



מרכז עזרי לחקר איראן והמפרץ הפרסי
מركز عزري برای مطالعات ایران وخليج پارس
The Ezri Center for Iran & Persian Gulf Studies

The Persian Gulf Observer

Perspectives on Iran and the Persian Gulf



The Kuwait Ministry of Defence School of Languages

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The Ezri Center for Iran & Persian Gulf Studies at the University of Haifa is happy to launch *The Persian Gulf Observer: Perspectives on Iran and the Persian Gulf*. *The Persian Gulf Observer* will be published periodically, expressing the views and analysis of the Ezri center's researchers on various issues concerning the Persian Gulf region and the countries which lay by its shores. Attached please find the eleventh issue written by Dr. Glen Segell on "The Kuwait Ministry of Defence School of Languages."

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The Persian Gulf Observer: מרכז עזרי לחקר איראן והמפרץ הפרסי באוניברסיטת חיפה שמח להשיק את

Perspectives on Iran and the Persian Gulf, בו יוצגו מאמרי דעה שיופצו בתדירות תקופתית, פרי- עטם של חוקרי

המרכז על מגוון נושאים מאזור המפרץ הפרסי והמדינות השוכנות לחופיה.

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מעניינים על היבטים שונים של החיים בישראל.

The Kuwait Ministry of Defence School of Languages

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Since the earliest days of trade and diplomacy there has been a need for a common language. Today English predominates as the language of global business and that of academic text books. Only a few notable countries such as Libya don't have the contents of their citizen's passports in both their own language and in English. The same need for a common language also permeates through military needs seen in the training and deployment of the joint and combined forces of allies in peace and war. The end of the Cold War and the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990 heralded the start of intensive American involvement in the politics and defence of the Persian Gulf. American soldiers deployed for short periods only learned rudimentary Arabic. More prudent was the need to train Kuwaiti soldiers and officials to a working level in English.

The well-established Defence Language Institute (DLI) of the US Armed Forces was tasked with setting up a languages school within the Kuwait Ministry of Defence. Students would come from all branches of the armed forces, civilian government offices, immigration and border control, police and any other organization that would need to communicate in the English language. The students were from all ranks. For example security guards at the rank of Sergeant, civilian aviation engineers, and high ranking command and staff officers. From the onset it was recognized that the school would need to be run and managed locally but using the DLI curriculum and with a US Army liaison officer. In addition to the DLI curriculum there was also instruction for exam preparation for international examinations such as IELTS for those being sent to study in Europe and the USA.

Every three years the Kuwait government issued a competitive tender for the management and for the staffing of the school. By 2010 the main school was well established at the Subhan base adjacent to the Kuwait international airport, and with smaller school schools at other bases. It was managed by a private Kuwait company who also owned and managed primary and secondary schools throughout Kuwait. In addition there were Kuwait and US army officers to provide liaison and specialist input. The Director of the school was an Egyptian national with a PhD in Linguistics from the UK University of Warwick. The teachers for the lower levels were bi-lingual in Arabic and English coming from Egypt and Syria. The teachers for the middle and higher levels were all native English speakers from the USA, Canada, Britain, and Ireland. All the teachers had university

degrees supplemented by teaching qualifications. These teachers were on an annual contract that included accommodation and so were bussed in together to the school and back home.

The DLI General English curriculum consists of 36 books where each book took two weeks of teaching. So a student starting from 0 English would need 72 weeks to complete the course. Given various religious, national and annual holidays these 72 weeks would in fact be spread over 100 weeks or two calendar years. It was however rare for any student to spend such a long time at the school. Most units could not release their personnel for such a long time. All students took an English level placement test and an oral test before starting the course. A percentage of students were proficient enough to start a book higher than book 1, for example 12 or even 19. Other students came from combat units where there wasn't a need to reach the proficiency of book 36 and hence ended their studies at book 24 or lower. At any given stage there were between 120 and 150 students in class where each class had no more than six students. Thus there was a teacher student ratio of no more than that of 1:6. The majority of students were male though police and other government offices sometimes sent female students. Classes were gender segregated and the female classes were only taught by female teachers.

The two week teaching schedule for each book was as follows. Classes ran from Sunday to Thursday 06:30 - 12:30. Friday and Saturday are weekend days in Kuwait. The need to end by 12:30 each day was dictated by the temperature of the desert air. Students were assigned homework and exam preparation and studied in groups. The teaching each day was divided into three parts. The main of which was frontal teaching in a class environment from the written text book with teacher instruction. This was supplemented by audio lab facilities and computer aided teaching where each student progressed at his own pace in accordance with the curriculum. The teacher would monitor and assist this. On Thursday there was a mid-book test on Week 1 and an end of book test on Week 2. Student could only repeat the Book level once if they failed a test. If they failed twice they would receive a disciplinary and/or be sent back to their unit. The testing was computer based multiple choices that included a listening section. Teachers were also required to write a progress report on each student. Teachers were regularly monitored by the academic supervisors.

The DLI curriculum was an evolving one that also required constant modification for local requirements. For example a unit in a Book in 1990 would teach how to make a reverse phone call using an international operator with a case study of making flight reservations and car rental. In 2010 such vocabulary and case would be redundant given the use of the Internet. Similarly units teaching social interaction in the US for example parties including alcohol were deemed inappropriate for the Muslim students. So on rotation basis teachers within the Kuwait school would re-write sections of any new DLI curriculum and the associated tests to meet local requirements.

The Kuwait school was one of many in the region. Other US bases such as in Bahrain had their own schools. Other countries such as Britain also have defence language schools around the world. Indeed such military language schools are a mirror of civilian efforts such as the British Council and the Alliance Francaise to teach not only the language but also to project values and culture. In sum and retrospectively the Kuwait Ministry of Defence School of Languages and the US Defence Language Institute can quietly be applauded as having achieved their objective in this regard. Thousands of Kuwait nationals and many more in schools elsewhere have become proficient in English and have been influenced by the associated impact of values and culture.