

Kuwait prepares security plan as region 'boils'

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Iran's Gulf neighbour Kuwait said on Tuesday it was drawing up a comprehensive security plan as regional tensions escalate, in an apparent reference to a standoff between Tehran and the West over its nuclear plans.

"The situation in the region is boiling, which requires setting plans to protect the homeland against any danger," the official Kuwait News Agency quoted Interior Minister Sheikh Jaber Khaled al-Sabah as saying.

The United States accuses Iran of trying to develop a nuclear weapon under the guise of a civilian atomic programme.

The Islamic Republic says it will use its atomic programme to generate electricity. The standoff has provoked concerns that the volatile Gulf region is headed for another war.

Gulf Arab defence ministers met in Saudi Arabia last week to discuss joint defence against "emerging regional powers", which diplomats said was an apparent reference to Iran.

"Kuwait is in the heart of these situations. Violating the sanctity of Kuwaiti territory will not be allowed," said Sheikh Jaber, whose country is a close ally of the United States.

Sheikh Jaber, a former army officer, did not elaborate on the form of danger the plan was designed to avert but said it would be coordinated with the army and that it involves land, sea and air elements.

He urged Kuwaitis to keep in mind the lessons learned from the 1990-1991 Iraqi invasion and occupation of the small oil-exporting nation. "History serves as a base for security."

Kuwait, home to a large Shi'ite minority, also witnessed internal tensions during the 1980-88 war between regional Shi'ite power Iran and Iraq, then backed by Sunni Muslim Gulf Arab states.