Islamists Concerned at "Americanisation of Education" in Kuwait
Background, Argument and Possible Reasons

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Chapter 1. Introduction

An article in the Arab Times dated 22 December 2003 with the heading reading "MPs Warn Against Americanisation of Education" caught my attention and made me want to enquire more about the issue. There was a picture that showed an MP waving a school textbook in his hands. In the article, the MP urged the ministry of education to uphold Islamic teachings, and MP Dr Fahd Al-Khanna said the Ministry’s 1999 and 2003 educational programs have placed less emphasis on religion unlike the 1996 program, which laid more emphasis on the Islamic religion.

Another MP, Dr Daifallah Buramia, said other changes in the curricula are long overdue because Kuwaiti students continue to use United Arab Emirates English textbooks. In these read that the president of the country is Sheikh Zayed Al-Nahayyan and that the currency is dirham, which is not the case in Kuwait. Kuwait’s head of State is the Emir Al-Sabah and the currency is dinar. He added that at the beginning of every academic year, the ministry of education comes out to assure parliament that there were no problems in the educational sector.

Meanwhile, teachers in certain parts of the country have no chairs. There are also sanitary problems. He pointed out that it is not all that good, as the minister of education portrays. Referring to certain photographs depicting unsanitary conditions in schools, Dr Awad Barrad, another MP, said the government should clean up the mess in school lavatories and classrooms before talking about deleting some Quran verses from textbooks out of pressure from the USA.

Another MP, Mussallam Al-Barrak, said the ministry of education should not delete pages from textbooks that recount the 1990 invasion and occupation of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein in the name of fostering bilateral ties. He even added that all previous leaders of Iraq said that Kuwait was an integral part of Iraq and it was Saddam Hussein who put their dreams into reality by invading Kuwait. He continued that the invasion is a historical event and should not be distorted and that changes must come from Iraqis who think Kuwait is part of Iraq.

The list can go on and on, with comments that showed how certain MPs were intolerant to a possible change in school textbooks. This caught my attention, not to mention the words being used in describing their intolerance. With the USA’s war on terror, which has been criticized in some quarters as anti-Islamic, and the recent signing of an antiterrorism pact by the Gulf Co-
operation Council, (GCC) many analysts have said the Kuwaiti government intends to make 
changes in textbooks that encourages terrorism.

1.1 Aim and Research Issues

There has been a hot debate about Americanisation of education in Kuwait regarding how 
important it is for the Kuwaitis to maintain the originality of Islamic school textbooks with no 
interference from any outside influence, especially from the USA. The amazing thing in this 
debate was that there was no single MP who proposed that American Schools in Kuwait be 
closed because they were not teaching Kuwaiti children in Arabic. Neither did they say that the 
Kuwaiti children should stop studying in American Schools where they are taught in English 
only and not Arabic. This however implies that the MPs seriously just emphasised USA’s 
influence on the Kuwaiti Educational system.

For Kuwait reacting towards a so-called Americanisation of education was of great interest. 
This is because USA once played a great role in liberating the country in 1991 when the former 
Iraqi government occupied it, claiming that it was a part of Iraq. For the MPs to react in that 
strong manner was hard to believe especially for those who knew how the liberation of Kuwait 
going by in 1991.

The aim of this essay however, is to investigate Americanisation of education in Kuwaiti 
schools and try to understand parts of the textbooks, which are in question. The study will try to 
get hold of phrases in these textbooks, which may offend people from other cultures. Hence the 
aim is divided into three research issues:

1. Why was there a strong reaction from Islamist MPs about the Americanisation of 
education in Kuwaiti schools?
2. Which parts of the textbooks were being questioned and which arguments were used?
3. Could there any reason to delete particular phrases in textbooks, which may seem to 
offend people of certain religious denominations?

The thesis will begin to with the historical background of the issue, and at the end some possible 
reasons for the controversy will be discussed.
Chapter 2. Method and Material

In getting to my answers I have been in contact with Mr. Hashim a journalist who works with the Arab Times in Kuwait, whom I personally met in Kuwait. As a journalist he is frequently in the Kuwaiti parliament during discussions of the subject in question.

I have read articles in the Arab Times, tried to make long distance calls to Kuwait with the intention of having qualitative interviews with the Minister of Education, which I think was the closest way I could come into contact with the people involved in the subject. The distance has been an obstacle, as I would have liked to have these interviews, which could help make my study an interesting reading. However, it turned out to be impossible to interview the Minister.

As a result of this, my study is based on a somewhat one-sided journalistic material, which implies that I could rely only on those published articles I could lay hand on. So, the Arab Times is my main source of information or in other words my primary source of information, whilst other literature stands for my secondary source of information. Yet, I have also used literature for my case study. This must be put into consideration in reading this study.

2.1 Why the Topic came into Parliament

The Minister of Information attended a meeting in Iran, in October 2003, and was interviewed. He said he was misquoted and meant that the interpreter made a mistake in translating from Arabic to Farsi implying that he said: ”School textbooks were to be changed as there was pressure coming from the USA to do so”. This led to a hot debate in parliament on his return to Kuwait, as it was seen as a serious blasphemy. It meant that certain Holy Quran verses would be deleted should this be the case. The Islamists at the parliament session warned, however, the government against bowing to the USA and other Western pressure to change school textbooks. Islamist MPs in particular cautioned the government against changing the fundamentals of Islam in textbooks, insisting that the curricula neither encourage extremism nor breed terrorists. Therefore, they insisted that they would not accept the Americanisation of Kuwaiti education.

In addition to that, there were texts referring to the invasion and occupation of Kuwait by the erstwhile Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. They also warned against this as they regarded the deleting of it as a historical omission in these textbooks.
Chapter 3. Background

The United States of America became a world power and expanded westwards, i.e., new sub states became members in the union. This may liken the phenomena happening in Europe today with the EU. There were 13 sub states that formed the country in 1776 and by the beginning of the nineteenth century it had increased to a total of 45.¹ In 1959, the last state to join the union was Hawaii, which made it to the present 50 sub states. As the years went by, a growing number of American politicians, businessmen as well as missionaries for that matter, searched for new areas to expand or exercise their interest.²

During the early time after 1776, the main foreign policies of the USA were focused on questions that were directly connected to their own interest of expansion and with relationships to the states in the western hemisphere such as North and South America. Gradually, however, new areas were of interest as well, among others Asia.³ The most decisive step for the development of the USA as a super power was the Spanish-American war when Spain dominated Cuba. The American press at that time was dominated by heart breaking stories about how the Spanish more or less oppressed the Cubans.⁴ These developments resulted in war between USA and Spain, which USA won. This resulted in Cuba becoming independent. The influence of USA on the Cubans was very noticeable. A rather unexpected effect of the war was that the USA annexed the Philippines, which was owned by the Spanish. This was seen as the first important American intervention in Asia. In 1898, several countries followed the USA’s definite entrance to the world arena on a larger scale level during the 20th century. The USA together with England and France fought against Germany and Austria-Hungary in the First World War.

Twenty-three years after the victory in this enormous war, the USA was to face a yet bigger conflict with Japan after Japan attacked USA’s ships in Pearl Harbour in the Pacific Ocean.⁵ This led to an increased expansion of USA influence around the world. For business purposes they travelled and established themselves far and wide and Kuwait was not an exception. The

¹ Lindahl, Rutger (red) Utländska politiska system, tionde upplagan, första tryckningen 2001, p. 97
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
American school of Kuwait is one of the existing Western schools in Kuwait that was established of such business trips.

3.1 The Gulf: a Historical Background

The four tiny Arab states of the Persian Gulf are among the most extraordinary features of the 20th century. The hazards of history and geography combined made Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the Union of Arab Emirates (formerly the Trucial Coast), instead of entering the modern world as impoverished outlying provinces of one of the bigger states in the area: Iraq, Saudi Arabia or Iran, become independent members of the United Nations with living standards which are among the highest in the world. Two of these countries, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, are major financial powers. The accident of history, which helped to bring about this astonishing result, was that the Persian Gulf lies along the trade route of the 20th century greatest maritime power.

It was to forestall an attempt by Napoleon to establish himself in the Gulf when he occupied Egypt that resulted in Britain concluding a treaty with the ruler of Muscat, at the entrance of the Gulf in 1798. In 1823 Britain established a Political Agency in the little sheikhdom of Sharja in the lower Gulf and negotiated a series of treaties with the Arab tribal rulers of the coast binding them to refrain from piracy.

During most of the 20th century British intervention was confined to keeping the peace in dynastic disputes between the rulers and to the suppression of the slave trade, but by the 1890s Britain realized that it could no longer take its Gulf hegemony for granted. The Ottoman Turks, who had extended their rule to al-Hasa in eastern Arabia, and the Persians were infiltrating into the area. Intensified European imperialist rivalries also affected the Gulf. The French were active, the Russians were increasing their influence in Persia and attempting to establish a naval supply station at the head of the Gulf, and Kaiser Wilhelm’s Germany was planning to extend the Ottoman railway from Turkey to Baghdad and wanted to include Kuwait as part of its Drang nach Osten policy.

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6 Mansfield, Peter The Arabs new edition, 1985, page 331
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
From 1892 onwards Britain entered into a series of treaties with all the Arab sheikhdoms of the Gulf coast. These Exclusive Agreements, as they were called, all took much the same form, although they varied in detail. In return for British protection the rulers agreed never to cede any part of their territory except to the British government, not to enter into agreements with any government other than the British and not to admit foreign representatives without British consent.\(^\text{10}\)

This was the Arab sheikdoms’ status for half a century in the penumbra of the British Empire. When in the 1930s the world began to become aware that the Persian Gulf and its surrounding areas lay above a vast lake of oil, USA’s financial and diplomatic pressures were able to ensure that American oil companies secured a major share in the oil concessions, even though Britain with its headquarters in the Political Residency on the island of Bahrain, maintained political control.\(^\text{11}\)

The 18th century saw the decline of all three great Muslim empires, the Ottoman, the Safavid and the Mughal, which lost territory and power. There were, however, reformers who preached the revival of a more religious form of Islam, with renewed emphasis on the Quran and Hadith. The reformers had a critical attitude to the Muslim rulers who accommodated local customs, rejected some of the accretions of medieval Islam, and recognition of the importance of *Ijtihad* (the exercise of independent judgement in legal matters).\(^\text{12}\)

Within the Ottoman Empire, one scholar, Muhammad bin Abd al Wahhab, opposed Sufism and popular religion and regarded the Quran and Hadith as the only source of law. He advocated armed rebellion against the Ottomans and associated himself with Ibn Saud, the head of a minor dynasty in central Arabia. From then on, the influence of the Wahhabis started spreading in Arabia and culminated in their conquering of Mecca in 1803 and Medina in 1805, where they destroyed all sacred tombs, massacred the local inhabitants and imposed their ways on pilgrims.\(^\text{13}\)

The European aggression marks the next period, starting with Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt in 1798. It reached its greatest extent when in 1920 the League of Nations (forerunner of the

\(^{10}\) Ibid. p. 331

\(^{11}\) Ibid. p. 331

\(^{12}\) Robinson, Danielle The simple guide to Islam 1997, page 35
United Nations) gave France and Britain mandates over the newly created Arab states. Napoleon’s occupation was of great significance, as it was the first time since the Crusades, that European power gained control in the Muslim heartland.\textsuperscript{14}

1922, marks the beginning of the end of colonization as Egypt was first to be recognized as an independent country. However, this country did not achieve this status in reality until the revolution and the evacuation of the Suez Canal zone in 1954.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, for a long period of over a century, whether the Dutch in Indonesia or the French in North Africa or the Russians in central Asia, or the British in India and Africa, Europeans colonized most of the lands of the former Muslim empires.\textsuperscript{16}

The early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Wahhabis’ puritanical power-bid was stopped by the Europeanised armies of the Ottoman sultan of Egypt, but their religious influence continued to grow and their call to armed action in the cause of religion (Jihad) did not lose its appeal. About a century later, in 1914, the Sharif of Mecca agreed with the British that they would lead an insurrection against the Ottoman rulers who had allied themselves with Germany, in return for the independence of Arab lands once victory was won; the British, however, signed other agreements (Sykes-Picot 1916, Balfour Declaration 1917) contradicting their promises to their Arab allies. This led to British and French protectorates in the area and eventually to the creation of the state of Israel.\textsuperscript{17}

A new Arab Identity was born. During that period, prolonged exposure to Western technological influence and growing familiarity with European educational values led to a painful rethinking of Arab/Muslim identity. Different answers were tried in different countries of the Middle East. The exception remained Arabia where an independent process evolved, without references to the West but rather to the Wahhabi brand of Islam.\textsuperscript{18}

Turkey and Iran were not conquered but influenced by Europeans. In 1923 the republic of Turkey was born from the former Ottoman Empire and the Caliphate was abolished. The list of countries that obtained independence between 1922 (Egypt) and 1962 (Algeria) is too long to mention here or in the manner that independence was gained. After the initial period, when

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
nationalist leaders who were supported by their people had carried out some sweeping reforms, disillusion set in when many people were unemployed and there was unimproving living conditions.

This led people to see a return to Islam as their only hope. The anti-Western feelings, which often accompanied this Islamic revival, must be understood taking into account the artificial borders imposed on Muslim territories by Western cartographers and armies. The creation of the state of Israel (1948) and the failure of the United Nations to make it abide by the UN’s own resolutions, whilst sanctioning military retaliation in other cases of non-observance, notably over Iraq and Kuwait, remains a cause of complaint.

The West continued to interfere in sensitive areas it did not understand or was not familiar with. This could also be blamed for the rise of extremist regimes in places like Iran and Afghanistan. Peace and understanding are not yet in sight, while Muslim history as part of world history is still in the making.

3.2 Kuwait

Kuwait was the first of the gulf states to acquire vast wealth, and thereby it becoming the prototype of the tiny multimillionaire oil sheikhdom. Between 1896 and 1915, it had a ruler of an outstanding character whose name was Shaikh Mubarak the Great. He asserted his independence from the Ottoman Empire and asked a willing Britain for protection. After the First World War Britain was able to establish Kuwait’s frontiers with Saudi Arabia and Iraq, which was under British mandate (although the Iraqis have never wholeheartedly accepted Kuwait’s independence).

As a trading port, Kuwait prospered indirectly from the oil wealth in Iraq and Iran. Its population increased to about 75,000 by the year 1934. However, the real dramatic change came in the 1950s, when the export of oil, which had been discovered in 1938 by the Kuwait Oil company, shared by the British and the Americans, got under way and revenues began to soar upwards.
The small and somnolent mud-walled trading and fishing port was torn apart to give way to a modern concrete city. Shaikh Abdullah, who succeeded as ruler in 1950, was a social and religious conservative. However, he favoured the spread of education for girls as well as boys and rapid economic development. Under his rule, Kuwait became a comprehensive welfare state not only for the native Kuwaitis but also for the immigrant Arabs, Iranians and Indians who soon came to exceed them in numbers.23

Political power remained in the hands of the ruling Sabah family, but it was divided both traditionally between the Jabir and Salem branches of the family and on the basis of personality. In June 1961 the ruling family felt confident enough to insist on its independence and the 1899 Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement was terminated by mutual consent.

However, General Kassem, the unstable and adventurous ruler of Iraq, at once renewed his country’s claims and threatened to occupy Kuwait. The ruler of Kuwait asked for British troops, who landed immediately but were replaced two months later by a joint Arab league force. The Kuwaitis realized that in the long term their survival as an independent state would depend upon acceptance of the other Arab states rather than British military protection.24

### 3.3 Domestic Social Development

Certain pillars of social development were set and among the most important were: water, medical care and educational institutions. These pillars of social development were based on a philosophy of modernization and building a contemporary state. The aim was to improve the standard of living of its citizens due to the increase in oil revenues the country had acquired.

The revenue made it possible the development at local level after gaining political independence in 1961 and the declaration of the institution in 1962 on which, the parliamentary life was erected. In addition there was a desire to adopt the methodological planning, and scientific methods in running and guiding the economic and social life, as well as establishing well-developed institutions.25

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23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Kuwait and Social Development, ministry of planning & research and studies on Kuwait 1995 page, 34
Successive national development plans also translated this philosophy into actual projects. This philosophy was translated into essential principles in the country’s constitution. According to the constitution for example, Article 13 under Educational And Cultural Care, which states that education, is a fundamental requisite for the progress of society, which is to be promoted by the state.

Under Article 40, the same constitutional principles states that Education is the right of Kuwaitis, guaranteed by the state in accordance with law and within the limits of public policy and morals. Education in its preliminary stages shall be compulsory and free in accordance with law. The legal system shall lay down the necessary plan to eliminate illiteracy. The state shall devote particular care to the physical, moral and mental development of youth.

Kuwait seeks to achieve a comprehensive administrative development that can attain maximal efficiency in decision-taking, to guide, mobilize and utilize the available and possible resources. This is considered vital to promote individual and collective productivity to its highest level possible. This will be directly and indirectly reflected in achieving the development ambitions in the entire social, economic and environmental fields.

Also, in developing the philosophy of education and training systems, the concepts related to administrative development, their programs and methods is supposed to lead to establishing a national framework capable of assuming the burdens of modern administrations in Kuwait.

3.4 Islamic Social Structure

*Umma:* The model for all subsequent societies in Islam was the one that formed around the figure of the Prophet in Medina after the Hijra from Mecca in 622. In the Quran, *umma* appears frequently in reference to ethnic and religious groups (or nations) that are part of the divine plan of salvation. The people of Abraham, Lot, Moses and Jesus were termed *ummas.*

An *umma* is usually identified as a nation to which God has sent a messenger or prophet. The Quran states that past *ummas* rejected their messengers, for which they suffered divine acts of

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26 Ibid. p. 35  
27 Ibid. p. 34  
28 Ibid. p. 36  
29 Martin, C. Richard Islamic Studies: A history of religions approach 1996 page, 206
retribution. Muhammad’s first appearance as a messenger in Mecca also met rejection, by all but a very few close followers.

The Medinan umma included Jews who were loyal to the Prophet. The concept of inclusiveness within the community of Islam has to have far-reaching consequences for the subsequent development of Islamic society.30

Caliphate: the term ”caliph” (khalifa, successor, vice-regent) designates the rulers who assumed Muhammad’s function as the head of the umma, but not his function as Messenger of Allah. During the reign of the four caliphs, from 632 to 661, the Arabian conquest of Middle Eastern lands resulted in a religious empire that sought to implement the notion of the Quran umma on a much grander scale than the Medinan community.31

The abode of Islam was now much more than Arabia, Arabs, and even Islam. It was a multi-ethnic empire comprising several religious traditions. For six centuries caliphs ruled the empire. Also called “Commanders of the faithful”, the caliphs became, as a result of the conquests, imperial rulers over vast territories and diverse peoples. This political order lasted until the 13th century, when Mongol warlords destroyed the caliphate and assumed political rule over much of the Islamic world. Most of the Mongol conquers converted to Islam.32

The Ottoman Turkish sultans also claimed the title of caliph, and they sought recognition from the rest of the Muslim world. The caliphate was finally abolished and Turkey became an independent republic. Some Islamist revivalist movements have called for the dissolution of Western style national governments and the restoration of the caliphate.33

For more than thirteen centuries of history, the basic concept of Islamic society has been the Prophet’s umma. During the Middle Ages, the umma contained numerous ethnic and religious groups, which were social groups with individual social characteristics. In matters of civil affairs, each religious group or ethnic minority was allowed to maintain its own traditionally

30 Ibid. p. 207
31 Ibid. p. 207
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
conceived order. Islamic cities preserved this arrangement by forming separate quarters for each religious group and ethnic minority.34

Rabbis, bishops and other leaders replaced some of the roles of the ulama within non-Muslim groups. In modern times and without the caliphate, the Islamic umma may find itself to be the predominant religious group, as it is in Egypt, or a minority group among many others in India. In all settings throughout history, the umma has attempted to heed the Quran warning of what had happened to past ummas that rejected God and His Messengers.

The Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet are the central symbols and sources of guidance for the Islamic umma. Local historical and political circumstances have determined the specific forms the umma has taken as expressions of human society.35

_Ulama_: First of all, the term is a plural of the Arabic ‘alim’, which means ”one who is knowledgeable in respect to Sharia”. Thus, the ulama are the custodians of traditional learning about the Quran, the Sunna of the Prophet, and the legal theory and application of sacred law to all aspects of life. The ulama serve in the functional occupations of trained Quran reciters, teachers in madrasas and schools, imams (prayer leaders) and khatibs (preachers) of local mosques, and professors of sacred law and theology in university faculties.36

Secondly, in Sunni Islam the class of scholars known as the ulama is but loosely organized in an institutional sense. Its members are implicitly recognized by Muslims to be the purveyors of guidance to each community by virtue of their training and learning. Their authority is effective to the extent that they are able to reach a consensus among themselves and to articulate relevantly the idiom of consensus of past tradition to the exigencies of present circumstances. In Shi’i Islam, the ulama carry on the special interpretation of the Shari’a derived from ‘Ali, the fourth caliph and cousin of the prophet, and from the imams who succeeded ‘Ali, as spiritual leaders of the Shi’i community.37
Today, the highest-ranking members of the Twelve Shi’i ulama, are known as ayatollahs, they temporarily lead the Shi’i community in the temporary absence of the twelfth imam, who went into occultation in the 9th century.

The supreme living spiritual leader of the Twelve Shi’a is known as the marja’i‘taqlid. The Shi’i ulama serve the same basic functional occupations as in Sunni Islam, but with a greater degree of hierarchical authority. The ulama perform duties as a body of learned ones of Islam; no ordination, sacral office, or priestly function is involved. Virtually any Muslim can perform most of the duties of the ulama, such as leading the Friday congregational prayer.\(^\text{38}\)

Popular resentment against the leadership of the ulama in various historical periods, particularly in Sunni Islam, has differed from lay anti-clericalism in the history of Christianity. The main function of the ulama has been to remain in touch with the pulse of Islamic society in order to guide it in its real concerns, and to maintain lines of communication and understanding between central political authorities and the people.\(^\text{39}\) In periods when members of the ulama have become excessively preoccupied with scholastic dogmatism, popular religious sentiment has openly defied their leadership.

\textit{Waqf} is the income from a piece of land or property that is specifically assigned by its owner to religious (mosques, madrasas) or charitable (hospitals, orphanages) institutions. During the course of Islamic history, more and more land has been given or committed to \textit{waqf} endowments. The growth of endowments, have reduced available taxable lands.\(^\text{40}\)

\textit{Waqf} endowments, then, have provided the ulama with means to run religious and charitable institutions within Islamic society, as well as the power that results from having control of such activities. In traditional Islam, \textit{waqf} endowments established madrasas for each of the law \textit{madhhab}s (schools). The Seljuq period begun in 1055 and lasted until the fall of the caliphate in 1258 was a period, when \textit{waqfs} charity was established. Particularly, religious educational institutions, known as madrasas, which were established in the 11\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} centuries, stabilized

\(^{38}\) Ibid.  

\(^{39}\) Ibid.  

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
the four Sunni legal madhhabs. It also provided the ulama with a more or less standardized education, a system of certification and recognized position in society.41

However, with the rise of national states within the Islamic world, government ministries of education, welfare, health and culture have assumed the states’ interests and responsibilities in these areas. In addition, modern states have instituted civil and criminal courts and legal systems that have functioned independently of the shari’a courts of the ulama.

The effect of parallel sacred and secular systems within Islamic society is more pronounced in cities, especially capitals than they are in villages and nomadic regions. The general observation that Islam does not separate the domains of religion and state must be qualified when one is speaking about these trends of Islamic society in modern times.42

The results of the earlier development of parallel functions by the ulama and the national governments have been vital to Islamic and Muslim leadership. Popular movements in both predominantly Sunni and predominantly Shi’i countries have sought to bring the authority of the shari’a more directly into the structure of modern society and into national constitutions and governmental processes.43

This development has led to various kinds of conflicts in public and political arenas, where Islamists have challenged secular, Western oriented leadership. It is for this reason that it has become important to appreciate the cultural heritage to which more and more Muslims are turning to articulate their identity within the world of nations.44 Beneath the more salient manifestations of confrontations and political unrest is an identifiable process of boundary formation and maintenance. This is meant to re-establish personal and group identity in a world that is interpreted as increasingly alien to religion.45

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
Chapter 4. The Contemporary Educational Situation

Kuwait stood firm behind the USA’s leadership campaign against terrorism, which came into force post nine-eleven 2001. Also, it even gave its full support for the war against the Taliban government in Afghanistan. All these forms of support from the USA made Kuwait an alleged platform suitable for terrorist attacks, according to some of the neighbouring Arab countries.\(^{46}\) This actualised in the autumn of 2002, when a possible terrorist attack against US marine soldiers at a military station in Kuwait was suspected. This led to USA increasing its military in Kuwait to 10 000 soldiers for a possible attack on Iraq for the purpose of removing Saddam Hussein from power.\(^{47}\)

On January 27, 2004, the president for Religious Education in Kuwait University, Dr Bassam Al-Shatti, stated that Kuwaiti Curriculum taught in schools should be revised in order to produce graduates capable of competing in the world of today, reported a local newspaper, Al-Seyassah Daily, in Kuwait. He expressed his disappointment with liberals in Kuwait who had negative influence on the country.

This group increased the state’s problem through their actions such as contacting a number of embassies in Kuwait. Secondly, they usually travel to Western countries asking western governments to exert pressure on Kuwait to minimize the power of Islamic parties in the Kuwaiti government. Dr. Bassam was referring to recent disagreements between well-known officials regarding music in schools. He added that such teaching is forbidden in Islam, pointing out that many Islamic scholars agree with this *(fatwa)* view.

Jamal Omar, an MP, said investing in education and Kuwaiti children should be the priority of the government. He lamented on the fast deterioration of public schools. "We have free schools but parents are prepared to pay and enrol their wards in private schools because of poor standards and deplorable conditions of public schools. When shall we fulfil the objectives of producing graduates suitable for the job market, especially in the private sector?" he asked.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{46}\) Daleke, Pia Utrikespolitiska Institutet Oman Kuwait 2003 page 13  
\(^{47}\) Ibid.  
\(^{48}\) Ahmed, Hashim *Arab Times*: MPs Warn against Americanization of education, Minister misquoted on extremism December 31, 2003
This is so even though one can find many Islamists who seriously practise their religion. Before the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, Kuwait was still rich but had not become so "Americanised" as today. The majority who lived there before the invasion of Iraq, 1991, would probably say this.

For example, the outnumbered fast food restaurants including McDonalds and Burger King that can be witnessed all over this little Gulf state is evidence of such influence. With its population of a total of about two million citizens, the "pure" Kuwaitis are at most one million, making guest workers that are expatriates accounting for the remaining million, most of this people originated from several countries around the world.

New textbooks for religious education, the Arabic language, social sciences and national education are being authored to emphasize the good values, said the Education Ministry Under Secretary, Hmoud Al-Saadoun to the MPs. This he said whilst speaking in a debate on Kuwait’s education policy requested by some 15 Islamists who were concerned that changes might be made under pressure from the USA.49

Some MPs gave their remarks on the strategy submitted by the Ministry of Education that called for making education concentrate on developing the human factor to achieve progress in all areas. They demanded amending the curricula and making sure the amendments match with Kuwait’s interests, requirements and the developments currently occurring in the world.

The decision to change the books came in spite of findings by specialist committees that were set to investigate the issue said that current books contain no references calling for violence, fanaticism or encouraging struggle against other religions, added Hmoud Al-Saadoun.

The specialist committees found that those books contained sizeable portions focusing on tolerance, brotherhood, equality, passions, cooperation and respect for the rights of non-Muslims, the official pointed out.50

"In spite of those positive results, we need to lay more emphasis on these concepts while modifying text books. In fact, this is exactly what we are doing at this stage”, Hmoud

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49 Jarallah, Ahmed Al, Editor- in- Chief Arab Times Cabinet resigns, March 15 1998
50 Ibid.
Al-Saadoun said. Other MPs however warned the government against deleting sections from textbooks that are highly sensitive to Muslims.\\(^{51}\)  

This was after the Education Minister Rasheed Al-Hamad reportedly said that any reference that could be misinterpreted as promoting terror and fanaticism would be deleted from the new textbooks. He said, ”Our books should take into account what we have in Quran verses, i.e., the Prophet’s (PBUH) sayings, literature pieces. Thus, others should not make the young generation think in a fanatical way which leads them to take aggressive initiatives”, the minister added.\\(^{52}\)  

He denied that the change was a response to pressure, from Washington or external parties, but an internal reaction to developments. However, he admitted that the September 11, 2001 attacks in the USA had accelerated the process. He added that the Ministry of Education is serious on upgrading school curricula to cope with regional and international developments through a comprehensive educational strategy.\\(^{53}\)  

”It is important to explain whether our educational curricula cope with regional and international developments. We are serious to mould our curricula in the best possible image to simulate the future,” Hamad added. He submitted to the assembly a proposal of a new educational strategy to be implemented between the years 2005-2006.\\(^{54}\)  

There was an earlier issue concerning the subject of the Information Minister Saud resignation due to the fact that he allowed controversial books into a locally held Arab Book Fair, all fifteen Cabinet ministers on March 15, 1998, submitted their resignations to HH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.\\(^{55}\)  

Sheikh Saud, who was then Information Minister, was politically questioned for allowing initially banned publications into a local Arab Book Fair held in 1997. According to his opponents, the ministry sanctioned publicised books, which were prohibited since 1993. This was done in just ten minutes. The books in question were books that Al-Tabtabaei, an Islamist and
one of the opponents in parliament stunned the Kuwaiti society. These books "doubted the Almighty and cast doubt on the Islamic religion".

The books in question have also harmed values and morals. He continued by saying the books likened Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses and wondered how Kuwaitis could accept such stark violations. Responding to this, Sheikh Saud however insisted: "The decision to permit the books was after consultation with the (censorship) committee, so it was not the minister’s decision as he never would and never did commit injustice. My conscience is clear he added".56

This led to his and all 15 cabinet ministers demand to resign. The announcement of their demand came after a Cabinet session, held two days before a scheduled vote to no confidence against Information Minister Sheikh Saud Nasser Al-Sabah over the banned books issue. "To enable HH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister to take the necessary measures, the ministers have placed their resignations at his disposal", according to a statement issued by Cabinet. The statement however did not say whether or not Sheikh Saad has accepted the minister’s resignations. The Cabinet resignation has been seen as the governments attempt to abort the vote of no confidence against the Information Minister Saud.57

Sources, which are not provable, said, as many as thirty members were ready to vote the minister out of office over allowing controversial books into a locally held Arab Book Fair. Speaking to the Arab Times, MP Dr Nasser Al-Sane said that the Cabinet move "Looks as if it is to avoid a no-confidence vote. This tells you they are assured that the vote would not be in favour of the Minister".58

I am giving this as an example of previous issues that likened what is happening now as well as its consequences. This is to brief the reader of how important the current issue is.

**4.1 Educational Reform**

On January 6, 2004, Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) reported that the education undersecretary Dr Hmoud Al Saadoun said that the present general climate and time were right to launch

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55 Mac Donald, Fiona Arab Times MP griller Khannah "boiling" in Cabinet Oil, March 22 1998
56 Ibid
57 Ibid
58 Ibid
pioneering steps in educational reform and development. Speaking to KUNA, Saadoun said education is a key issue in every local or regional meeting as a vital factor in human resources development.\textsuperscript{59}

He recalled concern shown by the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on education and his instructions to endorse Ministry of Education’s strategy for the next 20 years. It is not only in Kuwait where there are plans to reform school textbooks but also in Jordan and other Arab countries.\textsuperscript{60} This they are doing to introduce notions of tolerance, human rights and democracy.

However, this has left academics and legislators with a concern about Western interventions. For instance, there were 50 Jordanian deputies who called for a private session of parliament to discuss plans by the education ministry to introduce new textbooks for the academic year of 2004-2004, according to the \textit{Arab Times}.\textsuperscript{61}

It cannot, however, be verified beyond all doubt by this study whether this meeting ever took place as there is only one-sided source of information (\textit{Arab Times}). As it was only Mr. Hashim a reporter at \textit{Arab Times} who told me by e-mail that this meeting actually happened, it was attended by the parliament’s educational committee, who also planed to meet education minister Khaled Tuqan to discuss the reform plan.

Islamist MPs have taken the lead among conservatives in warning governments in Amman, Kuwait and Riyadh. They demand that their governments should not bow to US pressure when they set down new guidelines for what should be taught in schools. Their main concern is that a revamped curriculum will ignore tradition and the precepts of Islam, which they see as the basis for society in these Muslim Arab countries.\textsuperscript{62}

Mustafa Hamarneh, who is the director for the Centre of Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, is a strong advocate for reforms across the Arab World. At the same time he has criticised the way the education plans had been slipped in and not discussed openly.\textsuperscript{63} He told AFP

\textsuperscript{59} Ahmed, Hashim \textit{Arab Times Arab plans to “modernize” textbooks face opposition} 2004, January 7, page 5
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
(Arab Freedom Press): "It is as if they are embarrassed by it and they want to sneak it in. Changes in traditional Arab societies should come as a genuine need from within as we see it happen. But being imposed by external forces as the way they are sneaking in these ideas not only in Jordan but also in Saudi Arabia and in Kuwait, signifies that there must be an outside pressure," Hamarneh added.  

To introduce international values and notions of human rights and peace into the curriculum the education minister Khaled Tuqan said: "The Ministry of Education is working with the United Nation’s Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). He emphasised that the reform project seeks to spread reconciliation focusing on values, Islamic teaching as well as Arab Islamic heritage and international law. Also, this is a way to increase awareness among students".  

Being a Muslim country together with other Muslim countries, Tuqan said, Kuwait has come under pressure from the West following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on the USA to speak out against terrorism carried out in the name of Islam. The Shura (consultative) council in Saudi Arabia, which is the home of 15 of the hijackers responsible for the September 11 attacks, endorsed an education review bill that calls for making the concept of moderation a central tenet of Islam.  

Kuwait also announced plans to reform its education system along the same lines but has met opposition from lawmakers who warn against bowing to Western pressure. "We warn the education minister and other officials against amending text books, especially on Islamic education to remove subjects important to Muslims", Kuwaiti Islamist MP Abdullah Okash said this to the Kuwaiti parliament.  

Abdullah Akkash exclaimed that the ministry of education talks about changes to the curricula as if Kuwait is in a quagmire. "Do you have a new religion you want to teach students? Is it the Western or American religion? He asked.

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
It is not terrorism when helicopter gunship fire on civilian cars and kill the occupants in cold blood (referring to the Israeli atrocities in Palestinian occupied territories) but it is terrorism when we practice our religion in peace charged another eloquent MP Ali Al-Rashed. He added: "They say they have gone to the moon and we have lagged behind. They should continue going to the moon and we would continue lagging behind. We do not need them to tell us how we should educate our children".  

To support him on this note, another Islamist MP in Kuwait, Khaled Al-Adwah said, "Our curricula will remain influenced by Islam and Arab nationalism. Those who do not like it should leave the country."

MP Khaled Al-Adwa, also a minister of parliament said the same curricula had been used throughout ages and did not produce terrorists. He added that students cannot read and write Arabic due to the ministry’s policies and asked the minister to explain why all the private universities are using English as the medium of instruction at the expense of Arabic.

He added and I quote: "If we respect ourselves and our ways, Americans will also respect us and would not try to impose their norms on us. The Japanese respect their traditions and their women continue to wear their traditional kimonos without any one looking down on them. If you do not want our Islamic educational system you can leave the country and go live on an island by yourself."  

What may seem contradictory to the whole issue is that, the Muslim of today exposes themselves to information about other fields. This is according to Dr. Muhammad Ali Al Hashimi who is the author of the book The Ideal Muslim, where he said: "The smart Muslim does not restrict himself to his own field, but is open to learning about other areas too and in this way, he gains a little knowledge about many things, which enriches his mind".

68 Ahmed, Hashim Arab Times MPs Warn against Americanization of Education Minister misquoted on extremism December 31 2003 page 6
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Hashimi, Muhammad Ali Al The Ideal Muslim: The True Islamic Personality of The Muslim Man as Defined in The Quran and Sunnah. 1999 p. 43
Certain evidence however, if it is of any significance, is according to the Hadith narrated by Zayd Ibn Thabit in which he says that the Prophet told him: “’O Zayd, learn the writing of the Jews, for by Allah I do not trust the Jews to write down anything for me’. Zayd said: So I learnt it, and it only took me a month to become proficient in it”.\textsuperscript{73} This may be one of the texts, which could be said to be of an offence to people from different religious denominations.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
Chapter 5. Findings and Conclusions

The important questions for my study would be answered in this chapter. First of all the reason why there was a strong reaction from Islamist MPs about Americanisation of Education in Kuwait is because one has to remember that Kuwait is an Islamic country with all the rules pertaining thereto.

It would have been strange if there were no reaction regarding such an issue. The possibility still remains that not all are pro-USA and still are offended by the removal of Saddam Hussein from office. Although the reactions of the Islamists were before Saddam Hussein’s removal they could certain aspects that ignited the issue. The historical value of the books in questions as well as its contents are seen as a national treasure and are seen as an insult should they be erased.

Concerning which part of the textbooks that are being questioned? I can only say that it has been difficult to get hold of them, as they were never published in the Arab Times, which has been my main source of information for this study. However I cannot tell if it has been published in Arabic for the Islamic public or not.

My third aim was to enquire if there was any implication to a particular phrase in these textbooks, which may have seemed to offend people from different religious sectors. On this note I would like to refer to a paragraph under the heading Educational Reform last paragraph which states that: The Prophet used words such as He does not trust the Jews to write down anything for him hence, the Muslim must study all languages and be able to communicate to others himself. Making him always to question the credibility of languages he does not understand.

The issue is no longer what it ought to be, putting into consideration how hot the debate has been in parliament within the Kuwaiti society and the Muslim world. This is because the Ministry of Education says it has not been pressured by the USA, to change the educational curricula.

Changes in the curricula in response to technological developments were welcome but changes due to external pressure to serve ulterior motives would be rejected said, MP Abdul Wahab Al Haroun.
In the *Arabs Times* of 15 January 2005, an MP accused the ministry of issuing a circular for the removal of some Quran verses on Jews from religious books but again the ministry has denied issuing any circular. I am not adding new information at this venture but just bringing up the awareness of the matter by the MPs involved.

The issue however will be revisited if a single Quran verse is changed in any of the textbooks. This is because the Islamists are following the review with an eagle eye. The review in all areas is a must as one can read in this thesis. The reaction of the Islamists because Kuwaiti schools use English textbooks designed for the United Arab Emirates currently reflects their concern about Americanisation of Kuwaiti schools.

However, Kuwait is in the process of changing a number of schoolbooks to promote tolerance and equality and to fight violence and extremism, the government told parliament according to the *Arab Times*, dated January 7, 2004.
Glossary

Caliph
The "successor" or "vice-regent" of the Prophet who was elected appointed or otherwise designated head of the Muslim state. The office of caliph or caliphate was subsumed under less than three periods, the latter two of which were dynastic: The Rashidun (632-661) The Umayyads (661-750) And the Abbasids (750-1258). The caliph was also known as "imam" (Leader) and "Commander of the Faithful."

Fundamentalist
This mainly refers to believers that stand firmly and support their religious ideology.

Hadith
Traditions about Muhammad’s sayings and actions used for guidance in all aspects of life.

HH
His/ Her Highness.

Islamist
One who submits or surrenders to the will of God in this case referring to Islam.

Ijtihad
Use of independent reasoning instead of repetition of past judgement.

Jihad
Holy war.

KUNA
Kuwait News Agency.

MPs
Members of parliament.
Quran
God’s revelation to Muhammad.

Quagmire
Soggy area of ground.

Terrorist
An individual, group of people or a country, which attacks civilian population without warning.

Ulama
A plural form of ‘alim, ”one who pursues knowledge” in the science of Islam. The ulama study and apply the religious sciences, such the disciplined study of Qur’an, Hadith, and Shari’a. As a class of non-Ordained religious functionaries, the ulama play important socio-political Roles as a buffer between the commonality and government.

Waqf
A pious disposal of property, such as land and buildings, to provide an Endowment income into perpetuity to be administered by the ulama for religious and charitable purposes.
Summary

Kuwait as a state has been in earlier conflicts with Iraq, which has led to some Islamists not being in favour of Kuwait, getting support from the USA. The Islamists in these Arab states imply that the war between Kuwait and Iraq was a direct punishment from Allah as Kuwaitis were in close contacts with USA. That USA supported the Kuwaitis in the battle against Iraq is still an irritation subject for some Arab states.

At this juncture, I would like the reader to put into consideration that the books in question are written in Arabic hence, the difficulty in translation without an Arabic translator, has made it impossible to use them for this study.

Both the verses and the books that are in question were difficult to get hold of. It is therefore difficult to give a vivid description of what it contained for this thesis. My try to get hold of them has been to no results. However, I will continue trying and hopefully get hold of a translated version of them.

To summarise the whole issue in a nutshell one can say that the ministry of education said that USA were not pressuring from them to make any changes in textbooks which could for that reason be a so-called Americanisation of Education.
Epilogue

Judging from all forms of democracies around the world. It can also be said that even educational systems are based on democracy. What this means is that such a young state as Kuwait needs a multi year program for stabilizing the law enforcement on education, before the country can be totally influenced by the Americans or as the study puts it Americanisation of education in Kuwait.

All the same, Kuwait should not forget what the USA has done for it over the past thirteen years. During the Iraqi occupation, Kuwait being a sovereign and independent nation was wiped off the political map of the world. It would have remained so but for the determined efforts of the USA and other allied forces.

Saddam Hussein was bullying not only Kuwait but also the entire region. He was constantly threatening to occupy and obliterate Kuwait. Over the past thirteen years, the USA first reined him in and recently overthrew him and his government.

Some Kuwaitis say it is by the mercy of the Almighty Allah, that the USA came to their rescue and made their lives better. On this note I would like to quote Ali Ahmad Al-Baghli the Former Oil Minister:

"No sane man can forget the favours done to him by others. It takes a man who is sick in his heart and blinded by extremism and fundamentalism to call infidels those who favoured him."75

The Kuwaitis have to stand firm and on its own in a multi year program as this would enable them do it by themselves and stand for its progress as well. This is however not a premonition nor a warning, neither appropriate nor correct. This is my suggestion of what I think they could do. It can however be difficult to erase the lessons they have learnt from the influence of other western countries including the USA who in this case is even influencing their educational system according to Islam MPs. Kuwait has to be on its guard as many influences be it from the western world or locally can lead to colonization of the mind which in turn can stagnate development in many "trying to grow" societies.

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