengers before they successfully escape during the night in Algiers and fly to Syria and then Lebanon. Sources: [New York Times](#), [BBC News](#)
- **May 25, 1985:** In a failed assassination attempt, a suicide bomber drives an explosives-laden car into the motorcade of Kuwaiti Emir Sheik Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah, killing two body guards and a passer-by.
Emir al-Sabah is left unharmed. The “Islamic Holy War”—a little-known Shiite militant group connected to Hezbollah and the Islamic Dawa Party—claims responsibility. The Islamic Holy War threatens more attacks unless Kuwaiti authorities release the “Kuwait 17.” Source: [New York Times](#)
- **December 3, 1984:** Four Shiite gunmen hijack Kuwait Airways Flight 221 en route to Tehran, demanding the release of the “Kuwait 17.”
After the plane lands in Tehran, the militants kill two American passengers, hold nine people hostage, and release 153 others—mostly Pakistani passengers—onto the tarmac. After six days, Iranian forces storm the plane, arresting the hijackers. The remaining nine hostages are freed. Sources: [New York Times](#), [New York Times](#), [UPI](#)
- **December 12, 1983:** Hezbollah operatives and members of the Shiite militant group Islamic Dawa Party carry out coordinated bombings against Kuwait’s French and U.S. embassies, the Kuwait airport, and a government-owned petro-chemical plant—all within the span of 90 minutes.
Six people are killed and 86 more are wounded. Kuwaiti authorities ultimately convict 17 terrorists, known as the “Kuwait 17.” Among these terrorists is Mustafa Badreddine, a senior Hezbollah military commander who escapes from Kuwaiti prison during Iraq’s 1991 invasion of that country and flees to Iran and then Lebanon. Sources: [Sacred Rage](#), [Robin Wright](#), [New York Times](#), [Washington Institute](#)
- **February 6, 1974:** PFLP militants attack the Japanese Embassy in Kuwait, taking the Japanese ambassador and seven others hostage.
The militants demand that four PFLP operatives detained in Singapore—who had attempted to blow up a Singaporean oil refinery—be flown to Kuwait aboard a Japanese airliner. After hours of negotiation, the Kuwaiti government offers the PFLP militants safe passage from the country, insisting that the Japanese hostages remain unharmed and denying the militants’ request of the Japanese airliner. On leaflets thrown from an embassy window, the PFLP says it carried out the attack in coordination with the Japanese Red Army—a Lebanese-based militant communist group—as well as the underground militant Arab organization Sons of Occupied Arab Territories. Source: [New York Times](#)

Domestic Counter-Extremism

Legislation

The Kuwaiti government prosecutes terrorist suspects under general provisions in the penal code. In early 2014, local news reports suggested that a draft law would add provisions to Kuwait’s penal code to punish citizens who had fought alongside terrorist organizations abroad. Throughout 2015, the government passed ad-hoc counterterrorism laws, including in February with the statute that ordered citizens to surrender unlicensed weapons and explosives. In April 2015, the Kuwaiti government made military service compulsory for all Kuwaiti males turning the age of 18, and in June, passed a law that would compel Kuwaiti business owners to install surveillance devices at their businesses. That month, the Kuwaiti government also passed a cybercrime law that criminalized online fundraising for terrorist activity. As part of that law, individuals could face up to 10 years in prison for creating a website for a terrorist organization, or for posting bomb-making instructions online. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Library of Congress](#), [Al Bayan](#), [Gulf Business](#), [Arabian Business](#), [Arab Times Online](#))

On July 1, 2015, in response to the June 26, 2015, ISIS suicide bombing that killed 27 people, the Kuwait National Assembly passed a law requiring all Kuwaiti citizens, foreign residents, and tourists to provide DNA samples to a database controlled by the Interior Ministry. The DNA will reportedly be used to track criminals and terrorist suspects. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has condemned the law, arguing that it violates the right to privacy. (Source: [Arabian Business](#), [Reuters](#))

Government Agencies and Programs

The Ministry of the Interior (MOI) and the Kuwait National Guard are the Kuwaiti government’s primary counterterrorism agencies. In addition to overseeing counterterrorism investigations, the MOI is responsible for criminal investigations and border protection. According to the U.S. Department of State, the MOI is “considered to be the single point of contact for [terrorist] incident response.” (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

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The Kuwaiti government carries out a number of countering violent extremism (CVE) programs, including campaigns on radio, television, and billboards that offer alternative messaging to extremist ideology. In 2014, it began broadcasting “Kuwait Youth Radio,” which reportedly promotes religious tolerance. That year, the government also formed the Higher Commission for the Promotion of Moderation, which aims to counter extremism through education. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

Monitoring of Prominent Clerics

Kuwait’s Islamic Affairs Ministry releases sample sermons to be used by the country’s imams, but does not require those imams to use them. In comparison to other Gulf countries, Kuwait “boasts a relatively free forum for speech and debate,” according to Reuters. In 2013, however, the Kuwaiti government began monitoring the sermons delivered by prominent Kuwaiti clerics, worried that extremist messaging would serve to inflame sectarian tensions and garner support for foreign jihadist organizations. In August of that year, the Kuwaiti government canceled the television show of religious scholar Shafi al-Ajmi and banned him from giving sermons after he voiced support for jihadist fighters in Syria. One year later, Ajmi was designated as a terrorist by the U.S. State Department for fundraising for the Nusra Front on social media platforms. Following his designation, Ajmi was briefly detained and then released by Kuwaiti security forces. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [U.S. Treasury](#), [Reuters](#))

Combatting Terrorist Financing

In response to the threat of terrorist financing, Kuwait participates in a number of task forces that seek to counter terrorist financing operations. Chief among these are the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF) and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [FATF](#))

The MENAFATF is a regional group that seeks to combat terrorist financing in the Middle East and North Africa. It is modeled after the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a separate intergovernmental organization that sets “standards and promote[s] effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating...terrorist financing,” according to the organization’s website. Kuwait directly participates in the MENAFATF, and is affiliated with the FATF through its membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which is a member of the FATF. (Sources: [MENAFATF](#), [FATF](#), [FATF](#))

In addition, Kuwait’s Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL) monitors the country’s charities and has dissolved charities that were found to have carried out illegal fundraising. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Countering Violent Extremism

Kuwait’s Ministry of Education implements programs to fight extremist ideologies at public schools through various teacher-training and student-counseling programs. The Ministry of Information also runs a television channel that targets audiences considered vulnerable to radicalization. Additionally, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs offers a training program for imams to jumpstart initiatives against extremism. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

International Counter-Extremism

Kuwait participates in the Global Counterterrorism Forum, an intergovernmental organization that convenes international counterterrorism experts and practitioners in order to reduce the threat from terrorism worldwide. In addition, Kuwait belongs to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which, according to its website, “endeavors to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace.” Kuwait is also a member of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, an international partnership of 86 countries and give international organizations that works to prevent and respond to nuclear terrorism. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Global Counterterrorism Forum](#), [Organisation of Islamic Cooperation](#), [Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism](#))

Cooperation with the United States

The United States and Kuwait have shared a robust diplomatic relationship since 1991, when the United States sent hundreds of thousands of troops to liberate the emirate from occupation by Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. According to the U.S. Department of State, Kuwait “[provides] assistance in the

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military, diplomatic, and intelligence arenas and also [supports] efforts to block financing of terrorist groups.” (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Washington Post](#))

In recent years, the MOI and the Kuwait National Guard have partnered with the U.S. Embassy’s Office of Military Cooperation. Both government agencies have received training and undergone bilateral military exercises with U.S. forces to increase Kuwait’s counterterrorism capacities. In March 2017, the United States sent an additional 2,500 troops to Kuwait to support coalition efforts against ISIS. Specifically, those troops were assigned to train Iraqi forces battling the terror group. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Army Times](#))

In March 2017, the U.S. government banned passengers from bringing certain electronics on nonstop flights from 10 Middle Eastern airports, including Kuwait International Airport. Other affected countries include Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. The ban—which prohibits passengers from carrying laptops, tablets, and other items—was prompted in part by intelligence gleaned during a U.S. Special Forces raid in Yemen in late January 2017. The information suggested that AQAP was actively attempting to build explosives for use on commercial flights. (Sources: [Washington Post](#), [Fox Business](#), [Daily Beast](#))

ISIS

Kuwait participates in both the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, as well as Saudi Arabia’s “Islamic military alliance,” which the kingdom formed in December 2015. However, Kuwait does not contribute militarily to these alliances, as its constitution prohibits it from fighting anything other than a defensive war. (Sources: [Global Coalition](#), [Reuters](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

As a member of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, Kuwait provides humanitarian support to Iraq and Syria. Kuwait has hosted at least three donor conferences for Syria, and has pledged at least \$200 million for humanitarian aid in Iraq. In April 2016, Kuwait hosted a meeting convening members of the Small Group of the Global Coalition to counter ISIS, to which Kuwait also belongs. (Source: [Farnesina](#))

Kuwait is one of 34 Sunni Muslim-majority nations to hold membership in Saudi Arabia’s “Islamic military alliance.” According to Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir, the alliance focuses on military and security measures, and seeks to combat extremist ideology using religious scholars and educators to “drown out the message of the extremists.” The alliance excludes Shiite Muslim-majority countries including Iran and Iraq. (Sources: [CNN](#), [Euronews](#), [Hudson Institute](#))

Yemen

Kuwait joined the Saudi coalition against the Houthis in Yemen in March 2015. In addition, Kuwait has hosted peace talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, including in April and July of 2016 and January 2017. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#), [Voice of America](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [Deutsche Welle](#))

Public Opinion

While public opinion polls are rare in Kuwait, statistics from September 2015 provide a glimpse into public attitude toward extremist groups. Polling by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy revealed that just 3 percent of Kuwaitis view ISIS positively, and that “the conflict against [ISIS]” was rated as the most important in a list of six foreign policy priorities. The polling suggested, however, that Kuwaitis view other extremist organizations more favorably than ISIS. According to the findings, 31 percent of Kuwaitis gave a “positive rating” to the Muslim Brotherhood, while Hamas received a favorable rating from 42 percent of the population. (Sources: [Washington Institute](#))