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First Kuwaiti terror suspect released from Guantanamo faces court, denies joining "foreign" military forces

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KUWAIT CITY (AP) - Kuwait's first detainee to be freed from Guantanamo Bay faced court Wednesday and denied joining a foreign country's military forces and being trained to use weapons for illegitimate purposes.

Nasser al-Mutairi, 27, was among hundreds of men captured in Afghanistan during the U.S.-led war on terror after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

He was released from the U.S. naval detention facility in Cuba in mid January and returned to Kuwait, where he has remained in custody, been questioned by prosecutors and referred to court.

Al-Mutairi's trial opened Wednesday and he is facing vague charges of harming Kuwait by working for the interests of a foreign country and those serving it; not obtaining permission to join foreign military forces opposed to another country; and undergoing illegal weapons training.

The counts did not mention terrorism or specify which foreign country he allegedly fought for. But they apparently referred to Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network, which was harbored by that country's former Taliban rulers.

Kuwait has been a major U.S. ally since the American-led 1991 Gulf War that liberated this small oil-rich state from a seven-month Iraqi occupation.

Al-Mutairi pleaded not guilty to all charges, said defense lawyer Mubarak al-Shimmiri, who claimed his client was sold to American forces by local Afghans.

"He went to Afghanistan for charity (to help) ... the displaced at the widows" of that country's civil war when he was 20, said al-Shimmiri.

"There is no evidence against him except for the statements by state security officers," he added.

The case was adjourned until April 13, when the judge is expected to interrogate him.

Eleven other Kuwaiti terror suspects are still detained at Guantanamo with some 500 others from more than 40 countries. Their families insist they were not there to fight but to offer humanitarian assistance to fellow Muslims in Afghanistan and along that country's border with Pakistan.

Although Kuwait depends on American forces for protection, some of its militant Muslim fundamentalists who oppose the super power's military presence here have attacked Americans several times since 2002, killing one U.S. Marine and a civilian contracted to the military.