

# Kuwaiti-Yemeni Relations within the Framework of the Arab League from 1962 To 1979

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## Abstract

The study explores Kuwaiti-Yemeni relations within the framework of the Arab League. The Arab League is one of the most prominent regional organizations established to foster cooperation among Arab countries, with Yemen playing a crucial role in this process. Despite Yemen's initial hesitation in attending the Preparatory Committee meeting, it eventually contributed to the establishment of the Arab League.

On March 19, 1961, Kuwait joined the Arab League shortly after gaining independence from British protection. Kuwait's accession was part of a broader strategy to strengthen its regional position and deepen its ties with other Arab countries. This step reflected Kuwait's commitment to the League's principles and objectives, including enhancing political, economic, and cultural cooperation among Arab nations. Yemen, in particular, was a beneficiary of Kuwaiti support.

The establishment of the Yemeni Republic following the September 1962 Revolution had a significant impact on Kuwaiti-Yemeni relations. Kuwait began to provide political support to Yemen in regional and international forums, working to promote stability and find peaceful solutions to Yemen's internal conflicts. Additionally, Kuwait extended financial and developmental assistance to Yemen, positively influencing its economy. The Arab League played an essential role in strengthening this cooperation by organizing meetings and consultations among member states, further solidifying the ties between Kuwait and Yemen.

**Keywords:** d Kuwait, Yemen, Arab League, conflicts, economic relations.

## 1. Introduction

The bilateral relations between Kuwait and Yemen are pivotal within the Arabian Gulf region, drawing their importance from the historical and cultural ties that bind the two peoples. From 1962 to 1979, Kuwaiti-Yemeni relations witnessed significant development, with the Arab League playing a major role in fostering these relations, which were the result of several key factors. Among the most important was Kuwait's independence on June 19, 1961, coupled with the Yemeni Revolutions of September 26, 1962, and October 14, 1963, in both parts of Yemen. These events directly contributed to the establishment of a friendly and distinguished relationship

between the two nations, characterized by closeness and cooperation, particularly in the field of economic development. Kuwait, leveraging its oil revenues, formed sovereign and economic funds to assist Arab countries.

### First Chapter: Yemen's Role in the Establishment of the Arab League

The need for a unified entity to bring together independent Arab states arose, aimed at protecting their interests, increasing Arab cooperation, preserving the independence of Arab countries, and supporting those that had yet to attain independence. This vision led to the conception of the Arab League. On July 31, 1943, Egypt's Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Nahhas, began sending invitations to the Arab governments. Al-Nahhas also met with the Yemeni delegation, led by Hussein al-Kabsi, to discuss cooperation among Arab countries, emphasizing both Egypt's and Yemen's commitment to collaborate with other Arab nations. Yemen welcomed the idea of economic and cultural cooperation among Arab countries.

At the invitation of the Egyptian government, representatives of Arab states convened in Alexandria, holding the first session of the Preparatory Committee on September 25, 1944, which lasted until October 7. Attending the opening session were delegates from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Transjordan, while Yemen and Saudi Arabia abstained. However, the Yemeni delegate, Hussein al-Kabsi, attended the second session as an observer.

The committee laid the foundations for the Arab League through the "Alexandria Protocol," which was approved by all Arab delegations except those of Saudi Arabia and Yemen. After some hesitation in attending the preparatory meetings, Yemen eventually agreed and became the last country to sign the protocol. On March 22, 1945, the Arab League was officially founded.

### Second Chapter: Kuwait's Accession to the Arab League

Kuwait gained its independence on June 19, 1961, after lengthy negotiations with the British, culminating in the declaration of Kuwait as a sovereign state. Subsequently, on June 22, 1961, Kuwait submitted a formal request to the General Secretariat of the Arab League, seeking approval for its membership in the League. The request was warmly received by the Secretariat and encouraged by Arab countries, which saw Kuwait as a potential supporter of development issues.

However, this move provoked Iraq's Prime Minister, Abdul Karim Qasim, who held a press conference on June 25, declaring that Iraq considered Kuwait an inseparable part of its territory. Kuwait responded with several official statements refuting Iraq's claims. On the same day, Kuwait submitted another memorandum requesting an urgent session of the Arab League Council to discuss its membership. On July 4, 1961, the Arab League Council convened to deliberate on Kuwait's accession, and all Arab states sent telegrams recognizing Kuwait's independence to the Kuwaiti ruler.

Yemen expressed its support for Kuwait's independence and sided with the Arab consensus in rejecting Iraq's claim to annex Kuwait. Yemen also sent a letter to King Saud of Saudi Arabia, pledging its full support for any measures the kingdom took to safeguard Kuwait's independence.

The Arab League held its first meeting on July 4, but the Iraqi delegate did not attend, leading to the postponement of the session.

On July 20, the meeting resumed, and after discussions among the members, the Arab League Council issued Resolution No. 1777/35, officially making Kuwait the 11th member of the Arab League. The crisis between Kuwait and Iraq was finally resolved after the February 8, 1963, revolution in Iraq, which toppled Qasim's regime. The new Iraqi government formally recognized Kuwait's independence, bringing the conflict to an end.

### Third Chapter: Kuwait's Mediation Role in Yemeni Conflicts within the Arab League Framework (1962-1979)

Arab countries sought to support Yemen's unity, with each state taking a stance based on its relations with Yemen and its connections to Western powers. Kuwait's independence coincided with the September 26, 1962, revolution in North Yemen, which followed the proclamation of Crown Prince al-Badr as the new Imam. Al-Badr introduced several reforms, guaranteeing Yemenis their rights, including the abolition of the hostage system. In foreign policy, he declared Yemen's commitment to positive neutrality. The Yemeni Free Movement expressed its support for the new Imam, but shortly after taking office, al-Badr resumed his father's policies and collaborated with his uncle, Prince Hassan, known for his hardline stance against the opposition.

This led a group of military officers, known as the Free Officers, to plan a revolution with the cooperation of Egypt. The revolution successfully overthrew the Hamid al-Din family's rule and the Imamate, establishing a republic. The revolutionaries gained popular support, and a Revolutionary Command Council, led by Abdullah al-Sallal, was formed. However, the Imam al-Badr's escape to Saudi Arabia with some members of the royal family escalated the conflict from a local to a regional and international crisis. Saudi Arabia began supporting the royalists with financial and military aid, which prompted the Yemeni revolutionaries to seek assistance from Egypt.

Egypt responded by providing moral and military support, including equipment and financial aid. Egyptian military aid and soldiers began arriving in Yemen on October 5, 1962, with an initial shipment followed by the arrival of 2,000 paratroopers the next day. Saudi Arabia, upon learning of the Egyptian troop deployment, immediately supported the royalist forces in their efforts to restore the Hamid al-Din monarchy.

After the declaration of the republic and the fall of the monarchy, rumors of Imam al-Badr's death spread, but on September 28, Prince Hassan bin Yahya proclaimed himself Imam of Yemen from New York and sought assistance from King Saud of Saudi Arabia. He established a royalist government in exile in the city of Najran, near the Saudi border, and on October 5, a formal royalist government in exile was announced.

In Kuwait, members of the National Assembly called for the recognition of the Yemeni revolution, questioning the delay in such a decision. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained that Kuwait's cautious approach was based on the need to ensure the situation

warranted recognition. Nevertheless, Kuwaiti official media implicitly acknowledged the new regime in Yemen by referring to it by its new name, the Yemeni Arab Republic.

Kuwait faced significant pressure from various parties due to its recognition of the republican regime in Yemen and its provision of aid to the Yemeni revolution. Despite these pressures, Kuwait remained steadfast in its support, continuing to aid and endorse the republican government. It is worth noting that Kuwait's backing of the republican regime was likely influenced by the support that the royalist family gave to Iraq's Prime Minister Abdul Karim Qasim's claims to annex Kuwait.

During the Arab League Council meeting in March 1963, the League officially recognized the Yemen Arab Republic. All delegations welcomed Yemen's membership in the League, with the exception of Saudi Arabia and Jordan. In addition, the Yemeni delegation submitted a memorandum concerning British colonialism in South Yemen, which garnered attention from all Arab League members, except for Saudi Arabia's representative. On September 19, the Arab League called on member states to provide assistance to the republican government in Sana'a and support it in international forums. Kuwait also sought to mediate the Yemeni conflict that emerged after the revolution, aiming to halt the civil war between the royalist forces backed by Saudi Arabia and the republican forces supported by Egypt. This conflict was considered one of the most dangerous disputes handled by the League due to its complexity and the wide array of parties involved. In September 1963, the League issued a resolution urging concerned governments to maintain peace and security in Yemen, following which a peace mission was dispatched. The mission succeeded in securing commitments from the warring factions to de-escalate the conflict.

Kuwait demonstrated interest in the Yemeni situation since the first Arab summit, held on January 13, 1964, in Cairo under the Arab League's auspices. Despite the regional and international significance of the Yemeni civil war, it did not receive the expected attention during the Arab League's sessions and was instead discussed outside the formal meetings. In the summit's second, closed session, council members attempted to bridge the gap between Egypt and Saudi Arabia but failed to find a resolution to end the crisis.

Kuwait's delegation, led by Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, attended the second Arab summit, held in Alexandria on September 10, 1964. The Secretary-General of the Arab League, Abdul Khalek Hassouna, emphasized that the Yemeni conflict was among the most pressing issues that required resolution, as the continuation of the war would harm relations between Arab states. On the sidelines of the summit, several meetings took place between President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Prince Faisal, with Kuwaiti representatives also in attendance. However, Yemeni President Abdullah al-Sallal was excluded from these discussions, which culminated in the issuance of a joint communiqué on September 14, 1964, regarding the talks between Nasser and King Faisal.

On August 24, 1965, a Kuwaiti delegation, led by Crown Prince Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, visited Saudi Arabia to discuss the Yemeni crisis with King Faisal. The king accepted Kuwait's

mediation, which resulted in the signing of the Jeddah Agreement between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The agreement stipulated the following points:

1. The Yemeni people would decide the form of government they desired through a public referendum, to be held no later than November 1966.
2. The remaining period until the referendum would serve as a transitional phase to prepare for the referendum.
3. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Republic (Egypt) would cooperate in forming a transitional council of fifty members representing all national forces.
4. Both governments would adopt and support the council's decisions and cooperate to ensure their successful implementation.
5. Saudi Arabia would immediately cease all military support and stop using its territory to launch attacks against Yemen.
6. The United Arab Republic would withdraw all its military forces from Yemen within ten months, starting from November 23, 1965.
7. A joint peace committee would be formed by both sides to oversee the ceasefire.

However, the disagreements that arose between the warring factions during the Haradh Conference sessions, primarily over the republican rejection of the agreement, posed significant obstacles. The republicans were unwavering in their stance, refusing to compromise on the republican system and outright rejecting the return of the Hamid al-Din family or the restoration of the Imamate system.

At the beginning of 1966, tensions between the royalists and republicans in Yemen resurfaced, leading to an increase in military operations. Egyptian forces launched air raids against the Najran region, which the rebels had used as a base for operations against the Yemeni republic. In response, Saudi Arabia filed a complaint with the United Nations against the United Arab Republic (Egypt) to prevent further air raids on Saudi territory. The two nations also engaged in heightened media campaigns and mutual accusations. In an attempt to mediate, Kuwait called for a meeting in May, attended by representatives from both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Kuwait proposed a peace plan based on a ten-month transitional government in Yemen, dominated by republican elements, alongside the withdrawal of Egyptian forces within nine months, to be replaced by a joint Arab force overseeing the referendum on Yemen's future. Egypt agreed to refer to Yemen's system as "the Yemeni State" during this transitional period, giving King Faisal time to adjust to the republican name. Both the Saudi and Egyptian governments showed interest in the Kuwaiti proposals, but the talks broke down over Egypt's insistence on a direct referendum and the demand that the Hamid al-Din family be kept away from the Saudi-Yemeni border, stalling negotiations and prompting Kuwait to officially halt its mediation efforts.

In August 1967, efforts were renewed under the framework of the Arab League at the Khartoum Arab Summit, aimed at uniting the Arab world and resolving the Yemeni crisis. The summit

resulted in the signing of the Egyptian-Saudi Khartoum Agreement, which outlined the following:

1. A tripartite committee, composed of three Arab countries, would be established to address the issue, with Saudi Arabia choosing one member, Egypt selecting another, and the third being chosen by Arab foreign ministers or through mutual agreement between the two sides.
2. The committee would develop plans for the withdrawal of Egyptian forces from Yemen and the cessation of Saudi military aid to the royalist forces.
3. The committee would ensure the orderly withdrawal of Egyptian forces.

On September 15, 1967, Egyptian forces began their withdrawal from Yemen, returning to Egypt.

In 1971, relations between the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) deteriorated, leading to several clashes in February and May 1972, reaching their peak in September. The Arab League decided to form an Arab Reconciliation Committee, which was accepted by both parties. Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad of Kuwait was a member of this committee and visited both Sana'a and Aden in October of the same year. He carried a settlement proposal from the Sana'a government to Aden, consisting of five points, including the return of displaced people, compensation for tribal leaders and merchants whose properties were nationalized, the cessation of sabotage activities, and the resolution of border disputes. His efforts succeeded, not only in halting armed clashes but also in the signing of a peace treaty and a trade agreement between the two states.

However, in March 1979, conflict erupted again between the two Yemeni states, prompting the Yemen Arab Republic to request immediate intervention from the Arab League to de-escalate the situation and restore peace. On March 4, 1979, the Arab League Council held an extraordinary session in Kuwait at the foreign ministerial level, which lasted three days. The conference produced several key recommendations, including a ceasefire, the continuation of Arab mediation efforts, and the formation of a monitoring committee composed of the foreign ministers of six Arab countries, including Kuwait, alongside the Arab League Secretary-General. The meeting also proposed a summit between the two governments to improve relations and restore normal conditions, eventually implementing the Cairo and Tripoli agreements.

On March 28, peace talks began in Kuwait between President Ali Abdullah Saleh of the Yemen Arab Republic and Chairman of the Supreme People's Council of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Abdul Fattah Ismail, under the direct patronage of the Kuwaiti leadership. The conference, opened by Kuwait's Sheikh, called for strengthening national unity in both Yemeni states and fulfilling the aspirations of the Yemeni people. Discussions focused on the implementation of the agreements reached by the military committee during its meetings in both Aden and Sana'a, resulting in the signing of the National Unity Statement, known as the Kuwait Declaration.

According to the agreement, a joint constitutional committee was formed, tasked with drafting a new constitution within four months. The two presidents were then to meet again to approve the

final draft and call for the convening of the respective People's Councils in both Yemeni states within an agreed timeframe. The draft constitution would then be submitted to the People's Councils for approval, followed by the formation of a joint ministerial committee to oversee a public referendum on the constitution and the election of a unified legislative authority for the new state within six months of the committee's formation. The two presidents also committed to the provisions of the Cairo Agreement, the Tripoli Declaration, and the Arab League Council's resolutions, working to implement the decisions made by the unity committees. The constitutional committee was to complete its work within the agreed timeframe, and Kuwait continued to provide material and moral support to both Yemeni states, achieving the desired goal of unity at the official level.

Kuwait's efforts played a significant role in ending the 1979 border war and overcoming the obstacles to reconciliation between the two Yemeni states.

#### Chapter Four: Kuwaiti Aid to Yemen 1962-1979

To affirm the strong ties and numerous connections binding the Arab countries, the Charter of the Arab League stipulates that member states cooperate closely in economic, financial, health, educational, and cultural affairs. Consequently, Kuwait's role in the League extended beyond mere diplomatic efforts. Kuwait advocated for a reconsideration of member states' contributions to the League's budget for the common good and played a significant part in contributing to various specialized organizations of the Arab League. Accordingly, Kuwait provided assistance to Yemen, both North and South, from the early years following the September 26, 1962 revolution.

The initial step involved a Kuwaiti delegation's arrival in Sana'a in 1963, aimed at exploring avenues for economic cooperation between Kuwait and Yemen. This resulted in the establishment of a Kuwaiti projects office in Sana'a, under the General Authority for the South and the Gulf Arab Region. This authority played a role in founding several health and educational institutions, including Sana'a University.

On April 17, 1963, Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah sent a message to President Abdullah Al-Sallal, indicating Kuwait's readiness to provide assistance to Yemen and reflecting the deep bond between the two countries. The aid was offered in various fields as a fraternal duty.

Kuwait began providing grants without charge to both Yemeni regions. It built fifty-two primary and secondary schools, a teacher training center, a library in Sana'a, as well as an Islamic studies college, a law and sharia college. In 1965, Kuwait constructed a police academy and the General Authority for Civil Aviation and Meteorology in Sana'a, and two mosques in Northern Yemen in 1967.

On May 14, 1968, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development deposited \$1.6 million with the Yemeni Central Bank to cover Yemen's international institutional subscriptions. On May 16 of the same year, the Kuwaiti Central Bank deposited 500,000 Kuwaiti Dinars to cover Yemen's subscriptions to Arab development institutions.

On May 19, 1969, Yemeni Prime Minister Hassan Al-Omari, accompanied by a large economic delegation, made an official visit to Kuwait. Reflecting the development of bilateral relations, Kuwait appointed its first ambassador to Sana'a in 1970. On March 17, Kuwait Fund provided a loan of approximately 700,000 Kuwaiti Dinars for the expansion of the Salif port in Yemen, and 25,000 Kuwaiti Dinars to restart a textile factory in Bajil. On November 28, 1971, Kuwaiti and Yemeni visits were exchanged, with Yemeni Prime Minister Mohsen Al-Aini hosting Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Nasser Sabah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in Sana'a. In 1972, the Salif project agreement was signed, costing fifty million dollars by 1974.

A similar office was established in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, in Aden, to oversee the implementation of educational and health projects funded by Kuwait, starting in 1970. This included the construction of four small hospitals, five schools, and a boarding section for the College of Education in Khormaksar, Aden in 1973.

In November 1975, the Finance Minister of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen visited Kuwait for several days, conducting discussions on various cooperative fields. On January 17, 1976, the Fund provided two loans: the first of 2.54 million Kuwaiti Dinars for agricultural development, and the second of 1.485 million Kuwaiti Dinars for the construction of the Taiz-Kilo 64 road. Additionally, on December 22, a loan of 1.81 million Kuwaiti Dinars was provided for a multipurpose project in Al-Mukalla(73 )

. Between 1977 and 1978, Kuwait built the Initial Development Institute and the Institute of Fine Arts and sent forty-four teachers to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen(74)

## 2. Conclusion

1. The Arab League is a regional organization aimed at strengthening connections among member states through political, economic, social, cultural, and security cooperation.
2. The September 26, 1962 revolution in Yemen marked the beginning of strong Kuwaiti-Yemeni relations. After Kuwait's independence on June 19, 1961, it became increasingly capable of supporting brotherly nations, especially as Yemen became an arena of international conflict.
3. Kuwait played a significant role within the Arab League in mediating between the two Yemeni regions, often alleviating tensions through its diplomatic initiatives.
4. Kuwait contributed to Yemen's development through numerous free projects in the fields of development, economy, culture, education, health, and construction, whether through its government or the General Authority for the South and the Gulf Arab Region, as well as through concessional loans.



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