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**Southern Mediterranean Countries' Approach to the
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**Southern Mediterranean Countries' Approach to the
Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Testing the EU's
Mediterranean Policy*****Chunghung Cho******Abstract**

This paper revolves around how Southern Mediterranean Countries (SMCs)—Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt—are managing their foreign policies in light of the Ukraine conflict. It also encompasses EU's approach and strategic considerations in the Southern Mediterranean region. As a special focus on the European southern neighborhood, EU maintains specific foreign policy goals with various countries within the region. Building on the points discussed above, this article sets out to accomplish the following objectives: the initial section aims to define and clarify the concept of hedging and bandwagoning strategy; the second part explores into the practical application of hedging as a framework for analyzing the policy positions taken by SMCs in the context of the Ukraine conflict, despite the relatively limited attention it receives; the third part explores how the EU engages in the Mediterranean

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region and also examines the multifaceted policies that the EU employs in its interactions with SMCs; lastly, the conclusion assesses the effectiveness of the hedging strategy adopted by SMCs and evaluates the resources and strengths available at the EU levels to bolster this strategy.

Keywords: Hedging, Bandwagoning, Southern Mediterranean Countries, EU's Mediterranean Policy, Russia-Ukraine War

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I. Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine conflict represents a turning point in the global political order, with its outcomes and impact on international politics still uncertain. However, the effects on neighboring regions are already significant. The Southern Mediterranean countries (SMCs)—Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt—are in a unique position, having long navigated between the Western powers of the U.S. and Europe and Russia, maintaining close cooperation with both. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has increased pressure from these major powers, demanding that Mediterranean countries more clearly define their stance in the regional and international system.

Understanding the foreign policy orientations of SMCs, particularly within regions experiencing great power competition, is crucial. Although often overshadowed by the actions of major powers, these SMCs collectively wield significant influence, and their strategic choices can substantially impact regional stability, economic flows, and the broader geopolitical landscape.

Taking North Africa and the Middle East as an example: this region is rich in vital natural resources. North Africa and the Middle East are key suppliers of global oil and natural gas, granting significant strategic importance to SMCs that control or

serve as transit hubs for these resources. Their foreign policies, especially concerning resource management and trade relations, directly influence global economic stability and the interests of larger nations.

Furthermore, North Africa and the Middle East are situated at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, serving as critical strategic corridors exemplified by the Suez Canal and vital straits. The region's interests are closely intertwined with powerful external actors, including the United States, Russia, major European nations, and the rising influence of China. SMCs are often located at the nexus of these great power influences, and their foreign policy decisions regarding alliances, security partnerships, and regional conflicts can significantly shape regional security dynamics and the potential for conflict or cooperation.

Beyond resources and geopolitics, North Africa and the Middle East are important centers for trade and investment, connecting Eastern and Western economies. Regional constructs, such as the Arab League, reinforce regional economic integration. Therefore, studying the foreign policies of strategically important SMCs – given their control over key resources, pivotal geopolitical locations, and growing geoeconomic influence – allows for a more comprehensive understanding of regional dynamics and the challenges and opportunities presented by a multipolar world.

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During the Russia-Ukraine war, the responses of SMCs can be understood through the concepts of “hedging” and “bandwagoning.” Hedging refers to actions taken by these countries to minimize the potential risks posed by the war. This might include maintaining neutrality, intensifying diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the conflict, or strengthening domestic security. Bandwagoning, on the other hand, suggests that these countries may choose to support or oppose one side based on the international situation in order to protect their own interests.¹

As neighbors on the southern border of the European Union, the EU has established a special relationship with some SMCs. These bilateral relations are not just about maintaining good neighborly relations but are also characterized by mutual interdependence. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has brought profound changes to this region, making the situation increasingly complex and fragile. Additionally, new actors and challenges are emerging, such as migration, security threats, and the evolution of stable democracies, all of which deeply affect the Mediterranean region and the EU. Regardless, the situation in Ukraine serves as a reminder to the EU of the urgent need to pay attention to potential conflicts on Europe's borders and to seek diplomatic solutions while there is still time. From this perspective, Europe

¹ Máté Szalai. “Between Hedging and Bandwagoning - Interpreting the Reactions of Middle Eastern and North African States to the Russian-Ukrainian,” *IEMed Policy Brief*, no. 123 (2023): 1-2.

can no longer afford to ignore the threat of conflict among its southern neighbors.

The topic revolves around how SMCs are managing their foreign policies in light of the Ukraine conflict. It also encompasses EU's approach and strategic considerations in the Southern Mediterranean region. As a special focus on the European southern neighborhood, EU maintains specific foreign policy goals with various countries within the region. Building on the points discussed above, this article sets out to accomplish the following objectives: the initial section aims to define and clarify the concept of hedging and bandwagoning strategy; the second part explores into the practical application of hedging as a framework for analyzing the policy positions taken by SMCs in the context of the Ukraine conflict, despite the relatively limited attention it receives; the third part explores how the EU engages in the Mediterranean region and also examines the multifaceted policies that the EU employs in its interactions with SMCs; lastly, the conclusion assesses the effectiveness of the hedging strategy adopted by SMCs and evaluates the resources and strengths available at the EU levels to bolster this strategy.

II. Security approach

Classical theories posit that nations employ a range of strategies to pursue and safeguard their national interests and

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achieve foreign policy objectives. These strategies can encompass conflicting approaches, cooperative efforts, and the use of both hard and soft balancing. Still, some countries opt for a neutral stance, while others align themselves with major powers, a phenomenon often referred to as bandwagoning. This alignment may include seeking alliances or dependencies.²

While the dichotomy of balancing and bandwagoning may oversimplify matters, in recent discussions about regional assertiveness, it has become hard to avoid employing the term “hedging” when evaluating contemporary security issues. the term “hedging” is widely employed to delineate the various patterns of interaction among regional states.³

Hedging encompasses a two-pronged approach involving both balancing and bandwagoning strategies. It has a dual purpose: engaging with a target country and simultaneously balancing against potential threats. The engagement aspect primarily focuses on economic interactions, with the aim of improving bilateral relations, gaining economic benefits, and even working to positively influence the political system and values of the target country through regular interactions. This approach ultimately

² Mohammad Salman, Moritz Pieper and Gustaaf Geeraerts. “Hedging in the Middle East and China-U.S. Competition.” *Asian Politics & Policy* 7, Issue 4 (2015): 578; İsmail Numan Telci and Mehmet Rakipoğlu, Hedging as a Survival Strategy for Small States: The Case of Kuwait, *All Azimuth* 10, no. 2 (2021): 215.

³ Szalai, “Between Hedging and Bandwagoning.”

aims to reduce the perceived threat. On the other hand, the balancing aspect is predominantly related to security concerns. It involves a comprehensive strategy that encompasses both internal measures to strengthen national capabilities and external actions like forming alliances to ensure security guarantees.⁴

Kuik's shares a similar view as well. Hedging is a comprehensive policy approach that incorporates elements of both bandwagoning and balancing. Its primary objective is to foster increased political and economic collaboration among nations, with the aim of influencing the preferences and actions of leaders towards a more peaceful direction. Furthermore, hedging can be executed along with soft balancing, wherein a country simultaneously pursues two sets of policies that counterbalance each other, aiming at maximizing returns and contingently managing risks.⁵

This concept of hedging encompasses diplomatic, security, and economic elements. It refers to the actions taken by countries

⁴ Y.-S. Wu. "The choices of small and medium-sized countries between two superpowers: A theoretical perspective," in Y.-S. Wu & S.-Y. Yang, eds., *Benefiting from both sides or stuck in a dilemma? The choices of small and medium-sized countries between two powers*. Keygo Innovative International (2019): 6.

⁵ Cheng- Chwee Kuik. "Getting hedging right: a small- state perspective," *China International Strategy Review* 3, (November 2021): 300-315, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-021-00089-5>; Cheng-Chwee Kuik & Chen-Dong Tso. "Hedging in Non-Traditional Security: The Case of Vietnam's Disaster Response Cooperation." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 15, Issue 4 (Winter 2022): 422–442. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poac017>.

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to mitigate risks in uncertain situations by pursuing multiple policy options that are intended to counterbalance each other. When a country perceives a rising power as an imminent security threat, it seeks to achieve strategic balance against this rising power. This means that despite potential political or security concerns between the two countries, the state still attempts to maximize benefits from the rising power by establishing direct trade and investment links.⁶

The concept of hedging strategy lies at the intersection of conflict and cooperation mechanisms, as well as between traditional balancing and bandwagoning tactics. This strategy allows a nation to adopt a defensive posture by forming alliances with potentially threatening countries or an offensive stance by aligning with nations that compete with those potential threats. Consequently, hedging strategy stands out as a pivotal preventive measure employed by countries to safeguard their interests and national security against looming potential threats.⁷ In this regard, the hedging strategy represents the third option among the

⁶ Lluç López i Vidal and Àngels Pelegrín Solé. "Hedging Against China: Japanese Strategy towards a Rising Power," *Asian Security* 14, no. 2 (2018): 197-198.

⁷ Ali Hussien Hameed and Hamza Raheem AL. Mufarge, "Contemporary Global Security Strategies and the Manifestations of Major Powers: Hedging Strategy as A Model," *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6, no. 9 (2022): 4341-4342.

spectrum of national security strategies embraced by both second-tier states and great powers.⁸

This kind of hedging strategy is not a novel concept in the realm of foreign policy. Throughout history, numerous instances have demonstrated that countries of varying sizes have employed this strategy to advance their own policies and safeguard their national security.

In situations where there is uncertainty regarding the future actions, intentions, or foreign policy stance of a powerful actor, second-tier states choose to adopt a strategic approach to mitigate potential risks stemming from the powerful actor's foreign policies. In practice, this involves pursuing policies that align with their own national interests, encompassing economic, regional, security, political, domestic, or other considerations, all while avoiding open confrontation with the regional power. This strategy of hedging enables states to refrain from provoking or directly challenging the dominant country while still allowing them to pursue policies that may not align with the dominant country's preferences or interests.⁹

⁸ Numan Telci and Rakipoğlu, "Hedging as a Survival Strategy for Small States," 216.

⁹ Salman, Pieper and Geeraerts, "Hedging in the Middle East and China-U.S. Competition," 577; Sofie Hamdi and Mohammad Salman, "The Hedging Strategy of Small Arab Gulf States." *Asian Politics & Policy* 12, no. 4 (May 2020): 130, <http://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12528>.

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It is particularly appealing to nations confronting uncertainty resulting from structural shifts from unipolarity to a more de-concentration of power in the international system. In this context, hedging emerges as an attractive alternative to other strategies like balancing or bandwagoning, especially for nations with limited capabilities.¹⁰

III. The stance of SMCs in the Russia-Ukraine conflict

The ongoing crisis has given rise to a global divide reminiscent of the Cold War era, effectively ensnaring smaller and less affluent countries in a geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the United States/Europe. As the Ukraine crisis progresses into its third year, certain trends have become more discernible compared to two year ago, including the emergence of diplomatic alliances among SMCs.¹¹

In essence, the responses of SMCs during the Russia-Ukraine war are likely to vary. Within this context, various SMCs have adopted different approaches: Some SMCs have opted for a hedging strategy, driven by their desire to avoid potential regional conflicts. They choose to remain neutral in an

¹⁰ Hamdi and Salman, "The Hedging Strategy of Small Arab Gulf States."

¹¹ Youssef Cherif. "Ukraine and the Changing Face of the Southern Mediterranean – European Relations." *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2023*, <https://www.iemed.org/publication/ukraine-and-the-changing-face-of-the-southern-mediterranean-european-relations/>

effort to safeguard their economic, political, and security interests. Certain countries may take on the role of mediators on the international stage, working to de-escalate tensions in the conflict; conversely, there are those SMCs that opt for bandwagoning, aligning themselves with either Russia, Ukraine, or other relevant states based on their preexisting relationships. This alignment could serve to enhance their international standing or advance their individual interests, which might encompass providing political support, economic aid, or engaging in military cooperation.¹²

Two specific votes have been chosen as illustrations, UN General Assembly resolutions ES-11/1 and ES-11/2, concerning to the condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The voting patterns of SMCs on the Ukraine crisis during the UN General Assembly session highlighted a notable division. Resolution ES-11/1 passed in early March 2022, which called on Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine and cancel its recognition of two separatist entities in Ukraine. Similarly, Resolution ES-11/2 adopted during the same month, reiterating the call for Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine and emphasizing the demand for Russia to take action. Algeria consistently advocated for peace rather than aligning against Russia and often abstained from or voted against related motions. Morocco showed reluctance and was generally hesitant to participate in the discussions and did not

¹² Szalai, "Between Hedging and Bandwagoning."

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even attend the session. Egypt, with occasional support from Tunisia and Libya to a lesser extent, occasionally abstained from voting. However, in most cases, these countries did not lend unconditional support to Ukraine or the European Union's proposals.¹³ The nuanced positions of these SMCs in their voting reflected their complex geopolitical considerations and varying stances on the Ukraine crisis. Regarding the condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the findings reveal a range of strategies adopted by different SMCs (see table 1).¹⁴

A. Russia-leaning strategy/ bandwagoning

Egypt can be seen as pursuing Russia-leaning strategy. It refrained from supporting either side in the conflict and did not alter its relationship with Russia. Since 2013, General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi staged a coup and assumed power, leading Egypt to re-engage with Russian. In response to mounting Western criticism of his human rights record, Sisi has reverted to an old tactic of turning towards the East. Consequently, there has been reciprocal visits and the signing of numerous contracts and agreements. In 2015, Egypt and Russia jointly revealed an ambitious project for the construction of a nuclear power plant,

¹³ Cherif, "Ukraine and the Changing Face of the Southern Mediterranean."

¹⁴ Szalai. "Between Hedging and Bandwagoning."; Youssef Cherif. "Ukraine and the Changing Face of the Southern Mediterranean."

which officially commenced in July 2022, marking a significant step in solidifying the Russo-Egyptian alliance.¹⁵ A leak from U.S. intelligence officials revealed Egypt's intentions to supply rockets to Russia, sparking strong warnings from both the USA and the EU and forcing Egypt to reconsider.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the fact that Egypt contemplated supplying arms to Russia during such a tense period underscores the depth of the relationship between the two nations.

Algeria has demonstrated varying levels of support for Moscow. It abstained from voting positively in any of the UN votes and did not provide assistance to Ukraine. Furthermore, Algeria put itself in a strategically imperative position to maintain strong ties with Russia amidst escalating tensions with Morocco. In June 2022, Algeria formalized this commitment by signing a joint declaration with Russia, designating the two nations as strategic partners rather than mere allies. On the other hands, Algeria's substantial contribution to Europe's oil and gas supplies has the potential to not only compensate for any losses resulting from its pro-Russia stance but also to benefit from the

¹⁵ Khalil Al-Anani. "The Fallout of Sisi's Gambit with Russia." Arab Center Washington DC, April 11, 2023.

<https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-fallout-of-sisis-gambit-with-russia/>.

¹⁶ Evan Hill et. al. "Egypt secretly planned to supply rockets to Russia, leaked U.S. document says," *Washington Post*, April 10, (2023).

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/04/10/egypt-weapons-russia/>.

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considerable advantages that may arise due to European sanctions against Russia.¹⁷

B. Hedging

Countries like Tunisia, and potentially Morocco, have embraced a hedging strategy, sending ambiguous signals to major powers without a clear stance. Although they have publicly criticized of the Russian attack and the annexation of Ukrainian territories, they also maintain open policies towards Russian tourists and continue to import Russian oil. By voting in favor of the UN resolution condemning the Russian use of force in Ukraine Tunisia began by joining the Western camp.¹⁸ It's worth noting that Morocco initially adhered to a stance of hedging but subsequently extended military aid to Ukraine, becoming the first African nation to do so.¹⁹

¹⁷ Samuel Herize et al., Relevant strategic facts about the northwestern Mediterranean countries, November, 2022.

<https://en.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/observatorio-del-magreb-nov.-2022>

¹⁸ Akram Belkaid. "Maghreb-Ukraine (2). Tunisia with its Hands Tied, Public Opinion Favourable to Russia," *Orientxxi*, May 24, 2022.

<https://orientxxi.info/magazine/maghreb-ukraine-2-tunisia-with-its-hands-tied-public-opinion-favourable-to,5635>

¹⁹ Basma El Atti. "Morocco remains silent amid alleged reports of weapons sent to Ukraine," *The New Arab*, January 30, 2023, <https://www.newarab.com/news/morocco-remains-silent-amid-reports-weapons-ukraine>

C. Western-leaning strategy

Libya's strategic alignment leans closer to Western positions. It has consistently voiced its condemnation of Russia in all UN General Assembly votes and has undertaken various actions in support of Ukraine or against Russia. For the Libyan leadership, aligning with the EU enables them to address the separatist eastern government and its Russian Wagner forces more effectively.²⁰

Table 1: Strategies adopted by different SMCs regarding the Russo-Ukraine war

²⁰ Giorgio Cafiero and Emily Milliken. "Russians unlikely to leave Libya, despite Ukraine war," Aljazeera, April 15, 2022.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/15/russians-unlikely-leave-libya-despite-ukraine-war>

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Strategy Type	Country	Key Actions & Alignments
Russia-leaning strategy/ Bandwagoning	Egypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintains strong ties with Russia despite Western criticism.• Strengthened relations since 2013 coup by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.• Signed multiple agreements, including a nuclear power plant project (construction started in 2022).• Leaked U.S. intelligence suggested Egypt planned to supply rockets to Russia, though later reconsidered after Western pressure.
	Algeria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abstained from all UN votes on Ukraine.• Maintains close ties with Russia, partly due to tensions with Morocco.• Signed a strategic partnership declaration with Russia in June 2022.• Continues supplying oil and gas to Europe, benefiting from sanctions on Russia.
Hedging	Tunisia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publicly criticized Russia's invasion and annexation of Ukrainian territories.• Voted for the UN resolution condemning Russian aggression.• Still maintains open policies for Russian tourists and continues importing Russian oil.
	Morocco	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initially hedged but later provided military aid to Ukraine, becoming the first African nation to do so.• Publicly condemned Russia but also allowed economic engagement with Russia.
Western-leaning strategy	Libya	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fully aligns with Western positions.

Source: Made by the author

The reactions of SMCs can vary depending on their geopolitical interests, diplomatic relations, and domestic situations. These countries may seek to balance between hedging and bandwagoning to ensure their own best interests. These diverse strategies reflect the complex and nuanced positions that different nations adopt in response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, influenced by regional interests, diplomatic relations, and geopolitical considerations. The uneven voting patterns in the United Nations General Assembly also highlight the importance of the multilateralism in play.

The lack of support for Ukraine and the support for Russia among both the general population and elites in the Southern Mediterranean region can be attributed to several key factors, as outlined by Cherif:²¹

First, many countries in the Southern Mediterranean region have a strong anti-imperialist sentiment. This sentiment can be traced back to historical struggles against colonialism and foreign intervention. As a result, there may be a predisposition to view Russia's actions in Ukraine through a lens of anti-imperialism. Algeria, a nation with a strong history of resistance against French colonialism, exemplifies this. This historical experience has cultivated a deep-seated suspicion of Western powers and their interventions abroad. When faced with the Russia-Ukraine conflict, some Algerians view Russia's actions, however controversial, as a countermeasure against perceived Western hegemony, even if they don't necessarily endorse the invasion itself. This sentiment is reflected in Algeria's abstentions on UN resolutions condemning Russia and its avoidance of unilaterally accusatory language. They emphasize the importance of respecting national sovereignty while also criticizing NATO expansion as a contributing factor to the conflict. This stance allows them to resonate with a segment of their population holding anti-imperialist views without fully alienating Russia, a significant arms supplier.

²¹ Cherif, "Ukraine and the Changing Face of the Southern Mediterranean."

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Secondly, Russia has effectively conducted disinformation and misinformation campaigns in this part of the world. These tactics can easily find receptive audiences among those who hold anti-imperialist views, contributing to a skewed perception of the conflict. The Egyptian government's cautious approach to criticizing Russia may be partly attributed to this. They tend to focus on the economic repercussions of the conflict rather than the political or moral dimensions. State-controlled media subtly echoes some Russian talking points or downplays the severity of Russia's actions. This approach is likely influenced by public opinion that has been exposed to pro-Russian disinformation, as well as the need to maintain vital economic ties with Russia.

Thirdly, some in the Southern Mediterranean region perceive a disparity in how the West approaches issues like Ukraine compared to their stance on human rights and democracy in the global south. This perceived double standard can lead to accusations of hypocrisy and affect attitudes toward the Ukraine crisis. A country like Tunisia, which underwent the Arab Spring and aspires to democratic governance, highlights this point. Many Tunisians may observe the intense Western focus on Ukraine's sovereignty and democratic aspirations while recalling the West's more muted response or even past support for authoritarian regimes in their own region.

Tunisia calls for a peaceful resolution in Ukraine while subtly pointing out the West's selective engagement with human rights issues, indicating an awareness of perceived double standards. This allows them to express concern about the conflict while also reflecting domestic views on Western foreign policy and maintaining a degree of neutrality.

Fourthly, governments in the global south may actively promote anti-Western or somewhat pro-Russian propaganda while maintaining strong economic and military ties with Russia. This dual approach can shape public opinion in favor of Russia, such as Egypt, subtly promote pro-Russian narratives in state media. This serves to outfit to certain domestic constituencies or signal a degree of strategic alignment without fully jeopardizing relations with the West, especially if significant economic links exist.

Fifthly, Ukrainians have done a lot to win over the Western public to their cause, but they have done little to engage with the Arab world. Ukraine's efforts to garner support in the Southern Mediterranean region may have been insufficient. This factor contributes to a lack of strong domestic resonance for supporting Ukraine, stemming partly from limited direct engagement and understanding of the Ukrainian perspective.

These factors collectively contribute to the complex attitudes and perceptions surrounding the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the Southern Mediterranean region, highlighting the importance of

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diplomatic efforts, information campaigns, and engagement to shape opinions and build international support. The lack of support from SMCs for suspending Russia from its seat on the Human Rights Council suggests that linking the Ukraine issue to the human rights domain is not appealing to governments in that region. On the other hand, when Russia's actions are perceived as threats to values like territorial integrity and the prohibition of aggression, most SMCs take a clear stance against it. The results indicate that the majority of SMCs, in the current situation, lean more towards prioritizing security and influence, rather than viewing 'great power competition' as a significant threat to their survival.²²

Regarding the statement that 'the Russia-Ukraine conflict is not considered great power competition,' indeed, this perspective might originate from a specific viewpoint. However, the roots and development of the Russia-Ukraine war are deeply implanted in the strategic competition between great powers, particularly the contest over the European security order and spheres of influence. Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO impinged upon Russia's core security interests, which Russia perceived as an encroachment on its strategic space by NATO, led by the US.

Although not a direct, full-scale war between major powers, the military, economic, and intelligence support provided by the

²² Szalai. "Between Hedging and Bandwagoning."

US and Europe to Ukraine, alongside Russia's military actions, largely transform this conflict into a contest of interests between different great power blocs, effectively making it a 'proxy war.' For SMCs, the implications and nature of 'great power competition' can differ significantly from those of the major powers directly involved.

IV. The EU Mediterranean initiatives

Given that the Russia-Ukraine conflict represents a significant threat to European and global security, it becomes imperative for the EU to comprehend the motivations of SMCs to formulate an effective strategy. In the practice terms of Mediterranean policy, the EU and Spain employed a series of initiatives in the early 1990s,²³ such as 5+5 Dialogue,²⁴ Madrid Peace Conference,²⁵ Barcelona Convention²⁶ and Barcelona

²³ For the details and process of the EU's Mediterranean policy, please see Foteini Asderaki. "The EU in Eastern Mediterranean: Multilateral and Bilateral Relations," in Aristotle Tziampiris and Foteini Asderaki (eds.), *The New Eastern Mediterranean Transformed: Emerging Issues and New Actors*, Switzerland: Springer (2021): 38-43.

²⁴ "5+5 Dialogue" comprises Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and Malta, on the European side, and the five Maghreb countries, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia. It was established in 1990 for enhanced cooperation between the two banks of the Mediterranean and consists of a series of ministerial meetings.

²⁵ The Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 was a significant international diplomatic event aimed at resolving the Middle East conflict between Israel and its neighboring countries through negotiations and diplomatic efforts, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The conference led to a series of negotiations, including talks between the Palestine Liberation Organization

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Process²⁷ to foster dialogue, build consensus, and promote stability in the Mediterranean.

Within the EU's comprehensive and multifaceted policy framework for the Mediterranean region, a significant turning point was marked by the Barcelona Process, which led to the establishment of the European Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). This initiative represented a noteworthy shift in the EU's approach to its Mediterranean neighbors. Subsequently, in 2008, the EMP underwent a transformation and evolved into the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).²⁸

(PLO) and Israel, as well as negotiations between Israel and its neighboring countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. While the conference itself did not result in final peace agreements, it marked a significant milestone in the Middle East peace process.

²⁶ The Barcelona Convention, formally known as the "Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean," is an international environmental agreement established in 1976. The main objective of this convention is to protect the environment of the Mediterranean region, with a specific focus on combating pollution in the marine environment and addressing pollution sources originating from the coast.

²⁷ The Barcelona Process officially known as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, launched in 1995, with the goal of establishing a framework for political, economic, and social cooperation between the EU and the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

²⁸ The UfM is an intergovernmental organization that promotes regional cooperation in the Mediterranean region, and it was launched in 2008 during the French presidency of the EU. The UfM includes all 27 European Union member states and 15 non-EU Mediterranean countries, creating a comprehensive framework for cooperation that spans both shores of the Mediterranean. The process aimed to enhance mutual understanding, stability, and prosperity in the Mediterranean region through various forms of

The Ukraine crisis has had a profound impact on SMCs, spanning from Egypt to Morocco. Commencing in 2010, the Southern Mediterranean region went through a tumultuous period characterized by political instability, as seen during the Arab Spring, security threats such as civil wars, and economic collapse. Furthermore, the region faced challenges related to illegal migration, drought, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In early 2022, just as the region was beginning to recover from these manifold crises, Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered an unprecedented set of challenges. These included a severe food crisis, disruptions in energy supply, and surging immigration flows, all of which had profound social and political consequences.²⁹ The instability in

collaboration, e.g. The UfM focuses on a wide range of issues beyond traditional diplomacy and trade, including environmental sustainability, energy, transportation, water management, education, and social development; the priority Areas are organized around specific priority areas, such as economic development, environmental sustainability, energy, and regional cooperation. Working groups, projects, and initiatives are developed to address challenges in these areas; One of the distinguishing features of the UfM is its emphasis on concrete projects that have a tangible impact on the region's development. These projects are designed to enhance economic growth, infrastructure, and social well-being; The UfM promotes collaboration across different sectors to address interconnected challenges. For example, projects might involve multiple countries working together on issues like renewable energy, water management, or transportation networks; The UfM facilitates political dialogue and cooperation among its member states to address regional conflicts, security concerns, and other geopolitical issues; The UfM seeks to promote cultural understanding and intercultural dialogue, fostering connections among the diverse societies of the Mediterranean region; The UfM addresses migration issues by promoting dialogue and cooperation among member states to manage migration flows, protect migrants' rights, and support development initiatives that can address the root causes of migration.

²⁹ Cherif, "Ukraine and the Changing Face of the Southern Mediterranean."

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the EU's southern neighbors has become a concern for Mediterranean regional security. This has prompted the EU to take a more active role in the region to effectively address common challenges.

A. Energy crisis:

In response to the energy crisis resulting from the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the EU has adopted an emergency plan aimed at reducing gas consumption by 15% compared to the average annual consumption from 2017 to 2021. This measure is taken in an effort to conserve fuel in anticipation of a winter with uncertain Russian gas supplies. Prior to its invasion of Ukraine, Russia served as the primary gas supplier to the 27-member EU, accounting for 40% of its gas supply.

To reduce its energy dependency on Russia, the EU is increasingly shifting its focus towards the Mediterranean region. Approximately 65 percent of Western Europe's oil and gas consumption passes through Mediterranean routes, and this proportion is poised to grow further due to the proliferation of pipeline projects across the Mediterranean in recent years.³⁰ The

³⁰ Manfred Weissenbacher. "Renewable Energy in the Mediterranean Context: State of the Play and Future Perspectives." *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2012*: 235; Athanasios Dagoumas. "The European Perspective on the Energy Development in Eastern Mediterranean and South East Europe." in Aristotle

EU is exploring three primary alternatives to address its energy needs.

Turkey plays a pivotal role in this strategy as it already transports oil from various sources, including Iraq, Russia, the Caucasus, and the Caspian region. The Nabucco pipeline has also commenced oil shipments from Iraq and Azerbaijan (potentially Turkmenistan as well), bypassing Russian territory. In addition, there are plans to interconnect the gas pipelines between Turkey and Syria, integrating them with the Arab gas pipeline. This would enable Egypt to export gas to Western Europe, where gas currently relies heavily on liquefied natural gas (LNG), which demands more expensive infrastructure.

Algeria's role holds significant importance for the European Union in terms of energy supply, surpassing that of Egypt. Algeria boasts substantial natural gas reserves ranking third globally, trailing only the United States and China (with Argentina holding reserves comparable to Algeria's). Algeria has historically delivered natural gas to Europe through two routes: a western pipeline traversing Morocco to Spain and an eastern pipeline passing through Tunisia to Sicily.³¹ Additionally, a new

Tziampiris and Foteini Asderaki (eds.), *The New Eastern Mediterranean Transformed: Emerging Issues and New Actors*, Switzerland: Springer (2021): 160-161.

³¹ Sergio Matalucci. "Can Algeria contribute to the EU's energy security?" May 4, 2022.

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submarine pipeline directly linking Algeria to Spain through the Mediterranean has recently become operational.

Libya possesses relatively modest natural gas reserves, with significant untapped potential, particularly in its promising offshore regions. Furthermore, a gas pipeline from Libya to Sicily has been inaugurated, although it faced temporary disruptions due to the turmoil in Libya. Enhancing gas connections with both Algeria and Libya align with the EU's articulated objective of fortifying its relations with Africa.

The aforementioned Mediterranean energy alternative routes have become a major substitute for Russian natural gas, highlighting the geographical advantage of Spain. Spain currently possesses one-third of LNG import capacity, a significant portion of which remains underutilized. Spain maintains two primary gas pipelines connecting it to Algeria, including the Medgaz pipeline completed in 2004, which regrettably ceased operations since November 2021, primarily driven by France's advocacy for safeguarding its nuclear industry. It is evident that Spain could significantly enhance Europe's gas security if efforts were made to bolster the connections between the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of Europe.³² Starting from June 2022, Spain has re-exported

<https://www.dw.com/en/can-algeria-contribute-to-the-eus-energy-security/a-61680466>.

³² Francis Ghilès. "War in Ukraine and the Gas Crisis Force a Rethink of EU Foreign Policy." *CIDOB notes internacionales* 268 (March 2022): 4.

20% of its imported LNG to other EU nations. It has potential to evolve into a gas hub for Europe, thus assisting in regional endeavors to reduce reliance on Russian gas.³³ This Iberian pipeline stands to benefit not only Spain and France but also Algeria, offering added incentives for the exploration and development of new gas reserves, including shale gas, where the country boasts the world's third-largest reserves.³⁴

One additional avenue through which the EU can bolster its energy security is by increasing its utilization of renewable energy sources. This approach carries the added advantage of curbing the emissions of climate-altering greenhouse gases that result from fossil fuel usage. To this end, the EU has made a commitment to meet its “20-20-20” targets, which encompass several goals: Reducing EU greenhouse gas emissions to at least 20% below 1990 levels; Ensuring that 20% of EU energy consumption is derived from renewable resources; Achieving a 20% reduction in primary energy use compared to projected levels, primarily through improvements in energy efficiency. These targets signify the EU's dedication to transitioning towards cleaner and more sustainable energy sources while simultaneously enhancing its

³³ Christina Thykjaer and Inti Landauro, “Spain has capacity to become gas hub in Europe, PM Sanchez says,” *Reuters*, July 27, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spain-has-capacity-become-gas-hub-europe-pm-sanchez-says-2022-07-27/>.

³⁴ Ghilès, “War in Ukraine and the Gas Crisis Force a Rethink of EU Foreign Policy.”

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energy security.³⁵ The Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP) stands as one of the six pivotal initiatives under the UfM. Directive 2009/28/EC outlines regulations for achieving renewable energy targets by 2020, permitting EU Member States to fulfill their national objectives by investing in renewable electricity infrastructure in “third countries,” provided that the generated electricity is utilized within an EU member state.³⁶ The concept of generating electricity from renewable sources in SMCs for consumption in European nations is indeed a viable and promising option. Consequently, the EU has expanded its renewable energy initiatives to encompass the southern Mediterranean region.

B. Migration and Border Control:

The Mediterranean region has played a crucial role as a major route for irregular migration into Europe. Currently, three main routes through which large-scale migration enters Europe via the Mediterranean. The eastern route passes through the Aegean Sea or Turkey's Dardanelles Strait to Greece, from where migrants make their way to Europe. The central route crosses the

³⁵ Weissenbacher. “Renewable Energy in the Mediterranean Context.”

³⁶ Directive 2009/28/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources and amending and subsequently repealing Directives 2001/77/EC and 2003/30/EC (Text with EEA relevance) OJ L 140, 5.6.2009, p. 16–62

sea from Tunisia or Libya, heading north to Malta or Italy. The western route goes through Morocco and Algeria, crossing the Strait of Gibraltar to reach Spain or the Canary Islands, which are under Spanish jurisdiction. As the EU has removed internal border controls in the process of establishing the common market, external border control relies on cooperation from member states. In theory, as long as Greece, Italy, and Spain manage their borders properly, there should not be an uncontrolled influx of migrants within the EU.

The EU has consistently worked on developing a comprehensive approach to migration, addressing a wide range of issues from border management to asylum procedures and integration. It has implemented various measures to manage and control irregular migration, including strengthening coastal patrols and collaborating with EU agencies like Frontex.³⁷ The new “Pact on Migration and Asylum,” reached in December 2023, addresses the issue of large-scale migration.³⁸ However, there are

³⁷ Frontex is the EU’s border and coast guard agency responsible for coordinating border control activities among member states. It assists in patrolling and monitoring the EU’s external borders, including those in the Mediterranean. Frontex plays a role in managing irregular migration and enhancing search and rescue operations. The Joint sea operations by Frontex please see: Toteini Asderaki and Eleftheria Markozani. “The Securitization of Migration and 2015 Refugee Crisis: From Words to Actions.” In Aristotle Tziampiris and Foteini Asderaki (eds.), *The New Eastern Mediterranean Transformed: Emerging Issues and New Actors* (Switzerland: Springer, 2021), p. 191.

³⁸ “Commission welcomes the major progress achieved by Parliament and Council on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum,” European Commission,

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significant differences among EU countries on how to handle the migration crisis. The main point of contention lies in the Dublin Regulation, which states “refugees can apply for asylum in the first country they enter.” Southern European countries, which are on the frontline of migration into Europe, feel overwhelmed by the heavy burden of migration. Northern European countries, on the other hand, criticize Southern European countries for not strengthening patrols along the Mediterranean borders, allowing migrants to enter northern countries, including Germany, Austria, and Sweden. Furthermore, there are disagreements among member states regarding the distribution of migration responsibilities. Frontline countries like Italy and Greece believe that all countries should establish migrant quotas and set up African asylum centers. However, Central and Eastern European countries, such as Austria and Hungary, are unwilling to take on this responsibility and have rejected the EU’s previous measures requiring member states to share the burden of migration. Under the revised “Pact on Migration and Asylum,” some migrants will be relocated to other EU countries to relieve the pressure on frontline Southern European nations. Countries that refuse to accept asylum seekers, such as Poland and Hungary, will need to pay fees to the countries that do accept migrants. At the same time, the EU will seek to expedite the processing of asylum applications, returning those deemed ineligible to their country of

origin or transit country, and extending the maximum detention period at border immigration centers from the current 12 weeks.

Although the EU has proposed establishing migrant identification centers to distinguish between economic migrants and asylum seekers—allowing those truly in need of asylum to be transferred to Europe and repatriating those seeking better economic opportunities—this plan depends on cooperation from the source countries. On the other hand, the EU is also developing a European Intervention Force to strengthen border control, which involves complexities related to member states' contributions to the EU's defense budget. Other proposed measures include establishing an EU Intelligence Academy to train intelligence personnel, appointing EU public prosecutors to handle terrorism and organized crime, and creating a "European Border Guard" to protect the EU's borders. Given the complexity of establishing an EU force, the current consensus within the EU is to first build a European Border Defense Force to assist Greece, Italy, and Spain in defending their borders, thereby creating a Mediterranean defense line to block the influx of migrants from the southern Mediterranean into Europe. This also involves the transfer of judicial authority from the three Southern European countries and the harmonization of judicial and border defense systems among member states.³⁹

³⁹ "Historic agreement reached today by the European Parliament and Council on the Pact on Migration and Asylum," European Commission, December 20,

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C. Regional security and stability:

Security challenges in the Mediterranean region, including events like the institutional crisis in Tunisia, tensions between Algeria and Morocco, and the civil war in Libya have sparked concerns within the EU.

The “Arab Spring” marked a turning point, inspiring a movement for greater political openness and civic engagement in the Mediterranean region. This movement called for constitutional reforms in certain countries, including Morocco and Algeria. In the case of Tunisia, the revolutionary process paved the way for the establishment of a democratic and diverse political system. However, instability and armed conflicts continue to plague Libya.

A decade after the Arab Spring and the subsequent disappointment of an unsuccessful democratic transition, the Maghreb states are grappling with both internal and regional political issues.⁴⁰ These challenges have left the region, home to approximately 130 million inhabitants within the Arab Maghreb

2023,

https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/historic-agreement-reached-today-european-parliament-and-council-pact-migration-and-asylum-2023-12-20_en.

⁴⁰ Pernille Rieker. “EU Performance as a Regional Security Actor: comparing ENP south to NATO’s MENA policy,” in Ingo Peters (ed.), *The European Union’s Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 134.

Union (AMU), in a state of stagnation. The ousting of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia did not lead to an enhancement in the quality of life for the populace. This economic stagnation largely elucidates President Keith Saied's successful efforts to reestablish a robust centralized state capable of meeting the people's aspirations. In essence, the lack of economic progress in North Africa has undermined democratic initiatives. Similar to many authoritarian regimes, nationalist factions and military elites have come to believe in their aptitude for addressing the emerging challenges.⁴¹

While the economic and political repercussions of the Arab revolutions continue to reverberate, another pressing concern is the surging food prices and the potential for social unrest due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Notably, the agricultural sector in North Africa is grappling with the impacts of climate change, including water scarcity and drought, amid a global food crisis fueled by the protracted Ukrainian conflict. The persistent drought in the region imperils agricultural production and heightens reliance on imports, all within a context marked by a broad uptick in international food prices. Algeria ranks as the world's third-largest importer of cereals, while Tunisia imports a significant 64% of its cereal needs, with common wheat constituting 85% of these imports. Clearly, over a decade

⁴¹ Luis Martinez. "Fragmentations in the Regional Mediterranean Integration: What Do the Tensions in the Maghreb Mean for Europe?" *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook* (2022): 111.

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following the Arab Spring, food security issues have taken precedence over the question of democratic transition.⁴²

The Western Sahara conflict appears to stand as the primary political obstacle hindering regional integration. It illustrates the persistent inability of Algeria and Morocco to overcome deep-seated distrust and even enmity that dates back to the 1963 Sand War. The prospect of a conflict between the two North African nations has raised alarms in both Europe and Africa following Algeria's announcement in August 2021 that it was severing diplomatic ties with Morocco. Both countries had been engaged in a military buildup, seeking to persuade their respective populations of the superiority of their military capabilities. As of 2022, six decades following Algeria's independence, Morocco has transformed from merely a rival into a potential adversary in the eyes of Algeria's military leadership. While the conjecture of a direct conflict between these two nations has been raised, potentially serious havoc on European interests and security, minimal efforts have been exerted to bridge the gap of mistrust separating these North African neighbors. Regarding the Western Sahara issue, the EU has consistently supported the United

⁴² Hanna Arhirova and Andrew Wilks. "Russia suspends deal allowing Ukraine to export grain, destabilizing global food markets." *PBS Newshour*, July 17, 2023.

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/russia-suspends-deal-allowing-ukraine-to-export-grain-destabilizing-global-food-markets>; Luis Martinez, "Fragmentations in the Regional Mediterranean Integration."

Nations in playing a pivotal role in seeking a resolution and maintaining its humanitarian commitments to the people of Western Sahara. The EU is also a major donor, providing significant aid to refugee camps in the region.⁴³

However, the Ukraine war temporarily put a halt to the military tensions between these two North African countries. During Spain's presidency of the EU Council in the second half of 2023, it sought to promote a new balance in the relations between its two North African neighbors. Spain openly supported Morocco's Sahara autonomy plan while maintaining good relations with Algeria.⁴⁴

The EU ensure that its policy on Western Sahara is balanced and aligns with its commitments to SMCs, both in rhetoric and in practice. Moreover, the precedent set by the Morocco-Algeria conflict will shape the future of European Mediterranean policy. The EU must ensure that this policy framework becomes a meaningful tool for political practice, rather than merely symbolic diplomatic rhetoric.⁴⁵ By transforming the conflict into an

⁴³ Martinez, "Fragmentations in the Regional Mediterranean Integration."

⁴⁴ Elcano Royal Institute. "Ten principles for Spain's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2023." July 24, 2023. <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/ten-principles-for-spains-presidency-of-the-council-of-the-european-union-2023/>.

⁴⁵ Kristina Kausch. "Spain's Diminished Policy in the Mediterranean," *Friede Policy Brief*, 26 (2010): 1-5.

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opportunity for integration with the Southern Mediterranean region, a win-win model could be established.

V. Conclusion

The Russia-Ukraine conflict and the EU's approach to the Southern Mediterranean illuminate shifting global power dynamics, particularly in the behavior of SMCs. These states, prioritizing their security and influence without viewing regional rivalries as existential, have largely adopted hedging strategies. This involves balancing against potential threats while engaging major powers to secure maximum benefits, a logic applicable across various regions.

Facing considerable economic, security, and climate challenges, SMCs theoretically need EU support. However, the growing influence of anti-Western elites, who blame the West for regional problems and advocate for diversified partnerships, presents a significant counterforce. These voices view the Ukraine conflict as a chance to decrease reliance on Western powers. The years following the Russo-Ukraine war demonstrate SMCs navigating their positions within local pressures and global geopolitical realignments.

The Ukraine crisis has exacerbated the divide between the West and Russia, simultaneously empowering Southern

Mediterranean SMCs in their dealings with Russia. While initial EU concerns arose from limited regional support, pragmatic imperatives concerning energy, migration, and regional stability led to a more accommodating approach. This has allowed SMCs to assert greater autonomy, potentially expanding their influence while diminishing Western sway. The crisis has underscored a perceived weakening of European leadership, encouraging the Southern Mediterranean to exercise newfound independence in its decision-making.

Recognizing the fluidity of its Mediterranean policies, influenced by evolving geopolitical, economic, and regional landscapes, the EU is likely to diversify its partnerships beyond its traditional allies. This anticipated increase in cooperation with various stakeholders suggests a potential redefinition of the EU's Mediterranean policy and an effort to rebuild relations with SMCs, with the aim of ultimately restoring and potentially enhancing European influence.

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India's Energy Cooperation with Vietnam in The South China Sea: Seeking Energy Security And Balancing Against China

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Abstract

The South China Sea has a remarkable role in cementing India and Vietnam relations, which evolved around their energy and strategic cooperation. Energy resources are an indispensable pillar of cooperation between India and Vietnam. The South China Sea is known for its geopolitical significance. Its continuously growing geopolitical and geostrategic importance became crucial for India, Vietnam, and the world's countries. India has an active presence in the Sea. Given its increasing energy demand and prospects of energy availability in the South China Sea and trade flow through this water body, India wishes to strengthen its presence in the region. This paper examines two research questions: how India-Vietnam energy cooperation has evolved in the South China Sea and the challenges of such energy

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cooperation between India and Vietnam. It also intends to explain and understand the role of the Look/Act East Policy in achieving India's strategic objectives in the South China Sea to balance against China. The paper argues that such cooperation between India and Vietnam helped them strengthen their regional strategic objective.

Keywords: Energy Cooperation, South China Sea, India, Vietnam, China, ASEAN

India's Energy Cooperation with Vietnam in The South China Sea

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I. Introduction

In 1991, India liberalized its economy, provided impetus, and paced the development process. Major fields such as heavy industry, transportation connectivity, service sector, education, health, agriculture, and space witnessed immense improvement.¹ Continuous development across the sectors increased energy consumption in India. However, such a continuously growing population and improving lifestyles added more to energy demand as consumption significantly increased. In post-1991, India experienced economic growth at around eight percent to achieve its social and economic development goals. With seventeen percent of the world's population, India has only 0.8 percent of the world's known energy resources (oil and gas),² which is far less considering increasing energy demand. The lack of adequate energy resources to meet its growing demand forced India to rely on energy imports. Indian oil and gas dependency has increased since 2000, and energy use in India has doubled.³ To meet its increasing energy demand and, at the same time,

¹ Montek S. Ahluwalia. "India's Economic Restoration: Achievements and Next Steps," *Asian Economic Policy Reform*, 14, (2018): 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aepr.12239>.

² Ashok Sharma. *India's Pursuit of Energy Security: Domestic Measure, Foreign Policy and Geopolitics*. New Delhi: Sage, (2019).

³ "India 2020: Energy Policy Review," International Energy Agency. January, (2021). https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/2571ae38-c895-430e-8b62-bc19019c6807/India_2020_Energy_Policy_Review.pdf.

reduce energy import dependence to some extent, India has been engaged in diversifying its energy supply with a particular focus on energy exploration and production. Indian-owned Oil and Natural Gas Company (ONGC) is involved in energy exploration and production activities in India and abroad. Major countries such as Azerbaijan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Brazil, and Vietnam strengthen energy cooperation with emerging economies, where ONGC actively engages in energy exploration and production activities.⁴ Out of several countries with which India has energy ties, the energy cooperation with Vietnam in the South China Sea region is the most significant as it brings value both in terms of energy and strategy.

With ample oil and gas resources, Vietnam is a developing economy among Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members. According to the Asian Development Bank, in 2015, Vietnam's crude oil and gas reserve was approximately 4.4 billion barrels and 0.6 trillion cubic meters (Tcm).⁵ It ranked Vietnam first in proven crude oil and third in proven natural gas reserves among ASEAN members. Consequently, the contribution of oil and gas to Vietnam's national economy has a large share. Energy (oil and gas) has always been the backbone of Vietnam's

⁴ Sharma, *India's Pursuit of Energy Security*, 10.

⁵ "Vietnam: Energy Sector Assessment, Strategy and Road Map," Asian Development Bank, December, (2016).
<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/178616/vie-energy-road-map.pdf>.

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economy and has significantly impacted the country's overall development. However, the proven oil and gas reserves in Vietnam's territories attracted foreign investment for oil and gas exploration and production. Vietnam experienced investments between 1988 and 2014 from several foreign companies such as the UK, USA, Japan, Russia, Canada, Malaysia and India.⁶ India's state-owned oil and natural gas company, Videsh Limited (OVL), is involved in energy exploration activities in South China's water with the cooperation of Vietnam. Interestingly, Vietnam's most proven oil and gas reserve falls under its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), a part of South China Sea water.

The South China Sea has a significant geographical setting and strategic location regarding its international shipping. It is distinguished not only for the littoral states but for the rest of the world as more than forty percent of the trade of the countries across the globe passes through the South China Sea.⁷ The region is immensely rich in hydrocarbon reserves, which have improved

⁶ Le Viet Trung, Tran Quoc Viet, and Pham Van Chat. "An Overview of Vietnam's Oil and Industry," *Petroleum Economics and Management*, Vol. 10, (2016).

<https://www.pvn.vn/DataStore/Documents/2016/Tap%20chi%20Dau%20khi/thang%2010/TCDK102016.pdf>

⁷ Martin Stuart-Fox. *A short history of China and Southeast Asia: tribute, trade and influence*. Allen & Unwin, (2021).

<http://ngc.digitallibrary.co.in/bitstream/123456789/236/1/A%20Short%20History%20of%20China%20and%20Southeast%20Asia%3A%20Tribute%2C%20Trade%20%26%20Influence.pdf>

the doubt that the disputed body of water could possess significant potential energy resources. The South China Sea- as per the estimates of the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) – is a critical world trade route and 10 billion barrels of petroleum and petroleum products and 6.7 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of liquefied natural gas (LNG) passed through the South China Sea in 2023.⁸ The prospects of fishing, oil, and gas make it more significant, and it could be one of the main reasons why many non-coastal nations are engaged in this region. Given the geo-political, geo-economic, geo-strategic, and resource richness, non-coastal states are trying to benefit from the area. However, China sees such acts as a direct threat to its territorial sovereignty.

India is a non-claimant and non-coastal country in this region. However, it has a substantial strategic, economic, and geopolitical interest in the South China Sea. Even though the South China Sea region is far from the Indian mainland, it is almost nearby, considering the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. India's approach towards the South China Sea is evident as it supports a stable maritime environment, right to passage, unimpeded commerce, and peaceful settlement of maritime disputes. India's approach towards the South China Sea region maintains that it should increase trade with Indo-Pacific and ASEAN countries, for which

⁸ "South China Sea," U.S. Energy Information Administration., March 21, (2024). Accessed on 10 December 2024.
https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/South_China_Sea.

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a calm and undisputed South China Sea is essential. By 2014, more than fifty percent of trade between India and Asia-Pacific countries passes through the choke point of the Malacca Straits to and from the South China Sea.⁹ India supports free movement and navigation in the South China Sea and treats it as an international body of water under international law. India is involved in maritime, trade, geopolitical, and energy exploration in this region with outstanding commitment and is supported by some significant coastal states, like Vietnam, the Philippines, etc. Among them, Vietnam, India has an exceptional commitment, and Vietnam Invited India into the water body of the South China Sea to explore oil and natural gas. Energy cooperation has been the central pillar of relations between India and Vietnam, and such cooperation has experienced improvement in recent years.

II. Methodological note

The study employed multiple methodologies, including analysis, interpretation, historical-logical methods, policy analysis, comparison, and statistical techniques, to examine the nature of cooperation between India and Vietnam in the South China Sea. Additionally, it utilized both qualitative and quantitative research designs to explore India-Vietnam energy collaboration in the

⁹ David Scott. "India's Extended Neighborhood Concept: Power Projections for a Rising Power," *India Review*, 18, no. 2, (2009): 107-143.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14736480902901038>

region and other factors influencing their energy relations.¹⁰ This paper uses original, primary, and secondary research documents. The data presented in this research are sourced from official documents provided by the governments of India, the Embassy of Vietnam in India, ASEAN, China, the USA, and Vietnam. Qualitative methods are suitable for exploring complex issues and policy concerns.¹¹ The process of qualitative analysis involves examining data gathered from official papers. Relevant documents, reports, and official publications related to the India-Vietnam energy cooperation are used and analyzed to understand the historical context and policy developments. Document analysis systematically reviews primary and secondary sources to identify key energy initiatives, challenges, and India's energy security concerns. The research findings will contribute to the existing literature on India-Vietnam energy cooperation and its implications on China's behavior. The insights from this study can inform policymakers and energy stakeholders about the potential national security threats arising from inadequate energy security measures and underscore the need for effective policy responses. The research methodology presented above aligns with the research objective of analyzing India-Vietnam energy

¹⁰ Cuong Pham. "Maritime Security: The Pillar of India's IPOI in Southeast Asia and Its Implications for Vietnam," *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* 10, no. 2, (2024): 48-73. <https://doi.org/10.47305/JLIA24102048p>.

¹¹ Norman K. Denzin and S. Lincoln Yvonna. "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Norman. K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. 3rd edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, (2005).

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cooperation and India's balancing act against China in the South China Sea region. It ensures a rigorous and comprehensive investigation of the topic, offering valuable insights for policymakers, academia, and other stakeholders interested in energy security and India-Vietnam energy relations.

III. Energy Cooperation

India and Vietnam's cooperation in the South China Sea (SCS) has evolved significantly, driven by shared economic, energy, and strategic interests. Both countries seek to maintain a rules-based order in the region while countering China's assertiveness. This evolving cooperation reflects the growing strategic importance of the South China Sea to both India and Vietnam and their shared desire to counter China's influence in the region. India's strategic interests, energy security requirements, and dedication to a rules-based maritime order have all influenced the nation's involvement in the South China Sea (SCS). Global trade and energy resources depend on the area, and India's engagement shows that it wants to maintain a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. During the Cold War, India's emphasis on non-alignment and its immediate regional interests allowed it to maintain a modest presence in the South China Sea. India acknowledged Vietnam's claims to the Paracel and Spratly Islands and provided diplomatic support to the country, especially during

the Vietnam War.¹² However, India started exploring the Sea in the 1980s, coinciding with Vietnam's efforts to open its economy to foreign investment. The United Nations Convention governs the SCS on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Still, several countries, including China, perceive its interpretation and applicability differently, and it has become a central concern for all the countries involved in the region.

China claims sovereignty over approximately 90% of the South China Sea using the Nine-Dash Line, a demarcation based on historic rights. This line overlaps with the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of several Southeast Asian nations, including Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei. The Nine-Dash Line is not recognized under international law or by UNCLOS, as it lacks explicit coordination and legal justification.¹³ China's selective adherence to UNCLOS is demonstrated by its position in the South China Sea. It ignored other UNCLOS articles, such as EEZ boundaries and the 2016 arbitration verdict, while citing others, like territorial seas, to bolster its claims.¹⁴ This strategy has increased regional and international conflicts while undermining international law. Stronger international cooperation and

¹² Huynh Tam Sang. "The Growing Importance of Vietnam to India's South China Sea Policy," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, 5, no. 2, (2022): 133-150.

¹³ Sofia Kausar. "Charting contested waters: The South China Sea and competing state claims," *International Journal of Law*, 9, no. 5 (2023): 14-22.

¹⁴ Jonathan Odom. "The Value and Viability of the South China Sea Arbitration Ruling: The US Perspective 2016–2020," *International Law Studies* 97, no. 1, (2021): 16.

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commitment to UNCLOS principles will be necessary to sustain a rules-based maritime order in the SCS.

Given the geostrategic, geo-economic, and geopolitical significance of the South China Sea and several common concerns, India and Vietnam have improved their cooperation in various fields, such as Maritime, defense, energy, nuclear and renewable, education, etc. Both nations are developing economies in Asia and lack energy resources, which compels them to take significant steps to secure energy supplies; otherwise, the states' pace of development would get struck. Vietnam is geographically well-located and has a vast coastline with the South China Sea. Still, it does not have sufficiently advanced technologies to manipulate and extract the resources from the South China Sea. India is geographically far from the South China Sea but is technologically advanced and able to extract, explore, and manipulate natural resources. Elements like historical legacy, Cold War experiences between both countries, cultural bondage between India and Vietnam, and Vietnam's fear of the expansion of China contributed to building the bondage between India and Vietnam, which led to cooperation in various fields. In post-2000, India and Vietnam experienced substantial improvements in energy cooperation, encompassing the joint exploration of oil and gas in the South China Sea. India imports around 2/3rd of its energy needs from West Asian countries, African countries, Mexico, and other countries with uncertain supply

environments.¹⁵ Energy cooperation between India and Vietnam might reduce India's import dependency on Gulf countries and help diversify the energy supply. Energy cooperation between India and Vietnam might reduce India's import dependency on Gulf countries and help diversify the energy supply.

The intended involvement of India in the South China Sea and its energy cooperation with Vietnam is not a new activity. It dates back to 1988 when India successfully acquired an exploration license of block 06.1 in Vietnam's Nam Con Son Basin.¹⁶ ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) holds 45 percent stakes in block 06.1, Russia's Rosneft has 35 percent, and PetroVietnam has 20 percent. The block 06.1 is considered one of Vietnam's most significant gas sites.¹⁷ It contributes around thirty percent of Vietnam's total natural gas production and immensely helps in power generation. India was allocated two significant blocks, block 127 and block 128, in Phu Khan Basin in 2006 to explore hydrocarbons in the South China Sea.¹⁸ Consequently, by 2012, OVL successfully acquired block 06.1, block 127, and block 128

¹⁵ Gulshan Deitl. "New Threats to Oil and Gas in West Asia: Issues in India's Energy Security," *Strategic Analysis* 28, no. 3, (2004): 273-389.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160408450143>.

¹⁶ Rahul Mishra. "India- Vietnam: New Waves of Strategic Engagement," *Indian Council of World Affairs*, New Delhi, (2014).

¹⁷ "ONGC Not to Exit Vietnam Block Despite Poor Prospectivity," *The Times of India*, New Delhi, July 12, (2015).
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/ongc-not-to-exit-vietnam-block-despite-poor-prospectivity/articleshow/48040450.cms>.

¹⁸ Mishra. "India- Vietnam," 8.

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and invested around US\$ 360 million in all three blocks concerned for acquiring and developing exploration activities. Since India acquired these blocks, OVL has been intensely involved in the allocated blocks to improve hydrocarbon exploration and extraction.¹⁹

Later, India found that block 127 did not have enough oil, which led India to withdraw from the bloc in 2009.²⁰ In 2011, China registered vocal complaints against India's involvement in block 128 of Phu Khan Basin's block. China's vocal opposition to India's exploration of block 128 made it controversial, as both China and Vietnam claim that block 128 falls under their jurisdiction. China cautioned and threatened to keep India from entering the South China Sea waters as China declared the South China Sea under its jurisdiction. India announced in May 2011 a temporary withdrawal from the exploration of block 128 after China's protest, citing low prospects of hydrocarbons. Many scholars and Vietnamese officials widely perceived India's move as influenced by China's threat. After India's declaration to relinquish block 128, Vietnam approached India with more incentives and a contract extension to OVL. Consequently, India

¹⁹ "ONGC Videsh Ltd. Gets 1-Year Extension for Exploring Vietnamese Oil Block," *The Economic Times*, August 23, (2016).
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/oil-gas/ongc-videsh-ltd-gets-1-year-extension-for-exploring-vietnamese-oil-block/articleshow/53827194.cms?from=mdr>.

²⁰ B.R. Deepak. *India and China: Foreign Policy Approaches and Responses*. New Delhi: VIJ India Pvt. Ltd, (2016).

agreed to continue the joint exploration of block 128 in July 2012.²¹ According to international law, both blocks are under Vietnamese jurisdiction, although China claims sovereignty over allotted blocks.²² OVL, in 2019, sought another two years extension (6th extension) to explore block.²³ India's state-owned company, OVL, has not been able to find any hydrocarbon in block 128. Its desire to stay and invest in block 128 strengthens India's strategic interests in the South China Sea and exploring hydrocarbons.

Both sides made several attempts to improve cooperation in hydrocarbon exploration. ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) was selected in Vietnam's 2004 licensing Round for nine major offshore block explorations.²⁴ OVL relinquished some blocks as it faced unavoidable problems regarding oil and gas reserves. An important development occurred during Nguyen Phu Trong's significant visit to India in 2013. Seven oil blocks were offered to

²¹ Utpal Bhaskar. "OVL to Resume Drilling in South China Sea," *mint*, January 08, (2012). <http://www.livemint.com>.

²² Pranab D. Samanta. "China Puts Indian Oil Block up for Auction," *Indian Express*, July 17, (2012), New Delhi. <https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/web/china-puts-indian-oil-block-up-for-auction/>

²³ "OVL Seeks 2-Year Extension for Exploring Vietnamese Oil Block," *The Economic Times*, September 2, (2019). <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/oil-gas/ovl-seeks-2-year-extension-for-exploring-vietnamese-oil-block/articleshow/70946198.cms?from=mdr>

²⁴ Ganganath Jha. "India's Dialogue Partnership with ASEAN," *India Quarterly*, Vol. 64, no. 4, (2008): 1-34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097492840806400401>.

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India in the South China Sea based on nominations where Vietnam hoped for a production-sharing agreement. In November 2013, OVL and Petro Vietnam strengthened their energy ties by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote joint exploitation and exploration of Vietnam's hydrocarbon assets.²⁵ In a significant visit by Indian president Dr. Pranab Mukherjee in September 2014, a joint oil exploration agreement was signed between OVL and Petro Vietnam, giving India and Vietnam more opportunities to strengthen their cooperation in the South China Sea.²⁶ During the Narendra Modi government's first tenure, several visits took place, and leaders from both sides showed significant commitment to cooperation between the two countries.

In addition to energy cooperation between India and Vietnam in the South China Sea, other fields, such as nuclear and renewable energy, emerged as significant fields of energy cooperation between India and Vietnam. On March 25, 1986, both countries agreed to cooperate in nuclear energy development and peaceful use. In 2002, with the help of India, a nuclear science center called the Vietnam-India Nuclear Science Center (VINSC)

²⁵ Harsh V. Pant. "China on the Horizon: India's Look East Policy Gathers Momentum," *Orbis* 57, no. 30, (2018): 453-466.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2013.05.007>

²⁶ Ministry of External Affairs of India. "Joint Statement: The Third India-Philippines Joint Commission on Bilateral Co-operation," *Media Center*, New Delhi, October 14, (2015).
https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25930/Joint_StatementThirdIndiaPhilippines_Joint_Commissionon_Bilateral_Cooperation

was established at Da Lat, Vietnam. In addition, an MoU was signed for atomic cooperation between the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) of Vietnam and the Dept. of Atomic Energy (DAE) of India in the same year. India has experience and expertise in the field of atomic energy utilization. At the same time, Vietnam showed eagerness to improve its nuclear energy sector, and such properties created possibilities for both countries for mutual benefit cooperation.²⁷ In 2019, Indian Vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu visited Vietnam and signed an agreement with Vietnam's Prime Minister, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, to cooperate in the nuclear and renewable energy sector.²⁸ Vietnam has grown to be a desirable renewable energy market for Indian businesses. For instance, the Adani Phuoc Minh wind power plant and the Adani Phuoc Minh solar power plant are two projects in Vietnam in which the Adani Group has invested.²⁹ Vietnam may benefit from the Indian-led International Solar Alliance (ISA) initiative and strengthen its renewable energy sector. International Solar

²⁷ *The Economic Times*. "ONGC Videsh Ltd. Gets 1-Year Extension."

²⁸ Reena Marwah and Le Thi Hang Nga. *India–Vietnam relations: Development dynamics and strategic alignment*. Cham: Springer Nature, (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-7822-6>.

²⁹ "Trade Facilitation ahead with ASEAN-India deal upgrade," Embassy of India in Hanoi, April 15, (2024). <https://www.indembassyhanoi.gov.in/page/trade-facilitation-ahead-with-asean-india-deal-upgrade-vir/>

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Alliance came to light in 2015 with the efforts of India and France.³⁰

The defense sector has emerged as a significant field of cooperation between India and Vietnam. The Ministries of Defense signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Cooperation in 2009, and the general framework was provided by the Joint Vision on Defense Cooperation, signed by the defense ministers in 2015.³¹ A new “Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defense Partnership towards 2030” and a “Memorandum of Understanding on Mutual Logistics Support” were inked by the two countries during the June 2022 visit of India’s defense minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh. The two countries agreed that Vietnam would receive an indigenously built missile corvette, the INS Kirpan, during the visit of General Phan Van Giang, the Vietnamese Minister of National Defense, to India on June 18–19, 2023.³²

³⁰ Katyayani Rajawat. “International Solar Alliance: India’s Potentials in Clean Energy,” *International Journal of Academic Research and Development* 4, no. 3, (2019): 32-39.

<https://www.multidisciplinaryjournal.in/assets/archives/2019/vol4issue1/4-1-16-284.pdf>

³¹ Temjenmeren Ao. “India-Vietnam Strategic Cooperation: A Key Element in India’s Act East Policy,” *Diplomatist*, March 05, (2020).
<https://diplomatist.com/2020/03/05/india-vietnam-strategic-cooperation-a-key-element-in-indias-act-east-policy/>

³² Manjeeti Negi. “India gifts indigenously-built warship INS Kripan to Vietnam,” *INDIA TODAY*, June 19, (2023).

On August 1, 2024, the 14th India-Vietnam Defense Policy Dialogue was held in New Delhi. The two sides discussed various bilateral defense cooperation issues during the meeting. They noted the revolutionary developments in the relationship since the signing of the “Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defense Partnership towards 2030” in June 2022.³³ when Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh was in Vietnam. Vietnam suggested five areas of cooperation: staff discussions, service-to-service collaboration, education and training, defense industry collaboration, and delegation exchanges and dialogue. The defense secretary praised the five-point plan and suggested collaboration in new areas of interest for both nations, such as information security, cyber security, military medicine, and submarine search and rescue. In all three military branches—air, land, and sea—defense cooperation between the two nations has dramatically increased. The partnership’s primary focus is training, the defense sector, and visiting ships. Both sides consistently conducted joint military and naval exercises. For example, a joint maritime exercise in 2018 and 2019, a joint exercise in the South China Sea in 2021³⁴, maritime exercise Milan in 2022 and February 2024

³³ Mayank Singh. “India-Vietnam hold first bilateral military exercise involving armies and air force,” *The Indian Express*, November 04, (2024).

³⁴ “Indian Navy undertakes bilateral maritime exercise with Vietnam People’s Navy,” *Press Information Bureau*, February 24, (2024).

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held.³⁵ These targeted exercises enhanced cooperation and communication between India and Vietnam.

Maritime security has witnessed a growing field of cooperation between India and Vietnam. In light of China's militarization of the SCS, fostering maritime security cooperation between India and Vietnam helps safeguard Vietnam's economic interests and territorial sovereignty. Addressing China's territorial aspirations and its "String of Pearls" strategy also assists Vietnam and India in finding common ground. In theory, India supports the idea of a rules-based system, permits freedom of navigation in the SCS, and settles territorial disputes amicably.³⁶ To address security concerns, India started a project in August 2019 to construct 12 speedboats for the Vietnam Coast Guard as part of the India-Vietnam high-speed patrol ship project framework.³⁷

India better understands the disputed nature of the South China Sea, wherein a joint venture for oil and gas exploration and extraction between India and Vietnam is in progress. Considering this, India and Vietnam clearly stated that the joint venture is

³⁵ "India hosts Milan Naval exercise; around 50 countries participating," *Deccan Herald*, February 19, (2024).
<https://www.deccanherald.com/india/india-hosts-milan-naval-exercise-around-50-countries-participating-2901095>

³⁶ Pham, "Maritime Security," 62.

³⁷ Dinakar Peri. "Rajnath Singh hands over 12 high-speed guard boats to Vietnam," *The Hindu*, June 09, (2022).
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/rajnath-singh-hands-over-12-high-speed-guard-boats-to-vietnam/article65509690.ece>.

purely commercial and peaceful. Both countries issued a joint statement in 2014, which clarified that their desire and determination are to work together for stability and to maintain peace, growth, and prosperity in the region.³⁸ Both countries believe that the area's freedom of navigation and aviation should not be hampered. They have called all the involved littoral countries to resolve the dispute peacefully by the rules of international law, including UNCLOS. A stable, peaceful, and amicable environment in the South China Sea is in the interest of both India and Vietnam. In addition to energy cooperation, India and Vietnam have extended cooperation to other fields like defense, Maritime, technical, education, and culture. India-Vietnam cooperation faces several existing challenges, which create obstacles in enriching and extending their cooperation.

India's energy cooperation with Vietnam in the South China Sea (SCS) significantly impacts its overall geopolitical strategy and economic security, particularly when it comes to handling tensions with China. Collaboration with Vietnam expanded India's economic influence in Southeast Asia by strengthening trade and investment relations. This is consistent with India's Act East Policy, which aims to include India in the geopolitical and economic framework of the ASEAN region. The area is vital for trade, energy

³⁸ "Joint Statement between India and Vietnam during the Visit of Prime Minister to Vietnam," Ministry of External Affairs of India, September 3, (2016), <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/27362>.

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security, and strategic interests since it contains enormous undeveloped oil and gas deposits. India must, however, strike a balance between its energy interests in the SCS and its overarching objective of containing China's ambition in the Indo-Pacific.

IV. Challenges to India-Vietnam Energy Cooperation

The primary concern for both India and Vietnam in the post-Cold War period was the need to maintain economic growth, which was impossible without active energy cooperation. Energy cooperation between both countries faces several common challenges, such as the disputed nature of the South China Sea, China's expansionist behavior in the region, the involvement of several major and regional powers in this region, infrastructure limitations, technological gaps, environmental concerns and lack of political willingness to some extent for energy cooperation.

The territorial jurisdiction of the South China Sea is claimed and challenged by coastal states such as the Philippines, Taiwan, Laos, Malaysia, China, and Vietnam.³⁹ The dispute over the South China Sea involves islands (including Spratly and Parsley),

³⁹ Michael McDevitt. "The South China Sea: Assessing US Policy and Options for the Future," *A CNA Occasional Paper*, Centre for Strategic Studies, November, (2014): 1-90.
https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/iop-2014-u-009109.pdf

reefs, and the banks of the sea.⁴⁰ Littoral countries' involvement-except China- in the disputed body of water is guided by their interest in maintaining the right of freedom of navigation and aviation, fishing areas, shipping lanes, exploration of hydrocarbons, etc. The overlapping claims by the littoral countries over the region created challenges for those non-littoral countries that showed a willingness to participate in activities, including hydrocarbon exploration and naval exercises in the water of the South China Sea. Because of the disputed nature of the region, the UK's energy company 'British Petroleum' (BP), abandoned the plan of hydrocarbon exploration in a block located between the Spratly Islands and Vietnam in 2007, citing overlapping claims between Vietnam and China. BP defended its intention not to continue with oil and gas exploration to allow the involved parties (Vietnam and China) to resolve the issue.⁴¹ Such a disputed nature of the region has undoubtedly created obstacles for India-Vietnam energy cooperation in the water of the South China Sea.

China claims the entire South China Sea by referring to its 2000 years of historical presence there. It believes that the prospects of hydrocarbon reserves and geopolitical and

⁴⁰ Geoffrey Murray. *Vietnam-Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture*. London: Kuperard, (2021).

⁴¹ "BP halts Vietnal exploration plan due China dispute," *Reuters*, August 10, (2007).

<https://www.reuters.com/article/markets/update-2-bp-halts-vietnam-exploration-plan-due-china-dispute-idUSSP242592/>

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geostrategic significance of the region can help strengthen its energy and national security. China maintains that any state carrying out activities, such as navigation, naval exercise, and hydrocarbon exploration, in the South China Sea region, with the help of Vietnam, interferes with China's internal affairs.⁴² China claimed that activity of joint explorations for hydrocarbons and naval exercise between India and Vietnam in the water of South China is illegal as the region where Indian companies are active comes under Chinese territorial jurisdiction. After getting two blocks, 127 and 128, in the South China Sea by India, China – since 2011- continuously warned India not to be involved in their water without its permission.⁴³

At the start of the second decade of the 21st century, India witnessed increasing Chinese assertion in the South China Sea region against the Indian Presence. In 2011, amid rising tensions, in a significant development, INS Airavat- India's amphibious assault vessel- was stopped by Chinese Naval forces to explain INS Airavat's Presence in 'Chinese Waters'.⁴⁴ Similarly, on many

⁴² "India-Vietnam Sign Pacts for Oil Exploration in South China Sea," *The Hindu*, October 13, (2011).
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-vietnam-sign-pact-for-oil-exploration-in-south-china-sea/article2532311.ece>

⁴³ Munmun Majumdar. "India's Stakes in the South China Sea," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, USA, 3, no. 13, (2013): 242-247.
https://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_3_No_13_July_2013/28.pdf

⁴⁴ Indrani Bagchi. "China Harasses Indian Naval Ship on South China Sea," *The Times of India*, September 02, (2011).

occasions, the Chinese authorities openly opposed India's maritime exercise with other countries in this region. Such incidents indicated China's aggressive attitude towards coastal and non-coastal states. China's claims and assertive activities in the water of the South China Sea made India uneasy about exercising its exploration activities.

As India's significant strategic, maritime, and economic partner in the South China Sea region, Vietnam has a continuing claim over a specific part of the Sea. It considers it an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which China challenges. Understanding the complexities of the South China Sea, the diversification of energy supply, and India's strategic presence in the region, India avoided China's threat. It decided to continue and enhance regional cooperation with region.⁴⁵ In response to China's threat, Vietnam officially stated, "All cooperation activities between Vietnam and another partner, including ONGC Videsh Limited, are under the sovereign right of Vietnam entirely in conformity with UN Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982."⁴⁶ However, In addition, China continuously kept threatening Vietnam against India so that ongoing cooperation between India and Vietnam

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/china-harasses-indian-naval-ship-on-south-china-sea/articleshow/9829900.cms>

⁴⁵ Pant, "China on the Horizon," 455.

⁴⁶ Rakesh Sharma. "ONGC to Continue Exploration in South China Sea," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 19,

(2012). <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10000872396390444464304577536182763155666>.

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could be influenced. Through such tactics, China made a compelling alternative to Vietnam and challenged India's ambition to gain regional strategic benefit.⁴⁷

Unlike China's view, the South China Sea is considered by the rest of the world under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as an international body of water, where no country can claim any sovereignty over the whole area, which is primary countries extensive involvement of countries with different purposes.⁴⁸ Cooperation between India and Vietnam faces challenges from countries like the USA, Japan, and Europe. The strategic competition among involved powers for purposes like naval exercises, exploration of hydrocarbons, etc., has increased. Increased competition in the water body of the South China Sea gave littoral countries many options to bargain with the countries involved in the region. The significant involvement of the major regional powers has affected Indian interests and made the area more competitive. In such a case, India needs to balance its position with that of the rest of the ASEAN countries with the help of Vietnam.

⁴⁷ Carl Thayer. "Alarming Escalation in the South China Sea: China Threatens Forces if Vietnam Continues Oil Exploration in Spratly's," *The Diplomat*, July 24, (2017).

<https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/alarming-escalation-in-the-south-china-sea-china-threatens-force-if-vietnam-continues-oil-exploration-in-spratlys/>.

⁴⁸ Paul Gewirtz. "Limits of the Law in the South China Sea," *Brookings, East Asia Policy Paper* 8, May, (2016): 2.

<http://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Limits-of-Law-in-the-South-China-Sea-2.pdf>

The need for profound political willingness is a significant hurdle in cooperation between India and Vietnam. However, the need for more political willingness is determined by both domestic and external factors. For India, external factors compelled it to show less political willingness. India initially thought it would not be wise to go- along with Vietnam- to a disputed area of water in the South China Sea, which could provoke China. China's unstoppable aggressive policies and intentions in the region of the Indian Ocean and South China Sea made India think of participating in hydrocarbon exploration and naval exercise activities in the water of the South China Sea.⁴⁹ India has slowly but indeed improved its cooperation with Vietnam. The political dilemma still exists among Indian policymakers while dealing with the issue of the South China Sea and India's involvement in the region.

Vietnam is the single and most reliable ASEAN member for India in the Indo-Pacific region. Except for Vietnam, India doesn't find other reliable nations in ASEAN and other organizations in the area with which India has appreciable engagement. In this regard, China has the upper hand as some pro-China countries (like Cambodia) in regional organizations support Chinese interest in the region and favor Chinese

⁴⁹ Premesha Saha. "India Calibrates its South China Sea Approach," *ORF*, Issue Brief 477, (2021).

<https://www.orfonline.org/public/uploads/posts/pdf/20230531123708.pdf>

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aggressiveness.⁵⁰ To tackle these obstacles, one must possess diplomatic grace, strategic forethought, and a dedication to sustained cooperation. By removing these barriers, India and Vietnam may be able to develop strong energy cooperation that will be advantageous to both nations strategically and economically. In the post-Cold War period, India improved its ties with ASEAN and Indo-Pacific countries, which helped enhance cooperation between both nations.⁵¹ Look East Policy of India has benefitted, to a large extent, by improving India's ties with ASEAN countries. Vietnam helped India to become involved in the water of the South China Sea. It continuously helped India extend its reach to the other members of the ASEAN and East Asian countries. India's significant initiatives towards energy cooperation portray its intention to enrich its relationship with Vietnam and other ASEAN member states.

V. The Growing Spectrum of Cooperation

In addition to energy cooperation, India and Vietnam have strengthened their ties in other major fields such as strategic and

⁵⁰ Wen Wang and Xiaochen Chen. "Who Supports South China in South China Sea and Why," *The Diplomat*, July 17, (2017).
<https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/who-supports-china-in-the-south-china-sea-and-why/>

⁵¹ Ashok Sjjanhar. "From Look East to Look Act: India's Growing Engagement with ASEAN and Beyond," Ministry of External Affairs of India, April 26, (2018),
<https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?749>.

defense, maritime, and science, technology, and education. India and Vietnam share a robust and growing partnership in the realm of defense and strategic affairs. Their cooperation is driven by shared security concerns, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, and their mutual desire to uphold peace, stability, and international law.

India-Viet Nam relations were elevated in 2016 to the level of “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi to Vietnam; earlier, the relations were designated as “Strategic Partnership.” The development of India-Viet Nam relations is currently guided by a “Joint Vision for Peace, Prosperity and People” adopted by Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi and the then Prime Minister Mr. Nguyen Xuan Phuc during the Virtual Summit held on 21 December 2020. Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, Mr. Nguyen Phu Trong, had a telephone conversation on 15 April 2022. To support Vietnam in strengthening its defense and security capabilities, India set up a \$500 million credit line for defense cooperation in 2016. Additionally, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his commitment to establishing a military software park at the National University of Telecommunications in Nha Trang province and pledged an extra \$5 million for the initiative.⁵²

⁵² Pham, “Maritime Security,” 62.

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In 2022, the two countries celebrated the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations, and they are working together actively to strengthen their multi-dimensional cooperation further. The two countries agreed that Vietnam would receive an indigenously built missile corvette, the INS Kirpan, during the visit of General Phan Van Giang, the Vietnamese Minister of National Defense, to India on June 18–19, 2023. The two defense ministers met in Jakarta on November 16, 2023, as part of the 10th ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus.⁵³

India and Vietnam have a growing maritime security partnership driven by shared concerns about the South China Sea and a desire to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific region. This partnership includes joint naval exercises, information sharing, and capacity-building initiatives. India has also given Vietnam credit lines to improve its marine security capabilities. India helped Vietnam to boost its defense sector by giving \$100 million in 2014 and \$500 million in 2016. In addition, since 1990, Vietnamese defense officers from all three sectors (air, naval and military) have been getting trained in various defense training centers in India. In a significant strategic move, both nations engaged in conducting maritime exercisesserved as training and capacity-building activities. Recently India and Vietnam conducted maritime

⁵³ "India-Vietnam Relations," Embassy of India in Hanoi, (2024)
<https://www.indembassyhanoi.gov.in/page/bilateral-relations/>

exercises in 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023.⁵⁴ Enhancing maritime security cooperation between India and Vietnam helped safeguard Vietnam's territorial sovereignty and economic interests in the South China Sea, particularly amid China's increasing militarization of the region.⁵⁵

Cooperation in science, technology, and education constitutes an important area of the India-Vietnam partnership. The two countries have signed several agreements, including the "Exploration and Uses of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes, IT Cooperation, Cyber security" and the "Framework Agreement on Uses of Atomic Energy for Peaceful Purposes." The Program of Cooperation (POC) in Science and Technology covers wide-ranging areas such as biotechnology, material sciences, ICT, ocean development, pharmaceuticals and medical research, etc. In 2016, the two countries signed an MoU on Information Technology and are working to set up a Centre for Satellite Tracking and Data Reception and an Imaging facility in Vietnam under the ASEAN-India Cooperation mechanism.⁵⁶ During his

⁵⁴ Kamlesh Agnihotri and Nirmal Shankar M. "India's Outlook towards South-East Asia and Beyond: 'Changing Tack' in Contemporary Environment," *National Maritime Foundation*, August 22, (2023). <https://maritimeindia.org/20901-2/>.

⁵⁵ Pham, "Maritime Security," 48-73.

⁵⁶ Embassy of Vietnam. "Promoting India-Vietnam in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI): Perspectives and Prospects," *Research and Information System for Developing Countries ((RIS)*, New Delhi, June 24, (2021). https://ris.org.in/sites/default/files/Publication/India%20Vietnam%20Cooperation_Final.pdf

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visit to India in the first week of 2024, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính had a fascinating conversation with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In addition to cooperation in rare earth mining and processing, information technology development, and IT workforce training in each nation, the two leaders suggested extending collaboration in science and technology, particularly in core technologies, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and innovation.⁵⁷

VI. Major Indian Initiatives towards Energy Cooperation

Just after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Indian foreign policy witnessed a shift. After the collapse of the USSR and the sudden end of the Cold War, the balance of power across the world suddenly changed. India needed to redesign its foreign policy priorities in a changed global environment. To increase its reach and strengthen economic, political, and cultural ties with Southeast Asian countries, India launched a significant foreign policy called Look East Policy (LEP) in 1991 under the then Indian Prime Minister Narsimha Rao.⁵⁸ This policy has broad objectives, including economic integration with Southeast Asian

⁵⁷ “Vietnam, India to expand cooperation in trade, sci-tech, security-defense: PMs,” *Asia News Network*, August 02, (2024).
<https://asianews.network/vietnam-india-to-expand-cooperation-in-trade-sci-tech-security-defence-pms/>

⁵⁸ Sukh Deo Muni. “*India’s Look East Policy: The Strategic Dimensions*,” ISAS Working Paper, Singapore: National University of Singapore, (2011).

countries, regional connectivity, strengthening political and strategic partnerships, improving security and defense cooperation, cultural and people-to-people connections, energy cooperation, and promoting regional stability. It aimed to extend India's presence in Southeast Asia by knotting security and strategic ties with ASEAN member countries. India also hoped this policy could be essential in making India a notable Asian player. India achieved its first "Look East Policy" in 1992 when it conferred the Sectoral Dialogue Partnership (SDP) of ASEAN. Subsequently, within three years, India became a "complete Dialogue Partnership" (FDP) in 1995.⁵⁹

The "Look East Policy" of India has three significant aspects. First is India's membership in various institutions connected to Southeast Asia. Second, Bilateral strategic and defense agreements between India and significant ASEAN countries like Vietnam, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, etc. Third, India's increasing maritime activities in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions are cited as a 'legitimate area of interest' under India's maritime doctrine of 2004. Look East Policy of India involves the ASEAN countries and the "Rimland states" like Japan and South Korea. Since 1992, India's presence in ASEAN and the East Asian Summit has increased, and it has improved to

⁵⁹ Jha, "India's Dialogue Partnership with ASEAN," 24.

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the status of 'ASEAN-India Summit' and member of ASEAN+3+3.⁶⁰

Vietnam is essential in India's economic, strategic, and political promotion in Southeast Asia. Being a regional power among Southeast Asian countries with its solid financial performance and political stability, it has always supported Indian efforts to engage with ASEAN states. Vietnam was the first country in ASEAN to invite India to participate in hydrocarbon exploration and maritime activities in the South China Sea.⁶¹ Both countries have signed several agreements that created conditions for Indian investors and companies to invest in Vietnam and the South China Sea in fields like Medicine, health and care, transport, information and technology, and oil and gas. Vietnam is considered the most trustworthy state among other ASEAN countries.⁶² Strengthening strategic cooperation between India and Vietnam and improving India's presence in the region with the help of Vietnam alerted China.

⁶⁰ Sampa Kundu. "ASEAN-India Partnership at 25," *The Diplomat*, July 07, (2017). <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/asean-india-partnership-at-25/>

⁶¹ Dipanjan R. Chaudhury. "Vietnam Invites India to Explore Resources in Disputed South China Sea Region," *The Economic Times*, July 12, (2018). <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/vietnam-invites-india-to-explore-resources-in-disputed-south-china-sea-region/articleshow/51123742.cms?from=mdr>

⁶² "Official Visit of Vice President to Vietnam, 9-12 May," Ministry of External Affairs, (2019). <https://www.mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-info.htm?2/1165/Official+Visit+of+Vice+President+to+Vietnam+May+912+2019>.

India's Look East/Act East Policy directly connects to India-Vietnam energy and economic interests. The general consensus is that geographically speaking, Myanmar is India's gateway to Southeast Asia. Still, Vietnam has emerged as India's gateway and serves both countries' interests in geopolitics, security, trade, culture, energy, defense, and other areas. Vietnam has been at the forefront of India's involvement in the region, as Modi claimed when he visited the country in 2014. Particularly in the Indo-Pacific area, both nations pledged to uphold rules-based order and to share concerns about security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. During Modi's historic visit to Vietnam in September 2016, India and Vietnam signed a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" based on shared understanding and interests. With the help of Indian policy, Vietnam-India relations have seen steady expansions over the past few years, especially since the two countries upgraded their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2016.⁶³

The growth of bilateral relations is strategically motivated by the shared strategic ambitions of Vietnam's foreign policy of balance of power and India's Act East policy. India intends to use Vietnam to extend its operations throughout East Asia and maybe the South Pacific as part of its expanding eastward policy. India aspires to have a position in Southeast Asia to oppose China and

⁶³ G. Jayachandra Reddy, "Vietnam is central to India's Act East Policy," *The Sunday Guardian*, December 31, (2022).
<https://sundayguardianlive.com/opinion/vietnam-central-indias-act-east-policy>.

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strengthen its influence in other South Asian concerns while China is growing.⁶⁴ The primary cause of the recent sharp warming in Vietnam-India relations is pursuing energy security interests. The energy consumption of a nation increases in tandem with its economic expansion. Vietnam and India are experiencing fast economic growth, and their combined energy consumption is rising annually. Nonetheless, both nations have a pressing need to investigate maritime resources actively. It has been noted that by enhancing and fortifying collaboration with neighboring energy-producing nations and foreign energy-producing nations, the Indian government is addressing the challenging circumstances facing India's energy issues. As a result, the foundation of India and Vietnam's oil and gas development cooperation is the two nations' pressing need for these resources.⁶⁵

China perceives such cooperation between India and Vietnam as a threat to its claim over the South China Sea. With the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative and String of Pearls, China is encircling India by constructing Chinese naval bases in the Indian Ocean. Such strategic initiatives by China are considered a direct threat to Indian interests in the Indian Ocean region. However, India's presence in the South China Sea, with the help of Vietnam, is also considered a reaction to China's

⁶⁴ Sharma, *India's Pursuit of Energy Security*, 110.

⁶⁵ Linh Do. "New Development of Vietnam-India Relations under Indian's Act East Policy," April 11, (2023).

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4414615.

involvement in the Indian Ocean. In this context, Vietnam is significant for India as a strategic player in the South China Sea region. In the circumstances of uncertainties wherein world politics is changing quickly, India understands the contribution of Vietnam in achieving the aims of the 'Look East Policy' and its cooperation in strategic benefits in the South China Sea region and beyond. After coming into power in 2014, present Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi- to give sharp- has renamed "Look East policy" as "Act East Policy."⁶⁶ This move by the Indian government came almost around the same period when President Barack Obama of the United States declared the plan to 'Pivot Asia.'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Act East Policy in 2014 to give a more action-oriented focus on Indo-Pacific countries, considering that India needs to be more seriously engaged in the region in economics, maritime, energy, defense, and culture. "Act East Policy" aims to improve and reinvigorate India's ties with the members of ASEAN and East Asian countries. It also aims to eliminate insurgency problems in North-East India and open the region to Southeast Asia, which can help counter China's aggressive foreign policies.⁶⁷ India's foreign policy

⁶⁶ Surupa Gupta, Rani D. Mullen, Rajesh Basrur, Ian Hall, Nicolas Blarel, Manjeet S. Pardesi, and Sumit Ganguly. "Indian foreign policy under Modi: A new brand or just repackaging?" *International Studies Perspectives* 20, no. 1, (2019): 1-45. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/eky008>.

⁶⁷ Amintendu Palit. "India's Act East Policy and Implications for Southeast Asia," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (2016): 81-92. <https://doi.org/10.1355/aa16-1f>.

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toward ASEAN countries is critical to policymakers as the region is getting more attention worldwide. In 2015, during the 13th ASEAN-India summit in Singapore, India expressed its eagerness to improve its ties with ASEAN. At this summit, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggested a mechanism to enhance cooperation: counter-piracy, maritime security, and humanitarian relief between India and ASEAN member countries.⁶⁸ The same issues were also discussed at the joint commission of the 3rd Indo-Philippines bilateral cooperation in November 2015 in New Delhi. During this meeting, Sushma Swaraj- the then Indian foreign Minister- expressed willingness and commitment to a peaceful solution to the South China Sea dispute. During this meeting, India and the Philippines asserted the importance of safeguarding navigation in the region. They reiterated the implementation of the parties' code of conduct in the South China Sea of 2002.⁶⁹

In September 2015, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Vietnam, where the South China Sea issue was again at the center of the discussion between both strategic partners. India's ambassador to Vietnam, P. Harish, indirectly stated that China

⁶⁸ "As it Happened: Modi Addresses ASEAN Summit," *The Hindu*, November 21, (2015).

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Prime-Minister-Narendra-Modi-four-day-visit-to-Malaysia/article60297281.ece>.

⁶⁹ Ministry of External Affairs of India, "Joint Statement between India and Vietnam during the Visit of Prime Minister to Vietnam."

needs to respect the Hague Tribunal's verdict on the South China Sea dispute.⁷⁰ India believes that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) represents the essential aspect of international law on the Sea and Oceans. India has accepted the verdict of the International Court of Arbitration (ICA) regarding the India-Bangladesh maritime dispute.⁷¹ By referring to this verdict, India wants China to accept the verdict and, at the same time, calls all parties to respect UNCLOS. The verdict of UNCLOS provides legal validity for India's presence in energy exploration across the South China Sea with the cooperation of Vietnam.

Act East Policy helped India improve close cooperation with Vietnam and other concerned regional and multilateral organizations like BIMSTEC, EAS, ASEAN, MCG, IORA, and ACD. Through the "Act East Policy," India has been developing cross-border infrastructure to access the South China Sea via land routes.⁷² Both 'Look East' and 'Act East' policies have had political, military, and economic components. However, the focus on energy cooperation and exploration has increased in the past decade.

⁷⁰ "India, Vietnam Signs 12 Agreements," *The Hindu*. September 3, (2016). <https://www.thehindu.com/news/Modi-in-Vietnam-India-Vietnam-sign-bilateral-agreements/article60525785.ece>

⁷¹ Rajendra M. Abhyankar. *Indian diplomacy: beyond strategic autonomy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2018).

⁷² L.H.M. Ling, Adriana Erthal Abdenur, Payal Banerjee, Nimmi Kurian, Mahendra P. Lama, and Li Bo. *India China: Rethinking borders and security*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, (2021).

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With increasing Indian engagement with the Southeast Asian nations, India faces severe problems from China. Twenty Indian soldiers were killed, and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers were injured in a brawl between Indian and Chinese troops on June 15, 2020. The conflict is a component of an ongoing border standoff between the two forces on the Line of Actual Control along the Galwan River. Most members of the Indian strategic community concur that the relationship between China and India is irreversibly deteriorating as a result of this border conflict. They contend that the foundation of ties that developed following the 1988 visit of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to Beijing has been upended, if not destroyed.⁷³ China and India began to doubt one other's motives and actions after the Galwan battle. Both parties tend to attribute benign reasons to their conduct while attributing malicious motives to those of the other. It seems to have given the Chinese the sense that India's goodwill towards China is not being returned and the Indians the impression that China is not attentive enough—even unconcerned—about India's fundamental issues. Deep-seated mistrust is also suggested by each side's propensity to reject the other's justifications. In August 2023, Indian Prime Minister Mr. Modi and Chinese Premier Mr. Xi met in Johannesburg on the sidelines of the BRICS summit. They agreed to disengage the problem at India's border with China. In September 2023, the Indian Foreign Minister claimed that about 75

⁷³ Vijay Ghokhale. "The road from Galwan: The future of India-China relations," *Carnegie India*, 10, (2021).

percent of the “disengagement” problems at India’s border with China had been resolved. However, a definitive resolution of the China-India border dispute remains elusive.⁷⁴

India and Vietnam hold significant potential for expanding energy cooperation, particularly given their shared interests in energy security, the global energy transition, and economic growth. Both countries want to diversify their energy sources, promote renewable energy, and develop sustainable infrastructure. As India’s energy demand rises and Vietnam focuses on meeting its growing industrial and domestic energy needs, energy cooperation has become a strategic area of focus in their bilateral relationship. Fields such as rare earth minerals, nuclear energy, civil nuclear, LNG supply, solar energy, and hydropower energy offer a vast space for cooperation between nations. India and Vietnam are in a good position to expand their solar energy cooperation, which is consistent with their shared goals of energy security and sustainable development. The two nations can strengthen their bilateral ties and play a key role in propelling the global solar energy transition by utilizing their manufacturing, technology, and policy innovation strengths. This partnership further strengthens their dedication to combating climate change and promoting a sustainable energy future in the Indo-Pacific.

⁷⁴ Federica Marci. “How India and China Pulled back from a border war- and why no,” *Aljazeera*, October 22, (2024).
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/22/how-india-and-china-pulled-back-from-a-border-war-and-why>.

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The present collaboration between Vietnam and India is aggressive, forward-thinking, and backed by innovative policy measures. One crucial motivator is still economic cooperation. In 2023–2024, India and Vietnam's bilateral trade totaled USD 14.82 billion. China is Vietnam's biggest trading partner, and their combined trade in 2023 will be worth USD 171.9 billion, far exceeding this amount. If tensions between Beijing and Hanoi are resolved shortly, Vietnam's pursuit of deepening strategic ties with other partners, including India, might be deprioritized. Growing trade ties with India could be crucial in this situation. While trade is essential for a stable partnership, cultivating like-minded alliances in the Indo-Pacific is increasingly relevant to India's rising influence in the region amid the China challenge.⁷⁵

VII. Conclusion

The recent positive developments in the energy cooperation between India and Vietnam have enlarged the momentum of several mutual collaborations and engagements. Moreover, India is involved in joint exploration activities, but it is still insufficient to fulfill India's geopolitical and geostrategic interests. So far, the three blocks have been allocated to ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL), which is inadequate for the security of supply of both concerned

⁷⁵ Rishi Gupta and Shruti Dey. "India and Vietnam: Forging a Forward-Looking Strategic Partnership," *Institute for Security and Development Policy* 53, September 10, (2024).
<https://www.isdp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Blog-53-Vietnam-new.pdf>.

countries. The region is very significant for Indian interests, and it should stand by to protect its interests. If India still hesitates to participate in the South China Sea with total capacity for activities like hydrocarbon exploration and naval exercise, then it would be a big mistake both at diplomatic and policy-making levels. Although trade between India and Vietnam has witnessed improvement these years, it is still not satisfactory, seeing the importance of Vietnam for India. Hence, India should engage itself more proactively to strengthen trade activities with Vietnam and other ASEAN countries. The Chinese maritime forces in the Indian Ocean are surrounding India. The South China Sea is where India could challenge Chinese maritime expansion behavior. In response to such Chinese activity, India's involvement in South China Sea water could compel China to consider its Indian Ocean policies. Vietnam has become a reliable partner in the South China Sea region, which may help India balance power against China. However, India requires a serious geopolitical and geostrategic commitment in the South China Sea region.

India's efforts to make Vietnam a close partner have advanced India-Vietnam cooperation successfully in many fields. However, it would be sensible for India to prioritize energy cooperation, while collaboration in other fields like defense, finance, and shipbuilding should also be given due importance. By considering the need for energy resources, this paper suggests

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that India should take steps seriously to enlarge engagements with other members of ASEAN. It may strengthen India's strategic presence in the region and help India increase its power balance against China. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's continuous visit to several ASEAN countries gave a sense that the Modi government is committed to implementing the objectives of the Act East Policy. Despite several geopolitical challenges to India, it is still strengthening its ties with ASEAN countries, although the pace is slow.

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<https://www.deccanherald.com/india/india-hosts-milan-naval-exercise-around-50-countries-participating-2901095/>.

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<https://www.indembassyhanoi.gov.in/page/trade-facilitation-ahead-with-asean-india-deal-upgrade-vir/>.
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A Policy Reversal of the British Arms Export Control to the Middle East in the Arab Israeli Wars of 1967 and 1973: A Reassessment*

Muhamad Hasrul Zakariah**

Abstract

This essay will reassess a policy reversal of the British's arms export control to the Middle East during the 1967 Six-Day Arab-Israeli War and the Yom Kippur War of 1973. This study asserts that the wars profited the British arms industry, which primarily sold its military products to the Middle Eastern nations. With the escalation of the conflicts, the demand for arms supplies accelerated, and Britain, as one of the major arms suppliers, enjoyed a hugely rewarding business in the developing lucrative market. Subsequently, the mountainous revenue from arms sales influenced the British's policy during and after the wars. In fact, the British government has had to reconsider their policy, such as in the case of the arms embargo aftermath of the 1973 war, to suit the compulsions of various stakeholders, particularly the arms

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manufacturers in Britain. Concurrently, stiff competition in the arms trade business in the Arab countries, especially from the Soviet Union pressured London to revise the arms sales policy during the wars. Hence, London has to balance the huge profit of the arms sales with a strategy to secure the oil flows from the Arab nations, which can only be preserved by ending the wars through a comprehensive peace plan. The study relies predominantly on the archival of declassified documents available at the National Archive of the United Kingdom in London. In the analysis, the findings of the essay determined that during the age of peace and wars, the Arab Israeli affair remains a cardinal event to the British's economic interest—especially in terms of the grossing arms industry

Keywords: Arab Israeli Wars, British, Arms export, policy reversal, embargo, Middle East

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I. Introduction

The Six-Day Arab-Israeli War in 1967 and the *Yom Kippur* War in 1973 were among the most critical conflicts in the history of the Arab Israeli dispute since the founding of the Israeli state after the Second World War. Unlike the Israel Independence War of 1948 and the Suez Crisis of 1956, the British was not directly involved in the battlefields. Nevertheless, in both wars, London's position remained relevant since the wars affected British oil imports and arms exports to the Middle East, subsequently influencing its policy towards the region. The wars all took place within a short period—six years or so. Nonetheless, during the conflicts, London still played an important role and gained a huge profit when the demand for arms multiplied tremendously. As tension escalated in the 1960s and the 1970s, the strategic interest of Britain became more critical. The wars spurred the promotion of Britain's long tradition of arms supply business with the Middle Eastern nations. Ironically, as the conflict intensified, the British government had to balance its policy of maintaining peace with the escalation of arms supply demand. Peace and political stability in the region were vital to ensure that British economic activities in the region were uninterrupted, particularly the oil supply from the Arab countries and Iran. Initially, during the 1967 and 1973 wars, Britain's imports from the Middle East were, as always, predominantly oil. It is worth noting that the total of

Britain's oil imports from the region had risen from over £300 million in 1960 to under £350 million in 1965, accelerated to over £400 million in 1967 and then shot ahead to over £600 million in 1968.¹ Based on the source from the Department of Trade and Industry, the same pattern remains in the 1973 war.² Britain's crude oil import in 1973 came mainly from the Arab World. Most of this oil was imported from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya. In this context, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Sir Alex Douglas-Home, during the War of 1973, clearly stated that:

*The Middle East is important to Britain for economic, strategic, and historical reasons. The major British national interest in the area is that there should be an overall settlement of the Arab Israelis dispute. Only if there is such settlement can our (UK) continued access to Arab oil be safeguarded.*³

Despite the importance placed on oil, the Arab Israeli war and conflict dramatically increased the demand for arms supplies from Britain. Accordingly, in the context of the British arms exports policy, this article will focus on the British's approach to

¹ Frank Brenchley. *Britain and the Middle East: An Economic History 1945-87*. London: Lester Crook, (1989): 182.

² Foreign and Commonwealth Office. A report by Department of Trade and Industry, file FCO 56/1135, London: The National Archive, (1973).

³ Sir Alex Douglas-Home. A statement extracted from the parliamentary Hansard, Col. 3-41, vol. 861, file FCO 93/205, London: The National Archive, (October 16, 1973).

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balance the needs of the Arab oil supplies on one side, which could only be preserved through the stability of the region by imposing the arms embargo for permanent and durable peace, and at the same time, being very prudent in imposing the embargo to ensure the stance would not compromise Britain's arms trade activity and prospect in the region, especially when the demand for arms escalated as a consequence of the wars. Hence, the British faced a dilemma in their decision to implement arms embargo to the Middle East during the Arab Israeli wars as London had to consider wisely between preserving the cheap oil flow or securing the lucrative arms trades.

Retrospectively, the Israelis' victory in both wars changed the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, and the impact of the wars remains to this day.⁴ Tragically, the incomprehensive solution to the conflict in 1967 led to another war, known as the *Yom Kippur War*, in 1973. Nevertheless, the battle in 1973 ushered for the first time a momentous peace agreement with the seal of the Camp David Accord in 1978. The Accord, orchestrated by President Jimmy Carter, brought for the first time since the First World War the Israeli and Arab leaders to the negotiation table, concurrently a remarkable symbol of recognition to Israel as an independent state by the Arabs for the first time since its founding

⁴ Ahron Bregman. *Israel's Wars: A History Since 1947*. London: Routledge, (2000): 91-92.

in 1948. Eventually, the wars again boosted demands from the confronted nations for arms supplies from Britain.

Several studies have addressed the issue of the arms embargo policy imposed by Britain on the confronted nations during and after the Arab Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973. Among them was Simon Smith (2014), who concluded in his analysis that the British arms embargo was based on London's determination to protect ongoing and extensive British economic interests in the Arab World, especially oil supplies.⁵ Moshe Gat shared the same conclusion with Smith, emphasizing the importance of Arab's oil as the main reason for the embargo.⁶ Meanwhile, Oded Eran and Lauren Calin explicated that the embargo was purely a punitive policy by Britain against Israel and simultaneously a desire to improve relations with the Arab countries.⁷ Echoing with a similar conclusion was Jonathan Rynhold and Jonathan Spyer, who in their analysis elucidated that the arms embargo imposed by Edward Heath's government in 1973 was biased and clearly benefited the Arab side. Like Gat and Smith, Rynhold and Spyer accentuated that the embargo was undoubtedly caused by Britain

⁵ Simon C. Smith. "Centurions and Chieftains: Tank and Sales and British Policy Towards Israel in the Aftermath of the Six-Day War," *Contemporary British History* 28, no.2 (2014): 219.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2014.930348>.

⁶ Moshe Gat. "Britain and Israel Before and After the Six Day War, June 1967: From Support to Hostility," *Contemporary British History*, 18, no.1 (2004): 54.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1361946042000217301>.

⁷ Oded Eran, and Lauren G. Calin. "Were, Are and Will Sanctions be Effective against Israel?" *Strategic Assessment*, 16, no. 4 (2014): 61.

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and European nations' reliance upon the Arab oil supply.⁸ Clive Jones provided the homogeneous pronouncement that the Conservative government policy, like the embargo under Prime Minister, Edward Heath was much influenced by the increasing dependence on Arab oil.⁹

Most studies collectively interpreted the British arms sales embargo policy during the Arab Israeli wars as a move to preserve British oil interests in the Arab World. However, these authors never explained the reason why the British revoked the arms embargo execution hastily, although the comprehensive and permanent peace accord, as repeatedly stated by the British before lifting the ban, was not yet concluded by January 1974. It is noteworthy to reemphasize that the British aim in imposing the arms embargo was to ensure the oil flow from the Middle East would not be obstructed by the continuous wars, subsequently avoiding the possibility of Arab's oil embargo towards Europe and Britain as they did in the Khartoum Conference after the Arab-Israel war of 1967.¹⁰ In addition, a continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict will dramatically increase world oil prices. In

⁸ Jonathan Rynhold, and Jonathan Spyer, "British Policy in the Arab Israeli Arena 1973-2004," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 34, no.2 (2007): 148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530190701427891>.

⁹ Clive Jones, 2021, "Getting the Better of the Bargain: Technical Intelligence, Arms Sales and Anglo-Israeli Relations 1967-1974," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 32, no.3 (2021): 545. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2021.1961489>.

¹⁰ Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Note of Arab Foreign Minister Conference, Khartoum, file FCO17/7, London: The National Archive (August 1967).

1973, for instance, the war-induced increase in oil prices added an extra £400 million to Britain's balance of payments. Therefore, as mentioned by The Chancellor of Exchequer in his speech at the Mansion House in October 1973, the importance of a comprehensive peaceful solution was the best way to reduce the British's balance of payments due to the war.¹¹ To secure the oil flow, London has to ensure the conflict discontinues, and one of the most effective ways is to ban the sales of arms and ammunition to the confronted nations. However, as the region remained volatile and a comprehensive peace accord was still a long way off, London rescinded the arms embargo without hesitation.

In rebutting the accusation that the embargo was imposed because of oil, the British government has openly denied on many occasions any direct link between the policy of arms sales and the oil supply. The stance continued when the Labor Party returned to power in 1974, as affirmed by Patrick Wright, head of the Middle East Department at the Foreign Office. He said there was no direct link between arms sales and the Middle East oil.¹² Reflecting a similar statement was Roy Hattersley, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in 1974, who stated

¹¹ The Chancellor of Exchequer. Extract from the Chancellor's speech, Lord Barber at the Mansion House, file FCO 55/1131, London: The National Archive, (October 18, 1973).

¹² Patrick R.H Wright. A memo from Foreign Office to Mr. A.T Lamb, British Ambassador to Kuwait, file FCO 8/2210, London: The National Archive, (November 21, 1974).

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the accusation was “entirely misleading.”¹³ The British government also refuted any allegation that the embargo proved that London was bowing to the Arab’s oil blackmail as affirmed by The Foreign and Commonwealth Office repeatedly in 1970s.¹⁴ Above all, the previous discourses again did not explain on what basis the British lifted the embargo in a hurry, whilst the comprehensive disengagement agreement between confronted nations, such as Syria and Israel, was not achieved until May 1974.¹⁵

Looking back, the first Egyptian Israeli Disengagement Agreement, which temporarily ended the 1973 War, was only signed by the military commanders at Kilometer 101, Cairo-Suez Road on January 18, 1974.¹⁶ Instantaneously, the British lifted the embargo on January 21, 1974, just two days after the obscure disengagement, without further waiting for a more durable and comprehensive peace agreement between the conflicting parties. Suffice to mention, since the end of December 1973, the British had remained uncertain about the prospect of the Middle East conflict, as highlighted on many occasions. For example, Mr. R.

¹³ Roy Hattersley. A letter from Hattersley, Minister of State for FCO to Airey Neave, MP, file FCO 93/567, London: The National Archive, (April 11, 1974).

¹⁴ Anthony Parsons. A memo from A. D Parson, FCO to Lord Nicholas Gordon Lennox, file FCO 55/1133, London: The National Archive, (November 8, 1973).

¹⁵ Mark Tessler. *A History of the Israeli Palestinian Conflict*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, (1994): 481.

¹⁶ Dan Tschirgi. *The American Search for Mideast Peace*. New York: Praeger, (1989):86.

Anderson from the Defense Sales Department responded to Mr. Marwan, President Anwar el-Sadat's adviser on December 21, 1973, saying that the British government "cannot contemplate lifting the embargo while the ceasefire is still in a fragile state. The talks at Kilometer 101 have broken down and minor breaches of the ceasefire have become frequent during the past few days."¹⁷ The justification by Anderson was agreed by historians like Frank Brenchley who concluded that, "the ceasefire lines with the Egyptian troops on the east bank and Israeli troops on the west bank of the Suez Canal, were clearly unstable."¹⁸

Furthermore, the armistice talks under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) attended by Egypt, Jordan, Israel, the USSR and the USA only began in Geneva on December 21, 1973, without Syria. The talks made some early progress but then became bogged down. It took some shuttling between Aswan and Jerusalem by the US Secretary of State, Dr. Henry Kissinger, to bring them to a conclusion on January 18, 1974 with the partial withdrawal of the Israeli troops from Sinai and a limited Egyptian forces occupying a 6-mile strip along the whole of the east bank of the Suez Canal, with another 6-mile strip to the east forming a demilitarized zone (DMZ) occupied by UN forces. This relocation of the troops was only completed on March 4, 1974. Despite the

¹⁷ Lord Balniel. A memo from Mr. R Anderson in a letter from Lord Balniel, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs to Secretary of Defense, file PREM 15/1768, London: The National Archive, (December 4, 1973).

¹⁸ Brenchley, *Britain and the Middle East*, 209

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British admitting that the peace process was not yet comprehensively achieved, and the region had remained fragile with the Four Powers talks still under negotiation in Geneva, London decided to lift the arms embargo promptly as early as January.

Undoubtedly, the British also fully realized from the beginning of the embargo that if London continued to resupply the arms without a comprehensive peace disengagement, it would only invigorate tensions in the region and prolong the conflict. According to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the government believed that it was a ‘permanent and durable political settlement’ that was desperately needed in the region, and not only a temporary disengagement, to guarantee an uninterrupted flow of oil to Britain from the Middle East.¹⁹ The continuation of the conflict will interrupt the oil flow into Britain and Western Europe, which depended largely on the Arab countries’ exports in the 1960s and 1970s. Hence, it is inconsistent that the Arab oil was the principal factor of the British embargo, yet London had lifted the embargo so briskly.

In the end, this essay will divulge the importance of the wars in determining the British policy towards the Middle East region

¹⁹ Sir Alec Douglas-Home. A memorandum from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in a telegram no. 338, to the British Embassy, Kuwait, file FCO93/213, London: The National Archive, (November 12, 1973).

during the 1967 and 1973 wars. The study will disclose how the British balanced its policy strategy between preserving stability through a comprehensive peace plan to secure the oil flows and simultaneously protecting the lucrative arm business in the region when the demand of military supplies escalated because of the wars. By assessing the archival records, the study will examine the British policy during the conflict with a focus on the arms embargo approaches in the wars.

II. Britain, the 1967-1973 Arab Israeli wars, and the Peace

Accord: An Overview

The 1967 Six-Day War began with an air strike by the Israel Air Force (IAF) against the Egyptians under the operation code name “Moked” at 7:45 a.m. on Monday, June 5, 1967. Operation Moked was extraordinarily successful and led to a sensational and dramatic victory for the Israel Defense Force (IDF). Under the command of Israel’s Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, the Egyptian army was destroyed and chased to the bank of the Suez Canal. The end result of the strike was disastrous—2,000 Egyptian troops were killed fighting the Israelis, and 10,000 perished in the retreat.²⁰ Meanwhile, the Jordanian front war started at 9:45 a.m. on the 5th of June with the result being the control of Jordan’s territories on the West Bank including East

²⁰ Bregman, *Israel’s Wars*, 91-92.

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Jerusalem, by the IDF. Elsewhere, on the Golan Heights, the war did not start until the 8th of June. The result was the defeat of the Syrian army. After the war, the international community initiated a peace effort, which ended with the United Nations Resolution 242 on November 22, 1967.²¹

However, UN Resolution 242 failed to set a comprehensive and permanent peace settlement among the fighting nations. Consequently, another war broke off in October 1973, known as the *Yom Kippur* War. The war ended with a ceasefire announced on 22nd October through the UN Security Council Resolution 338 after the Arab troops were badly defeated.²² Subsequently, the ceasefire led to the signing of disengagement agreements from January to May 1974 between the Arabs and Israelis.²³ After two consecutive wars since 1967, the international community led by the United States began talks on a comprehensive peace plan after the 1973 war. The tireless efforts by US Secretary of State Dr. Henry Kissinger and President Jimmy Carter were finally successful in bringing the Arabs and Israelis to the negotiation table. Egypt's President Anwar Sadat and Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin met for the peace accord hosted by US President Jimmy Carter at Camp David on September 17, 1978,

²¹ Yehuda Lukacs. *The Israeli Palestinian Conflict: A Documentary Record, 1967-1990*. Cambridge: Press Syndicate, (1992): 1-2.

²² Lukacs, *The Israeli Palestinian Conflict*, 13-14.

²³ Bregman, *Israel's Wars*, 91-92.

where the Egyptian Israeli Peace Treaty was subsequently executed on March 26, 1979.²⁴

Although the Suez Conflict in 1956 generally marked the end of the British's strong influence in the Middle East since the First World War, the region remained invaluable to Britain in the 1960s and the 1970s. The British government was excluded and was not involved directly in the wars and peace accord. However, it is undisputed that London played a critical role during the conflicts. One of the British's roles was to draft the United Nations Resolution 242, which not only ended the war but turned it into a basic framework for peace bargaining.²⁵ The resolution had indeed become the fundamental framework of all peace negotiations, including the one at Camp David in 1978 and the Oslo Plan of 1994. Avi Shlaim, for instance, writing as late as 1994 on the Oslo Accord said, "the basis of all negotiations [at Oslo] was UN Resolution 242 and the principle of exchanging land for peace."²⁶ It was certainly considered so by George Brown, Secretary of States for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who said in his speech at the House of Commons on January 24, 1968 that "the resolution that was unanimously

²⁴ William Quandt. *Camp David Peace Making and Politics*, Washington D.C: The Brooking Institution, (1986): 219-249.

²⁵ U-Thant. *View from The U.N.* London: David & Charles, (1978): 281.

²⁶ Avi Shlaim. "The Oslo Accord," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 23, no.3 (1994): 24-40. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.1994.23.3.00p0024k>.

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adopted was a success for the whole Security Council, but we in Britain can rightly take great pride in what happened.”²⁷

During the 1967 war, the British government’s policy was to end the war as soon as possible. London also declared that their stand on the 1967 conflict was unbiased and similar to what they believed before the war. The policy had been declared publicly many times by the Foreign Office, such as on March 22, 1966, when it was indicated that “our declared policy is to be impartial, to avoid taking sides in the dispute...”²⁸ On June 15, 1967, British Foreign Secretary George Brown in the House of Commons declared that Britain was “not to take sides” in the Arab Israeli War. British forces in the Middle East, he disclosed, had been ordered “to avoid any involvement in the conflict.”²⁹ This policy was based on the principle of safeguarding the British’s vast interests in the Middle East as described by George Brown when the war erupted in June 1967.³⁰

²⁷ George Brown. A Parliamentary Hansard. *Cols.* 440-1, vol. 24, A speech by George Brown, Secretary of States, London: The National Archive, (January 24, 1968).

²⁸ Michael Stewart. A report from Mr. Stewart to Hadow (Tel Aviv) entitles ‘British policy towards the Arab/Israel dispute’, file PREM 13/1617, London: The National Archive, (March 29, 1966).

²⁹ Hol Kosut. *Israel & the Arabs: The June 1967 War*, New York: Facts on File Inc., (1968): 120-148

³⁰ George Brown. A memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs entitles “British in the Middle East”, Guidance no 151, file OD 34/282, London: The National Archive, (June 16, 1967).

Eventually, in the 1973 war, the British government's policy remained, and London's aim was to stop the conflict as soon as possible and work tirelessly with all the parties concerned to achieve a just and durable peace in the region. The fundamental policy of the British government towards the peace settlement was based on the principles laid out by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Sir Alex Douglas-Home, in his famous Harrogate's Speech of 1970, emphasizing on the principle of equilibrium whereby agreed solutions on all the separate elements would have to be incorporated into formal and binding agreement and endorsed by the UN Security Council.³¹ Expressing the same view, the British Prime Minister, Sir Edward Heath in 1973 stated,

*The policy of the British government through the present crisis has had two objectives: to bring about an end to the fighting, and at the same time to ensure that urgent steps are taken to establish a just and lasting settlement of the Middle East question.*³²

Meanwhile in the House of Commons on November 22, 1973, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Balniel, in his

³¹ Sir Alex Douglas-Home. A brief note no. 2, a visit of US Secretary of State, file FCO 55/108, London: The National Archive, (December 11-13, 1973).

³² Edward Heath. Sir. A letter from the UK Prime Minister to President of Algeria, file FCO93/284, London: The National Archive, (November 5, 1973).

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response to a question from H. Dykes, MP stated that the “HMG’s policy in the Middle East, as set out in Alec Douglas-Home’s speech at Harrogate in October 1970 contributes to a peaceful settlement in the interests of all concerned.”³³

With regard to Carter’s initiative which led to the Camp David Accord in 1978, suffice to say that from the beginning, London agreed not to get directly involved in the peace process. This is as indicated by Sir Peter Ramsbotham, the UK Ambassador at Washington when he informed Dr. Henry Kissinger at their meeting in March 1974 (while he recalled British Foreign Secretary Sir Alex Douglas-Home’s stand), “that London would not be the party to anything which will cut across US peace-making efforts in the Middle East.”³⁴ The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (hereafter FCO) emphasized that the British government did not wish to insist on participation in the initiative because “intervention by other parties with specific ideas could lead to crossing of wires.”³⁵ Meanwhile, in the parliament, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, David

³³ Lord Balniel. A letter from the Minister of State to H. Dykes, MP, House of Commons to Anthony Robert Lindsay, file FCO 55/1134, London: The National Archive, (November 22, 1973).

³⁴ Sir Peter Ramsbotham. A note of meeting between HMG Ambassador and the Secretary of State, Dr. Henry Kissinger, file FCO 93/497, London: The National Archive, (March 6, 1974).

³⁵ Michael Weir. A note of Mr. Weir’s talk with Mr. Sytenko, Head of Middle East Department in Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, file FCO 93/509, London: The National Archive, (September 13, 1974).

Ennals, further stressed the British policy of not getting involved in the peace negotiations which were led by Dr. Kissinger.³⁶

III. Britain and arms exports in the 1967 War

The Arab Israeli wars were very significant to the British's business strategic interests in the Middle East during the 1960s. For Britain, particularly from the late 1960s, defense sales became an alternative means of promoting its national interests in the Middle East at a time when its more traditional methods – the stationing of troops at bases in Bahrain, Sharjah and Aden – were becoming both economically unsustainable and regionally unpopular.³⁷ Hence, the British Ministry of Defense had found it worthwhile to set up a Defense Sales Department in the 1960s and even to bring in a prominent businessman to head it.³⁸ Although in the above discussion, the British's official policy was to stop the wars immediately and to find a 'durable and comprehensive' solution for peace, the escalation of the conflict was also important in doubling Britain's arms sales to the Middle Eastern countries. Certainly, the war would disturb oil flow from the

³⁶ David Ennals. A Parliamentary Hansard. *Cols.* 1521, vol. 875, a written answer to the House of Commons, file FCO 93/517, London: The National Archive, (June 17, 1974).

³⁷ Nicholas Gardner. "The Harold Wilson Government, Airwork Services Limited, and the Saudi Arabian Air Defense Scheme, 1965-1973," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42 no. 2, (2007): 345–363.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009407075547>.

³⁸ Brenchley, *Britain and the Middle East*, 184.

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region, which Britain mostly depended on, but at the same time, war would also increase the demand for more arms, and Britain was one of the major arms suppliers for the region.

Meanwhile, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Soviet bloc's influence was growing in the Middle East, especially in the Arab countries. The scenario created stiff competition for the trade and threatened Britain's arms market in the region when the revolutionary Arab countries, especially Egypt, Syria and Iraq, started to purchase military equipment from the Soviet Union. For example, from 1955 until its formal break with Egypt in 1976, the Soviet Union supplied an average of 86 per cent of the country's total arms imports.³⁹ In fact, in the case of Iraq, since 1968, virtually all of Iraq's land armaments came from the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ In Syria, the arms trade was dominated by Czechoslovakia as one of the biggest Soviet bloc arms exporters to the Middle East during the Cold War.⁴¹

Based on the above scenario, at the time of the Six-Day War, the British Cabinet agreed not to hold up arms to the Israelis so long as the Soviet Union Bloc continued to supply the Arab

³⁹ David Kinsella. "Conflict in Context: Arms Transfers and Third World Rivalries during the Cold War," *American Journal of Political Science*, 38, no. 3(1994): 557-581. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111597>.

⁴⁰ Rachel Schmidt. *A Rand Note: Global Arms Export to Iraq, 1960-1990*, Washington: RAND (1991): vi.

⁴¹ Jan Adamec. "Czechoslovakia and Arms Deliveries to Syria 1955-1989," *Les Cahiers Irice* 10, no. 1, (2013): 69-81. <https://doi.org/10.3917/lci.010.0069>.

states.⁴² The Cabinet subsequently pointed out that “if we were to default, both to Israel and to the Arab States, on orders which had been placed with us, we should cease to be regarded as a reliable source of supply and might put at risk large long-term orders already placed with us.”⁴³ It was estimated that the export profit of the British arms to the Arab states, especially to Egypt, Syria, Algeria and Iraq, reached up to approximately £250 million within two to five years during these periods. In fact, from 1962 to 1967, the total of British arms sales to the Arab nations was 10 per cent of the total export of British arms sales worldwide. Individually, the sales to Saudi Arabia and Libya within three to five years of the period profited Britain around £40 to £50 million per year.⁴⁴

Interestingly, with the escalation of the conflict prior to the 1967 war, the values of purchases increased excessively. As the war approached, the worth of British arms exports to the region increased to \$360 million, and with many military equipment destroyed during the war, the amount increased to \$520 million in 1970.⁴⁵ In total, from 1966 to 1975, Britain exported

⁴² Cabinet Conclusions. CC (67) 36th conclusions, file CAB 128/42, Part 2, London: The National Archive, (June 6, 1967).

⁴³ Cabinet Conclusions. CC (67) 37th conclusions, file CAB 128/42, Part 2, London: The National Archive, (June 8, 1967).

⁴⁴ Timothy Crosthwait. A report of Arm Sales to the Middle East, file FCO 17/114, London: The National Archive, (April 5, 1968).

⁴⁵ John Stanley and Maurice Pearton. *The International Trade in Arms*. London: Praeger (1972): 72-73.

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approximately \$775 million of arms to the Arab nations.⁴⁶ Simultaneously, the acceleration of the British's arms trade in the region was concurrent with the increasing value of the Arab's expenses on military equipment due to the war. This included replacing arms after the war when most of their military equipment was destroyed by the Israelis in the battle.⁴⁷

The growth of the Soviet Union's influence was a big threat to the British's lucrative arms market in the region in the 1960s. For example, in 1966 almost 70 percent of the Soviet Union's arms exports to developing countries were directed to the Middle East.⁴⁸ This figure was a lot higher than the Soviet Union's exports to China, North Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba, Africa and South Asia. During this period, the Soviet Union emerged as one of the arch-rivals of Britain as the leading arms exporter to the Middle East.⁴⁹ The following Table 1 contains the list of major arms suppliers to the Middle East during this period, which becomes the major competitors to Britain, especially the Soviet Union.

⁴⁶ ACDA-Arms Control and Disarmament Agency of the United States. *World Military Expenditure and Arms Transfer, 1966-1975*, Washington: Government Printing Office (1976): 77-78.

⁴⁷ Fred Gottheil. "An Economic Assessment of the Military Burden in the Middle East: 1960-1980," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 18, no. 3, (1974): 502- 513.

⁴⁸ ACDA, *World Military Expenditure and Arms Transfer, 1966-1975*, 77-78.

⁴⁹ ACDA, *World Military Expenditure and Arms Transfer, 1966-1975*, 77-80.

Table 1: Total Arms Transfers of Major Suppliers From 1966-1975 to the Middle East (Million Current Dollars)

Supplier	Amount
Britain	775
Soviet Union	6300
United States	7475
France	544
China	224

Source: ACDA, World Military Expenditure and Arms Transfer, 1966-1975, 78.

The outcome of the 1967 War was very important to London as the export shares would go favorably for the Soviet Union if the Arab nations lost in the battle and suspected Britain of actively supporting the Israelis. From this strategic point of view, the British policy must be accommodated to the war scenario to preserve London's arms supply businesses in the region. It has to be emphasized here that during the same period, cumulatively, the arms exports to the Middle East comprised almost 50 per cent of Britain's total arms export to the developing nations.⁵⁰ The importance of this region to Britain's arms business and the threat from the Soviet Union was indicated in the memorandum of the

⁵⁰ ACDA, *World Military Expenditure and Arms Transfer*, 1966-1975, 77-78.

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Foreign Office in 1967 which disclosed the delivery of “thousand-million-pound sterling worth of arms, about half of it to UAR.”⁵¹ Due to the threat by the Soviet Union, one of the strategies in British policy during the 1967 war to preserve her interest in the arms business was “to avoid from being identified as the main arm supplier to Israel.”⁵²

Nonetheless, stopping or reducing the number of arms exports to the conflicting nations was not the best option for Britain. This fact was admitted by the British’s Foreign Secretary who emphasized the British’s view that, “If we do not continue to supply arms, we should lose not only profitable exports, but any political advantage which our position as a supplier might give us.”⁵³ One of the examples was in November 1968 when Israel asked Britain to provide a further 200 Centurions, as well as 250 Chieftain tanks, over a four-year period. The Israeli request stimulated a lively debate among British decision-makers. Recalling that a major objective of British policy was a peace settlement in the Middle East, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Michael Stewart (who succeeded Brown in March 1968) argued that, it would avoid putting at risk Britain large military and civil

⁵¹ Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Guidance no. 160 to British missions abroad, file FCO 17/112, London: The National Archive, (June 26, 1967).

⁵² Michael Hadow. A memo from Mr. Hadow to A. R. More, file FCO 17/114, London: The National Archive, (November 28, 1967).

⁵³ George Brown. A note ‘Policy for the Sale of Arms to Israel and the Arab countries’ by Secretary of States for FCO, file FCO 17/114, London: The National Archive, (November 27, 1967).

export orders to the Arab countries and setting back the improvement in London relations with these countries which she had achieved since the war in 1967. Bolstering his argument still further, the Foreign Secretary recorded that, “it would be contrary to our policy to be the first to introduce weapons into the Middle East which had a greater offensive power than those already there.”⁵⁴

Defense Secretary Denis Healey, by contrast, favored the sale of Chieftains to Israel. On the commercial side, Healey pointed out that were Britain to refuse to supply the Chieftains, the whole of the Israeli order might be lost. Regarding military arguments, he emphasized that, in the opinion of the Chiefs of Staff, the military balance in the region had shifted to Israel's disadvantage since the 1967 war. Eventually, in his report to the Defense and Overseas Policy Committee on November 13, 1968, Stewart stressed that orders from Arab countries that might be imperiled by the sale of Chieftains to Israel amounted to some £500 million.⁵⁵ Summing up, nevertheless, Harold Wilson stressed the merit of maintaining secrecy in order to minimize any

⁵⁴ Defense and Overseas Policy Committee. A Minute of Meeting, 20th meeting, file CAB 148/35OPD (68), London: The National Archive, (November 7, 1968).

⁵⁵ Defense and Overseas Policy Committee. A Minute of meeting, 20th meeting, file CAB 148/35OPD (68), London: The National Archive, (November 7, 1968).

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damaging consequence.⁵⁶ Concurrently, the Cabinet Defense and Overseas Policy Committee recommended that Britain should supply not only the Centurion tanks to Israel but Chieftains too.⁵⁷

During the 1967 war, the British government gained a huge profit due to the acceleration of arms exports to the Middle East. The demand for more arms increased dramatically before and after the war. Nevertheless, following the Six-Day War, the British government prohibited the sale of any offensive weaponry to either Israel or its immediate Arab neighbors, being concerned that any destabilization of the military balance between the belligerents would lead to another regional war, with an array of consequences ranging from a possible superpower confrontation to the Arab states cutting off oil supplies to the West.⁵⁸ In this respect, there was a difference between the arms and equipment that the British were prepared to sell to the Arabs. For example, from the UK's perspective, the Egyptian navy would have been an ideal client because, of all the four-armed services, it was the one least likely to be committed to offensive operations in a war against Israel due to its limited capabilities. As a comparison, Whitehall imposed stringent restrictions on defense sales to Egypt, banning the supply of any weaponry or equipment that could be

⁵⁶ Defense and Overseas Policy Committee. A Minute of meeting, 20th meeting, file CAB 148/35OPD (68), London: The National Archive (November 7, 1968).

⁵⁷ Smith. "Centurions and Chieftains," 219-239.

⁵⁸ Hughes, "Courting Sadat," 317-332.

transferred to the Soviet bloc, and also (during the course of both the South Arabian insurgency and the Egyptian intervention in the Yemeni civil war, 1962–67) prohibiting the supply of any arms or other items that could either be smuggled into South Arabia to aid the anti-British insurgency, or support the Egyptian expeditionary force fighting in Yemen.⁵⁹

IV. The Arms Sales Embargo in the 1973 Arab Israeli War

In the 1973 Arab Israeli conflict, a similar pattern of businesses came up in Britain's arms trade activities in the Middle East. The conflict was very crucial to the survival of the British arms market, with the demand continuing to increase tremendously. The Arabs and Israelis continued their policy of rebuilding military strength across the region. The value of annual transfers to the Middle East grew even more dramatically in the 1970s – from \$4 billion to \$24 billion.⁶⁰ Parallel to the growth of Middle East arms imports is a rapid increase in military expenditures. Sivard indicated that by the end of the 1970s, the

⁵⁹ Dennis Speares. A memo by Spears, (Head of North and East Africa Department, Foreign Office), Aircraft Equipment for the UAR, File FCO 39/290, London: The National Archive, (February 6, 1967).

⁶⁰ Congressional Budget Office. *Limiting Conventional Arms Exports to the Middle East- A CBO Report*, Washington D.C: Congress of the United States (1992):5.

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Middle East region was spending between 13 and 15 per cent of its gross national product on the military.⁶¹

In this context, it is also important to explore the value of British arms exports to the Middle East during the 1970s. Prior to the 1973 conflict, the region was one of the biggest British arms export markets. As revealed by the record from the Ministry of Defense, the total of export orders of the British's Defense Equipment from 1969 to 1970 was valued at £551 million and the deliveries of the defense equipment from 1967 to 1970 were worth more than £620 million.⁶² In addition, based on the record from the UK Department of Trade and Industry, in 1972, there were more than £687,000 worth of combat aircraft sold to the Middle Eastern countries, and this increased to more than £2 million between January and August 1973. The British exported warships amounting to more than £18 million from 1972 to August 1973 with most of the receiving countries being Iran, Oman and Saudi Arabia. Other exported items during the same period were £2 million worth of explosives and £23 million worth of ammunition, with the main purchasers being Libya, Israel, Qatar, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Kuwait.⁶³ The vitality of the

⁶¹ Ruth Sivard. *World Military and Social Expenditures, 1982*, Virginia: World Priorities, (1982).

⁶² Ministry of Defense. Extracted from a report "British Sales of Defense Equipment", file PREM 15/296, London: The National Archive, (1973).

⁶³ Department of Trade. Economic and Statistic Division, a report "UK Export Arms to the Middle East," attached in a letter from Coates, M. to Nixon, P.M., file FCO 93/293, London: The National Archive, (December 11, 1973).

Middle Eastern market compared to other continents is detailed in the following Table 2 which was extracted from the UK Department of Trade and Industry's record.

Table 2: United Kingdom Arms Export (£ million)

1969 -September 1973	Europe	Middle East	Africa	North America	Latin America	Rest of the World	Total
Warship	-	31	8	7	1	21	68
Combat aircraft	5	36	2	39	3	5	90
Arms & ammunition	111	110	19	7	5	65	307
Aircrafts engine (all)	291	44	21	311	16	72	755
Parts of aircraft (all aircraft)	252	55	26	82	21	83	519
Electronic, radio and radar communications	155	58	43	43	21	68	431
Total	799	334	119	489	67	314	2,122

Source: Department of Trade and Industry. A report "UK Export Arms to the Middle East," a copy of report attached in a letter from Coates, M. to Nixon, P.M., file FCO 93/293, London: The National Archive, 1973.

The above statistics show that the Middle Eastern region was one of the most important arms markets to British exporters from 1969 to 1973. From the breakdown, more than 46 per cent of the British export of warships and 40 per cent of the combat aircrafts were exported to the Middle East. In fact, other than European countries, the Middle Eastern countries were the highest purchasers of British arms and ammunition with a value of £110 million or 36 per cent of the total supplies. In addition to this statistic, it was also estimated that the total value of Arab's imports of major weapons from 1971 to 1975 (at constant prices)

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was more than \$22.9 billion and thus, it was very hard for Britain to let this lucrative market go.⁶⁴

Interchangeable with the 1960s era, the same scenario also appeared in the 1970s. British arms exporters in this era encountered stiff competition from other countries like the Soviet Union and France. One of the major factors Arab countries like Egypt purchase arms from the Soviet Union, apart from the ideological similarity, is because of the superiority, discount and attractive package provided by the Soviets. As analyzed by Yuriy Kirshin, during the Cold War, including in the Arab-Israel conflict, the Arabs were attracted to purchase arms from the Soviets due to the superiority of Soviet weapons as proven through their successful use in military conflicts at various levels and times. Kirshin further argued that Soviet arms proved to be simple in use and highly reliable yet had high-performance characteristics.⁶⁵

A memorandum by CIA in 1974 revealed that Soviet arms are usually priced lower than comparable Western equipment and are sold at discounts averaging about 40 per cent below list prices. Overall, Soviet was the second largest source of arms for the

⁶⁴ Michael Brzoska. *Arm Transfer to the Third World, 1971-85*. London: Oxford University Press, (1987):16-17

⁶⁵ Yuriy Kirshin. "Conventional arms transfer during the Soviet period," in *Russia and the Arms Trade*, Anthony, Ian, ed. New York: Oxford University Press, (1998): 42.

Middle East, committing some \$4.6 billion during 1967-73.⁶⁶ Moscow program has been highly concentrated, with Egypt and Syria accounting for about two-thirds of Soviet Middle East arms commitments.⁶⁷ Prior to the October 1973 War, one of the major recipients of the Soviet's arms was Egypt. Cairo weapons procurement was estimated at 25 per cent of all arms and military equipment supplied by the Soviet Union to the Third World as a whole. According to Efraim Karsh, the USSR, for its part, managed to turn Egypt into its main naval foothold in the Mediterranean. Hence, Karsh further argued that arms supplies constitute the major foreign policy instrument employed by the Soviet Union in pursuit of its goals in the Third World in general, and the Middle East in particular.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, as revealed in the CIA's report in 1967, the Soviets have generally quoted low list prices for its arms assistance to Cairo, usually below those for comparable equipment from Western countries. Moreover, it has discounted these prices - often by as much as two-thirds.⁶⁹ The package comes with technical assistance and the military training for the Egyptians.⁷⁰ Arm equipment exported to Egypt by the Soviets included Surface Missiles (SAMs), Air to Surface Missile

⁶⁶ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). *Intelligence Memorandum, the Middle East: An Arms Race*, Washington D.C.: Directorate of Intelligence, (1974): 19.

⁶⁷ CIA, *Intelligence Memorandum, the Middle East*, 19

⁶⁸ Efraim Karsh. "Influence Through Arms Supplies: The Soviet Experience in the Middle East." *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, 6 (1986): 45-55.

⁶⁹ CIA Intelligence Report. *Soviet Military Aid to the United Arab Republic, 1955-1966*. Washington D.C.: Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Research and Report, CIA, (March 1967):.5

⁷⁰ CIA, *Soviet Military Aid to the United Arab Republic, 1955-1966*, 12

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(ASMs) and Air to Air Missile (AAMs).⁷¹ During this period, the Soviet Union emerged as one of the arch competitors to Britain as the leading arms exporter to the Middle East, as shown in the following Table 3.

Table 3: Soviet and Britain Arms Export to the Developing Countries, Cumulative 1966-1975 (\$USD million)

	Soviet		Britain	
<i>Region</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Middle East	6,300	68.2	775	50
South Asia	1,749	18.9	96	6.2
Africa	1,086	11.8	219	14.1
Latin America	84	0.93	328	21.1
East Asia	15	0.17	134	8.6
Total	9,234	100	1552	100

Source: ACDA, World Military Expenditure and Arms Transfer, 1966-1975, 77-80.

Other than the Soviet Union, another competitor which wrestled British domination of the Arab arms business was France. As reported by the Foreign Office, in the 1970s era, France was very active in the Middle East. For example, in April 1974, a £67 million deal was signed with the Arabian Peninsula States,

⁷¹ CIA, *Soviet Military Aid to the United Arab Republic, 1955-1966*, 27-30.

including Kuwait.⁷² *The Kuwait Times* quoted a Reuters report from Paris claiming that the arms order from Kuwait was worth £130 million and is an ‘oil for arms’ deal.⁷³ The following Table 4 illustrated French defense equipment export orders between 1967 and 1970 which contributed a stiff competition to the British’s export domination.

Table 4: Export Orders for French and Britain Defense Equipment (£ million), 1968-1970

	France				Britain			
	1967	1968	1969	1970	1967	1968	1969	1970
Naval	13	13	3	93	33	31	106	116
Land	33	50	30	40	102*	29	67	18
Air	74	174	86	333		172	126	118
Total	120	237	119	466	135	232	299	252

Note: *no breakdown available

Source: Note by the Ministry of Defense, March 9, 1971, file PREM 15/296.

The above figures were declassified from the Annual Defense White Paper of the British government. To clarify, if the totals for 1969 and 1970 are taken together, the figures show a

⁷² Sir Antony. A. Acland. A Memo from A. A. Acland, FCO to Secretary of States for Foreign Affairs, file FCO 93/567, London: The National Archive, (April 24, 1974).

⁷³ Peter Hinchliffe. A letter from P.R.M Hinchliffe, British Embassy Kuwait to P. A. Raftery, Middle East department, Foreign Office, file FCO 8/2201, London: The National Archive, (April 17, 1974).

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remarkable similarity. For instance, the French total for 1969 and 1970 was £585 million, a comparable figure to Britain’s £551 million as revealed in the Ministry of Defense’s record in 1971.⁷⁴ Overall, the competition in arms sales market in the Middle East was formidable in the period between the 1960s and 1970s. The types of military equipment exported to the Middle East countries by the major suppliers in the 1970s are listed in the following Table 5. The figures indicated stiff competition in the arms market shares in the region, which was almost similar to the period of the 1960s.

Table 5: Import of Major Weapons by Recipient Region, by major suppliers, Cumulative 1971-75

Equipment type	Britain	Soviet	France	United States
Land armaments	1135	8740	620	6440
Naval crafts	55	43	25	8
Aircrafts	70	1415	250	860
Missiles	170	3720	470	7470

Source: ACDA, *World Military Expenditure and Arms Transfer, 1966-1975*, 84.

Consequently, the arms trade scenario shaped the British’s policy towards the *Yom Kippur* War of 1973. The policy accommodated the British’s interests, including the arms trade, which later created ambiguity over its inconsistency. On one hand,

⁷⁴ Note by the Ministry of Defense, file PREM 15/296, London: The National Archive (March 9, 1971)

as mentioned earlier, the British government emphasized the policy of establishing a 'just and durable peace' in the region on many occasions like in the statement by the Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth in Harrogate's Speech of 1973 and the statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the parliament in November 1973. In these statements, based on the equilibrium principle, the British government's policy was "to preserve peace through a comprehensive settlement for a just and lasting peace in the interest of all concerned." This policy was later implemented by the announcement of the arms embargo immediately when the war erupted in October 1973. The Prime Minister, Sir Edward Heath (1970-1974) in his statement at the Conservative Conference in Blackpool on October 14, 1970, declared that the main interest of the British in the Arab Israeli war of 1973 was to 'work on for a genuine settlement' as determined in the UN Resolution 242 of 1967.⁷⁵ This interest is best achieved through the arms embargo policy to the conflicted nations. Later, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London further elaborated on the justification of the embargo policy. According to the FCO, "it is not our policy to sell arms which we believe would enhance the risk of hostilities or impede the search for peace."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Sir Edward Heath. A statement at the Conservative Conference, published by Daily News Bulletin, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, File FCO 93/290. London: The News Archive (October 15, 1973).

⁷⁶ Anthony. D. Parson. A memo from A.D. Parson, Assistant Under Secretary of State to A.A. Acland, Private Secretary, file FCO93/290, London: The National Archive, (October 17, 1973).

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Looking back, during the 1973 *Yom Kippur* conflict, in contrast to 1967, Britain maintained a strict arms embargo on Israel, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Libya. Sir Alec Douglas-Home informed the Cabinet, “We would sacrifice our ability to influence the peace moves and Arab policy on oil if we were to reverse our policy on the embargo.”⁷⁷ On the 9th of October, the Department of Trade and Industry revoked all outstanding export licenses for aircraft, arms, military stores and appliances to Egypt, Syria, Israel and Libya, and later, by the 14th of October, to Jordan. The British government strongly believed that one of the best ways to settle the dispute was by imposing an arms sales embargo on the conflicting nations. Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Lord Balniel, in a meeting with the delegation of parliamentary members on October 8, 1973, explained that the British interest at that time was to get the fighting stopped and negotiations started leading to a settlement on the basis of Resolution 242 of 1967.⁷⁸ Contending the same stance was the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Alex Douglas-Home in a memorandum dated October 10, 1973 which asserted,

⁷⁷ Cabinet Conclusions. Minute 2: confidential annex, CM (73) 48th conclusions, file CAB 128/53, London: The National Archive, (October 18, 1973).

⁷⁸ Lord Balniel. Record of meeting between Lord Balniel and MPs delegation, file FCO 93/256, London: The National Archive, (October 8, 1973).

*We took this decision (arm embargo) because we believe it would be inconsistent to call for a cessation of the fighting on the one hand and on the other to continue to allow the export of arms to either side of the conflict.*⁷⁹

Afterward. Sir Alec Douglas-Home continued to reemphasize in his public statements such as to the BBC's Program TODAY on 12th October, that "if you are putting forward a cause for a ceasefire, it certainly seems inconsistent to supply either side with arms."⁸⁰ Later in the parliament, Sir Alex Douglas-Home repeated his statement on the policy of the arms embargo. According to Douglas-Home, it is inconsistent to call for immediate end to the fighting and yet to continue to send arms to the conflict.⁸¹ The Prime Minister, Sir Edward Heath during his meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, Mrs. Golda Meir in London on November 12, 1973, also expressed the same view. Regarding the arms embargo, Heath explicated his government's stance to Mrs. Meir that the embargo was applied it with absolute

⁷⁹ Sir Alec Douglas-Home. A memorandum by Sir Alec-Douglas Home for UK Political Directors, in a telegram no. 263, File FCO 93/258, London: The National Archive, (October 10, 1973).

⁸⁰ BBC- British Broadcasting Corporation. 'TODAY' Program, the interview with Secretary of State, extracted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in file FCO 93/262, London: The National Archive, (October 12, 1973).

⁸¹ Sir Alec Douglas-Home. A Parliamentary Hansard. *Cols.* 30-41, vol. 861, Douglas-Home, Alex Sir, a statement extracted, file FCO 93/205, London: The National Archive, (October 16, 1973).

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strictness and complete even-handedness.⁸² A similar message was sent by Sir Edward Heath to his counterpart, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and to King Faysal of Saudi Arabia, dated December 20, 1973.⁸³

The embargo was further reaffirmed by the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Baroness Tweedsmuir of Belhelvie at the parliament on December 16, 1973.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, Minister of Defense Ian Gilmour described the embargo as neither targeting Israel nor the Arabs.⁸⁵ The same voice was shared by the government politicians at the parliament like Earl Ferrers, which indicated that “the sole purpose of the embargo was in order to defuse a potentially dangerous situation.”⁸⁶ In a

⁸² Foreign and Commonwealth Office. A Record of Conversation between The Prime Minister- Sir Edward Heath and the Israelis Prime Minister, Mrs. Golda Meir, file PREM 15/1715, London: The National Archive, (November 12, 1973).

⁸³ Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Telegram no.745 from FCO to Cairo and telegram no. 468 to Jedda, file PREM 15/1768, London: The National Archive, (1973).

⁸⁴ Baroness Tweedsmuir of Belhelvie. The Middle East: The Arab/Israeli Conflict, House of Lords debate, Hansard vol 345 cc176-91. A statement by Priscilla Jean Fortescue Buchan, Baroness Tweedsmuir of Belhelvie, Minister of Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs, (October 16, 1973), <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1973/oct/16/the-middle-east-the-arabisraeli-conflict>

⁸⁵ Ian Gilmour. Arms Sales, House of Commons Hansard, vol 864, cc1107-9, (November 20, 1973), <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1973/nov/20/arms-sales>.

⁸⁶ Earl Ferrers, Robert Washington Shirley. The Middle East: Arms Supplies, Hansard House of Lords Debate, vol 346 cc896-902, (November 20, 1973),

discussion at the Defense and Oversea Policy Committee in December 1973, the Foreign Secretary noted that if Britain lifted the ban on Arab countries, it would have to do the same for Israel. He counselled that “the sale of arms to Israel at this stage...would most likely cause an adverse reaction in certain Arab states with possible consequences for our supplies.”⁸⁷ Impressed by the strength of Douglas-Home’s presentation, his colleagues on the Committee supported the maintenance of the arms embargo until there was an agreement on the comprehensive settlement. Adding his voice to the debate, FCO Under-Secretary of State, Anthony Parsons, advised against an early lifting of the embargo since oil supplies would be put at severe risk if Britain resumed sending arms like Centurion, ammunition and spare part to Israel.⁸⁸

Nonetheless, the delivery of arms under the existing contracts was suspended to the confronted nations but continued to the Arab nations considered by the British as non-revolutionary or moderate regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the Gulf States. As explained by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the parliament on October 16, 1973, “they must be exception

<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1973/nov/20/the-middle-east-arms-supplies>

⁸⁷ Cabinet Defense and Oversea Policy Committee. Minutes of Meeting of the Cabinet Defense and Oversea Policy Committee, file CAB 148/129, London: The National Archive, (December 19, 1973).

⁸⁸ Anthony Parson. Minute by A.D Parsons, file FCO 93/294, London: The National Archive, (December 19, 1973).

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for Gulf security. We have too big a stake there to take risks.”⁸⁹ Hence, by providing arms supply to the moderate Arabs, London’s aim was to strengthen the non-revolutionary Arabs’ military capability as a strategy to prevent the spread of Soviet and revolutionary Arab countries like the UAR, Syria and Algeria’s influence in the region; in other words, this is an attempt to indirectly balance while curbing the growth of Soviet influence in the region. It is important to further elaborate that the export of arms to certain Arab countries during this period was limited to the battlefield countries only. This stand was mentioned by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, during his meeting with the Deputation of the Board of Deputies of British Jewish represented by Lord Janner of Braunstone, Sir Samuel Fisher of Camden, Mr. Michael Fidler, MP and Mr. Graville Janner, MP at the Foreign Office on October 15, 1973.⁹⁰

Retrospectively, the threat of the revolutionary Arabs led by the UAR towards the moderate Arab countries was a serious issue to the British since the era of the 1950s. Therefore, it was unlikely that British arms sold to the moderate countries like Saudi Arabia

⁸⁹ Sir Alec Douglas Home. A reply from Sir Alec Douglas Home to the question from Mr. Clinton Davis MP, Extract of Parliamentary Hansard, Col. 30-41, Vol. 861, File 93/205, London: The National Archive, (October 16, 1973).

⁹⁰ Sir Alec Douglas Home. A Record of Conversation between the Secretary of State- Sir Alec Douglas-Home and Deputation of the Board of Deputies of British Jews at the Foreign Office, File FCO93/264, London: The National Archive, (October 15, 1973).

and the Gulf States were channeled by those Arab regimes to the UAR and its allies. A report by the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) to the British Cabinet in March 1968 disclosed the subversive movement activities in the moderate Arab countries, including Saudi, to dethrone the monarchs, sponsored by the UAR under the banner of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM).⁹¹

Furthermore, in order to lower the risk of any possibility of British's arms being redirected from the moderate Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Kuwait to the revolutionary and pro-Soviet nations like the UAR, London took a precautionary strategy by imposing the insistence on the usual "no resale or reassignment" clause of unlimited duration in all arms contracts. According to the Foreign Office, it would be clear to the moderate Arabs that if they breached the contract, Britain would be able to withhold vital spares.⁹² One of the examples was when Abu Dhabi expressed an interest in purchasing some 30 Westland helicopters and 24 Lynxes helicopters worth about £23 million in 1974. Concurrently, Syria was interested in having the Lynxes as well. In this case, to avoid any risk of the arms being transacted from Abu Dhabi to Damascus and as part of protection from Syrian pressures towards the Emirates, Britain insisted on

⁹¹ Joint Intelligent Committee (JIC). A copy of report, "Subversive activities in the Gulf" by the JIC, for the attention of D. J Fewtrell, JIC Secretary, File CAB 163/73, London: The National Archive (March 28, 1968).

⁹² Wright P.R.H.1974. A Minute from P.R Wright, Middle East Department, Foreign Office to Mr. Weir, Mr. Coles, file FCO 8/2202, London: The National Archive (March 28, 1974).

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the inclusion of a binding “no-reassignment” clause in the contract to Abu Dhabi.⁹³ The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, George Brown, reemphasized that to counter the revolutionary Arab’s threat led by the UAR and preserve the moderate regime, the British decided to support the monarchy by all means, including strengthening their military capability through continuous arms exports. According to Brown, “the consolidation of the UAR victory could lead to the rapid undermining of the Arab States where British economic interests are concentrated and expanding.”⁹⁴

In addition, when answering the questions in the parliamentary debate on October 16, 1973, regarding the arms embargo, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Alec Douglas-Home justified the continuation of arms delivery to moderate states like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, such as the sending of arm tanks to the United Arab Emirates. Reasserting the importance of the Gulf area to British interests, he reminded the members of the parliament about the security of the Gulf, in which there is a vital British interest, and the supply of military equipment to those states was for defense purposes and security

⁹³ Sir Paul Hervé Giraud Wright. A letter from P.R. H Wright to I.S McDonald, Director of Sales, Ministry of Defense, and A Minute from P.R.H Wright to Mr. Weir, file FCO 8/2369, London: The National Archive (November 11-12, 1974).

⁹⁴ Sir Alex Douglas-Home. A Memorandum of the Secretary of States for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, file PREM 13/1618, London: The National Archive (1967).

of the Gulf.⁹⁵ Lord Balniel, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in his letter to the Secretary of State for Defense, Sir Ian Gilmour, MP, dated October 29, 1973 reiterated the government policy on the exception especially to protect the oil interest.⁹⁶ Suffice to mention, in 1973, Saudi Arabia was the leading oil supplier to Britain, accounting for 24.2 per cent of the UK's imports, which amounted to 27.3 million tons of oil.⁹⁷ At the same time, Saudi Arabia was its principal Arab customer, with Britain's exports to Riyadh amounting to £58.7 million (excluding arms), an increase of 30 per cent in 1973 alone compared to the previous year. Britain's import from Saudi in the same period was almost entirely oil.⁹⁸

V. A Reversal of Policy: Britain Revokes the Arms Trade Embargo

Ironically, the unilateral embargo was surprisingly lifted on January 21, 1974 through the announcement made by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Alec Douglas-Home at

⁹⁵ Sir Alec Douglas Home. Extract of Parliamentary Hansard, Col. 30-41, Vol. 861, File 93/205, London: The National Archive, (October 16, 1973).

⁹⁶ Lord Balniel. 1973. A letter from Lord Balniel to Ian Gilmour MP, Ministry of Defense, file FCO 93/291, London: The National Archive (October 29, 1974).

⁹⁷ Sir Paul Hervé Giraud Wright. A Minute from P.R.H Wright, Middle East Department, Foreign Office, to Mr. Weir, file FCO 8/2234, London: The National Archive, (March 26, 1974).

⁹⁸ Sir Paul Hervé Giraud Wright. A Minute from P.R.H Wright, to Mr. Weir, file FCO 8/2234, London: The National Archive, (March 26, 1974).

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the House of Commons.⁹⁹ There were many considerations for the decision, but this study argued that one of the main reasons for stopping the embargo in a hurry was due to strong pressure from the British's arms exporters, the prominent politicians, and the senior officials in charge. For example, in October 1973, the Head of Defense Sales sent a minute to Secretary of Defense Lord Carrington, arguing that the policy tarnished Britain's reputation and reliability as a supplier of defense equipment to the Middle East.¹⁰⁰ On a separate occasion, the Minister for Defense Ian Gilmour had sent a letter to the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Balniel on November 8, 1973, stating that the embargo presented many problems: "unless it is modified soon, there could be a serious loss of business for the United Kingdom, with adverse effect of a balance of payments and employment."¹⁰¹

In the meantime, British private manufacturers such as the Marconi Space and Defense System Limited also criticized the government's embargo. As one of the main arms manufacturers in Britain, they were displeased with the embargo due to the impact on their exports to the Arab countries, especially to Libya. On November 6, 1973, the marketing director of Marconi sent a letter

⁹⁹ Sir Alec Douglas-Home. A memo from SOSFCO to Cairo and other missions, telegram no. 049, file FCO 93/565. London: The National Archive, (January 21, 1974).

¹⁰⁰ Head of Defense's Sales. A minute to Secretary of States for Defense, file DEFE 13/942, London: The National Archive, (October 24,1973).

¹⁰¹ Ian Gilmour. A letter from Gilmour to Lord Balniel, file DEFE 13/942, London: The National Archive, (November 8,1973).

to the Controller of the Department of Trade and Industry (export licensing branch) to reconsider the embargo on their supply. Another example is Plessey Company Limited, which was contracted to supply arms equipment to Egypt and other Arab countries. In a meeting with the Department of Trade and Industry on December 20, 1973, the representatives of the company urged the government to lift the ban as soon as possible due to the severe impact of the action on their exports to the Arab nations, especially over their proposal for the Cairo Airport's communication equipment worth more than £2.5 million.¹⁰² Earlier, the Plessey's chief executive, Sir John Clark, sent a letter to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Sir Alex Douglas-Home to warn the government that the embargo would endanger the British's arms supply firms unless the ban was lifted in due course.¹⁰³

The embargo was also heavily criticized by several Labor and Conservative parliamentary members. Michael Stewart, Foreign Secretary in the last Labor government, was among those who protested the arms ban. He said that Britain was guilty of a breach of contract in refusing spare parts needed by Israel for her

¹⁰² Neville Lupton. A note of meeting between Plessey Company Limited's director of contract- Mr. Neville L. Lupton and other company's representatives with Department of Trade, file FCO 93/565, London: The National Archive, (December 20, 1973).

¹⁰³ John Clark. A letter from Plessey's chief of executives, Sir John Clark to Sir Alex Douglas-Home, Secretary of State for FCO, file FCO 93/294, London: The National Archive, (December 18, 1973).

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British-made Centurion tanks. Meanwhile, Lord Hailsham, Heath's Lord Chancellor, told the Foreign Secretary, Douglas-Home, the refusal was ignoble and immoral.¹⁰⁴ Greville Janner MP, a Labor member of parliament, joined in the protests. According to Janner, the embargo, especially to Israel, was absolutely disgraceful.¹⁰⁵

Concurrently, the Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban, reflecting on the British decision on the embargo, called it as "pulling back in panic before the Arab threaten to withhold oil supplies" and described it from Israel's standpoint as an especially harsh blow which encouraged other European countries to also sacrifice Israel's interests.¹⁰⁶ In a meeting with the British Ambassador to Israel, Sir William Bernard John Ledwidge on October 24, 1973, Abba Eban expressed Tel Aviv's disappointment towards the arms embargo imposed by London.¹⁰⁷ Echoing the same critique was The Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir (1969-1974). Mrs. Meir described the British's

¹⁰⁴ Robert Philpot. "The Yom Kippur and British Politics." *Fathom Journal*, 2020. <https://fathomjournal.org/the-yom-kippur-war-and-british-politics/>

¹⁰⁵ Alvin Shuster. "London Assailed on Arms Embargo", *The New York Times*, October 16, 1973, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/10/16/archives/london-assailed-on-arms-embargo-some-laborites-and-tories-term.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Jonathan Spyer. "An Analytical and Historical Overview of British Policy toward Israel," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 8, no. 2 (2004): 1-22.

¹⁰⁷ Sir William B. Ledwidge. Ambassador Ledwidge called Mr. Eban, telegram no. 519, Tel Aviv, File FCO93/271, London: The National Archive, (October 24, 1973).

decision of the arms embargo as “shameful and would not have been taken by a decent government.”¹⁰⁸ On October 16, 1973, Mrs. Meir openly criticized the British embargo at the Israeli parliament, subsequently the *Knesset* passed the resolution which condemned the British embargo.”¹⁰⁹

In the House of Commons, the former Prime Minister, Harold Wilson called for an end to the embargo and pointed out that while the government had remained silent regarding past Arab aggression against Israel, it had sponsored resolutions condemning Israeli military actions on three occasions. The protest of the embargo intensified at the House of Lords when Lord Coleraine accused the government of making a decision that had given the impression that they were giving way to Arab blackmail over oil supplies.¹¹⁰ Another vocal protester was a prominent member of the Conservative Party, Lord Boothby, who described the policy as a clear discrimination of the British

¹⁰⁸ Golda Meir. A statement by Mrs. Meir in a telegram no. 454, Tel Aviv to Foreign Office, London, file FCO 93/260, London: The National Archive, (October 13, 1973).

¹⁰⁹ Golda Meir. A statement by the Prime Minister, Golda Meir at the Knesset, file FCO 93/266, London: The National Archive (October 16, 1973).

¹¹⁰ Hansard. “The Middle East: The Arab/Israeli Conflict,” House of Lords debate, vol 345 cc176-91. A question from Lord Coleraine (Richard Kidston Law) to the Minister of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, (October 16, 1973).

<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1973/oct/16/the-middle-east-the-arabisraeli-conflict>.

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government towards Tel Aviv.¹¹¹ Another Conservative leader, Lord Barnby, stated the embargo as hypocritical and unrealistic.¹¹² Not to be excluded was the protest from the Liberal Party, Lord Byers who described the embargo imposed by the government especially to Israel as both commercially dishonest and politically reprehensible.¹¹³

Despite the heavy criticism in the parliament, the government defended the embargo very firmly. With regard to the Arab blackmail issue, the Foreign Office, in an official statement, rebutted the accusation vigorously. According to the Foreign Office,

We are not bowing to the blackmail. Blackmail is a process by which someone demands a prize from someone else on the threat of doing something unpleasant if the victim fails to pay

¹¹¹ Lord Boothby, Robert Boothby. "The Middle East-The Arab Israeli Conflict," Hansard House of Lords, vol 345 cc176-91, (October 16, 1973). <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1973/oct/16/the-middle-east-the-arabisraeli-conflict>.

¹¹² Lord Barnby, Francis Vernon Willey. "The Middle East-The Arab Israeli Conflict," Hansard House of Lords, vol 345 cc176-91, (October 16, 1973). <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1973/oct/16/the-middle-east-the-arabisraeli-conflict>.

¹¹³ Lord Byers, Frank. "The Middle East: The Arab Israeli Conflict," Parliamentary Hansard House of Lords, vol. 345 cc1. 76-91, (October 16, 1973). <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1973/oct/16/the-middle-east-the-arabisraeli-conflict>

*up. The Arab have made no demands on us, and we have offered no price.*¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, the Foreign Secretary admitted the importance of Arab oil to Britain in his statement to the parliament on November 7, 1973.¹¹⁵ Arab oil was very crucial to the British's energy sources in the 1970s. For example, based on the record of the Energy Department, the proportion of Britain's crude oil imports from Arab countries had grown from approximately 70 per cent in 1973 to about 73 per cent in 1974.¹¹⁶ Despite the importance of oil, the government strongly rejected the accusations that fear of Arab's use of the 'oil weapon' was dictating government policy. At the end of the day, based on the amount of pressure from various parties as mentioned above, the government finally agreed to lift the embargo in early January of 1974.

VI. Conclusion

Conclusively, this essay has shown that the Arab Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973 were pivotal to British arms exports in the

¹¹⁴ Anthony Parson. A minute from Parson to Lord Nicholas Gordon Lennox, file FCO 55/1133, London: The National Archive, (November 8, 1973).

¹¹⁵ Parliamentary Hansard. *Cols.* 984-6, vol. 863, Answer to a question by Mr. Lawson, MP, file FCO 55/1151, London: The National Archive, (November 7, 1973).

¹¹⁶ Energy Department. A report enclosed in a minute from Lockton, G.P, Energy Department to Mr. Fenn and Mr. Egerton, file FCO 8/2409, London: The National Archive, (February 14, 1975).

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Middle East. From the analysis and perustration of the declassified governmental records, it is proven that the wars sparked the acceleration of the arms supply demand from the region. Britain, as one of the major arms exporters to the Middle East for decades, was unable to resist a pressing requirement from the Arabs and Israelis to continue supplying the arms, particularly for replacements of destroyed military equipment. Data and statistics have shown the distinct elevation of military arms supply from Britain to the region during the wars, which subsequently raised the hypothesis that the escalation of the conflicts and wars profited the British's military industry.

At the same time, the oil sources and other economic advantages from the region were also crucial to Britain for ages. Hence, continuous wars would disrupt economic activities, especially the oil supplies, consequently catalyzing a catastrophic impact on Britain. Antithetically, without wars and conflicts, the demand for arms supplies would eventually decline. Thus, the decrease in arms exports would imperil Britain's arms industry. Therefore, in the context of the Arab Israeli wars, London had to always equalize the policy of preserving a comprehensive peace with the strategy of exploiting the war for the sake of business and economic interests. This argument is logically substantiated, at least in the arms embargo case of 1973. The one-sided embargo was heavily criticized not only by industrialists but also by government members, which influenced the hasty lift of the ban

and reshaped the British's policy in the Middle East during the wars.

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