

Key ally and vital partner

By **LEO DOCHERTY MP**

CHAIRMAN OF THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON KUWAIT



LEO DOCHERTY was elected MP for Aldershot in the 2017 General Election and was subsequently elected to the Defence Select Committee. Prior to this, he attended the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and was commissioned into the Scots Guards in 2001, where he was deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. After leaving the British Army in 2006, his interest in the Middle East led him to become the Director of the Conservative Middle East Council in 2010. He is a frequent visitor to the GCC states and a vocal champion of British-Kuwait relations in the House of Commons.

The Persian Gulf has always been a focal point for the international community. It is the cradle of civilisation, its waterways are busy trading routes, its airports a gateway for millions of passengers throughout the world, and its oil remains the lifeblood of the global economy. In recent years, defence cooperation, particularly in the fight against terrorism and the unfolding crisis in Syria, has given the region a renewed focus. Despite many cleavages and instabilities, the Arab Gulf states have well and truly found their feet and are taking their places as serious players on the world stage. One such state is Kuwait.

Although a relatively young country, Kuwait has a long and rich history and it has achieved remarkable development in the decades since the ending of the 1899 Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement in 1961, and liberation from Iraqi forces in 1991. Kuwait is a very modern Gulf state and is one of the freest countries in the region in terms of civil liberties, political rights, and the media. Its legal system is largely secular and even exhibits aspects of English common law. It has a remarkable level of religious freedom and sees Sunni and Shias living together peacefully. In many ways, for those in the west, it is the model Gulf state and one with which we can - and should - work closely to further our mutual interests as well as help guide them towards even better human rights outcomes.

Kuwait is a hugely important ally and a longstanding partner of the UK and they enjoy a particularly strong defence relationship. This has been built upon decades of friendship, mutual interest, cooperation, respect, and trust. It is the policy of the UK Government to further deepen this relationship. This makes sense for both sides, not least with a muscular Iran, ever seeking to extend its influence in the region.

The UK helps train Kuwait's Armed Forces and provides its defence institutions with military expertise through embedded officers, as well as partaking in US-led multinational joint exercises. Kuwait is not just interested in home defence, but also bolstering stability in the region. Itself no stranger to terrorist attacks, Kuwait has been a strong supporter of the highly successful and multinational counter-Daesh coalition, helping prevent the spread of terrorism. On the back of this cooperation, I know there is a strong appetite on the Kuwaiti side for

increased military cooperation which is something I wholeheartedly support.

In 2018, I visited the country in my role as the Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Kuwait along with a number of other UK Parliamentarians. We met with Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah – himself a former Defence Minister – and had an extremely productive discussion, focussing on boosting bilateral cooperation across all our areas of mutual interest and many aspects of our defence relationship.

As well as maintaining a significant degree of hard power, Kuwait has emerged in recent years as a leading soft power, playing a pivotal role in helping promote stability and security in the region. The country continues to work to bring together the conflicting sides in Yemen and has also hosted humanitarian conferences with the aim of easing the pain caused by the ongoing crisis in Syria. This strong regional and international leadership reflects the astute, forward-looking, and practical outlook of the modernising monarchy of His Highness Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, his government, as well as his network of skilled diplomats. As a British politician, I give special mention to the very impressive and long-serving Kuwaiti Ambassador to the UK, His Excellency Khaled Al-Duwaisan, with whom I have had the pleasure of meeting on several occasions.

Kuwait is an exemplar – not just for other states in the region, but for other countries around the world – of measured statecraft, practical governance, a pragmatic approach to military matters and an instinct to modernise without compromising the essential identity of the country. As we move towards an uncertain future with an emboldened Iran and an interventionist Russia, I am glad that the UK and Kuwait can rely on each other to help counter emerging threats. **F**

State of Kuwait

- Measured statecraft
- Practical governance
- Programme of modernisation
- Pragmatic approach to defence