

diplomats in straitjackets when it came to dealing with the media, the Kuwaiti government in Ta'if trusted its diplomats, officials and even popular committees of ordinary Kuwaitis who volunteered to represent their nation to the world press. It gave them enough slack to create their own initiatives and follow them without much need to refer to their government except to ask for more help or resources, or to facilitate witnesses' travel and communication.



A Lone Rider

What was remarkable was the large number of individual Kuwaitis – and it is beyond capability to list all of them – who were playing different roles to different audiences. This versatility has already been demonstrated in matters to do with the resistance, smuggling and organisation, but in the media and communications war Kuwait had secret weapons improvised by the country's *collective* conscience – namely, certain individuals who acted on their own and in contact with resistance cells, individuals who chose to be ordinary, run-of-the-mill Kuwaitis, who kept their heads down, causing no trouble, even being objects of contempt. These individuals collected information and news on the ground about daily life, acts of resistance and Iraqi atrocities. Between their own four walls, they were Arthurian knights, their steeds their electronic equipment, their battlefield the airwaves, their shields their cunning wit and their shining swords, the message they broadcast to the world.

One of these Kuwaiti knights was an amateur (“ham”) radio enthusiast by the name of Abdul Jabbar Marafie, a retired Kuwaiti communications engineer. His 3 August call for help was picked up by a ham operator in The Netherlands who, in turn, passed the transmission on to Frank Moore at a TV station in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in the US. Realising the gravity of the message, Moore took it immediately to the State Department. Throughout the Iraqi occupation, Moore would remain

in the loop, taking Marafie's messages right up until liberation seven months later.

The 50-foot radio aerial on the roof of Marafie's house, near an Iraqi manned police station, was too conspicuous to be missed; Iraqi soldiers had gone around to all the ham radio transmitters and confiscated equipment. Marafie pre-empted the Iraqis' inevitable action by going directly to the police station and informing them that he was a radio transmitter. Accordingly, the soldiers came to confiscate his computers, bringing with them a list and orders from Baghdad to confiscate all licensed radio equipment.³⁷ Before going to the Iraqis, however, Marafie had hidden his most up-to-date systems, leaving out some older working equipment. Satisfied with what they found, the Iraqis packed up the old equipment and went away, thanking him for his cooperation – and the tea he served them. Marafie was annoyed to lose some of his equipment, but it was a small price to pay to keep working until the liberation – news of which he was able to transmit to Sweden, where a text was printed out, retyped and faxed to the *amir* in Ta'if.

As soon as the Iraqis left, Marafie changed his Kuwaiti call sign from 9K2DZ to a borrowed call sign (from a fellow operator in Bahrain sympathetic to Kuwait). He used a computer-based messaging system called Amateur Tele-printing Over Radio (AMTOR), which sent a digital signal via radio antenna. He was not the only ham radio operator active during the occupation; there were about 160 in Kuwait during that time, with an unknown number of other operators – but the Marafie transmissions reached the US State Department and the government in Ta'if.

Moore testified to passing strategic information directly to a contact at the State Department, at times with help from fellow ham Clark Constant of Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. After US forces entered Kuwait, it was subsequently verified that the information on Iraqi positions provided by Marafie had been remarkably accurate and “very valuable to Operation “Desert Storm””, and were passed directly to General Colin Powell.³⁸

³⁷ *Last Voice from Kuwait*, a three-part documentary by Frank Moore, WANE-TV (Fort Wayne, IN) and WA1URA (Moore's radio call sign, assigned with the licence).

³⁸ Moore, *Last Voice*.

One message said that a VIP in the Iraqi/Kuwaiti governorate from where it was gleaned had issued orders indicating plans by the Iraqis for a surprise attack against US ground forces south of Kuwait, with the object of capturing as many US forces as possible to use as a bargaining tool. The message from Marafie indicated that the attack was to happen that evening. (The Iraqis did attack Khafji in great force, but the town had already been evacuated a week earlier – see Chapter Nineteen.)

Most of Marafie's messages during the occupation provided information about atrocities committed by Iraqi forces and about the oppressive treatment to which the Kuwait populace was being subjected, in addition to intelligence on the Kuwaiti people's general health and well-being. He relied on spotters to bring him information that he could report. He brought to the world's attention the disturbing results of the lack of discipline among Iraqi soldiers. The ignorant troops cared little for the consequences of stealing Kuwaiti property, including oxygen cylinders, medical equipment and hospital incubators.

In December, Marafie alerted the world to random arrests by Iraqis, and to the fact that prisoners were being deprived of adequate food and winter clothing. His reports confirmed cases of rape by Iraqi soldiers and gangs, as well as the organised looting of Kuwaiti food stores, chemists and medical centres.

USS Kennedy in the Red Sea became another point of contact for Marafie on 9 September, as reported by its radio operator, Officer First Class Scott Ward. The latter developed a personal connection with the Kuwaiti ham radio enthusiast, and was deeply saddened by the reports of atrocities committed in Kuwait. One moving transmission came on Armistice Day (11 November – Memorial Day in the UK), and was broadcast by Marafie to Fort Wayne:

Everyone here will be very happy to see war break out to drive the Iraqi savages from this land. We no longer care for the consequences of war, since death would be a relief from what we are now facing.

Like the vast majority of Kuwaitis mentioned in this book, Marafie took an immense risk not only with his own life but with that of his

family. They begged him to stop sending messages, but he refused. At one point, his eight-year-old son came to him, saying that the Iraqis were near and they would be killed if he were caught. Bravely, he carried on, sometimes transmitting for up to twelve hours a day. "I could not stop because there were so many [Kuwaiti] people who were abroad and they needed help," Marafie later reflected.³⁹ "It was a good idea to send information to the United States so people there knew what was happening in Kuwait."⁴⁰



Voice in America

Meanwhile in Washington, Kuwaiti Ambassador Saud Nasser was involved in the campaign to persuade the American public of his nation's just cause in seeking their help. On the eve of the invasion, when his annual leave had already started, he made a last-minute decision to stay in the States after receiving a far from diplomatic and, in his own words, harshly worded memorandum from the Iraqi foreign minister, accusing Kuwait of "stealing Iraqi land".⁴¹

When the invasion had been confirmed, still before midnight in the US, the ambassador followed Foreign Minister Sabah Ahmad's instructions and called the State Department. He was engaged in a constant effort to get the Americans' attention. Having had no sleep since the early hours of 1 August, he was nevertheless able to translate a call for President Bush from the *amir*. Regardless of sleep deprivation, Saud Nasser never once said no to a live television interview or news commentary, and even took many calls from London newsrooms. He spoke to Congressional leaders and initiated contacts with reporters. His primary focus was to the bring human rights violations taking place

³⁹ During the occupation, Marafie would also send messages from people in Kuwait to Kuwaitis abroad via ham operators in other countries.

⁴⁰ Moore, *Last Voice*.

⁴¹ *The Los Angeles Times*, 8 August 1990.

atrocities are being committed daily by the Iraqis.”⁴⁸

The messages sent from Kuwait played a significant role in getting media and public backing for the White House and Congress. In combination with Kuwait’s own diplomatic efforts, they helped to win over public opinion and, more importantly, the lawmakers on Capitol Hill in Washington, in the *Assemblée Nationale* in Paris and in Westminster in London. Securing votes to enable Western democracies to join the war coalition was another success for Kuwait’s message to the world; but it was in the US that securing public opinion in the constituencies of the lawmakers made the historic difference.

The impact of Marafie’s messages demonstrates this. His transmissions were passed on to the media, and CBS News’s *America Tonight* show, hosted by Charles Kuralt, was briefed on the source of the messages. Until then, only a select few on the news team were aware that a ham radio broadcaster in Kuwait was providing the information – his life was on the line. Moore, in Fort Wayne, was losing sleep, awaking from nightmares that Marafie had been discovered by the Iraqis as a result of some slip-up by the media. It was not just his friend on the airwaves, but another 159 Kuwaiti ham radio operators who faced mortal danger. Moore called every journalist involved and pleaded with them to make no references whatsoever to radio, ham radio or shortwave in connection with the source of the information coming from Kuwait.

In one CBS News broadcast on 25 February 1991, in the midst of the liberation of Kuwait, Kuralt described the source and his efforts thus: “For months, we have been receiving almost daily messages from a brave man in Kuwait City, who gets them out to us at considerable risk to himself. In October and November he sent us descriptions of caravans of Iraqi trailer trucks looting houses, hospitals and schools.” Then he chronicled some selected items from Marafie’s messages. In December: “They are kidnapping and torturing boys, even children. They knock on the door of a house, and when the parents come to the door, they shoot their son in the head and leave him dead on the step.” A month ago: “The bombs are falling everywhere around us. These explosions

⁴⁸ *The Independent*, 8 January 1991.