The Role of Public Administration in Crises Management: A Case Study of the State of Kuwait

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Abstract
State of Kuwait is located on the Arabian Gulf in a region wounded by conflicts, rebellions and political instability. In June 2015 a terrorist attack by a suicide bomber detonated in a mosque in Kuwait City. This brutal act left twenty-seven people dead, and 227 wounded (Hubbard 2015). The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed to be the perpetrator of the attack. This article applies new insights in the study of crises and crisis management to the case of the Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq Mosque Bombing terrorist attack. Such new insights include the notion of crisis as process, the politicization of crises, the increasing importance of the media, and the revision of some concepts of crisis management. The article pays specific attention to the role of public officials and public agencies. It explores the contributions they made in the immediate response to the crisis.

Keywords: Kuwait; crisis management; media; police; leadership

1. Introduction
Kuwait is a Middle-Eastern emirate, on the Arabian Gulf, close to Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Israel, and Syria. This location in a region wounded by conflicts, rebellions, political instability, social fragmentation, and religious contrasts is certainly among the reasons for which the state is confronted to terrorism. Kuwait has been in fact a country unfortunately prone to terrorist activity in recent decades. The most recent terrorist attack was on the 26 of June 2015, when a suicide bomber detonated in a mosque in Kuwait City. This brutal act left twenty-seven people dead, and 227 wounded (Hubbard, 2015). The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed to be the perpetrator of the attack.

More recently, in July 2016, three terror plots planned by the Islamic State (also called Daesh in Arabic) have been foiled by three pre-emptive raids inside and outside Kuwait (Reuters, 2016). Again a few months later, in October 2016, an Egyptian citizen who claimed to be affiliated to the Islamic State was arrested, while driving a truck loaded with explosives with the aim of carrying a terrorist attack against United States soldiers (Gulf News, 2016). Both these episodes underline the large geopolitical connexions behind these networks and actions, deeply rooted into the Arab world. They also bring to the forefront the international dimension of contemporary terrorism, calling for an internationally concerted response to effectively fight against this phenomenon.

Beyond the suitable global geopolitical reaction, this paper nevertheless focuses on a Kuwaiti perspective and on the specific measures and transformations needed to enhance security and effectiveness in the country in the fight against terrorism. The response to the most recent attack and to the terrorist threat has in fact been a swift and a relevant case to consider for studying governance and public administration structures in Kuwait. The situation allows a unique recent instance that researchers can draw considerations of the current state of governance structures in Kuwait, starting from retrospect. The case can be examined at multiple levels of governance, showing its complexity, but also its central role. An emphasis on the area of crisis management and response will be considered as a starting point and the role of public administration in this is critical. As well, the research has to identify blind spots or weaknesses in governance and public administration, and offer potential recommendations, and areas for further investigation.

This paper is divided into seven sections. The first is devoted to present the crisis management framework used in the paper. The second focuses on the political responses to crises, while the third section concentrates on law enforcement and the multi-level governance required. The fourth section is dedicated to information dissemination by government agencies through social and mass media. Sections fifth and sixth summarize respectively positive governance responses that can be learned from the Kuwaiti example and gaps identified during the analysis, presenting some possible responses to them. The last section, the seventh concludes offering research areas on which further academic and policy research of keen interest for future action to effectively deal with terrorist crisis management in Kuwait.

The main theme of the paper is not the terrorist attack, but more importantly the mechanisms of effective response to crises, which implies dealing with a domain that can be defined as crisis management. The definition of crises, the elements, the characteristics, which all can be applied to this specific event and once these circumstances come together, lead at a precise time and place to a crisis are henceforth at the core of this section. Therefore, the mosque attack is considered as an event, serving as a tool to analyse how crises are dealt with in Kuwait.
The starting point is then the definition of a crisis in the specific context of this paper. First, it must be noted that this definition depends on the size and nature of the phenomenon considered. In social contexts, nowadays immersed in a global and interconnected world, especially through real time information and communication technologies, large-scale organisational crises are the norm and to them specifically refer the crisis management domain, as well as political science, and international relations.

A crisis is different from a risk, a hazard or a disaster, as it is an actual event, something that has happened and produces consequences. Although it must be recognized that international community response to crises are by nature challenging and difficult to judge, the capacity to react depends both on the nature and on the gravity of the crisis. Generally, it is worth to point out that the international community has the responsibility to act to protect human rights and lives and to create awareness to support adequate responses. Acknowledging the variety of possible definitions and nuances, Pearson and Clair propose a definition that has become a classic. “An organisational crisis is a low-probability, high impact event that threatens the viability of an organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly” (Pearson and Clair, 2008: p. 3). This definition underlines the uncertainty as the main character of crises that appears to be especially challenging for their management. Crises also emphasize the crucial role of leaders in their management and eventual resolution, their capacity to decide effectively in a difficult and critical time. In fact, according to the same authors, “organisational crisis management is a systematic attempt by organizational members with external stakeholders to avert crises or to effectively manage those that do occur” (Ibid.: p. 3).

Applying this framework to the Kuwaiti crisis, to which this paper refers, it is evident that the organisation is in this case the Kuwaiti society and terrorism is a crisis that the country has to face. The leadership of the country that has to promptly decide and act has at his head the Emir, but includes the parliament and the government, as crucial organs of decision making, as it will be shown later in the paper, especially from a legal perspective. The effectiveness of leadership response is fundamental to ensure the efficacy with which crises are managed. “Crisis management effectiveness is evidenced when potential crises are averted or when key stakeholders believe that the success outcomes of short- and long-range impacts of crises outweigh the failure outcomes” (Ibid.: p. 4). Translated into the specific context, this means that there is partial effectiveness, as terrorist attacks have been foiled, avoiding failure to this extent, but there is room for improvement and this is what this paper focuses on.

Furthermore, to ensure that crisis management is effective requires that terrorist attacks stop being “strategic surprises”, by giving to counterterrorism the needed priority in various sectors (policy making, law enforcement, politics, homeland security and governance, etc.), appropriately allocating funding to it and eventually creating an authority (a commission for example) ensuring that the country is preparing for it in the best way possible, given the resources available. This implies to revise the overcrowded political agenda of the state, while reconsidering political priorities and giving to terrorism the attention that it deserves in every dimension of the political agenda (Parker and Stern, 2008).

Although it must be acknowledged that crises may be analysed through a variety of perspectives (including psychological, technological, etc. focuses) and henceforth they require a truly multidisciplinary approach, given the subject of the paper and its intrinsic nature, a social-political approach is used here.

3. Political Responses on the Short and Long Term
Societies being political systems, crisis management gives a critical role to leadership (Boin et al., 2005) and consequently to the governance it inspires and sets in place. High-level authority figures, as political leaders, can be usefully examined here in relation to crisis management: they are critical crisis decision makers. The action of political leaders in crisis management can be schematically divided in two segments:

- Swiftly make critical choices during the crisis (short-term perspective)
- Follow and ensure the learning from crises, while encouraging and sustaining the politics of reform (long-term perspective).

For the first level, the prompt decision making capacity of leaders during a crisis or at its immediate aftermath is strategic: the analysis of the behaviour of the Emir of Kuwait during the 2015 terrorist attack is consequently of great interest here. The Emir of Kuwait is in fact considered as the highest authority figure in Kuwait, the highest recognized political leader. The Emir responded to the crisis on June 26, 2015, by personally conducting a visit to the scene upon learning of it, despite the lack of security and without bodyguards to delay him, while demonstrating his willingness to sacrifice his own security just to show the national unity among Kuwaitis through his visit. This was also clear from his first statement “these are my kids”. “Footage on state-run Kuwait Television showed him visibly moved by the scenes of carnage” (Gulf News, 2015, no page). This can be understood as a uniting political response and a strong symbolic message, considering the risks of the immediate situation.

A terrorist attack can be in fact considered as a tectonic change, according the definition given by Léautier
believe that Kuwait is for all…and not excluded for a particular segment. All live in its soil and belong to it.”

breaks down the decision making process of leaders in four stages. For the first one, the key skill is keen observation to understand the situation and find a solution promptly, using the knowledge and experience cumulated over time by the leader. The second stage requires the ability to suspend the judgment to see and sense from the field what is happening with fresh eyes, interpreting with new way of thinking. The third stage is the transformation of the information acquired into the co-creation of a vision and a set of intentions on the required action. The fourth stage involves the organisation of a series of actions, delivering performance and related results through daily practices and the required supporting infrastructures. This “U” process is based on leadership capacity to properly handle the situation and subsequently the consequences of actions and daily practices, adapting to the changes produced during the process, sometimes through experimentation and practice.

This theoretical framework can be applied to the behaviour and action of the Emir of Kuwait from the terrorist attack in June 2015 and since then. Its immediate visit to the mosque where the bombing took place in its immediate aftermath summarizes the first two stages of “Theory U”, according to which the Emir went on the field to understand and sense the situation from the witnesses’ words and the scene of the bombing. According to the third stage, the Emir of Kuwait formed a counterterrorist vision with two complementary dimensions and levels: the role and responsibility of the international community and the need for Kuwait’s national unity. He declared to the Qatar News Agency in July 2015 (less than ten days after the attack): “the international community should use all of its energies to confront and eliminate it (terrorism), dry out (financing) resources so nations and peoples can live in peace and security” (Qatar News Agency 2015, no page). This is a strong acknowledgement of the intrinsic networked and multi-level nature of terrorism, requiring concerted and interconnected actions, if counterterrorism measures want to be effective at the national level. Through this statement, Kuwait makes also public its will to participate to this international fight.

At the national level, the Emir emphasized the need to protect and enhance Kuwait’s national unity. “We believe that Kuwait is for all…and not excluded for a particular segment. All live in its soil and belong to it” (Ibid.: no page). This action pertains at first to him and to the government: this is why a subsequent action followed this statement. In October 2016, the Emir dissolved the country’s parliament, explaining his choice with the following words: “given the circumstances in the region…. and the security challenges” (Al Jazeera, 2016: no page). This action and its explanation highlight the geopolitical concerns related to Syria and other Middle-Eastern critical political situations, but in his statement “security” specifically refers to the terrorist threat. This is certainly only the beginning of the fourth stage of “Theory U” mentioned above, but some results have been already obtained with the three attacks recently foiled, as previously mentioned. This fourth stage includes in fact also law enforcement measures and governance.

4. Law Enforcement Response with Multiple Levels of Governance

Law enforcement and police response to crises in Kuwait are critical dimensions of governance and must be closely examined here. Going back to the terrorist attack that took place in June 2015 as an example, the Kuwaiti police agency has been immediately active and arrested within a few hours, multiple suspects and the perpetrator, including his accomplice who drove him to the mosque.

This highlights the critical role of Kuwaiti police in managing crises. Since 1962, the Ministry of Interior is responsible of Kuwaiti police and involved as being directly coordinating and supervising the overall body and its departments. The office of the minister of interior commands the various police sectors, departments, and administrations through the assistance of the office of the undersecretary of the ministry of interior. Some administrative departments more particularly are very helpful to manage crises. Some examples of their role are mentioned below:

- The General Security Affairs Department maintains security in the national territory to keep evidence and crime records and track suspects; it is also involved in investigations of terrorism;
- The Communication Department supervised information and communication on crises to ensure that events are accurately captured, without spreading fear among citizens, residents, and tourists and reporting on terrorists’ actions and networks;
- The Identification Department tracks suspects and dangerous individuals and networks;
- The Criminal Investigation Department is not only responsible for ordinary criminal cases, but it collaborates also with the General Security Affairs for political security-related offenses that can engender crises;
- In a global and increasingly connected world where most phenomena and crises are international and encompass borders, the Border Department is also important in crises management;
- The Planning Department is important to ensure that policies on crises management are implemented through police action on the ground at various levels and with multiple actions.

To these administrative departments have to be added the three territorial police departments: they are
important to cover the national territory with appropriate security and prevention forces to properly address crises when they happen. Their coordination with the administrative departments is of primary importance.

More recently, at another level of governance, Kuwait has announced that the country will store the DNA of its 3.5 million residents and its visitors (Farivar, 2016). Beyond the criticisms that such a measure can raise, if implemented, this would be a law enforcement database. If one admits that the law is passed and that the country engages to implement this measure, two doubts remain: the technical capacity to manage and constantly update this database (as the number of visitors will certainly increase exponentially over time) and more importantly the public administration capacity to effectively benefit from the database and make it available to other countries, while protecting its interests and the privacy of its citizens and residents.

These two counterterrorist responses allow to underline that law enforcement has multiple dimensions, among which two are particularly important in the war on terror in Kuwait. The local scale is where police delivers ground-level defense to citizens, while the DNA database refers to the national level the homeland security.

This law enforcement response to terrorism with at least two relevant levels in Kuwait means that it relies on multiple levels of governance and that all of them must work properly for crisis management to be effective. Governance refers in fact to the processes, measures, and dynamics of governing a political organisation or institution. In the contemporary context of a global and networked world, governance cannot be limited to the global level, generally referred to by international relations, but must be more accurately considered as a “system of governance: a multi-level, multi-nodal, non-hierarchical, knowledge-based” (Ekengren 2006, p. 94).

Effective law enforcement must go through a multi-level governance system, the same to which the Emir referred in the discourse previously mentioned, starting from the global level of international communities and organisations (especially the United Nations with their central coordination role), to the regional level of Gulf countries and its regional organization, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), to the national level of homeland security, and down to the local ground-level for which resilient police organisation is strategic.

Every law enforcement level of action is not isolated from the others, but interconnected and networked. These levels also share the common need to use the most adapted and updated technologies (especially georeferenced data management and display through geographic information systems), requiring specific knowledge and capacities, making police training even more crucial. Multi-level governance for law enforcement purposes puts cooperation and coordination of stakeholders at the forefront of counterterrorist strategies. They are equivalently strategic for media and governmental agency effectiveness.

5. Media and Government Agency Response

In the era of information and communication technology, media coverage and governmental agency coordination are other key areas for the examination of terrorist crisis management in Kuwait. The manner in which information was developed, distributed and conveyed, from government agencies (the ministry of information, the unit of information in the ministry of interior, the ministry of health’s engagement) and coordinated with the media during and immediately after the June 2015 attack was important in providing real time coverage of the event.

It is consequently essential to provide insights into governmental agency coordination, information management, and media conveyance, which is indispensable in distressing events such as this and in managing the terrorist threat. It must be in fact underlined that there is a strong and proved link between terrorism and media. Terrorists use and take advantage of the power and outreach capacity of both social and mass media. “The way terrorist organizations exploit the 24/7 media cycle to spread fear and insecurity feeds the fundamentlist’s raison d’être. […] The media is not only a passive channel to share information, but a key player that shapes people’s perception of reality, […] The amount, focus, and tone of news coverage of terrorism can help stir the kind of public outrage that influences governments’ responses to attacks” (Rivera, 2016: no page). While agreeing with the author, this paper adds that the example of Kuwait in June 2015 shows that information has to be handled in coordination between government agencies, leadership, and media, since this cooperation allows to transmit and inform also on the state strategy and leadership vision to manage the crisis, to avoid the sensationalistic and terrifying effect of news about terrorist attacks.

Rivera also interestingly underlines that, despite the power of social media and digital platforms, enhancing nowadays media competition, television remains the most strategic information channel, as the general public’s main source of information. Furthermore, a study conducted on media attention to terrorist attacks worldwide, using them as critical contemporary examples of crisis, between 1998 and 2012 highlights that suicide bombings receive more media coverage, independently from the number of casualties that they engender. The media attention that suicide bombings get could also eventually explain their actual recent popularity among terrorist groups (Jetter, 2014). For this reason, this research supports the thesis that the attention given to the information that is communicated by media and to the modalities of this transmission is of peculiar importance and has effects not only on the social understanding and reaction to terrorist attacks, but it also influences the behaviour
and choices made by terrorists.

The role of media is also nowadays shaped by an increased demand from citizens, which is related to the changing role of government and leadership. As schematically portrayed in Figure 1, an effective terrorist crisis management in Kuwait can only be achieved through a coordination of political powers with media, responding to social expectations and productive conducive social responses to terrorism.

**Figure 1 – Effective terrorist crisis management in Kuwait**

“Government openness and transparency, constant scrutiny by the media and widespread dissemination of information on-line and through social media put governments and their decision-makers under constant pressure. This pressure is all the more acute when a crisis occurs: citizen’s expectations are at the highest due to the emotional nature of a crisis. They demand more transparency, responsibility and high standards of ethics from their governments, which need to react almost instantly or risk a political backlash amid criticism of unresponsiveness” (Baubion, 2013: pp. 7-8).

As previously emphasized using “Theory U”, the role of leaders, such as the Emir, in communicating a crisis with media and the social body is critical. Media coverage is critical and it especially has positive impacts on the citizens’ confidence in leadership and in the government, and in their capacity and determination to ensure safety and security, through political efficacy (Christensen et al., 2014). In fact, no social group or sector of society is immune to crisis. It is consequently necessary that crisis management policies, strategies, and practices take into account critical social stakeholders. Social groups must be protected from the adverse consequences of crisis, but they also actively react to crisis and leaders must consider them as responders and opponents to crisis and to possible future crisis. Their participation and commitment is henceforth fundamental. At a further stage, leaders also communicate to media the vision shaped by the analysis of the situation and the way they implement it through daily actions: again the role of media and of the overall society is crucial to this extent to achieve results.

Effective political governance for crisis management cannot nevertheless be limited to leaders. It also includes governments, their transformation, and their consequent changing role in crisis management. Government accountability to its citizens is central in crisis management: it is both a political and a bureaucratic process, entailed into the democratic process, the empowerment of minorities and vulnerable social groups, and the spread of education. Given general global trends on multi-stakeholder infrastructure development and augmented decentralisation of service provision, governments have to deal with a growing variety of stakeholders, with their different values, logics, priorities, and interests. These stakeholders also include civil society organizations and non-governmental organisations, in which social groups increasingly organize themselves in multi-level civil society actors and that could become increasingly relevant over time in Kuwait.

The government has to work in coordination and cooperation with these stakeholders to manage crises on the short term and to prepare and leverage actions to effectively oppose terrorism on the long term. This coordination is far from being easy on a daily basis in general and even less in times of crisis: it raises the “wicked problems” (Christensen et al., 2014: p. 2) of conciliating specialization and coordination. It is in fact challenging to ensure better and greater specialization of government agencies, while improving their vertical and horizontal coordination. This is another angle through which this paper underlines the critical role of effective multi-level political governance. For instance, terrorist attacks, as other major crises, often take place in
urban areas, in which local and national governance are intertwined, especially in capital cities and metropolises. Urban planning and management is then part of the measures to effectively manage terrorist crises.

6. Relevant Positive Governance Lessons from Terrorist Crisis Management in Kuwait

After the analysis of the different dimensions of contemporary terrorist crisis management in Kuwait, it is thus possible to highlight what can be learned from this case for positive elements of current governance and public administration in Kuwait.

The analysis presented in this paper underlines the important and positive role of leadership during a crisis like a terrorist attack. The Emir with his presence, behaviour, and his media interviews has ensured a fundamental action in the way information has been shared with the Kuwaiti society and the global world. The Cabinet has been also directly involved, especially the Ministry of Interior (with its Security Media Department) and the Ministry of Information.

In 2015 and later also in 2016, media have been important to document Kuwait’s actions, attempts, and intentions to effectively fight against terrorism and protect citizens, residents and tourists. Even sometimes alimenting disputes (such as in the case of the proposed DNA database), media have done their work relying actions, success, and telling to the Kuwaiti society that there is a constant ongoing action to combat terrorism in the country. Media have also duly reported that Kuwait Police has enhanced security measures, including places of worship such as churches and mosques.

The analysis offered by this paper indicates that, for the specific dimensions taken into account here, the immediate response of Kuwait to terrorist crises is quite effective: individual crises and their immediate aftermath are promptly and efficiently managed. This offers lessons that can be emulated in crisis response governance structures in other Arab countries (especially in the Gulf region but also more widely in the entire Middle-East and North-African region) that could benefit from Kuwait’s approach. This paper points three main and fundamental lessons that can be learned from Kuwait.

First of all, as emphasized by the Emir’s discourses, social unity is critical to effectively manage dramatic crises. Social division and the eventual discontent of minorities or of social groups feeling discriminated for any reason (religious, ethnic, etc.) can aliment terrorism and (directly or indirectly) support it.

Secondly, severe crises such as suicide bombings, killings and other mass injuries and dangers, have to be placed at the core of the national political agenda, as a top priority, despite the existence and recognition of other important issues that make the political agenda of contemporary states too crowded by number of pressing issues. It is for example important to acknowledge precedence to react to crises in state budget: this should be a key priority in the political agenda to avoid that a crisis happening could be a “strategic surprise” (Parker and Stern 2008, p. 157).

Thirdly, coordinated and multi-level governance between the different relevant scales of governance (the local/urban, national, regional, and global) is a necessary condition to effectively prevent and manage crises. This type of governance also applies to police, as the coordination of police forces at various levels has sensibly increased the level of security in Kuwait. Recognizing that security must be ensured at every level, the Ministry of Interior has been adding new police units, like the community police unit, created in 2008, and the environmental police following the environmental law No. 42 of 2014. Police training on crises management, including scenario-based learning is to this extent critical to enhance multi-level governance through police. Kuwaiti police has to be capable of detecting early signs of disasters, crises or risks; this capacity to size and understand the danger must be acquired through training.

7. Relevant Governance Lessons for Improvement

Despite the positive and encouraging governance scenario in relation to short-term crisis management in Kuwait, it is worth to identify some gaps in coordination, information, and action in responding to the terrorist attack, with possible important implications.

The first domain in which there appears to be room for improvement is long-term crisis management. Kuwait’s leadership, public administration, and government have proved to be able to effectively react to a crisis, as they have shown in June 2016 and in the following months. When one turns to long-term planning and crisis management policy-making, it nevertheless appears that the effectiveness of public administration for governance and early warning may be improved. Henceforth, public-sector training to effectively prevent and react to crises would be welcome, as in other Gulf countries (Realuyo, 2015).

National media need to be supported to enhance their efficiency to disseminate changes and progress and to support early warning strategies. In fact, as a simple proof of this statement, from a general Internet search on media reporting about the 2015 bombing attack, one can easily notice the large number of websites of Western media (New York Times, The Guardian, CNN, BBC, etc.) and the near absence of Kuwaiti sources relating the fact in English for an international audience. This means that Kuwaiti sources and perspectives are too limited on the Internet. This is a domain in which important advances could be made in crisis response and management.
The existence of renowned and recognized high-quality Kuwaiti media sources would have been an important asset to communicate Kuwaiti views on the attacks and to report and make known the measures subsequently taken to fight terrorism in the country. It is in fact still acknowledged by the literature that traditional ways of information (like television and newspapers) remain critical for effective crisis management and for this reason some scholars suggest that a dedicated social media response team could be useful to share information about crises (Baubion, 2013). In the specific case of Kuwait, it appears that more than a media team to respond in the immediate aftermath of a terrorist crisis, it would be more useful to have one dedicated to the long-term terrorist crisis management and to communicate what the government and the Emir are doing and to justify the choices.

8. Conclusions, Recommendations, and Future Research

This paper provides an overview of the current state of governance and public administration in Kuwait, as well as their role in crisis management and response, especially in the context of terrorist attacks. It identifies important positive elements of governance and any opportunity for learning for other states or institutions. It also points out any noteworthy faults in response, explaining how they might be addressed. The major recommendations coming out from this paper are:

A. To focus national efforts on long-term capacity building of public administration, starting with the Ministry of Interior and police training, for terrorist crisis management at every level of governance, but more particularly at the local and national level.

B. To build new curricula, including more updated and adapted knowledge for police education for crises management in Kuwait.

To conclude, it is time to outline areas for future research of interest for specific situations of crisis in Kuwait, to better understand the role of governance in managing them. Three domains appear of critical importance in Kuwait and beyond in any country confronted to a terrorist threat:

a) Multi-level homeland security and defence against terrorism.

b) State behaviour and its transformation in relation to counter-terrorism threats.

c) Innovative education and professional training of public administration, especially police.

Multi-level governance capacity to manage terrorist crisis is thenceforth a critical necessity for Kuwait and the central point for the way forward. There is in fact also a mutual relation between this governance and democratic legitimacy and accountability (Christensen 2014, pp. 20-21): they reinforce each other. The new security measures presented above importantly contribute to enhance this multi-level governance for crisis management: the very close control ensured by the General Security Affairs Department on the entire national territory and on its various spaces (especially in cities) is a central point. By enhancing its governance through security, Kuwait will also become a more democratic country.

References


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