

Kuwait

Aviation Show 2018

For the first time in its history, Kuwait hosted an airshow, part of the country's ambitious goal to become a major player in the Middle East aviation industry. **Stefan Goossens and Arnold ten Pas** were there.



The Kuwait Aviation Show (KAS) took place at Kuwait International Airport, outside Kuwait City, from January 17 to 20. The new biennial event, marketed as an "aerospace gateway to the Gulf Cooperation Council", was held in an aircraft hangar and adjacent static aircraft display area. The first

two days were for trade visitors, while the last two were open to the public. The show was opened on January 17 by Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Homoud Al-Sabah, the chairman of the General Directorate of Civil Aviation of Kuwait. After the opening speeches, the Kuwait Air Force (KAF) performed a flyby 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. The flying display on the opening day came to a close with routines by the Turkish Air Force's Solo Türk F-16 followed up by a performance from the Saudi Hawks. The Saudi team was the only act

to perform each day, as part of a limited display programme. However, the KAF exhibited several assets in the static display.

Training

Tucano Mk52 serial 107 and Hawk Mk64 serial 149 were on display to represent local KAF training efforts, alongside Gazelle serial 523 used for rotary-wing tuition.

Initial training for KAF pilots is currently conducted in France. Défense Conseil International (DCI) provides schooling at its Centre International de Formation Académique et Aéronautique (CIF-AA, International Centre for Academic and Aeronautical Training) at Salon-de-Provence. The two-year syllabus is identical to that of the French Air Force and employs civil-registered Cirrus SR20 and SR22 aircraft.

The next steps for future helicopter pilots are also taken in France, at DCI's Centre International de Formation Hélicoptères (CIF-H, International Centre for Helicopter Training), which handles basic helicopter training at Dax Seyresse and Le Luc-Le Cannet using civil-registered EC120Bs. After basic helicopter training, type conversion is completed on French Army Gazelles before returning to Kuwait for further instruction.

A similar path is followed



The KAF Hawk Mk64 quickly traded its original light stone/beige desert scheme for this three-tone grey camouflage in the 1990s. Serials – in this case, 149 – are applied in both Arabic and anglicised numerals. Attrition losses occurred in January 2002 and April 2005.

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Left: A pair of F/A-18Cs – serials 409 (c/n 1111) and 412 (c/n 1130), from 9 and 25 Squadrons respectively – over Kuwait International Airport. These units are the two frontline KAF Hornet operators, while 61 Squadron, also at Ali Al Salem AB, serves as the operational conversion unit. **Below:** SA342K serial KAF 523 (c/n 1379) was included in the line-up of training types in the static display. In service from June 1974, the survivors from a total of 24 Gazelles are now operated by 33 Squadron at Ali Al Salem. All photos Stefan Goossens and Arnold ten Pas



by fixed-wing pilots after finishing the DCI course at Salon-de-Provence. Of the 16 Tucano Mk52s delivered in the mid-1990s, six remain active and ten are stored. Fighter pilots move on to 12 Squadron, flying six Hawk Mk64s (two more are stored), before transferring to 61 Squadron equipped with the F/A-18C/D. KAF pilots have been flying the T-346A at Lecce in Italy since 2015. Leonardo was present at KAS and hopes to secure Kuwait as a customer for its M-346. DCI is also involved in follow-on courses

including ground/simulator training at Cognac, fighter courses at Tours and Cazaux and transport specialisation at Avord.

Transports and rotors

The static park featured C-130J serial 327 and C-17A serial 343. From 2014 onwards, 41 Squadron has operated three C-130Js, but three of the four L-100-30s last seen flying in 2013 reportedly remain in use. Two C-17As were delivered to 41 Squadron in 2013 and 2014.

From the KAF helicopter fleet, a Super Puma was

used to drop parachutists, while S-92A serial 996 was present in the static display. Six SA330Ls are assigned to 32 Squadron at Ali Al Salem, while sister 62 Squadron flies four AS332Bs. The Gazelle soldiers on in Kuwaiti service, with 15 SA342Ks assigned to 33 Squadron. Six S-92As are in service with 91 Squadron.

Besides the three AH-64Ds performing a flyby, Apache serial 013 was in the static display. A total of 16 AH-64Ds were delivered to 17 and 20 Squadrons after a period of training in the United States.

Fighters and the future

Of the 40 F/A-18C/Ds delivered after the 1991 Gulf War, 26 single-seaters and seven two-seaters remain active with 9, 25 and 61 Squadrons. F/A-18C serial 432 from 25 Squadron was in the static, while four aircraft from 9 and 25 Squadrons flew during the opening of the show.

In 2016 it was announced that the KAF had signed a deal for 28 Tranche 3 Typhoons (22 single-seaters and six dual-seaters), to be delivered from 2019. The aircraft will be based at Ali Al Salem and initial training will be conducted at Grosseto in Italy, with 20° Gruppo.

The sale of at least 40 Super Hornets (32 F/A-18Es, eight F/A-18Fs) was approved by US Congress in November 2016. Local media suggest the deal is still on but there's no official confirmation as yet. More will surely be revealed before the Kuwait Aviation Show is held again in 2020.



A trio of KAF AH-64Ds opens the inaugural Kuwait Aviation Show. All 16 Apaches were delivered during 2007 and most serve with 17 and 20 Squadrons at Ali Al Salem, with a training detachment in the US.