

A valued friend and ally

By ALISTAIR BURT

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ALISTAIR BURT was born in Bury, Lancashire and was educated at St John's College, Oxford where he also became president of the Oxford Law Society. He was first elected to Parliament in 1983. After the 1992 general election he became Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Social Security and later Minister of State in the same department. Out of parliament during the period 1997-2001, he was re-elected in the 2001 general election. He served as opposition spokesman on Education and Skills and became a Minister in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office after the 2010 general election.

On behalf of the British Government I should like to congratulate the people of Kuwait on their 50th Anniversary of Independence and the 20th Anniversary of Liberation.

The historical relationship between the Britain and Kuwait goes back centuries. It was natural that two maritime trading nations should develop close and friendly ties through shared commercial interests. Those ties were strengthened further when, in 1899, the two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship – Al Sadaqa, under which the UK undertook to protect Kuwait's national security. In the immediate aftermath of independence the British Army was deployed to protect Kuwait's northern borders until 1963. Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 it was British Prime Ministers Baroness Margaret Thatcher and Sir John Major who provided the leadership to ensure that the international community would, through the United Nations, liberate the country. During the liberation campaign forty-seven British servicemen lost their lives. Their sacrifice is honoured every day by all that Kuwait has achieved as a nation, not only in the twenty years since liberation, but in the fifty years of your independence.

Given the strong historical ties between our two nations the UK was always going to be at the forefront of helping Kuwait celebrate its major anniversaries this year. As such the Embassy developed a year long programme of events, which we have called 5020, to recognise this special year. The programme is based around four key pillars. The first of these was the anniversary of the liberation in February. Staff at our

Embassy, working closely with London and Kuwaiti colleagues, arranged invitations to Sir John Major, Lord King, Lord Lamont, Mr Tony Blair, Sir Michael Weston our Ambassador at the time of the Iraqi invasion, several senior military officers and Gulf War veterans to attend the celebrations. A contingent of Grenadier Guards was also in attendance at many of the events during the anniversary week. The British wall at the Kuwait House of National Works Memorial Museum was rebuilt and new photos added and an inscribed roll of honour hung up. Frank Baker, our current Ambassador to Kuwait, hosted a Liberation Garden Party for British and Kuwaiti veterans from the occupation to meet the visiting dignitaries. A touching moment was when Sir Michael Weston was introduced to the pilot, Flt Lt Kiwi O'Meagan who had flown him back into Kuwait in February 1991 to re-open the British Embassy, the two had not met since the flight.

Since the first accurate survey of Kuwait Bay by the captain of the British ship "The Eagle" in 1777, trade remains a great engine of growth and opportunity for Britain and Kuwait. But anyone who thinks this trade is just about purchasing oil on the one hand and selling manufactured goods in return is completely out of date. It is much more diverse and complex. British companies are playing a pivotal role in exciting and ambitious development plans including the new international airport to be built in Kuwait. In turn, the Kuwait Investment Authority, which has its headquarters in London, has invested heavily in the UK. The value of trade and investment between Britain and Kuwait is already over £1 billion per year.

As the British Government renews its partnership with the Arab World, we look from the new cities of the Gulf shores to the diversity of the Near East and North Africa.

We look forward to a future that is rich in prosperity, strong in defence and open in its handling and pursuit of political and economic reform. And as the United Kingdom and Kuwait celebrate the past we also to look to the future as we work to strengthen still further the close bilateral ties that bind our nations. We will continue to stand side by side with Kuwait during the next fifty years, and beyond. And as we do so we will renew and create joint British-Kuwaiti initiatives to bolster the bilateral ties between us and underline this unique relationship that we enjoy.



British soldiers at a parade in Subiya to mark the 20th Anniversary of Kuwait's liberation