



Message from  
The Rt Hon. Ben Wallace MP  
Secretary of State for Defence, United Kingdom

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In October 2020, I accompanied His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales to Kuwait to offer my condolences at the sad passing of the late Amir His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. It was also an opportunity to affirm the special friendship and shared interests between our two nations.

The United Kingdom has been alongside Kuwait since the Declaration of Independence 60 years ago, and our bilateral relations pre-date even that. We signed the Anglo-Kuwaiti Treaty of Friendship in 1899, when we pledged to protect the territorial integrity of Kuwait against external threats. Our Royal Air Force's first overseas deployment to Kuwait was in 1920, while our flying aces were instrumental in getting the Kuwaiti Air Force off the ground.

We were with you before oil and before aerospace because, as a trading nation, we have always understood that your stability and our stability are linked. And our love for the region and respect for the Kuwaiti people has never wavered. That's why we did not hesitate thirty years ago when Saddam Hussein's forces threatened your nation.

Not only did we rally the international community to your aid- we backed our words with deeds. Only the United States made a bigger contribution to the First Gulf War in what was our Armed Force's

largest deployment since the end of World War Two. We put more than 53,000 in field. In barely a month and a half, the RAF flew more than 2,500 sorties, helping bring the Iraqi infrastructure and its air force to its knees. Our Forces were among the first coalition soldiers to enter Iraqi-held territory. The British 1st Armoured Division famously outflanked Iraqi forces and our Royal Navy Lynx helicopters destroyed almost all of Saddam's Navy.

Every day on my way into the office I pass a memorial to the extraordinary efforts of Operation Granby. We will never forget the sacrifices and service of our personnel in that conflict – a war in which our own Chief of Defence Staff fought. Nor will we ever forget the fierce resistance of Kuwaitis in defence of their country. The presence of the head of your Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Sheikh Khalid Al-Sabah – an active member of the Kuwaiti Resistance – at a small remembrance service at the UK Embassy last November was a moving reminder of how deep the bonds of blood run.

This century we have maintained our tradition of standing shoulder to shoulder with our friends in Kuwait. Most recently, we came together as part of the Counter-Daesh Coalition to defeat the terrorists in Iraq and Syria. Our efforts to remove the scourge of

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Daesh would not have been possible without the unfettered access, basing and overflight Kuwait so generously provide.

And today our partnership continues to flourish. On the training ground we have the annual Ex-Desert Warrior – with a UK light role infantry company partnering with a Kuwaiti infantry battalion. It’s an exercise we hope will resume once the pandemic is under control. Meanwhile, in the classroom, our military students study together. As a former Sandhurst graduate, I’m particularly proud that the Kuwaiti Ruling Family are prominent in the roll call of alumni. Just as I am proud that we have UK officers serving as instructors at the renowned Mubarak Al-Abdullah Joint Command and Staff College. This is the only college in the region accredited by our UK Defence Academy as delivering a course equivalent to our own Advanced Command and Staff Course.

But, in an ever more insecure and anxious world, at a time of growing security threats across your region, I believe we can do

yet more to enhance our relationship. Our Integrated Review and Defence Command Paper sets out the UK’s determination to honour our commitments to the stability of the region. With our Kuwaiti friends, we’ve started as we mean to go on. We are already studying how to counter the threats posed by our adversaries’ advances in small, unmanned air systems and cyber warfare. And we’re exploring new ways to train our personnel to operate the novel capabilities which will win the wars of the future.

So, on behalf of the United Kingdom, I congratulate Kuwait on marking this momentous milestone in the history of your proud nation. The UK is no “*fly by night friend*” of Kuwait. We were there 60 years ago as you secured your independence. We were also there 30 years ago to help you achieve liberation. And, as you look to achieve your ambitious plans for 2035, we will remain by your side, ready and resilient, in pursuit of peace and prosperity across this dynamic region. 



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