

Egypt and kuwait: a comparison of two arab countries essay sample

War



Egypt and Kuwait are both Arab countries, and yet they are very different from one another. Egypt has a culture that goes back centuries, predating Islam, and is considered part of the cradle of civilization. Kuwait is a modern and new country, very wealthy because of its oil, but very vulnerable to its more aggressive neighbors like Iraq. Both have different realities facing them in today's complicated world stage, and their foreign policies reflect their realities. I will compare the foreign policies of Kuwait and Egypt, and discuss any similarities and the definite differences between them.

Kuwait is a small country with a population of just over one and a half million people. It is located at the head of the Persian Gulf, which is strategically a crucial area in the geopolitics of our time, in world affairs. It is precisely because of this prime location that Kuwait is vulnerable. The advantages of its wealth have also brought some misfortune on Kuwait, in the form of outside attack. Kuwait is bordered by Saudi Arabia on the south, and by Iraq on the north and west. It is a modern and very wealthy nation, but in some ways it still is behind the rest of the modern world in some of its cultural practices, for example equality of women. Although women in Kuwait live light years better than their Muslim sisters in Iran, they are still relegated second-class status and denied opportunities for public roles. Also, Kuwait has been criticized for its treatment of foreign laborers, especially poor women from the Philippines and Indonesia, who come to work as cheap domestics in the homes of wealthy Kuwaitis. In other respects, however, Kuwait enjoys a very important role in world affairs because of its oil supply.

The population of Kuwait is predominantly Arab, but only about one-third of the Kuwaiti population are actual Kuwaitis. This is due to the fact that native

<https://assignbuster.com/egypt-and-kuwait-a-comparison-of-two-arab-countries-essay-sample/>

Kuwaitis have a very high per capita income, and they pay no taxes. They also enjoy extensive social services. Therefore, there is not a viable work force that can perform all of the duties needed by a modern society. That is why many foreigners come to Kuwait to perform these duties and make a good living. Some of the major ethnic groups that come to Kuwait to find work are Iranians, Indians, Pakistanis, Yemenis, and Palestinians. 85-percent of the population is Muslim, but there are other religious groups active in Kuwait.

Kuwait is a monarchy, but the ruling sheikh does pick a prime minister to head the government. Kuwait has a unicameral national assembly made up of 50 members who are elected by popular vote. There are no official political parties. Women do not have the right to vote in Kuwait. In 1999, the sheikh issued an edict giving Kuwaiti women the right to vote and to run for office, but parliament failed to ratify it (Encyclopedia. com, 1, 2).

In 1897, Kuwait became a British protectorate. This protectorate ended in 1961, and Kuwait became an independent sheikhdom. Shortly after Kuwait's independence, however, Iraq claimed sovereignty over Kuwait. British troops were invited into Kuwait by the new sheikhdom for protection. Shortly after, the British troops were replaced by Arab League detachments. Finally, in 1963, Iraq officially recognized the nation of Kuwait.

Kuwait was a founding member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Kuwait's vast oil revenues have been used to support other Arab countries. One of the main causes supported by Kuwait has been the Palestinians, in their conflict with Israel. Kuwait has also kept up relations

with the West. Not to be too tied up into ideological arguments and positions, Kuwait was also the first Persian Gulf State to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1963. Kuwait did take part in the oil embargo against the nations that supported Israel in the 1973 war, and Kuwaiti troops stationed in Egypt along the Suez Canal fought against Israeli forces.

Kuwait supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. This support caused Kuwait's income from oil to drop some fifty percent. Iran went so far as to attack a Kuwaiti oil refinery in 1982, and fire upon Kuwaiti tankers in the Persian Gulf. Iran instigated terrorist activity in Kuwait through radical Muslim groups. The Sheikh al Sabah endured an attempted assassination in 1985. In 1987, Kuwait asked the United States for protection from attack in the Gulf, and American ships patrolled the Gulf until the end of the war in 1988 (Encyclopedia. com, 2).

Egypt is an ancient country whose culture goes back centuries into the past, predating Islam. This rich cultural history seems to give Egypt a different perspective on the world than its neighbors have. Egypt's modern history is not much different than the histories of its Arab neighbors. Egypt gained partial independence from the UK in 1922. Following World War Two, Egypt finally gained full sovereignty from the British. Egypt entered the modern world in full tilt with the construction of the Aswan High Dam in 1971, which created the new Lake Nasser and altered the sacred and time-honored Nile River forever (CIA, 1). In a way, Egypt had to alter its past a little bit to create better agriculture and hope for the future.

Egypt is a populous state of 68.3 million people, and the population is growing rapidly. It is the most populous of the Arab states. Most Egyptians are Muslim, but there is a small minority of Christians. Egypt is bordered by Libya, Sudan, and Israel. The Mediterranean Sea is to the north, and the Red Sea is on the east. Egypt is in possession of the famous Suez Canal, which connects both seas together. Arabic is the official language of Egypt, but the educated classes speak and understand English and French. Egypt is a republic with several different political parties. It would seem that Egypt is on the right track when it comes to being a free and open democracy.

Egypt does have some economic problems, partly due to its large and fast-growing population. It has to defer from its very independent and proud mindset and look for help from the outside world, particularly the United States. Hopefully, with modernization on the near horizon, Egypt can overcome some of its economic problems and become a major economy in today's world.

Egypt has had some difficulties with its neighbors in the Middle East, particularly Israel. In June of 1967, Egypt attacked Israel, but was soundly defeated and lost some territory that was occupied by Israeli forces. This territory, the Gaza Strip, is still under Israeli occupation today. After efforts at solving their differences were unsuccessful, Egypt began artillery barrages against Israel in the War of Attrition, between March 1969 and August 1970. In response, Israel began to use their air superiority to attack Egyptian positions and stage bombing raids deep inside Egyptian territory.

To remedy this intolerable situation for Egypt, the Egyptian government asked the Soviet Union for help in establishing an air defense system. The Soviet Union agreed to help Egypt, but Egypt had to grant the Soviets control over many of their airfields and large portions of the Egyptian armed forces. 10, 000 to 15, 000 Soviet troops were stationed in Egypt, and Soviet pilots flew on combat missions as part of the air defense system set up in Egypt. This was during the Cold War, of course, and could have led to a major confrontation between the two superpowers. The United States always considered Israel to be the bulwark against Soviet expansion in the Middle East (Egypt, 1, 2).

Kuwait is also worried about relations with its neighbors. Not from Israel, but from bigger, more aggressive Arab countries like Iraq. Saddam Hussein was not the first Iraqi leader who held designs on annexing its small neighbor to the south. As mentioned earlier, Iraq laid claims of its sovereignty over Kuwait shortly after Kuwait gained its independence. Kuwait's abundant oil reserves would be a treasure for any foreign country that would gain control of it. The problem that faces Kuwait is its small population and small size. Kuwait realized early on that it would need outside help. Therefore, when the United States and the West offered its assistance, Kuwait was not about to refuse. Even though the Kuwaiti government opposes Israel, and supports their fellow Arabs in Palestine and elsewhere, they didn't let ideology get in the way of practicality.

Although Kuwait and Iraq were allies throughout the Iran-Iraq War between 1980-1988, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein accused Kuwait of flooding the

international oil market, which brought oil prices down considerably. On August 2, 1990 Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait. Saddam Hussein then declared Kuwait annexed as Iraqi territory. Many native Kuwaitis fled the country, including the royal family. This invasion of Kuwait resulted in the Persian Gulf War. A coalition of Western and Arab forces, mainly American forces, drove Iraq from Kuwait by force, and freed Kuwait. The Iraqi's destroyed much of Kuwait on their way out, burning oil wells. 80-percent of Kuwait's oil wells were destroyed or damaged by Iraq in their retreat.

The roots of the Iraqi-Kuwaiti conflict go very far back in history. There were economic disagreements stemming from Kuwait's aid to Iraq during the costly Iran-Iraq war. Iraq was not in a good economic position to repay these loans after the eight long years of fighting, and hoped that the wealthy Kuwaiti nation would forgive these loans. Iraq also accused Kuwait of poaching from the Iraqi oil reserves during the war, when Iraq shut down all oil production. Besides these economic disagreements between Iraq and Kuwait, there were also border disagreements. Iraq claimed that it had once owned Kuwaiti territory. This is not true. Even during the Ottoman Empire, the Kuwaitis enjoyed self-rule. Kuwait did become close to the Ottoman rulers, but the British entered the picture. After World War One, Turkey renounced all claims to former Ottoman provinces. Britain soon became the protector of Kuwait.

Iraq does not have a very solid argument when it comes to its claims on Kuwait. First of all, when Iraq applied to the League of Nations for membership in 1932, it seems they had finally given up all claims on Kuwait,

and offered up border agreements worked out earlier with the British, that set firm borders between Iraq and Kuwait. But soon after oil was discovered in Kuwait, and Iraq renewed its verbal claims on the territory. As mentioned earlier, they even tested the resolve of the British when Kuwait first gained their independence from Britain. But Britain still maintained a force in Kuwait, thwarting the desires of Iraq. Iraq still made great efforts to support insurgents and rebels inside Kuwait, but had no great opportunity to act on their claims until 1990.

Interestingly, Iraq did not bring up their claims of sovereignty over Iraq when they initially entered Kuwait. Iraqi forces claimed to be assisting a Kuwaiti rebellion. Soon it became clear that no pro-Iraqi rebellion existed. Iraqi then tried to set up a provisional government in Kuwait, but failed miserably. Only after Iraq had no more options did they renew their claims that they had sovereignty over Kuwait (Kuwait, 1, 2). Iraq then resorted to direct occupation of Kuwait, until American and other forces drove them out.

In the aftermath of the Iraqi occupation, Kuwait is trying to reform its own government. As mentioned earlier, women are not allowed to vote in Kuwait at this time. Kuwait's cultural and political practices have brought a great amount of criticism from the rest of the world, especially the West. Many Americans were not happy with the fact that American troops were fighting for the freedom of Kuwait, while many of the Kuwaiti elite were partying all over Europe. And the fact that women cannot vote in Kuwait made many women's groups angry that the United States had defended them.

Egypt is located on a very strategic and important piece of land in the world, which has always brought the country to the forefront in world affairs. This has not changed in today's world. Egypt serves as a land bridge between two continents, as well as a link between two very important waterways, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Indian Ocean. Egypt has always needed to have a strong enough army to hold back the many nations that envied what Egypt had. Egypt's military today is still quite strong and impressive. In the political landscape of world diplomacy, Egypt has also traditionally held a key role. They played both sides very well in the Cold War, managing to get aid from both the United States and the Soviet Union.

Egypt has always seen its role in the Middle East as the center of the Arab world. This despite the fact that Egypt developed many of its own customs, character, and identity outside of the other Arab countries in the Middle East and Africa. Although they pride themselves in their unique Egyptian heritage, the vast majority of Egyptians see themselves as the rightful bearers of Arab honor and wish to play a major role in Arab affairs. Having said this, Egypt has always been on its own track when it comes to Arab politics and alliances. For example, during the 1950's, Egypt was modernizing its nation and was also focused on itself and its own affairs substantially. Its biggest ally during that time was Syria. Its main rivals were pro-Western Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In the 1970's it was Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia allied together to lead the Arab world in the search for peace with honor. When Anwar Sadat made separate peace with Israel, Syria became Egypt's main rival (Egypt, 1, 2). So as we see, Egypt can be a bit unconventional when it comes to its foreign policy and international relations. Egypt is sometimes

not afraid to go against the grain, even when it means almost certain censure from the rest of the Arab world.

Kuwait has also experienced some turnabouts in its foreign relations within the Arab world. Kuwait has always been a traditional supporter and ally to Palestinians and the Palestinian cause against Israeli occupation. As a result of the Iraqi occupation in 1990, and the Persian Gulf War in 1991, Kuwait has not been on very good terms with the PLO and the Palestinians. The reason for this switch is that the PLO, along with the Palestinian people, supported Iraq in its attempt to annex Kuwait. Many Palestinians who were working in Kuwait during this time were expelled from Kuwait because of the PLO's official stand on the side of Iraq.

Kuwait also learned some other hard lessons as a result of the Persian Gulf War. Despite being a very generous foreign aid provider for many of the Arab states, this did not buy popularity or support for Kuwait during the Persian Gulf War. Jordan, Sudan, and Yemen, who were recipients of some of the largest amounts of Kuwaiti aid, did not support Kuwait when Iraq invaded it. Kuwait has not been at all forgiving since Iraq was dispelled. They stopped all forms of financial aid to the countries that aligned with Iraq, and have forged partnerships economically and politically with many of the participants in the coalition to free Kuwait.

Kuwait and the United States signed an agreement that calls for American weapons to be stationed in Kuwait, and for military exercises to be performed on Kuwaiti soil, in preparation for defending against any future attack. Kuwait has forged defense agreements with Britain and France, and

is looking to do so with Russia and China as well. Kuwait remains in close relations to Saudi Arabia. And Kuwait's foreign relationship with Iran has improved considerably since the Persian Gulf War. But there still is conflict in the Kuwait-Iran relationship. Kuwait wants to maintain a visible and high profile level of American support in the region, and Iran wants to limit American influence in the Middle East (Kuwait, 1). Despite these differences, both nations can rely on their common experiences at the hand of Iraqi aggression.

While Egypt definitely has an independent streak when it comes to foreign relations, it is also tied to its need for outside financial help. Egypt is quite poor, and its economy is not as strong as some other Arab nations. As a result, it relies quite heavily on outside sources of aid, which diminish its independence from outside influence and pressure. Egypt had a huge amount of debt to foreign creditors, but their participation in the Gulf War coalition reduced that debt substantially. But Egypt needs to modernize and strengthen its economy, and is relying on United States help to do so. Egypt will have to delicately walk that fine line between nationalism and American influence. It seems to me that Egypt will somehow be able to do it.

The Egyptian mindset is also in play when it comes to foreign relations. After centuries of foreign subordination, Egypt has somewhat of an inferiority complex (Egypt, 2). This is where Egypt gets its strong anti-imperialist sentiment. Egypt is a very proud nation as well. It definitely does not want to be subservient to any other nation. That is why Egypt will accept financial and economic aid from the United States, but it doesn't want to give in

totally to American influence and American values. They would like to keep their Egyptian heritage and culture intact. Egypt is an Arab country, but it will not always align on the side of its Arab allies. Egypt's foreign policy seems to be made with the sovereignty and the best interests of Egypt and its people in mind. An example of Egypt's ability to avoid total dependence and the submission of Egyptian culture and ways is the way they were able to diversify their aid sources during the Cold War. Egypt was able to acquire aid from both the United States and the Soviet Union, therefore playing both sides and keeping some level of independence while receiving aid.

After increased United States support for Israel after the 1967 War, Egypt had to turn to the Soviets for even more aid, and gave up some of their independence in the process. Soviet aid was balanced by increasing support from Egypt's fellow Arab states, so Egypt was able to avoid becoming an absolute Soviet satellite country. By the late 1970's, Egypt had swung to the other side of the pendulum, relying more on American aid. This was done in the hope that the United States would be able to help achieve the return of land lost to Israel during the 1967 War. This did not work out quite as well as planned, as Israel still controls the Gaza Strip, but it did provide Egypt with large amounts of financial support. Egypt's relations with its Arab neighbors suffered heavily though. Today, Egypt is still quite dependent on American aid. Egypt is no longer considered a leader in the Arab world, either. If Egypt hopes to regain some of its independence from the United States, it will have to develop a much better and robust economy to support its burgeoning population. Until it does so, it will not be able to follow its traditional foreign policy strategy of non-alignment.

Since the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the main focus of Kuwait's foreign policy has been the recovery from the trauma it incurred from the Iraqi occupation. Kuwait is making great efforts to build on the relationships with the nations that aligned on the side of the liberators. Particular focus is being paid to the Arab states that were allied in the defense of Kuwait. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is one very important group of Kuwait allies. The GCC consists of the nations of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Other friendly Arab states that Kuwait is nurturing for the future is Syria, Egypt, Morocco, and Lebanon. Relations with the Arab states that sided with Iraq during the Persian Gulf War; Jordan, Yemen, Sudan, Tunisia, and the PLO, remain strained. Although economic relations with these pro-Iraq Arab states have now resumed with Kuwait, normal diplomatic relations have been restored with most.

Kuwait has also significantly expanded its efforts to deepen relationships with the international community. Particular focus has been focused on the United States, Great Britain, France, China, Russia, as well as other Western and Asian powers. Kuwait is also expanding its own influence on the world stage by being a major donor to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other multilateral agencies. Traditionally, Kuwait contributes about 5-percent of its GDP to economic development in other countries. This gives Kuwait a lot of influence in world affairs as it is near the top of the list of donor countries around the world.

Kuwait is also very concerned about preventing any future attacks like the one Iraq launched to start the Persian Gulf War. The government of Kuwait

has worked diligently to expand the umbrella of protection against the continued hostile regime of Saddam Hussein and Iraq. Help from the United States has provided a blanket of security in the event another invasion should take place. Kuwait is also using its substantial wealth to gain influence and create many allies all over the world who could possibly and probably will help in the event that Kuwait comes under any threat of attack by anyone, especially Iraq.

Even with all of the help in defending its borders from future attack, Kuwait has not left self-defense completely up to outsiders. Kuwait's military is geared for fighting a superior force and keeping it at bay for 48 to 72 hours until help from allies can arrive (Kuwait Information Office, 1-3). Even during the 1990 invasion, Kuwaiti military personnel were able to fight hard for a day or so, which bought valuable time to Kuwaiti's who escaped, and military forces who were able to flee the country.

Speaking of the Gulf War, Kuwait still has a major issue unresolved stemming from the Persian Gulf War. There are still nearly 600 missing prisoners who were captured by Iraqi forces during the invasion and the occupation. Many of these prisoners were civilians who were taken as hostages by the Iraqi's before they abandoned Kuwait. Iraq has denied knowledge of any such prisoners, but there have been sightings of some of the Kuwaiti missing in Iraqi prisons. Iraq did finally admit in 1994 that it did indeed have some Kuwaiti prisoners in its prison system, but they only claim to have held a little over 100 prisoners. This is still as sore point with Kuwait, as the thuggish Iraqi regime continues to thumb its nose at the

international community, and at the honor and dignity of the Kuwait nation. Kuwait has asked for help in resolving this matter, and because of its influence on the world stage, many other countries have offered assistance in any way they can to resolve this issue.

One of Egypt's main foreign policy concerns today is its neighboring states, particularly Sudan to the south. Egypt has not always had the best of relations with its neighbors, even outside of Israel. Sudan and Egypt have usually gotten along, but there have been disputes here and there about several different issues. One issue is the fact that Egypt has become close to the United States of America. Many Arab groups are a bit uncomfortable with this fact. Many Arab nations now rely on some sort of American aid and influence in their country, because the reality of today's world is that ideology and reality don't mix that well. It is better to be practical than pure. But many Arab citizens resent this reliance on the great enemies money and influence, and every Arab government has to answer to their constituency. Sudan is one Arab nation that has not been very fond of America. There have been some tensions between the neighbors due to the large influence that the United States has gained and developed in Egypt.

Along with their disagreement about American influence in the Middle East and Africa, Sudan and Egypt also are dealing with some border disputes. As seems usual in the Middle East, borders between countries are not absolute. There continue to be questions about where exactly the borders to neighboring countries lie. Also, Sudan has recently become hard-liner Muslim; which is one of the big reasons for the falling out between these two

neighbors. And being so fervently Muslim, Sudan has not been willing to accept Egypt for what it has become; a modern nation that is trying to regain its past status as a major diplomatic and economic force on the world stage. For Egypt to do so, they will need to continue to show tolerance and accept the differences of all of the nations of the world. They will have to compromise their Muslim beliefs for the sake of harmony and peace in the world. This may again not endear Egypt to its fellow Arabs, but Egypt is historically a country that will do what is in its own best interest rather than rely only on what is expected of them by allies or foes alike.

Sudan is clearly uncomfortable with much of Egypt's international relations, particularly with the West and the United States. There was an assassination attempt on Egyptian president Mubarak in 1995, when he was in Ethiopia. This assassination attempt was blamed on Sudan. This caused a lot of tension between the two neighbors, even more than usual. For six years, relations between Egypt and Sudan were almost non-existent compared to their former relations. But recently, both sides have made attempts to repair the rift between the two neighboring states. Sudan seems like there is a possibility that its former hard-line Islamic stance may be softening somewhat. How relations between the two proceed will depend on the willingness of both nations to accept each other's differences, and also to remain in communication and keep the diplomatic lines open, so that if any future problems develop, they can quickly and thoroughly work through them.

I believe that both Kuwait and Egypt have some interesting similarities in the way that they perform foreign relations with the rest of the world. Both countries are Islamic and Arab. Both remain proud of their heritage and ethnic makeup. But both have shown a willingness to look beyond the simple characteristics when forging their foreign policy. This is exactly what a modern country must be able to do, because what happens in the world of international relations is very seldom, if ever, in black and white. Supporting Arabs just because they are Arabs is not a very sound policy, especially when Arabs have conflicts with each other. This is the sort of thing that can happen in the real world, when people or nations are in close proximity to each other. Both nations have independent streaks regardless of the financial ties that bind them diplomatically. Both have turned to the United States for help, and this has strengthened the relationship between East and West. Indeed, former enemies have now become pretty good friends.

The differences between Egypt and Kuwait are quite striking as well. Egypt is relatively poor, while Kuwait is quite wealthy. Both have to use different strategies to make it and survive in today's new and uncertain world. But both nations have a strong will to hold on to the good things of the past, while at the same time changing things for the better future ahead.

Works Cited

CIA, " Egypt". [www. cia. gov/cia](http://www.cia.gov/cia). 1.

Egypt, " External Relations". [lcweb2. loc. gov](http://lcweb2.loc.gov). 1, 2.

Egypt, " Foreign Policy". [lcweb2. loc. gov](http://lcweb2.loc.gov). 1, 2.

<https://assignbuster.com/egypt-and-kuwait-a-comparison-of-two-arab-countries-essay-sample/>

Encyclopedia. com, “ Kuwait”. www. encyclopedia. com. 1, 2.

Kuwait, “ Persian Gulf War”. rs6. loc. gov. 1, 2.

Kuwait, “ Post Persian Gulf War Foreign Policy”. rs6. loc. gov. 1.

Kuwait Country Profile, “ Foreign Affairs and Defense”. www. kuwait-info. org.
1-3.