

Socialist standpoint in the Kuwait question, 1961-1963

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Kuwait was not independent state until 19 June 1961, because Great Britain dominated its foreign affairs. However, the political changes of the region and the recovery of Kuwait's economy have made the agreement of the protectorate, signed in 1899 with Great Britain, obsolete by this time, which made the founding of the total sovereignty possible. The permission of the independence triggered out a conflict with Iraq, which influenced the international valuation of the new state in the Middle East.

The aim of the essay is to set forth the brief preliminaries of the independence, the events led to the sovereignty and the contracts made on this occasion, as well as to show the claims and the reasons of Iraq on Kuwait, and the reactions of Great Britain on these claims. Moreover, the essay is aimed at showing the standpoint of the socialist states – first of all that of the Soviet Union – on the conflict and their role in its solving.

Status of Kuwait until 1961

Until 1961 the political life of the Emirate has dominated by the agreement between Great Britain and Kuwait signed in 1899. The treaty was signed on 23rd January by Sheikh Mubarak as-Sabah and Lieutenant-colonel Malcolm John Meade who was the political representative of Great Britain in the Persian Gulf.¹ According to this the Ruler of Kuwait

¹ Mubarak as-Sabah Sheikh applied for defence by the British Government on 5th September 1897 because of the menacing Ottoman invasion. Although Great Britain had never recognised the claims of the Ottoman Empire on Kuwait, it decided to supply non-intervention policy. Its standpoint has changed only at the time when it became known Russia's desire to establish a coaling depot in the Kuwait-Basra area and build the Tripoli-Kuwait railway in Syria which was planed to continue through Iran to Russia. This plan, if it had been fulfilled, had made it possible for the rivals of Great Britain to get out through the buffer zone created around India. On the one hand the British intervention had been supported by the claim on the winding up of all kind of influence of Russia or other foreign powers; on the other hand the questioning of the Ottoman sovereignty in the area, the realisation of a closer control of piracy and slavery and the geographical conditions of Kuwait – it was a fair harbour, a possible railway terminus and a trade-route crossing point. Alghanim, Salwa: *The Reign of Mubarak Al-Sabah*. I.B. Tauris Publishers & Co. Ltd., London, 1998, pp. 39–81. Ancombe, Frederick, F.: *The Ottoman Gulf, The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1997, pp. 99–112; Busch, Briton Cooper: Britain and the Status of Kuwayt 1896–1899. *Middle East Journal*. 21 (2) 1967, pp. 187–199; M. Szabó, Imre: *A véres gyöngyszem Kuwait*. Riportok, dokumentumok, Budapest, 1990, pp. 179–180.

committed himself in the name of his own and his descendants without the previous sanction and consent of the British Government:

- 1.) not to receive the Agent or Representative of any Power or Government at Kuwait or at any other place within the limits of his territory;
- 2.) not to cede, sell, lease, mortgage, and give either for occupation or for any other purpose any portion of his territory to the Government or subjects of any other Power.²

Until the middle of the 1940s Kuwait was an economically underdeveloped territory where the inhabitants lived under miserable circumstances. The new era started on 30th June 1946 in Kuwait when Abdullah as-Salim as-Sabah Sheikh, Ruler of Kuwait, permitted to the companies from abroad to develop the oil of the country which meant that capital could inflow from abroad to Kuwait. Due to this, the amount of oil-exploration has reached 84 million tonne a year by 1960 according to which Kuwait has become the fourth greatest country of the world in oil-exploration after the USA, Venezuela and the Soviet Union.³

The prospering economical state of Kuwait made way for the independent leading of political affairs. On the one hand, before the 1960s the countries of the Arab League had attempted several times to achieve the joining of Kuwait to the organisation without any success. On the other hand, the ambitions of the Arab countries made it unambiguous for the government of Great Britain that some paragraphs of the contract of the protectorate had lost validity in the given situation and these are needed to be loosen.⁴ Due to this that by 1960 the jurisdiction over the foreigners and several rights concerning the foreign affairs of the country felt within the competence of the government of the Emir.⁵

² A letter from Lieutenant-colonel Malcolm John Meade to Sheikh Mubarak had been attached to the contract, in which the political representative informed the Ruler that the 15.000 rupees will be paid from the treasury in Bushire after the ratification of the Agreement, in the sense of the previous concord. At the end of his letter, Meade reminded the Sheikh that the details of the Agreement should remain secret or without the British Government's knowledge and assent could not be published. The contract had been ratified on 16th February 1899 on Great Britain's side. Agreement between the British Government and the Sheikh of Kuwait, 23 January 1899. In: *The Kuwait Crisis: Basic Documents*. Edited by: Lauterpacht, E. CBE. – Greenwood, C. J. – Weller, Marc – Bethlehem, Daniel. Cambridge International Documents Series, Volume I., Cambridge, Grotius Publications Limited, 1991. pp. 9–10.

³ The exploitation of the oil began in 1946 in the quarry in Bourgan-Magouaban, south from the capital. The total production was 12,4 million tonne in 1949, 69,5 million tonne in 1959 and in the first three month of 1961 it was 20,9 million tonne. His oil-reserve was estimated to 8,5 thousand million tonne, which was the equivalent of the 21% of the known world petroleum reserves. *Journal de Genève: Kuwait gazdagsága. Cikkek a Nemzetközi Sajtóból.* VI. 53. p. 78.

⁴ Kuwait joined an international organisation in April 1959 for the first time. By 13 June 1961, the country had been a member of six international organisations. M. Szabó, *A véres gyöngyszem Kuwait*, p. 176.

⁵ Loesch, H. v.: Kuwait válaszüton. *Cikkek a Nemzetközi Sajtóból.* V. 81. p. 13.

The refusal of the independence and the announcement of the claim of Iraq

On 19th June 1961 Kuwait gained independence formally, too.⁶ The note of W. H. Luce, the British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, addressed to the Emir, constituted the formal basis of the independence. According to this, the government of Kuwait assumed responsibility for the leading of the home and foreign affairs of the country therefore:

- a) The Agreement of the 23rd of January, 1899 had been terminated because of its inconsistency with the sovereignty and independence of Kuwait,
- b) The relations between the two countries had to be governed by a spirit of close friendship in the future too,
- c) When appropriate the two Governments had to consult together on matters which concern them both,
- d) Her Majesty's Government affected his readiness to assist the Government of Kuwait in the future to the request of the Ruler of Kuwait.

Moreover, it had been announced that the contract loses validity 3 years after one of the contracting parties claims its cancellation.⁷ The Emir accepted the conditions above in his reply note, which he sent back on the same day.⁸

After the declaration of independence, however, Kuwait came up against the neighbouring revolutionary country, Iraq.⁹ On 24th June 1961 Abdul Karim Qassem Iraqi

⁶ Although the control of the way towards India had been ignored for decades because of the need for the insurance of the routes, necessary for the exploitation of the oil in some newly discovered quarries in the Persian Gulf, the British troops must be allowed to garrison in the area. Due to this, for the defence of Kuwait and the other emirates, military garrison was stationed in Gibraltar, Malta, Benghazi, Cyprus, Nairobi, Aden and Bahrain. The maintenance of these was a huge financial burden and it caused an increasing deficit in the budget for Great Britain. To avoid the deficit there was only one possible way, the overseas bases had to be gradually wended up. Sablier, Édouard: Úgy látszik Nagy-Britannia beletörődött a kuvaiti kérdés "arab megoldásába". *Cikkek a Nemzetközi Sajtóból*. VI. 63. p. 40.

⁷ Exchange of Notes between Kuwait and Her Majesty's Government, 19 June 1961. In: Lauterpracht–Greenwood–Weiler–Bethlehem, *The Kuwait Crisis: Basic Documents*. pp. 50–51. o.

⁸ Immediately after the signing of the new agreement between Great Britain and Kuwait, it has started the founding of the independent leading of the internal affairs. A Caretaker Government was established, a Constituent National Assembly gathered and it was decided that there will be an elections by January 1963. About the results, the constitution and the policies see more: Hopwood, Derek: *The Arabian Peninsula. Society and Politics*. London, 1972. pp. 37–40; M. Szabó, *A véres gyöngyszem Kuvait*, pp. 30–34. o.

⁹ The Iraqi Republican Government had no territorial claims towards Kuwait between 1958–61. Moreover, it regarded Kuwait as an independent state, if it was about foreign affairs. The following facts served as evidence of all these: in December 1958 the Iraqi Government requested for the contribution of the Kuwaiti Government to establish a consulate and they put it clearly in the official letters to the government that Kuwait had never been part of Iraq. The two countries made a commercial agreement and published a common declaration – referring to the good relations between the two states – a month before the speech of Qassem in June 1961. The delegate from Iraq

president laid claim to Kuwait as it was the part of the South-Iraqi Basra province until the downfall of the Ottoman Empire. They claimed that the Agreement of 1899 concluded by the British Governor in Bushire in return for 15.000 rupees paid to the Kuwaiti Sheikh, was illegal so could not be considered as valid having been concluded without the knowledge of the Sultan of Istanbul. Due to this: „The Republic of Iraq has decided to protect the Iraqi people in Kuwait and to demand the land, arbitrarily held by imperialism, which belongs to the province of Basra ... We shall accordingly issue a decree appointing the Shaykh of Kuwait as a qa'imaqam of Kuwait, who will come under the authority of the Basra province ...”¹⁰

The claim of the Government was put down in form of an informing note and was sent to all of the foreign delegation residing in Iraq. It emphasized that:

„The Government of Iraq announces disclosing these facts to the Arab and international public opinion that Kuwait belongs to Iraq; furthermore, the Government confirms its resolution on the fight against the imperialism and by doing so, it expresses its conviction that the imperialism will be wipe out in Kuwait and in the other Arab countries. Moreover, the Government declares its certain decision to consistently insist on the founding of the unity of the Kuwaiti and Iraqi nations and the Government will not give up doing so until the realisation of the aim.”¹¹

The ideological reason formulated in the speech could have served the resolution of three major problems from the Iraqi's side:

- 1) The demand on Kuwait had served the foundation of a stable state of the internal affairs, rather than some aims of foreign affairs;¹²
- 2) According to the *New Statesman*, 30 June the reason of the Iraqi measures was evoked by the stagnation of the oil-market, which went back to 1957, and the planned public nationalization of the Iraq Petroleum Company;¹³

proposed to admit Kuwait in the International Labour Organisation, two weeks before the announcement of the Iraqi leader. On the initiative of Iraq, Kuwait was among the founding states of the Organisation for Petroleum Exporting Countries. Baghdad – within the Arab League – take part in the foundation of the Arab Bank and the Arab Airlines. Trevelyan, Humphrey: *The Middle East in Revolution*. London, 1970. pp. 183–184.

¹⁰ Khadduri, Majid–Ghareeb, Edmund: *War in the Gulf, 1990–1991*. Oxford, 1997. p. 65.

¹¹ *Kuwaittal kapcsolatos iraki követelés*. 1961. augusztus 14. MOL KÜM TÜK XIX-J-1-j Irak 1945-64. 3. d. 5/bf-005692/szig.titk/1961.

¹² After the revolution of 14 July 1958 vanished the previous hope in connection with the functioning of the new Iraqi Government. The formally made promises were not fulfilled: as for the internal affairs the offered agrarian reforms were performed only partially, the cost of leaving increased, the trade unions were either dissolved or merged with the unions founded and coordinated by the Government, the strikes were suppressed violently, the freedom of speech, gathering and the press had been previously promised, were withdrawn. The banning of the Communist Party led to the charge of the imperialism. The Kurd minority who at the beginning were ready to co-operate with the government turned against them. After the refusal of the joining up to Cairo, the groups supporting Nasser turned against the Iraqi Government. Under these conditions the issue of Kuwait was a great opportunity of not considering the tensed situation in the internal politics and to establish a national unity days before the third anniversary of the revolution. Rouleau, Eric: A kuwaiti ügy: időzített bomba. *Cikk a Nemzetközi Sajtóból*. VI. 58. pp. 77-78.

- 3) President Qassem has not given up with his ambition to become the leader of the whole Arab World or at least the part of it. For the sake of the cause, he did his best to appear to the whole Arab World to be the most committed follower of the fight against the imperialism.¹⁴

On 28th June – whereas the speech of Qassem was not more warlike than the other standpoints concerning Kuwait which are on the agenda since the 1930s¹⁵ – the Emir has decreed extraordinary condition and mobilisation. On 30th June asked for military assistance from the British Government referring to the contract of Great Britain and Kuwait, after previously having informed the Arab Governments on the danger threatening his country. The fact of the coming attack from Iraq was questioned because:

- 1.) In so far as President Qassem had had the intention of annex Kuwait with violence, he could have done parallel to the press conference of 25 June by facing Great Britain with a *fait accompli* so the British Government could not have fulfilled its obligations to assistance they took on in the sense of the declaration of independence;

¹³ The economy of Iraq depended exclusively on the incomes from the oil-exploitation fulfilled by the Iraq Petroleum Company as this was the single financial source of the government which could meet the increasing deficit in the budget and the realisation of the forced development plans. Therefore, the Iraqi Government put constantly pressure on the company to increase its share from the profit and influence of the IPC on the oil-market at Great Britain's expense. The lack of an independent industry hindered the break with Great Britain as an embargo led to an economic catastrophe in the country. The oil in Kuwait was not expensive, was near the sea, there were great reserves of oil; the exploitation and the refinement went on at the greatest speed in the area. It was economically highly important for Iraq to gain control over the oil industry on the one hand, the oil in Kuwait not being expensive, was menacing for Iraq, on the other hand, the control over the oil industry had secured a strong financial background, which made possible to diminish the dependence on the Western countries and to realize the development plans. Ligetfalvi, Gábor: *Petroleum and the interest of Great Powers in Iraq. Méditerrané Tanulmányok/Études Sur La Région Méditerranéennes*, Vol. VIII. Université József Attila, Département d'Histoire Moderne et des Études Méditerranéennes, Szeged, 1998. pp. 13–14; New Statesman: *Mi az indítéka a kuwaiti ügynek? Cikk a Nemzetközi Sajtóból*. VI. 54. p. 74.

¹⁴ Iraq previously gave financial assistance to Algeria and Oman to support revolutions there, which caused serious problems in the economy of the country. Qassem made several aggressive statements concerning the liberation of Palestine and the military training of hundreds of Palestinian soldiers in Iraq. *Kuwaittal kapcsolatos iraki követelés*. 1961. július 1. MOL KÜM TŰK XIX-J-1-j Irak 1945-64. 3. d. 5/bf-005692/szig.titk/1961.

¹⁵ President Qassem – unlike his predecessor, Nuri Said – did not talk about the war, but emphasized the two states were depending on each other and that it would be of advantage from several points of view if the two countries were united. Among others, he offered his aid to supply Kuwait with drinking water: „Kuwait has always been a dry territory. We have offered several times to bring fresh water to Kuwait through pipeline but the imperialists never allowed the Sheikh to make use of it as they planed to bring some special machines and equipments to distil the sea-water. Kuwait ... is being the inseparable part of Iraqi Republic. As for the drinking water the Republic would solve the problems of Kuwait, moreover, it plans to establish schools and hospitals in Kuwait.” Wigg, George: *Mi az igazság Kuwait körül? Cikk a Nemzetközi Sajtóból*. VI. 58. p. 19.

- 2.) President Qassem was aware of the fact that supposing that his campaign is successful and he manages to occupy the territory, it would be avenged by Great Britain,¹⁶
- 3.) The President of Iraq was conscious of the fact that he could not count on any help from abroad if he began with a military activity or laid territorial claims. The danger of a possible confrontation with Great Britain ruled out all kind of assistance from the side of the Western Countries'. He could not count on the help of China or the Soviet Union, either, whose relations to Baghdad were quite stretching. Moreover, it was clear that it could not depend on any help from the countries in the Arab region as Qassem's rivalry with President Nasser for the leadership in the Arab World grew into a personal conflict. King Saud was friend and ally of the Emir of Kuwait and Hussein, king of Jordan could not have put up with the strengthening of the neighbouring anti-Hashemite Iraq.

In spite of this, Macmillan, the British Prime Minister, reacting on the Iraqi threatening and on the request of the Kuwaiti Emir stated: „Military strengthening and transport of weapons goes on in the district of Basra, according to several reports coming from various sources on 29th and 30th June. Under such circumstances, the ruler of Kuwait felt it being his obligation to make use of the urgent help from Great Britain in the sense of our exchange of notes. He did so in the morning of 30th June ... We had no other chance but to do as we did on that Friday.”¹⁷

Some of the troop movements began on 28th and 29th June, and finally on 1st July the more than six thousand strong British troops occupied the country, at the same time Saudi Arabia led a 1200 strong military group to the border of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia next to Iraq to the junctions of Hafr al-Batin and Vadi al-Auya. However, it never came to clashes, neither at this time, nor later.¹⁸

¹⁶ Kuwait provided Great Britain with 40% of its oil needs, the ruling family invested £300 million in the British economy, furthermore he invested 56% of the output of the British Petroleum in the country. Ashton, Nigel John: British Intervention in Jordan and Kuwait. *The Historical Journal*, 40 (4) 1997. p. 1072.

¹⁷ Wigg, George: Mi az igazság Kuwait körül? *Cikk a Nemzetközi Sajtóból*. VI. 58. p. 19.

¹⁸ The size of the English forces helping the Kuwaitian gave to some guessing in the press. It was unambiguous that President Qassem would have fulfilled his threatening and occupied Kuwait before Great Britain had ordered the mobilization of the troops, if he really had intended to do so. Later on, seeing the great number of the British troops in the area, the real intentions of Great Britain were questionable. According to experts, it would have been sufficient to order a battalion of British soldiers serving in the region to the area; if Great Britain had solely intended to demonstrate that it would intervene supposing that Iraq invaded Kuwait. However, a small number of British troops, supporting the forces in Kuwait, would have been unable to stop an occasional attack from Iraq's side. In connection with this, according to some assumptions, Great Britain wanted to put pressure on Baghdad using of the conflicts in Kuwait to hinder the nationalization the Iraqi oil fields owned by oversea companies. Wigg, George: Mi az igazság Kuwait körül? *Cikk a Nemzetközi Sajtóból*. VI. 58. p. 18.

The approach of the socialist countries to the conflict

The declaration of the independence of Kuwait in June 1961 had no effect on the Soviet foreign affairs. The Ruler of Kuwait was not considered to be conquered, or as a monarch who intended to gain independence for his country.¹⁹ This opinion of the Soviet Union was confirmed by the existence of the contract between Great Britain and Kuwait, which was regarded as a signal of the neo-colonialism. Due to this the Soviet Government did not send a greeting telegram to the Ruler of Kuwait and the event was only briefly mentioned in a provincial newspaper which informed that Great Britain managed to retain its position in the country. The speech of Qassem and Nasser's aimed to impede this claim of Iraq, complicated the position of the Soviet foreign affairs. During the short period between the speech and the British intervention, the Soviet newspapers criticized Qassem's politics, but no exact standpoint has been taken.

It came to a change after the joining up of the British troops on the request of the Emir. On hearing this Nikita Khrushchev sent for Sir Frank Roberts, the British Ambassador in Moscow, who informed him that the intervention occurred according to a previous undertaking of obligations of Great Britain. He expressed his assumption that the Soviet Union had done the same in this situation. He added that Great Britain would intend to withdraw its troops when Kuwait's safety was guaranteed. Khrushchev asserted the British Ambassador that he just enquired and he ensured even if he had not done it without any reason, neither he, nor his state would take steps in this matter.²⁰

¹⁹ The events in Kuwait before the bursting out of the conflict were not been precisely published in the Soviet press. They hardly acknowledged the Young Movement of Kuwait, that have claimed reforms since the 1930s, they forgot about the protests against the intervention of Jordan and Lebanon, and the warning of the advancing public opinion that requested to break of the protectorate contact with Great Britain and the nationalization of the Kuwait Oil Corporation. The foundation of the Department of Financial and Oil Affairs was hardly been taken into consideration just like the establishment of the Kuwait Oil tanker Corporation in 1959 or the talking of the control over the jurisdiction of the foreigners in Kuwait from the British authorities by the Kuwaiti authorities. Neither the visit of the Soviet ship, *Izhevsk* in Kuwait in August, nor the establishment of a national oil company in 1960 for the control of the details of the production and sale of the oil were been taken into account. However, the first meant on the side of the Soviet Union the assistance of the sovereignty of the subordinate country and the second was been valued by the Soviets as the first step towards the achievement of the economic independence of the oil producing countries in Afro-Asia. Page, Stephen: *The USSR and Arabia*. London, 1971. p. 52.

²⁰ The asking for references of high degree on the Soviet Union's side could be elicited by the crisis in Suez in 1956. The Soviet Union intended to know whether Great Britain was satisfied with the fulfilment of their duties, taken in the contract, or did they want to make further step against Iraq. However, the relations between Great Britain and Iraq were not that bad as the press suggested. Supposing that Great Britain had planned steps against Iraq, the Soviet Union would have – most probably – committed itself to support the Arab issue. When the British troops declared that they would not cross the Iraqi border, the Soviet Union was pleased with the British joining. Jakovlev, the Soviet Ambassador in Baghdad, called the British politics on the day of the joining in Kuwait 'extremely foolish' in the presence of Trevelyan, his British colleague. They did it with the intention

The Soviets did not intend to take part in the conflict and did distance from taking any menacing steps. However, the British occupation and Qassem's announcement as a reaction on this, which revealed that he wished to go on with his fight for the returning of the Kuwaiti territories to Iraq, with the help of peaceful means, made it possible for the Soviet Union and – for a certain period of time – for Egypt to take an ideological offensive, declaring the conflict between the Arab people as a fight against the imperialists and colonialists.²¹

In this sense, the change of the contract in 1961 was regarded as a simple manoeuvre, as a collective ambition of Great Britain and Kuwait to confirm their colonial reign and to retain their position in the Middle East in order to prevail over the progressive Arab states – like Iraq and the United Arab Republic – and the national liberation movements. They ignored the claim of Iraq, which based on questionable historical rights and they solely concentrated on the British landing that they considered as illegal.²² They denied the validity of the piece of news that there are Iraqi troops on the Kuwaiti border made ready for an attack. This was said to be a fairy tale that made the occupation of Kuwait possible again. On the other hand, by this means pressure could be put on the Iraqi Government, to withdraw the law of December 1960 that was made after the British–Iraqi negotiation on

to make the Arab World turn against Great Britain. Joyce, Miriam: *Kuwait 1945–1996. An Anglo–American Perspective*. Frank Cass, London, Portland, 1998. pp. 10–107; Trevelyan, *The Middle East in Revolution*. p. 198.

²¹ The soviet standpoint concerning the Kuwaiti issue was formed by the intention to save the relations between Iraq and the Soviet Union rather than by the principles and objections laid to the Emir and the new republic. In addition to the economic arguments it was also decisive that they wanted to be in the neighbourhood a friendly state and they did not want that a cordon like the one in the Baghdad Pact to be established there. Furthermore, the Soviet Union took into consideration that without the Soviet support the stressing of Iraqi aims could lead to actions on Great Britain's and U.S.A.'s side like those in Lebanon and in Jordan in 1958 which further could lead to a right wing change in politics and the downfall of the republic in Iraq. A proof of this is that in 1962, when the relation between the Soviet Union and Qassem became tensed, the 'feudal rulers' of Kuwait and other principalities in the Persian Gulf were accused – in the press – of being imperialists while they were doing their best to retain their social privileges and to hinder the liberation movements. The author supported this statement through the example of Kuwait: „The experience of Kuwait in gaining formal independence, however, shows that self-government alone is not enough. State sovereignty is largely illusory as long as the oil monopolies retain control of the entire economy of the sheikhdoms.” Andreyanov, Y.: *The Oil Monopolies in the Persian Gulf Colonies. International Affairs*. Moscow, 10. October, 1962. pp. 78–79; Page, *The USSR and Arabia*. p. 61.

²² The Soviet Union would have considered the standpoint of the Iraqi Government as acceptable, if it had came out in favour of liberation of Kuwait from the British influence and if had not laid claim on the annexation of Kuwait. Furthermore, the crisis deepened the decision of Iraq to name the ruler of Kuwait for administrative official in Iraq and to impose sanctions so that they were obedient. A similar announcement was formulated and published by the Communist Party in Iraq. According to this, the people in Kuwait should have decided the issue. They considered the correction of the proposal in the issue and the encouragement to the fight against the imperialism, as their duty. *Kuwaittal kapcsolatos iraki követelés*. 1961. augusztus 15. MOL KÜM TŰK XIX-J-1-j Irak 1945-64. 3. d. 5/bf–005692/szig.titk/1961; *A Kuwaiti kérdés*. 1961. augusztus 21. MOL KÜM TŰK XIX-J-1-j Irak 1945-64. 3. d. 5/bf–005692/1/szig.titk/1961. – 272/szig.titk/1961.o

the oil and that deprived the Iraq Petroleum Co. from its concessions.²³ The Soviet Union and, following its example, the other Socialist countries did not intend to the acceptance of the sovereignty of Kuwait, which got a further political confirmation when Qassem broke with diplomatic relations to those countries – except for China – that took stand on the independence of Kuwait, after his speech.²⁴

The debate on the Kuwaiti question in the Security Council

On the same day the British troops joined up in Kuwait, the Security Council of the United Nations assembled to discuss the situation. On the next day Adnan Pachachi, the UN Representative of Iraq, supported by the Soviet Union, demanded the withdrawal of the British troops. This claim had no effect, moreover, Great Britain, supported by the USA and France, submitted a proposal to the Security Council, in which it called upon the member states to accept the independence of Kuwait and its territorial integrity, referring to the request of the Emir, and to establish together peace and calmness in the area. The ambition of Great Britain has been totally supported by the Kuwaiti Government whose Representative declared: his country contributed to the withdrawal of the British troops on condition that the UN guaranteed it would give a helping hand in case of any kind of aggression on Iraq's side and he demanded that Kuwait be admitted to the UN.²⁵

Zorin, the Representative of the Soviet Union, expressed his protest on occasion of the gathering of the Security Council against the participation on the meeting of the

²³ The Soviet Union denied both the report on the concentration of troops in Iraq and that the British troops joined on the request of the Emir. In connection with the second report, they referred to the statement of the Kuwaiti Ambassador in Egypt, which showed that for not being in danger Kuwait did not want to ask for any assistance from Great Britain. Fatisov, V. Gunboat Tactics Again. *International Affairs*. Moscow, 2. February, 1962. p. 94; Ljubavin, A.: *Mi történelem Kuwaitban? Nemzetközi Szemle*. V. 8. sz. 1961. p. 68.

²⁴ It surprised diplomats of many countries that China had sent a greeting telegram on occasion of the independence of Kuwait before the Soviet Union and other socialist countries made a statement on the issue. Representatives of India and Iraq considered this as a manifestation of the conflict between China and the Soviet Union, while representative of Oman supposed that China misinterpreted the situation. However it is fact that China consequently supported Kuwait to become member of the world organisation – after the country had gained membership in the Arab League – referring to the roles of the country in certain international organisations and asserting that the sovereignty of Kuwait was acknowledged by several countries. We had to add that no sooner had there been diplomatic relations between China and Kuwait than Kuwait became member of the UN. It came to diplomatic relations between the two countries in November 1963. *Brit mesterkedések a kuvaiti kérdés körül*. 1961. július 9. MOL KÜM TÜK XIX-J-1-j Egyiptom 1945-64. 12. d. 11/f-005872/szig.titk/1961. – 248/szig. titk./1961.

²⁵ *Kuvaiti emirátus* MOL KÜM TÜK XIX-J-1-j Jemen 1945-64. 2. d. IV-130. sz.n. More about the speech of Dean, British representative in the UN on the meeting of the Security Council on 2nd and 6th July; about the answer given to this by Pachachi, Iraqi representative in the UN and about the speech of Hussein, Kuwaiti representative on 5th July see: Lauterpracht–Greenwood–Weller–Bethlehem, *The Kuwait Crisis: Basic Documents*. pp. 51–54.

delegation of Kuwait, as – according to him – after the occupation of Kuwait the British authority has dominated the local administration. In this situation, the country could not be regarded as an independent state. Because of this he vetoed the proposal put forward by Great Britain. Furthermore, in his statement on 5th July he drew attention on the fact that Iraq had no intention to get its way in Kuwait by force and that the peace of the area is only be menaced by the presence of the British troops and ships. Because of this, he demanded the Security Council to take the necessary steps, which force the British Government to withdraw its troops. He emphasized that it would be a basis for the solution of the matter in dispute, which should have been done in harmony with the charter of the UN, by peaceful measures, rather than violence.²⁶

The delegation of the United Arab Republic in the UN – together with the Soviet Union – had not recognised the sovereignty of Kuwait yet, while it took stand on the claim of Iraq to annex the oil-sheikhdom. His standpoint has been determined by two factors:

- 1) Not wishing that Kuwait – being part of Iraq – strengthened its rival, the delegation emphasized in the press that the unity of the Arab countries could not be brought about by force against the will of the inhabitants.
- 2) Taking advantage of the fact that the British troops arrived in Kuwait, the Egyptian propaganda stressed on the doubtfulness of the independence of Kuwait. The propaganda regarded the fact that an Arab country made use of the assistance of an imperialist state Great Britain as treason. Moreover, it condemned Saudi Arabia because of its military co-operation with Great Britain.²⁷

It put forward a proposal, supported by the Soviet Union as well, according to which the withdrawal of the foreign troops was demanded. The proposal was not been accepted for lack of sufficient number of votes.²⁸

²⁶ Ljubavin, *Nemzetközi Szemle*. p. 69; Page, *The USSR and Arabia*. p. 61.

²⁷ There has been a public opinion in Damascus in connection with the conflict according to which it would have been the best if Iraq had occupied Kuwait without having announced it. They thought it had met the interests of the Arab people as by this means an imperialist base would have come to end in this region. However they agreed with the common opinion that the disorder beginning after the announcement of Qassem served the interests of Great Britain as it made the realisation of the most important aim of Great Britain possible. Great Britain intended to strengthen the British military positions in Kuwait even after the independence of the country. It was made possible that Great Britain intended to secure the division of the Arab countries. If the Arab countries had unanimously committed themselves to the independence of Kuwait it would not have come to ambitions on the Arab countries' side to occupy Kuwait. *Brit mesterkedések a kuvaiti kérdés körül*. 1961. július 9. MOL KÜM TÜK XIX-J-1-j Egyiptom 1945-64. 12. d. 11/f-005872/szig.titk/1961. – 248/szig. titk./1961.

²⁸ President Nasser referred to the issue of Kuwait in his speech on 22nd July 1961 on the occasion of the 9th anniversary of the revolution in Egypt: „Let us now tackle another problem in the Arab world, namely that of Kuwait. (...) We announced our attitude at the outset, based on the principles already declared. Our sentiments were all the time with the people of Iraq and the people of Kuwait, knowing that only the imperialists would benefit and take advantage of the crisis. (...) The peoples of Kuwait and Iraq are Arab peoples belonging to the Arab nation. We, in the United Arab

At the same time, the Arab League placed the issue on the agenda on 5th July in spite of the Iraqi protest. The request for the membership of Kuwait, handed in on 27th June, was discussed. Furthermore, they sought for a solution for the given conflict. At the end of the negotiations – on 19th July 1961 – the following decisions were taken:

- 1) The Government of Kuwait undertakes to request the withdrawal of British forces from Kuwaiti territory as soon as possible,
- 2) The Government of the Republic of Iraq undertakes not to use force in the annexation of Kuwait to Iraq,
- 3) The Council undertakes to support every wish Kuwait may express for a union or a federation with other countries of the Arab League in accordance with the League's pact,
- 4) The Council decides to welcome the State of Kuwait as a member of the Arab League,
- 5) To assist the State of Kuwait in joining the United Nations,
- 6) The Arab states undertake to provide effective assistance for the preservation of Kuwait's independence, upon its request, and the Council confers upon the Secretary-General the power to take the necessary measures for the urgent implementation of this resolution.²⁹

The Emir of Kuwait and Muhammad Ali Hassouna, the General Secretary of the Arab League agreed on the issue of composition of the Arab troops, on 11th August 1961.³⁰ Next day the Emir sent a letter to Sir William Luce in which he officially demanded the withdrawal of the British troops from Kuwait.³¹ On 10th September arrived the first units

Republic, had no alternative to adherence to principles, not only for the sake of safeguarding those principles but also for the safeguard of the solidarity of the Arab nation. The future of the Arab nation cannot be made dependent on manoeuvres. Manoeuvres are the means of realising Arab aspirations; on the contrary, they might cause the collapse of Arab aspirations, and the return of imperialism and the British, as happened in Kuwait. This Republic can never accept that the policy of annexation governs relations between the Arab peoples. We have been announcing for years that we support unity and reject annexation. We support unity, if based on the unanimous will of the people. Our objective now, as it has always been, is to rid ourselves of colonialism and foreign occupation. Our objective, now after the Kuwait crisis and the return of the British, is the evacuation of the British, so that the independent people of Kuwait may enjoy security." *President Gamal Abdel Nasser's Speeches and Press-Interviews*. January–December, 1961. pp. 157–158.

²⁹ Agreement on the Status of the Arab League Security Force in Kuwait, 12 August 1961. Lauterpracht–Greenwood–Weller–Bethlehem, *The Kuwait Crisis: Basic Documents*. p. 55; Khadduri–Ghareeb, *War in the Gulf, 1990–1991*. p. 66.

³⁰ The letter of Hassouna sent to the ruler in this issue and his answer, sent to the Secretary-general of the Emir see: Note addressed by the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States to H. H. the Prince of the State of Kuwait, 12 August 1961. és Letter from H. H. the Prince of the State of Kuwait addressed to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, 12 August 1961. In: Lauterpracht–Greenwood–Weller–Bethlehem, *The Kuwait Crisis: Basic Documents*. pp. 55–56.

³¹ Great Britain met the request only on 19th October because of the new threatening on Iraq's side on 21st August. Mostyn, Trevor: *Major Political Events in Iran, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula 1945–1990*. Facts On File, New York, Oxford, 1991. p. 76.

of the military force, which consisted of united troops of five Arab states: United Arab Republic, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Sudan and Tunisia.³²

In the middle of July, Moscow seemed to separate from the issue and to let the Arab countries to solve the matters in dispute while hoping moral support to Iraq that was not dynamic anymore would not influence its relations to the United Arab Republic. Thus, the Arab League's recognition of Kuwait's independence was not been reported; nor was the replacement of British by Arab forces mentioned until early 1962.³³

The unchangeable Soviet standpoint in the issue was strengthened by the fact, that on 30th November, 1961 the United Arab Republic proposed a motion to recognise Kuwait as a member of the UN. The Soviet Union took a stand on the postponement of the issue, as according to her Kuwait could not be considered as an independent state without any doubt. As an explanation, it was emphasized that the withdrawal of the British troops did not establish the sovereignty of Kuwait so the Soviet Union would not recognise the sovereignty of Kuwait as long as the contract with the United Kingdom was valid.³⁴ In this sense the Soviet Union did again veto the membership of Kuwait in the UN which it took back only after the downfall of the Qassem Government.³⁵

³² The troops of the United Arab Republic were withdrawn on 12th October 1961, because Syria and Egypt permanently broke off their relations and Syria resigned from the UAR on 28th September. According to the diplomats the UAR had no interests anymore in supporting Kuwait as its rich oil fields remained in the hands of Great Britain. Furthermore, the Egyptian did their best in order that it came to situation in Syria similar to that before the membership of the country in the Union. To achieve this it was ready to support Iraq even if it happened hidden and unspoken. The Saudi Arabian, Jordanian and Sudanese units of the contingent remained in the region until February 1963, when the Baathists in Iraq banned Qassem through a coup. *Az EAK csapatainak visszarendelése Kuvaitból*. 1961. december 27. MOL KÜM TÜK XIX-J-1-j Egyiptom 1945-64. 12. d. 11/f-001789/szig.titk/1961. – 619/szig. titk./1961.; Joyce i.m. 108. o.; Khadduri-Ghareeb, *War in the Gulf, 1990–1991*. p. 66; Lenczowski, George: *The Middle East in World Affairs*. London, 1982. p. 667.

³³ The soviet press emphasised in August 1961, that „the tragedy of Kuwait is worsen by the constant conquering intention of Great Britain.” Another article attached the social status of the Emir and accused him of „having betrayed his people by letting in the foreign conquerors”, so the autonomy of Kuwait became illusory. „Kuwait.” *International Affairs*. Moscow, 9. September 1961. 113–114. o.; Page, *The USSR and Arabia*. p. 62.

³⁴ Zorin, the Soviet delegate, declared in his speech, that „The Ruler of Kuwait is directly dependent upon the United Kingdom Government, for the existing economic and political ties ... clearly set the stage for the exertion of influence on the Ruler ... The maintenance of Kuwait in a state of de facto dependence on the United Kingdom enables the latter at any time to send in as many troops as may be needed ... for any aggressive action against the independent Arab states of the area. Kuwait continues to play, in the far-reaching plans of the United Kingdom in the Near East, the role of a pawn, of a springboard for possible future aggression. The continuing and complete political dependence ... is reinforced by the absolute predominance, in Kuwait's economy, of British and American oil monopolies ... Kuwait essentially remains a British colony.” Page, *The USSR and Arabia*. p. 62.

³⁵ The Soviets were equally sceptical about the status of Kuwait and about all the reforms that were intended to introduce in the sheikhdom by the Emir. A sarcastic article was published in the soviet press in April 1962 in connection with the establishment of the Constituent Assembly and the

The acceptance of the UN membership of Kuwait

The coup of 8th February, 1963 and the overthrow of president Qassem called forth radical changes in the Kuwait question. Although the administration of the new republic under the leadership of Abd as-Salam Aref did not make a definite declaration on the Kuwait question, a few days after the coup many ministers stated that they do not intend to go on with Qassem's politics regarding Kuwait, and that they regarded the people of Kuwait likewise the inhabitants of other independent Arabic countries as brotherly Arabic people.³⁶

During the unsettled months of February and March Baghdad took a number of steps (the launch of airlines, the abolishment of restrictions on visa requirements, the restoration of economic relationships, the reception of an unofficial Kuwaiti government delegation between the 21st and 24th of March, etc.) in order to normalize the relationship of the two countries. This indeed suggested that Iraq, according to the statements of the first days, would to relinquish claim of Kuwait even without openly declaring it. At that time to the

appointment of the provisional government. The article analysing the reforms and referring to the inhabitants who had a few right to vote and to the composition of the first Cabinet – 11 of the 14 Ministres were members of the royal family – the author concluded, with a glance at the recent purchases of arms from Britain that Kuwait was being used, and the cooperation of the Emir with Great Britain, made the country to a “stronghold in the struggle with the growing national-liberation movement of the Arab peoples”. The attacks of the Soviets against Kuwait had diminished by 1962. The Soviet Union took the reforms, carried out by the Government of Kuwait, the building of several industries and houses and the foundation of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development – which began its functioning with a lending to Algeria – into consideration. It was also taken into account that the government put pressure on the Kuwait Oil Company: a law was made on the introduction of the governmental control on the export of foreign oil-companies on the one hand, and the KOC had to hand over about the half of its concession territories. Another signal of the gradual disappointment in Qassem's politics was that he was publicly criticized several times. The revoking of the Contract of 1899 was considered as a merit of the national movement and the Emir was not accused of co-operating with Great Britain anymore. Because of all these, the Soviet Union invited Kuwait to participate in a conference dealing with modern procedures of the fishing sent an official delegate to the Soviet Union. This was the first step towards the recognition of Kuwait's independence and towards the establishment of commercial relations between the two states. Page, *The USSR and Arabia*. p. 62.

³⁶ On 13 February, Shabib, Foreign Minister of Iraq answered on a question, put by foreign journalists on occasion of his first press conference: „On the issue of Kuwait, a satisfactory compromise is possible.” On 19th February Aref, President of the Republic made a statement to the journalists of the newspaper of Cairo, „Al-Ahram”, in which he emphasized that „the relation of Iraq to Kuwait is not a private issue, but it is a global issue of the Arab nations. The issue must be managed in a way that is sufficient for the whole Arab World, as there's no separated nation of Iraq and Kuwait. The nation of Kuwait does not differ from that of Iraq. If Kuwait does not want to join our country, our country will be united with Kuwait.” *Iraki-kuvaiti viszony alakulása*. 1963. október 16. MOL KÜM TÜK XIX-J-1-j Irak 1945-64. 3. d. 5/bf-004524/1/szig.titk/1963. – 266/szig. titk./1963.

socialist countries it seemed that, finally, in the radically changed situation, for the contentment of all the concerned parties, the conflicts would be solved. There was an increasing demand in the socialist camp to re-examine the previous dismissive standpoints. They judged the establishment of contact significant primarily from an economic point of view and in this concern judged the diplomatic recognition of Kuwait by all means justified.³⁷

However, with the consolidation of the new government and the appearance of extremely severe financial problems allusions were made regarding the necessity of Kuwait's integration into Iraq which they wished to accomplish in a peaceful way without particular international reverberations. Yet, the effort failed not only because of the reassessment of the socialist standpoint in February but also due to the anti-communist and anti-Soviet politics of the Iraqi leaders by which it practically turned against itself its greatest supporters up to that point. As one of the results of the deterioration of the Iraqi-Soviet relations, following the departure of the Arabic League in February 1963, the Soviet Union immediately adopted the motion of the Kuwaiti government for the establishment of diplomatic relations. On the 13th of March the Soviet Union officially acknowledged the Kuwaiti government with the aim of compelling Iraq to reconsider its politics up to that point.³⁸

In April they have announced that Morocco is making efforts for acknowledgement of Kuwait as a United Nations member and as a result, they have summoned the Security Council to discuss the issue. The Security Council's assembly was preceded by many weeks of internal discussion, during which Iraq was trying for the question not to be put on the agenda yet. They could not start an open campaign, which was doomed to fail anyway, with such an objective after the statements of the 8th of February. Thus at the beginning of May, during their talks with the foreign ambassadors deputed to Iraq the ministers – especially Mr. Shabib, the Minister of Foreign Affairs – wanted to persuade the UN representatives to vote down the Kuwaiti membership application.³⁹

³⁷ *A Kuwaiti kérdés.* 1963. február 23. MOL KÜM TÜK XIX-J-1-j Kis országok 1945-64. 3. d. /Kuwait IV-10-002229/szig.titk/1963. -63/szig. titk./1963.

³⁸ The conviction and execution of the Iraqi communists in large number caused displeasure not only among the leaders but also among the inhabitants in the Soviet Unions. The fact that a mass of 1500 protested in front of the embassy of Iraq in Moscow on 14th March, proved this. They protested against the anticommunist politics of Iraq. On 6th May the Communist Party of the Soviet Union assured the curd soldiers in the Pravda that the Soviet Union would support them in their fight for the autonomy. Mostyn, *Major Political Events in Iran, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula 1945-1990*, p. 85.

³⁹ When Shabib, Foreign Minister of Iraq questioned Jakovlev, the Soviet ambassador in Baghdad, why the Soviet Union altered its opinion, Jakovlev emphasised in his answer that the announcement of the Iraqi Government after 8 February and the behaviour of Iraq against Kuwait the conclusion could be drawn that the country did not lay claim on the annexation of the Emirate to Iraq anymore. The government did not deny this so it is incomprehensible why it changed its standpoint on the issue. Foreign Minister Shabib told the Soviet ambassador in confidence that Iraq did not consider Kuwait as an independent state as the country was established by the imperialists first of all by Great Britain. Firstly, they intended to exploit the oil in Kuwait and they could do it in a legal way.

By that time due to the previously mentioned reasons the Soviet Union's standpoint regarding Kuwait, had already changed and it was keenly advocating Kuwait's admission to the UN.⁴⁰ Besides the Soviet Union, among the socialist countries Kuwait only requested support for its application from Poland and Hungary. Hungary was chosen in order to increase the importance of its participation in the General Assembly.

The General Assembly of May 14th unanimously accepted its admission to the UN. Morocco welcomed the new member on behalf of the Arabic countries. Algeria, who was taking the floor for Somalia and Iran, as a return for the special Kuwaiti aid given for the country during the independence struggle, ensured the Emirates of its support. Kuwait became the 111th member of the UN.⁴¹

Besides the failure in foreign policy, the economic deterioration also posed a serious problem in Iraq. The Western countries declined providing loans and instead suggested Iraq to turn to Kuwait possessing significant amount of spare fund. The Kuwaiti did not remain aloof but stated that the only possibility for a loan would exist if the Iraqi government avowed Kuwait as a sovereign Arabic state, acknowledged its borders and undertook a responsibility of unconditioned respect to it. Thus the Kuwaiti conflict, which prolonged for 2 years, was totally settled on the 4th of October 1963 when Iraq and Kuwait delivered a common announcement stating:

- 1) „The Republic of Iraq recognised the independence and complete sovereignty of the State of Kuwait with its boundaries as specified in the letter of the Prime Minister of Iraq dated 21. 7. 1932 and which was accepted by the Ruler of Kuwait in his letter dated 10. 8. 1932;

Secondly, they wanted to deprive the anti-imperialist country, Iraq of a potential source of power, like the control over the oil in Kuwait. Moreover, they were aimed at establishing a direct bridgehead for the British–American army in case of an attack against Iraq. On the basis of these Shabib asked Jakovlev to inform the Soviet government about the facts mentioned above and to make them know that Iraq hopes that the soviet delegate considering the „real situation” will veto Kuwait's application for admission in the Security Council. *Iraki–kuwaiti viszony alakulása*. 1963. május 20. MOL KÜM TÜK XIX-J-1-j Irak 1945-64. 3. d. 5/bf-004524/szig.titk/1963. – 158/szig.titk./1963.; *Iraki–kuwaiti viszony alakulása*. 1963. október 16. MOL KÜM TÜK XIX-J-1-j Irak 1945-64. 3. d. 5/bf-004524/1/szig.titk/1963. – 266/szig.titk./1963.

⁴⁰ Fedorenko, the delegate of the Soviet Union in the UN, emphasized in his speech on 7th May the importance of the development that had gone on in the foreign affairs of Kuwait since November 1961. In connection with this he referred to the strengthening of the existing relations between Kuwait and other Arab countries to the measure of the government, which forced the Kuwait Oil Corporation to give up the majority of the concessional territories to the state and furthermore he hinted at the diplomatic relations established between Kuwait and the Soviet Union. Page, *The USSR and Arabia*. p. 81.

⁴¹ During the debate the delegation did not appear in the conference hall. The order of the speeches was Jordan, Morocco, India, Algeria, Japan, Liberia, Great Britain, Hungary, the U.S.A, Israel, Cameroon, Greece, Columbia and Kuwait. The Hungarian speech was well accepted by the participants, in which there were some new ideas. *Kuvait felvétele az Egyesült Nemzetek tagjai közé*. 1963. május 27. MOL KÜM TÜK XIX-J-1-j Vegyes 1945-64. 217. d. 13/004702: 26/h. – 148/szig.titk./1963.

- 2) The two Governments shall work towards reinforcing the fraternal relations subsisting between the two sister countries, inspired by their national duty, common interest and aspiration to a complete Arab Unity;
- 3) The two Governments shall work towards establishing cultural, commercial and economical co-operation between the two countries and the exchange of technical information;”

In order to realize all the foregoing objectives they decided to establish immediately diplomatic relations between them at the level of ambassadors.⁴²

Epilogue

Abdullah Salim Emir consequently emphasized in his speech in January 1963 on the first session of the National Assembly of Kuwait that his country is uncommitted and positively neutral in the issue of the Cold War. Kuwait intensively strove for the widening of its international relations after gaining independence. Due to this it came to diplomatic contacts with socialist countries and to enter into various contracts like commercial contracts, contracts of aviation and cultural contracts.

According to the motion Nr. 3190/1963, passed by the Hungarian Revolutionary Labour-Peasant Government on 16th May 1963, Hungary acknowledged the independence of Kuwait and announced its intention to the beginning of the negotiations on the issue of diplomatic contacts between the two countries. The embassies got into touch on 7th May 1964. After some measurements concerning this and the possibilities on the market several products of Hungarian firms (like Ikarus, Tungsram) appeared on the market of Kuwait. Furthermore, many Hungarian citizens contributed to the development of the country. The demonstration of the establishing of diplomatic relations and that of the role of the Hungarian companies in the Kuwaiti market could be the topic of another essay.

⁴² The protocol of the Agreement see: Agreed Minutes Between the State of Kuwait and the Republic of Iraq Regarding the Restoration of Friendly Relations, Recognition and Related Matters, 4. October 1963. In: Lauterpracht–Greenwood–Weller–Bethlehem, *The Kuwait Crisis: Basic Documents*. pp. 56–57.