

A Policy Reversal of the British Arms Export Control to the Middle East in the Arab Israeli Wars of 1967 and 1973: A Reassessment*

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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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