

The following is the full text of comments made by Mohammed Hussein Al-Dallal, Political Relations Official and Member of the ICM Political Bureau in Kuwait, on “Pushing towards Party Politics? Kuwait’s Islamic Constitutional Movement?” Nathan Brown (Carnegie Paper No. 79, February 2007).

To read Arabic version of letter, go to:

[http://www.carnegieendowment.org/programs/arabic/shorter\\_coment\\_kuwait\\_april07.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/programs/arabic/shorter_coment_kuwait_april07.pdf)

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It was with great interest and the utmost appreciation that I read the paper entitled “Pushing towards Party Politics? Kuwait’s Islamic Constitutional Movement” by Carnegie Endowment senior associate Nathan Brown, translated into Arabic on Carnegie’s website, and which included an objective study of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) and its influence on Kuwaiti politics. I was granted the valuable opportunity to meet Nathan Brown last March when he visited Kuwait, and we exchanged some views and ideas on his forthcoming study and issues concerning reformist, particularly Islamic, currents in the region. To support the outstanding effort exerted by Nathan Brown in preparing the study and express my agreement with him on several aspects, I am glad to offer a number of observations which may represent an addition to the study, including my views and amendments on a number of points in which I might disagree with the scholar, with my sincere appreciation for his work.

The scholar was correct when he at several points suggested that the most important obstacles blocking the development of Kuwaiti political life and contributing to the continuing crisis can be traced to the nature of the Kuwaiti political and constitutional system, which is built on distributing power between the head of state on the one hand and the community (via the legislative branch) on the other. The reason for this goes back to the desire of the ruling family while the constitution was being drafted in 1962 to retain a number of key powers, and the absence of a total satisfaction with democratic life among a number of ruling family members. Consequently, the political and constitutional system does not give either of the two branches the necessary and complete powers to manage state affairs as in modern democratic regimes, whether presidential or parliamentary, which makes this mutual contention among the government branches one of the reasons for the renewed struggle between the two sides.

The scholar indicated repeatedly that one of the problems of the political opposition is the extent of its ability to work jointly to achieve a reformist agenda, creating a united opposition agenda calling for political, cultural, and social reform.

To start with, it is difficult to evaluate and understand what is happening in Kuwait and the Gulf ideologically by Western or liberal measures, given the difference in social and cultural values between these societies. It follows that the ICM, considering the Islamic context it comes from, has an Islamic source of reference which endeavors to strike a balance between the requirements of freedom and human rights sanctioned by international organizations, and the requirements of respecting the moral and legal

foundations of the Islamic religion, as well as Arab and Islamic societies. Looking at the history of the ICM, one finds that it called for the amendment of the Publications and Publishing Law to allow more freedom and break the press monopoly, and with others expressed its reservations about encroachments on legal and constitutional values -- the Kuwaiti constitution stipulates respect for Islamic and Arab values, while demanding freedom and not overstepping constitutional principles.

The study stated that the ICM adopted “constitutional means” through real participation in the political and reform process. Lest the reader think that the expression “constitutional means” aims only at political reform in its understanding regarding expanding popular participation in governance and opening up freedoms, one of the pillars of the ICM’s work, in addition to the Islamic and constitutional dimensions, is development work. This is through participation in support developmental issues in the reformist framework. To give just one example, the Reformist Vision bill which the ICM put forward in parliament in 2001, addresses developing the education system and proclaiming the existence of a national charter for education between all the institutions concerned with this crucial sector.

In his study, Brown pointed to the ICM’s relationship with the political authorities and the ruling families more than once, and in this regard, the ICM does indeed take a moderate stance. This is in accordance with the powers, rights, and duties granted to the ruling family by the Kuwaiti Constitution, while the ICM has called for the royal family members to cooperate with political and popular forces to allow greater participation in political life and governance by the population at large. On the other side, some political factions disagreed with our stance and accused the ICM of making a truce and allying with the government and the ruling family at the cost of public welfare. This contradicts the reality of the situation, and these factions ignore the fact that the ICM has acted as a constructive opposition, such that it supported the positive steps of the government and opposed the undesirable moves of the authorities at other times.

The scholar suggested that the ICM “still stands outside the central structures of political power, pursuing its goals by harassing the government” instead of taking part in it. To correct this information, the ICM has not opposed political participation in the successive Kuwaiti governments, out of its wish to be politically active whether through the executive or legislative branch. The ICM took part in the 1992 cabinet with the entry of Dr. Abdallah Al-Hajiri as minister of trade and Mr. Jumaan Al-Azimi as minister of Islamic endowments. The ICM also joined the government formed in 2006 with Dr. Isma’il Al-Shatti, before his relationship with the ICM was later ended, in addition to Mohammed Al-Alim, a member of the ICM’s current political bureau entering the cabinet in March 2007, as the minister of electricity and water.

The writer at one place mentioned a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood serving as a minister after the unconstitutional dissolution of parliament in 1976, and to amend this point, although the well-known Yousef Al-Hajji did assume the chairmanship of the board for the Civil Reform Society, it is important to note that heading a public welfare

organization such as this does not necessarily mean that the chair or a member of the society belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood. It is widely known that a number of Kuwaitis worked under the umbrella of the Islamic Guidance Society and the Social Reform Society due to their corresponding goals, without directly belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, among them Yousef Al-Hajji. Also, the writer stated that the Muslim Brotherhood “cooperated with an attempt by the amir to amend the constitution as a condition of restoring it”. To clarify this ambiguity in an objective manner, we should point out that the Islamic trend embodied in the Social Reform Society in seeking the revision of the constitution at the end of the 1970s had taken a line in which it demanded the amendment of article 2 of the constitution, such that Islamic Sharia would become *the* source of legislation, whereas in the current text, it is a main source of legislation and related constitutional amendments. The Social Reform Society also showed its opposition to the government proposals that infringed on constitutional life and popular gains.

In the section entitled “Electoral Success and Limitations”, the writer stated that “ICM deputies have often shown some enthusiasm in using the tool [of interpellation] to push their agenda, moving against ministers deemed hostile to Islamization or overly permissive of practices offensive to religious or traditional values”. A look at the historical records show that, in addition to the ICM defending religion and values even if that meant using interpellation in accordance with the constitutional mechanisms, the ICM also used interpellation in cooperation with other deputies concerning development, finance, and other issues vital to society.

### ***Policies and Goals***

The ICM initiated a call for the political movements to form a front for political reform and channel their efforts, based on common ground and respect for the differences between the movements, in the cause of achieving development and overcoming the political crisis in the country. The movement also called for a national conference for reform in 2004, while it energetically participated in meetings of the political forces through the National Conciliation Society, which includes a number of key national figures. The ICM affirmed and still affirms the necessity of bringing back meetings of the political and parliamentary forces in accordance with a reformist agenda.

In its literature and vision for political reform has pointed out that the Kuwaiti people and political factions demand the adoption of serious steps towards enhancing popular participation and supporting the institutional development of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, the legalization of the political organizations and parties, and moving towards a popular cabinet, in addition to supporting and invigorating the role of civil society’s institutions.

The ICM demands, as do other leading players in the Kuwaiti arena, the evaluation of political and social performance; the review of plans and strategy towards society’s political, social, and cultural issues; the move to adopt reformist developmental

plans in which the various sectors of society participate; and the opening of greater channels for joint work with the other political forces.

Among the important issues which will preoccupy the ICM in the foreseeable future is that concerning its political and ideological rhetoric, which the ICM aspires to be balanced and modern, showing deference to the values and constitutional framework which the ICM adopts, not conflicting with the nature of Kuwaiti society, the requirements of development, and achieving complete transparency towards all the leading questions in society. Finally, it is concerned with upgrading the institutional and party system internally within the ICM, and contributing towards doing so in the political area via constitutional, official, and popular channels.

There are many challenges facing Kuwait in order to achieve stability and political and economic development. Most prominent and important, as the scholar mentioned, is the ability of the political currents and the opposition to work jointly for political reform, especially in light of the aspiration of some to abort constitutional life and reduce the public's gains. Second is the situation of the ruling family, which is currently in a state of instability and power struggles which has strongly affected the political and social arena, and reflected negatively on all walks of life in Kuwaiti society. Third is the imbalance between the executive and legislative branch's performance. The fourth of these challenges is seriously dealing with political and security events in the region, particularly the situations with Iraq, Iran, and the Palestinian question, and their spillover into local affairs. The last challenge is tied to the ability of the movements and the elite to allow inclusion of the Kuwaiti street, and let citizens participate more in producing positive change.

*The writer is a member in the political bureau and the general secretariat of the Islamic Constitutional Movement in Kuwait. For more information on the ICM, please visit its Arabic website at [www.lcmkw.org](http://www.lcmkw.org), or e-mail the author at [dalla@alkhebra.com](mailto:dalla@alkhebra.com)*

**Mohammed Hussein Al-Dallal**  
**Political Relations Official**  
**Member of the ICM Political Bureau**  
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