

Important and valued friendship

By THE BARONESS MORRIS OF BOLTON OBE DL

PRIME MINISTER'S TRADE ENVOY TO JORDAN, KUWAIT AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES



THE BARONESS MORRIS is the Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Jordan, Kuwait and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. She entered the House of Lords in June 2004, joined the Conservative front bench as a Whip in September of that year and has served as Shadow Minister for Children, Young People, Families and Women, as well as Vice-Chairman of the Conservative Party. She is Chancellor Emeritus at the University of Bolton.

Kuwait and the UK have an important and valued friendship and it is a pleasure to be asked to contribute to this significant publication, produced by FIRST, celebrating the 120th Anniversary of the signing of the Friendship Treaty between Kuwait and Great Britain; although we have been natural trading allies for much longer, with trade links recorded as far back as the middle of the 18th Century.

It has been my privilege to be the Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Kuwait for almost seven years. In that time, as part of a team of talented and dedicated people at the Department for International Trade and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and working side by side with our good friends in Kuwait, I have watched our relationship grow and prosper – with our total bilateral trade growing significantly from £1.5 billion in 2012 to £3.4 billion in 2018.

The links of our friendship are strong and historic and although in that context the links of my friendship are relatively new, beginning as they did just over ten years ago, they are firm and steadfast. It all began in February of 2009 when a planned visit to Yemen, as a guest of the British Council to observe their *Connecting Classrooms* programme, had to be cancelled because of continued political unrest following the September 2008 attack on the American Embassy in Sana'a. I was asked which other country in the region I would like to visit. I chose Kuwait. And so began my enduring friendship with, and love of, Kuwait and her people.

Following the 2010 General Election I was appointed Chairman of the Conservative Middle East Council, where one of the nicest aspects of the job was to work closely with the Council of Arab Ambassadors, led so wonderfully by the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, HE Khaled Al Duwaisan. Khaled is a wonderful national treasure in both of our countries and he perfectly embodies the ethos of our friendship.

With Khaled's encouragement and through the kind invitation of HE Jaseem Al-Kharafi, the then Speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, I had the pleasure in late 2011 of leading a delegation of members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords to Kuwait. We had the honour of meeting His Highness The Emir, and we relished listening to his view of world politics and domestic issues both in Kuwait and

the UK, all delivered with insight, clarity, kindness and good humour. We met an array of very talented men and women in business and politics and some outstanding young people who were enthusiastic and engaging and who impressed us with their knowledge and values; the young men and women we met certainly auger well for the future of Kuwait.

As the people of two great trading nations, Kuwait and Great Britain instinctively understand and trust one another and over the past seven years I have witnessed the positive view that each country holds of the other as a trade and investment partner.

Kuwait has liberalised her investment laws and set up the direct investment authority KDIPA, headed so brilliantly by my good friend HE Dr Sheikh Meshaal bin Jaber Al Sabah. I have the honour of Co-Chairing the Trade and Investment Group with Sheikh Meshaal, which seeks to get things done and has at its heart the determination to break down barriers to trade and investment. We meet every six months, alternating between Kuwait and London, as part of the Joint Steering Group between our two countries. This group is a reflection of our close and detailed working relationship.

Both countries are determined to build on the strength of our foundations and to look for future growth. In 2017 Kuwait unveiled a new plan to transform the country into a regional financial and cultural hub by 2035 and the UK, with over 100 companies and brands operating in Kuwait in many sectors stretching from oil and gas, retail and financial services, is well placed to support Kuwait in this endeavour. This is because our relationship is as modern as it is historic and is constantly expanding and adapting with education, health and security at its core.

Of course trading partnerships bring with them people and there are many British citizens who are proud to call Kuwait their home. The same is true in the UK and we warmly welcome many Kuwaitis, who come to live, work and study and who add to the richness of our life. And we are particularly fortunate that in the City of London, just next to St Paul's, we have the world's oldest Sovereign Wealth Fund, the Kuwait Investment Office, who chose to open their office in London some 66 years ago.

So as we celebrate 120 years of friendship between our two countries, we can be assured that our roots are deep, our friendship enduring and our future exciting. **E**