

The story of the Islands and Silk Road project

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The new formation of the Supreme Council for Planning was in 2013, which included in its membership with us the late Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Abu Abdullah suggested to the Public Policies Committee, and he was one of its members, that a sub-committee be established concerned with examining the methods and ideas that could help achieve the vision of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at that time, which was to restore Kuwait to what it was, As a leading financial and commercial regional center. Therefore, the Public Policy Committee made the decision to form a team to activate the Emir's vision, and Sheikh Nasser called on me to join this team.

The first meetings reviewed various ideas that constitute a suitable path for the vision, and the dialogue often ran into bureaucratic and legal obstacles that stood in the way of working to build a new Kuwait, a prosperous Kuwait without oil, as the current framework of public order, a culture of Society and the applicable development methodology were all based on the principle of an economy that is permanently financed by oil revenues and revenues from investment of the reserve, and it did not occur to many that these two sources of income (oil - reserve investment) could run out or their revenues could decrease one day, and they will not Accordingly, be capable of generating sufficient income.

Therefore, any new development model that addresses the principle of "development without any major support from oil revenues" had to work from outside the country's current system fund.

Herein, the idea of choosing a remote, uninhabited area with a important strategic location emerged that a development model can be established on it that is not affected by the existing model, and does not affect it until it proves its success, provided that this remote region has enough capabilities and ingredients that allow it, if it chooses, to came with a sound strategic vision and effective business management that attracts the capital needed to build its renaissance and prosperity without any major support from public finances. Here, the late Sheikh Abu Abdullah suggested the northern region and the islands, inspired by his initiative in the mid-nineties, which carried the name of the Continental Connection Project.

This project is similar to the role played by Hong Kong in crystallizing the economic model of the new China, or the role played by the free zone in Jebel Ali in formulating the economic development model in the Emirate of Dubai and building its economy and influencing the formulation of the general development model for the United Arab Emirates. Unconsciously, Hong Kong and Jebel Ali performed the task of taking the lead, exploring the route, proving the success of the maneuver ahead of the rest of the country, and building enough confidence in society and politicians to follow this new route.

[For this reason, the Islands Project was required to strive to achieve the following vision:](#)

to build the economy a prosperous free administrative zone, funded mainly by its own efforts and capital markets and investors, and allow the achievement of the following pillars:

First - that the project presents a model that can be utilized to guide the future of the Kuwaiti economy with the least amount of risks and the greatest possible clarity to reach the Kuwait of the future, a prosperous Kuwait without oil.

Second - To become a major contributor to the Kuwaiti economy, adding no less than 30% to the size of the Kuwaiti economy with job opportunities for youth and expanding the operating businesses of companies in Kuwait.

Third - To contribute to Kuwait's security and stability, through what it constitutes of importance and benefit to all of Kuwait's neighbors as vital source of services to them, which they cannot do without, and in turn, that contributes to the stability and security of Kuwait.

Fourth - To be an important source of revenue for the public finances of the State of Kuwait.

In order to achieve these goals together, the project must evolve; To be the first logistical, administrative and financial center in the northern Gulf region, which links it with service centers in the southern Gulf and the world, utilizing the largest and most-advanced port in the region (Mina Mubarak), a storage area, logistical services and areas for storing gas and oil derivatives and trading them along with support and maintenance services for the oil industry in the Northern Gulf Region with hope that this project will develop to become a center for companies working in the Gulf transit trade looking for a clear, stable and consistent legal and legislative environment that is consistent with international concepts, and a professional business environment.

After the idea formed, it became necessary to examine the project's vision and outlines for its strategy and its ability to achieve its goals. For this purpose, international consultants Wyman Oliver, who own a consulting company in Kuwait in which the General Investment Authority contributes, were used, we commissioned. Indeed, the study was conducted and confirmed the project's ability to achieve its goals, and highlighted the importance of administrative and legislative independence. HSS Engineering was also hired to clarify the structural scheme of the project and its connection with the general organizational structure.

It was necessary then to test that the project and its principles was not conflicting with the constitution. Here, a team of constitutional experts was consulted, including Dr. Adel Al-Tabtabai, Dr. Ahmed Al-Hamdan, and Dr. Rashid Al-Anzi.

After the completion of all of that, the final presentation of the project, its objectives and a summary of the study were prepared, and the Supreme Council for Planning for was briefed on the study of the project for approval. The Supreme Council for Planning reviewed the project and its objectives in its first upcoming session, headed by His Highness the Prime Minister, who approved it, and recommended that the Council of Ministers immediately approve and ratify it.

Then the project was presented to His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to personally obtain his support and blessing at that time, in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister and members of The Supreme Council for Planning. His Highness the Amir, in turn, promised to support the project and promised to fully support it.

Shortly thereafter, the Committee found out that there is another project under study for more than three years called Silk City, which includes part of the Sabia Area project looking into the management and operation of the port of Mubarak on Boubyan Island, and accordingly it was necessary to arrange a group of coordination meetings to discuss the possibility of untangling or merging the two projects.

Work on the project was suspended for about a year due to the difficulties of reaching a solution to this dilemma until the ministerial reshuffle, in which Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad "Bu Abdullah" entered the cabinet with the portfolio of the Minister of Defense, the First Deputy Prime Minister, and the Chairman of the Supreme Council for Planning and was entrusted with managing the project. He was authorized to merger the two projects under the umbrella and objectives of the islands project with the temporary name of (the islands and silk project) At that time.

The new formation of the board of trustees for the combined project was established, and I, Fouad Abdel Aziz Al-Bahr, was one of its members. The mission of the Board of Trustees. According to the decree, was to review the project as well as its goals and strategies and submit a vision of the law relating to the region to present it to the Council of Ministers, thus ending the task of the board of trustees, and a new board of trustees would be formed for the project with cadres rich with international expertise after the issuance of the decree and laws related to it.

During the first meetings of the Board of Trustees, and in order to speed up the progress of the Board and complete the task on the main lines of the project as soon as possible, the Board approved the formation of three committees to work continuously in line with the main objectives of the project as follows:

- **The Legal Committee**: which chose me - Adnan Abdel Aziz Al-Bahr - As its Chairman, and was entrusted with the responsibility of drafting the law on the project that will be presented to the Council of Ministers, and then to the National Assembly for approval.
- **The Structure Plan Committee**: chaired by Mr. Imran Hayat, and was tasked to develop structural planning for the project area, coordinate with the state master plan, and determine the infrastructure needed of the project.
- **The Media Committee**: chaired by Ms. Sarah Akbar and its responsibility was to market the project and present it to the public.

As a team entrusted with the task of the Northern Economic Zone Law, we were able to complete the initial draft law in cooperation with the international company **Shearman & Sterling**, and it was submitted to His Excellency the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. At this stage, the Board of Trustees were dismissed. Afterwards, a decree was issued by the Council of Ministers

to entrust the Public Policies and media Committee of the Supreme Council for Planning to carry out the tasks of the Board of Trustees of the Northern Economic Region, and the members of the legal team of young volunteers continued. Dr. Fahad Al-Rashed, Chairman of the Public Policies Committee, and member of the General Policies Committee Ms. Sarah Akbar and the legal team that was later formed, finalized the task of completing the procedures with the Fatwa and Legislation Committee and the Council of Ministers.

The law was referred to the National Assembly and all its articles were discussed in several sessions, which included a technical, legal and constitutional team from the Northern Economic Region and the constitutional, legal and technical team from the Finance Committee of the National Assembly entrusted with preparing the technical report related to the law, hoping that it would include the law is on the agenda of an upcoming session of the Assembly. Despite the sudden departure of Sheikh Nasser from the Cabinet, and the setback suffered by his health, he continued with a strong determination to follow up on the project with senior officials and the Public Policies Committee of the Supreme Council for Planning by virtue of his position as deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council of Planning, as the project needs a political and economic leader who believes in it and is able to champion it and advance it.
