

KUWAIT AVIATION SHOW

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F/A-18 formation

From January 17 to 20, 2018, for the first time in history, Kuwait hosted an airshow. The show, dubbed Kuwait Aviation Show (KAS) and held at Kuwait International Airport, marked the first step of an ambitious plan to become a major player in the aviation industry in the Middle East. This plan includes becoming the largest cargo-handling area in the region.

The event, also marketed as 'Your aerospace gateway to the gcc (Gulf Cooperation Council)', was held in an aircraft hangar and adjacent static aircraft display area. This first edition appeared to have attracted only a limited number of participants, judging by the layout of the exhibition area and the empty booths. Visitor numbers on both trade days seemed to leave considerable room for improvement. But, let's not forget it was the first edition.

On January 17, the show was opened by Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Homoud Al-Sabah, the President of Civil Aviation in Kuwait. Following the opening speeches, the Kuwait Air Force (KAF) performed a fly-by with three AH-64Ds from Ali al-Salem Air Base, followed by a flypast of a Kuwait Airways Boeing 777 flanked by four F/A-18s. After a performance of the Turkish Air Force F-16 of Solo Türk, the flying display of the opening day was concluded by a performance of the Saudi Hawks. During the show, two days were reserved for trade, while the last two days were open to the public. With only the Saudi Hawks performing on all four days, the flying display was quite limited and would have benefitted from more KAF and civil participation.

Besides adding to the somewhat limited flying displays, the Kuwait Air Force presented several assets in the static display



area. KAF assets are rarely ever seen outside the country, so the Kuwait Aviation Show presented an excellent opportunity to see the Kuwait Air Force's aircraft up close.

Training

Representing the training fleet of the KAF, a Tucano T52 as well as a Hawk Mk64 were on display, while helicopter training was represented by a Gazelle.

Initial training for KAF pilots takes place in France. Défense Conseil International (DCI) offers training at its International Centre for Academic and Aeronautical Training (CIFAA) in Salon de Provence, in partnership with Aix-Marseille Université and the French Air Force Academy in Salon de

Provence. The syllabus is identical to that of the French Air Force and spans a period of two years, Civil registered Cirrus SR-20 and SR-22 aircraft are used for initial training.

Helicopter training also takes place in France, as DCI-H (or International Helicopter Training Centre), the helicopter school of DCI, provides basic helicopter training at Dax-Seyresse and Le Luc/Le Cannet, using civil registered EC120Bs.

This course includes two weeks of high altitude training in the Pyrenees, simulating operations in hot weather conditions. After completing basic helicopter training, a type-conversion is done in France on ALAT Gazelles before returning to Kuwait for further training.

Order of Battle:

Kuwait IAP

Air Force

41 Transport Squadron: KC-130J, C-17A
91 Special Squadron: S-92

Government

VIP Flight: A300C4-620, A310, A319, A320,
A340, B737, B747, G550, G650

Ministry of Interior / Police

Police Rotary Wing: EC135T1, AS365N3

Ali al-Salem AB

Air Force

12 Training Squadron: Hawk Mk64
17 Attack Squadron: AH-64D
19 Training Squadron: Tucano Mk52
20 Attack Squadron: AH-64D
32 Helicopter Squadron: SA330L
33 Helicopter Squadron: SA342L
62 Utility Squadron: AS332M, AS532SC

Ahmed al-Jaber AB

Air Force

9 Fighter & Attack Squadron: F/A-18C/D
25 Fighter & Attack Squadron: F/A-18C/D
61 Fighter & Attack Squadron: F/A-18C/D



C-17 Globemaster III



Lockheed Martin C-130J

After completing the DCI-course at Salon de Provence, fixed wing pilots return to Kuwait for their follow-up training. The KAF uses the Tucano T52 for training with 19 Training Squadron, based at Ali al Salem air base. Sixteen aircraft were delivered in the mid-nineties, of which twelve remain active. Fighter pilots then transfer to 12 Training Squadron, which has nine Hawk Mk64s, before eventually transferring to the 61 Fighter and Attack squadron, equipped with the F/A-18C/D. Besides that, Kuwait Air Force pilots have been flying the M346 from Lecce in Italy since 2015.

The Italian Leonardo company was present at the show, hoping Kuwait will become one of its new customers for the M346 in the near future.

DCI is also heavily involved in follow-up courses including ground/simulator training at Cognac, fighter courses at Tours and Cazaux and transport specialization at Avord.

Transport

The KAF has a long history of using Lockheed aircraft for their transport needs. From the early seventies, two L-100-20s and later 4 L-100-30s were used. From 2014 onwards, three C-130Js have been used by 41 Transport Squadron, while three of the four L-100-30s are still serviceable and in use. A giant boost for the KAF's transport capabilities was given when two C-17As were delivered to 41 Transport Squadron in 2013 and 2014. The static park had a C-130J and a C-17A on display.

Helicopters

The backbone of the KAF helicopter force is formed by Airbus Helicopters' products. Eight SA330Ls are assigned to the 32 Helicopter Squadron at Ali el-Salem, while sister squadron 62 Utility Squadron flies five AS332Bs and an unknown number of AS532SC. The Gazelle also soldiers on in Kuwaiti service,



Apache formation



Saudi Hawks



with no less than fifteen SA342Ks assigned to 33 Helicopter Squadron. Five Sikorsky S-92As are in service with 91 Special Squadron. One of the AS532s was used to drop parachutists on several show days, while a S-92 was seen in the static display area. Dating back to 2005, sixteen AH-64Ds were delivered to 17 and 20 Attack Squadrons, after a period of training in the United States. Besides the three AH-64Ds performing a fly-by, one helicopter could be seen in the static display.

Fighters Fit for the future

When the Gulf War ended, the fighter fleet of the KAF was quickly modernised. Its fleet of A-4 Skyhawks and Mirage F1s was replaced by 40 F/A-18C/Ds, of which 26 F/A-18Cs and seven F/A-18Ds remain active with 9, 25 and 61 Fighter and Attack Squadrons. One of the F/A-18s from 25 Squadron was in the static display area, while four aircraft from 9 and 25 Squadrons performed in the opening of the show.

In 2015 it was announced that the KAF had signed a deal for the delivery of 28 Eurofighter Typhoons (tranche 3, 22 single-seaters and 6 dual-seaters), to be delivered from 2019 onwards. The aircraft will be based at Ali al-Salem airbase but initial training will be done in Italy, with Kuwaiti pilots receiving their training at Grosseto with 20 Gruppo.

Besides that, it was announced in November 2016 that a deal for at least 40 F/A-18E/F Super Hornets (32 F/A-18, 8 F/A-18F) was approved by US Congress. Local media suggests this deal could still be on, but no confirmation has been given so far.

In Conclusion

The Kuwait Aviation Show will be held again 2020 and certainly has potential to grow, but it will take some effort to show the aviation industry what makes this show different from other shows in the region. ☒