

KUWAIT AVIATION SHOW 2018

TEXT & PHOTOS - STEFAN GOOSSENS & ARNOLD TEN PAS / 4AVIATION

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A Kuwaiti F/A-18C Hornet seen on the ramp at the KAS show.

Photo by the authors

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From 17 to 20 January 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 G.C.C. (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 lay-out of the exhibition area and the empty booths. Visitor numbers on both trade days seems to leave room for a lot of improvement. But, let's not forget it was the first edition.

On Wednesday 17 January, 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 closed by a performance of the Saudi Hawks.

Of the four days in total, two days were trading days while the last two days were open to the public. With only the Saudi Hawks performing at all days the flying display was very limited and missed a large KAF and civil participation.

Besides adding to the somewhat limited flying displays, the Kuwait Air Force presented several assets in the static display. Since assets of the KAF are hardly ever seen outside the country, the Kuwait Aviation Show presented a nice opportunity to detail the Kuwait Air Force.







Training

Representing the training fleet of the KAF, both 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 is being done abroad, 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 University and the French Air Force Academy in Salon de Provence. The syllabus is identical to that of the French Air Force and covers a period of two years, using civil registered Cirrus SR-20 & SR-22 aircraft.

Next steps for future helicopter pilots are also in France, as DCI-H (or International Helicopter Training Centre), the helicopter school of DCI, also provides the basic helicopter training at Dax-Seyresse and Le Luc/Le Cannet using civil registered EC120Bs. This course includes a two-week high-altitude training in the Pyrenees simulating operations in hot weather conditions. After finishing the basic helicopter training, a type-conversion is done in France on ALAT Gazelles before returning to Kuwait for further training.

After finishing 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 transfer to 12 Training Squadron, flying nine Hawk Mk64s, before eventually transferring to the 61 Fighter & 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 the new customers for the M346 on short term.

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



Transport

The KAF has a long history of using Lockheed aircraft for their transport needs. Since the early seventies two L-100-20 and later 4 L-100-30 were used. From 2014 onwards, three C-130J are being used by 41 Transport Squadron, while 3 of the four L-100-30 are still serviceable and being used. A giant boost for the transport capabilities was given when two C-17As were delivered to 41 Transport Squadron in 2013 and 2014. The static park both had a C-130J and a C-17A on display.

Helicopters

The backbone of the KAF helicopter force is formed by the Eurocopter products. Eight SA330L are assigned to the 32 Helicopter Squadron at Ali el-Salem, while sister squadron 62 Utility Squadron flies five AS332B and an unknown number of AS532SC.

The Gazelle also soldiers on in Kuwaiti service, with no less than fifteen SA342K assigned to the 33 Helicopter Squadron. Five Sikorsky S-92As are in service with the 91 Special Squadron. One of the AS532s was being used to drop parachutists on several days, while a S-92 was seen in the static display.

Dating back to 2005, sixteen AH-64D were delivered to 17 and 20 Attack Squadron 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 and fit for future

When the Gulf War ended, the fighter fleet of the KAF was quickly modernised. The existing fleet of A-4 Skyhawks and Mirage F1s were replaced by 40 F/A-18C/Ds of which 26 F/A-18C and 7 F/A-18D remain active with 9, 25 and 61 Fighter & Attack Squadrons. One of the F/A-18s from 25 Squadron was in the static display, while four aircraft from both 9 and 25 Squadron 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 getting 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 suggest this deal could still be 'on' but no confirmation was 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.

