

## Chapter 1

# Britain and the Middle East: In Pursuit of Eternal Interests

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“The national interest is clearly defined by the government”

—Sir Steven Wall, ca 2005

“We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.”

—Lord Palmerston, ca 1848

Two broad interests have dominated Britain’s approach to the Middle East from the colonial era to the current day, and most likely they will continue to do so for decades to come: the control of oil and the desire for regional stability. However, cursory research into the contours of the United Kingdom’s foreign policy towards the region reveals a variety of other “interests” that either encourage, temper, or conflict with the two time-honored, overarching goals concerning oil and stability. If ensuring the free flow of oil and keeping regional instability to a minimum are Britain’s primary interests in the Middle East, where do other “interests”—such as generating political and economic reform in the region—fit into the grand scheme of UK foreign policy?

Guided by the premise that both exogenous and endogenous factors influence the definition of interests as defined here, the goal of this chapter is to look both *outside* and *inside* the “black box” of the state in order to examine what factors shape UK interests in the Middle East. First, however, understanding which actors make British foreign policy and what forces are at play is the goal of the next section.

### **The Architects of British Policy**

Both formal and informal factors have animated the institutional actors whose combined activities have produced British foreign policy. Such formal factors have included the bureaucratic structure, institutional mindset, and leadership of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), other pertinent ministries (i.e., Treasury, Ministry of Defence, Board of Trade, and various intelligence services), the Prime Minister’s office, and the Cabinet. Parliaments have put their mark on foreign policy formation as well. John Young has also pointed to particular values prevalent in

British policy making circles that stress defense of liberal democracy, the rights of individuals, and property rights. Mingled with these altruistic notions are those that are perhaps more self-serving, for instance, the drive for prestige on the world stage (not unlike the post-colonial French fixation on *rank* and *grandeur*) and belief in the efficacy of British pragmatism.<sup>1</sup>

Many a pundit and quite a few academics have posed the rhetorical question: Who makes Britain's foreign policy? Despite John Young's depiction of a host of critical actors, the short answer to this question is that today the Office of the Prime Minister has usurped the job of foreign policymaking, with the Foreign Office and Parliament trailing behind. Critics of the Blair Government have even accused the Prime Minister of introducing presidentialism to British politics, whereby 10 Downing Street makes major policy decisions with little oversight from the legislative body, and creates a serious point of friction between Parliament and the Prime Minister.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, observers have noted that even in the relationship between the Cabinet and the Prime Minister's office, department heads—such as the Foreign Secretary—tend to protect their departmental independence while the PM and his staff strive to centralize the making of foreign policy in a way that maximizes executive autonomy. The resulting contest between various parts of Government leads to, what Paul Williams has called, “multiple foreign policies,” where the government uses varying combinations of actors, institutions, and external leverage devices while pursuing several—sometimes contradictory—policy paths simultaneously.<sup>3</sup>

### **Traditional British Interests**

From the Colonial Era through the end of the Second World War, the UK favored a balance of global power in order to achieve the goal of international stability. In the minds of British statesmen, stability made it easier to protect the homeland and the Commonwealth, as well as to ensure continued economic prosperity. The use of British military and commercial power was understood as appropriate to protect Britain's global “prestige, markets, strategic outposts, and lines of communication.”<sup>4</sup> Gaynor Johnson has pointed out that the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) was the most consistent advocate of balance of power politics and the strategy of limited involvement, the preferred means by which to ensure Britain's vested interests in the period leading up to the Second World War.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Young, J.W. (1997), *Britain and the World in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, London: Arnold Publishing, 1–4.

2 Spyer, J. (2004), “An Analytical and Historical Overview of British Policy Toward Israel,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 8/2, 4.

3 Williams, P. (2004), “Who's Making UK Foreign Policy?” *International Affairs* 80/5, 912.

4 Goldstein, E. and McKercher, B.J.C. (2003), “Power and Stability in British Foreign Policy, 1865–1965”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 14/2, 1.

5 Johnson, G. (2004), “Introduction: The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century,” *Contemporary British History* 18/3, 1–12.

It is possible to compile a broad list of UK foreign policy goals for the period immediately following the end of the Second World War that is equally applicable to the present day. One goal was to stimulate economic growth through protection and expansion of trade. Another set of goals was to secure global interests, protect the near abroad, and cultivate strategic alliances. A final goal was to manage integration in an increasingly integrated world. This refers to cultivation of—and dedication to—a rules-based international order built upon law, institutions, and other fora that demand increasing levels of cooperation between states. Under this heading falls Britain's membership in, for instance, the European Union and NATO. Based on the imperatives generated by these overarching foreign policy goals, the UK found the promotion of peace and stability—rooted in non-interventionist beliefs—a public good that not only appealed to an international audience, but also served narrow British interests as well.<sup>6</sup> Before delving into a discussion of current British interests in the Middle East, however, it is helpful to become acquainted with the history of the UK's interests there.

### *Britain's Middle Eastern Interests: an Historical Overview*

After the First World War, British statesmen favored territorial expansion in order to provide greater security for the Empire. The downside of expansion was an increase in both commitments and potential problems—the experience in the Middle East highlighted this caveat. Even in the 1920s, British officials were concerned that their administration in the region could cause an Islamic counter-revolution capable of spreading all the way to Muslim populations in British India (the Punjab). Decades later, Churchill saw that the Middle East was vital to securing Britain's war aims, and would become increasingly important to Britain after the Second World War for both strategic and economic reasons. The British decision to grant independence to India in 1947—a major step on the road to decolonization—had the ironic effect of causing Britain to perceive the Middle East as more important to the last vestiges of empire than ever. Its military bases in the region allowed it to simultaneously project British power and thwart Soviet expansion. Part of Britain's security plan for the region included guarantees to Gulf States such as Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain, although Egypt, home to the largest collection of British military assets outside of Europe, continued to be the center of Britain's focus.<sup>7</sup> After the Second World War, British interests in the Middle East became increasingly intertwined with American interests.

In the immediate post-war era, British policymakers placed great emphasis on the Middle East since it appeared the region was the last piece of the old empire where British influence remained relatively strong. Despite the philosophical divisions between the two countries caused by the UK's reluctance to give up the remnants of colonialism—especially the UK's self-fabricated favored trading status in the region—Britain and the US produced joint statements that indicated the

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6 Young, 3–4.

7 Ibid.

“the objectives of the two countries [in the Middle East] were identical.”<sup>8</sup> These objectives took into account British interests from the past—unfettered access to the Suez Canal; the fundamental nature of oil financially, strategically, politically, and militarily; and protection of commercial interests in banking, insurance, and mining—as well as new goals, such as the deterrence of communism. To ensure their common interests and promote regional prosperity, both states sought to maintain regional stability. Meanwhile, the rising threat of communist expansion—assessed with greater apprehension in Washington than in London—made oil more important to foreign policy strategists than ever. In addition to making sure their access to Middle Eastern oil was guaranteed, US and British officials wanted to deny the Soviet Union access to it.<sup>9</sup>

Strategic cooperation between Her Majesty’s Government and British oil companies was an ingredient of UK foreign policy as well, and nowhere was this more evident than in Iran. Britain refused to accept its loss of control over the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) after Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh nationalized that entity in 1952. In the early days of the Eisenhower administration, the British appealed to the new president to help topple Mossadegh because of the Iranian leader’s supposed communist sympathies. Examining the result of Operation Ajax, the covert coup staged by the British and Americans that brought down Mossadegh’s Government, one finds a sterling example of the US ascending the ladder of Middle Eastern hegemonic pre-eminence while Britain was descending. On the one hand, the coup appeared to produce an outcome in line with Britain’s desires, since Mossadegh had been eliminated and the Westward-leaning Shah was returned to power. On the other hand, US oil companies ended up winning major concessions when the Shah allowed new oil contract negotiations. The end result of the joint intervention was that the UK experienced a net loss of access to Iranian oil.<sup>10</sup>

A general consensus among historians is that the Suez Crisis, which occurred later in the Eisenhower era, taught Britain that it could not afford to affront directly US preferences in the region, and that its post-colonial aspirations of exercising significant power in the Middle East would not be realized.<sup>11</sup> However, the US relied on at least partial British management of the region up to—and even after—the Labor government started withdrawal of its military from the area in 1968.<sup>12</sup> Even though the British willingly chose to reduce their obligations in the Middle East, they still had interests in the region that necessitated ongoing concern and management. Naturally, Britain’s leaders wanted to retain as much influence in the region as possible in

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8 Marsh, S. (2003), *Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil*, London: Palgrave, 22.

9 Marsh, 22–27.

10 Richman, S.L., “‘Ancient History’: US Conduct in the Middle East Since World War II and the Folly of Intervention,” *Cato Policy Analysis 19*, available at <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-159.html>.

11 Gordon, P.H. (2005), “Trading Places: America and Europe in the Middle East,” *Survival 47/2*, 87–99, especially 95–6.

12 Peterson, T.T., “Richard Nixon Confronts the Persian Gulf, 1969–1972”, available at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reports/SHAFR2004/Petersen.pdf#search=%22British-Iranian%20%22arms%20sales%22%20history%22>.

order to protect those interests. Selling arms to and keeping good relations with the smaller Gulf States helped buy influence, as did arms sales to the Shah's Iran and the Saudis.<sup>13</sup> Britain was cooperative with US policy toward Saudi Arabia and Iran and the elevation of these two countries to the status of twin pillars with which Western states could comfortably ally.<sup>14</sup> The "twin pillar" policy came to a crashing halt, however, after the Iranian Revolution. When the Islamic Republic went to war against Iraq, the UK and the US aided the regime in Baghdad in order to dash Iranian hegemonic aspirations.<sup>15</sup> Spurning Tehran earned Britain the status of Iranian state enemy number three, just behind the US and Israel. Except for one brief interval, from 1980 until 1998, Britain had no diplomatic relations with Iran. However, starting in 1998 UK diplomacy shifted into a mode of "constructive engagement" with Iranian officials that stressed cultural exchanges and commercial potentialities. Washington, diplomatically *persona non grata* in Tehran from 1979, showed little enthusiasm for British attempts to restart diplomacy with Iran.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that without the British quasi-rapprochement with the Iranian regime, Washington would have no means of sending "confidence building" signals to Tehran, a capability that is especially important as the US seeks to curb Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions diplomatically.

In the Saudi kingdom, Britain maintained its influence and complemented US policies by helping to turn petrodollars into British-made munitions. For instance, the al-Yamana arms sale represented the largest single defense contract in UK history. Traditional British interests in the Gulf were consistent with its goals elsewhere in the Middle East: containing communism (Yemen was a concern), keeping oil supplies secure, nurturing and exploiting export markets, and keeping ocean lanes open. By choosing not to support Israel in 1967, Britain earned bonus points in Riyadh, a status that won the UK a spot on the Saudi "most favored" list when other Western nations were cut off from purchasing Saudi oil in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that when Iraq attempted to annex Kuwait in 1990, King Fahd directly requested help from the UK's military the day *after* he accepted American military assistance.

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13 Peterson, 1–4.

14 O'Sullivan, C., "Observations on US Strategies in the Persian Gulf Region, 1941–2005: From the Atlantic Charter, the Twin Pillars and Dual Containment, to the 'Axis of Evil' and Beyond," *Columbia International Affairs Online*, available at <http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/suc02>.

15 Hubbel, S. (1998), "The Containment Myth: US Middle East Policy in Theory and Practice," *Middle East Report 208*, available at <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer208/hubbell.htm>.

16 Rundle, C. (2002), "Reflections on the Iranian Revolution and Iranian–British Relations," *Durham Middle East Paper 68*, (March), available at <http://eprints.dur.ac.uk/archive/00000148/01/68DMEP.pdf>.

17 Nonneman, G. (2001), "Saudi–European Relations 1902–2001: A Pragmatic Quest for Relative Autonomy," *International Affairs 77/3*, 631–59.

*British Interests in the Twenty-first Century*

After the Cold War, the UK found a measure of freedom to express and pursue interests in the Middle East that differed from America's. Not since the early post-Second World War days had Britain exercised as much independence from the playbook written in Washington. The fact that the UK engaged with Iran and supported the Palestinian Authority (PA) project provide two examples that the end of bipolarity and the demise of a common threat allowed states to focus their sights on previously unattainable goals.<sup>18</sup> During this transitional period, Britain gravitated toward the "third way" domestically and toward greater acceptance of European views on external issues. One example of the latter was the increasing rhetorical emphasis put on multilateral relationships over bilateral ones. However, assessing the Government's goals as put forth by the Foreign Office in early 2006, one sees that the bilateral relationship with the US is still a cornerstone of British foreign policy. At the time of war against terror, the government has outlined its most vital interests. The first item on the list was global security, particularly the threat posed by terrorism and proliferation of WMDs. Next came what EU elites refer to as "human security," the dangers presented by international crime. Third was support for multilateralism, followed by support for the EU and its institutions. The fifth goal cited was energy security, which was linked to open trade. Values-based interests—such as advocacy of human rights, democracy, and good governance—were next on the list, with migration control, support for Britons living abroad, and security for the Overseas Territories closing out the listing. In regards to the Middle East, the government has stated its desire to "build stronger relationships with the Muslim world."<sup>19</sup> However, given that the government has placed top priority on its "partnership" with America, it may be difficult to make credible headway in those foreign capitals where minarets rule the skyline.

Britain shares the concerns of its EU partners regarding post-war Iraq due to general fears about security and the possibility of widespread instability. However, Britain's economic interests were not as great as the other EU states, which combined provided over 55 percent of Iraq's pre-war imports. Long before George W. Bush and Tony Blair came to lead their respective countries, Britain supported the US against the regime of Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War. Rynhold has stated his belief that Britain was primarily motivated in 1991 by a desire to maintain stability and support rules-based order, interests that seemingly were inviolable until 2003.<sup>20</sup> Since then, British goals have reflected a desire to return to stability by promoting democracy in the region. In late 2005, then Foreign Minister Jack Straw opined

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18 This is the crux of William Wallace's argument when he assessed what the end of the Soviet Union meant for Britain. See Wallace, W. (1992), "British Foreign Policy after the Cold War," *International Affairs* 68/3, 423–42.

19 UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2006), *Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: The UK's International Priorities*, (March 28), available at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/fullintpriorities2006.pdf>.

20 Rynhold, J. (2005), "Britain and the Middle East" in *BESA Perspectives*, Vol. 11, November 7, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, available at <http://www.biu.ac.il/Besa/perspectives11.html>, 22.

that the government's support for democracy was "a process which is greatly in the interests of the Middle East, of the UK, and of the whole international community."<sup>21</sup> However, Blair's goal of being a bridge between Washington and Brussels has lost its vitality; of far more concern at 10 Downing Street is the ability to honor the commitment Britain implicitly has made to the cause of political reform in Iraq. Though a significant percentage of the British electorate is uncomfortable with the country's participation in the war, they nonetheless support America's leadership in reconstructing Iraq by a margin of almost four-to-one. That margin is a startling reversal of overall EU survey results indicating a three-to-one rejection of US reconstruction leadership.<sup>22</sup>

In the case of Iran, Britain has acted—and will continue to act—in cohesion with its major EU partners, France and Germany, in seeking a diplomatic solution to the Iranian regime's apparent desire to produce nuclear weapons. Proponents of this "trilateral" effort have pointed out that in addition to contributing to a solution, the "EU3" are actually acting together, doing their part in the name of Europe, and have the potential to relieve Washington from the burden of leadership. In addition, because the three nations—not the EU—are conducting negotiations with Iran, they have the latitude to downplay issues—such as human rights—that some EU states would insist upon elevating to prominent status.<sup>23</sup>

As of fall 2006, neither the EU3, nor the EU3 with heavy behind-the-scenes US involvement, has been able to bring Tehran to heel. In fact, France clouded the diplomatic waters by declaring that Iran would not have to give up uranium enrichment prior to negotiations that would be the last step before sanctions.<sup>24</sup> The UK's political leaders and strategists now look at the Iranian situation as far more important to the region—in other words, shows the greatest potential for widespread destabilization—than the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.<sup>25</sup>

## The Contours of the Anglo-American "Special Relationship"

Despite Wallace's insistence that the special relationship between the US and UK is dead, it is useful to review what this particular bilateral relationship has meant to

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21 *Foreign Secretary Straw's Speech to the Fabian Society, London* (March 10, 2005), available at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391647&a=KArticle&aid=1109172362793%20&year=2005&month=2005-03-01&date=2005-03-10>.

22 de Vasconcelos, A. (2005), "The EU and Iraq," in Walter Posch, (ed.), *Looking Into Iraq*, Institute for Security Studies.

23 Drozdiak, W., Kemp, G., Leverett, F.L., Makins, C.J., and Stokes, B., (eds), "Partners in Frustration: Europe, the United States and the Broader Middle East," *The Atlantic Council*, November 1, 2004, available at [http://www.acus.org/docs/0409-Partners\\_Frustration\\_Europe\\_United\\_States\\_Broader\\_Middle\\_East.pdf](http://www.acus.org/docs/0409-Partners_Frustration_Europe_United_States_Broader_Middle_East.pdf), 10.

24 Arnold, M. and Dombey, D., "Chirac Calls for UN to Scale Down Iran Sanctions," *Financial Times*, September 18, 2006, available at [http://us.ft.com/ftgateway/superpage.ft?news\\_id=fto091820060837157545](http://us.ft.com/ftgateway/superpage.ft?news_id=fto091820060837157545).

25 Rynhold, 24.



Britain, and the ingredients that have given it special character. To begin, US and UK foreign policy has been remarkably congruent in the post-Second World War era. John Calabrese has argued that a combination of belief and substance animates the “special relationship” the two states have enjoyed. An example of congruent belief is the shared notion of responsibility for international order. Substantively, the US and the UK both promote consultative and cooperative mechanisms such as those found in NATO.<sup>26</sup> In these, and a host of other, ways, policy congruence is best understood as the result of each state’s desire to see its own goals met. Thus, the calculus of congruence can be expressed as follows: for the UK, support for US policy allows Britain to use America as a “power multiplier,” exponentially strengthening Britain’s stand-alone capabilities; for the US, British support for American policies gives those policies a mark of legitimacy, and provides Washington access to British soft power assets.<sup>27</sup> One should note that this equation is unequal. Many analysts have pointed out that the foreign policy component of the US–UK special relationship has resembled “an essentially lop-sided partnership.”<sup>28</sup>

Broadly understood, the UK desires two outcomes as a result of its investment in the special relationship. First, London wants continuous Washington dedication to America’s role as world leader. Second, the UK wants to exert its influence over how that role is played. Hence, the relationship is based upon interests—many of them shared, but ultimately, all of them based on national gain.<sup>29</sup> By generally supporting US foreign policy, as well as formulating its own set of policies that stay close to those of its American ally, Britain continuously seeks to push the US into exerting global leadership in issue areas that directly complement British goals. While debate rages regarding the efficacy of London’s attempts to influence Washington, it does appear that British policy makers still hold fast to Harold Macmillan’s belief that Britain can “act as Greece to America’s Rome, steering ‘new world’ power with ‘old world’ wisdom.”<sup>30</sup>

### *The “Special Relationship” vis-à-vis the Middle East*

According to Calabrese, both the US and the UK have worked jointly since the end of the Second World War to promote security and stability in the Middle East, and

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26 Calabrese, J. (2001), “The United States, Great Britain and the Middle East: How Special the Relationship?” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 12/3, 57–84.

27 For a discussion of how lesser states use larger states or other political entities (i.e., the EU) to magnify their power–projection capability, see Treacher, A. (2001), “Europe as a Power Multiplier of French Security Policy: Strategic Consistency, Tactical Adaptation,” *European Security* 10/1, 22–44.

28 Stevens, P. (January 2006), “The Special Relationship and Foreign Policy: Panel Chairman’s Report,” in *US–UK Relations at the Start of the 21st Century*, McCausland, J.D. and Douglas, T.S. (eds) (Strategic Studies Institute), 135–144, available at <https://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/PUB633.pdf>.

29 Of course, in this instance *gain* could be measured—as realists do—in terms of relative military power, or it could be measured by realization of an international consensus on human rights, made stronger by the weight of serious US commitment.

30 Stevens, 138.



despite incidences such as Suez Canal crisis, “British–American differences over the [region] were little more than distractions and irritants.”<sup>31</sup> Having looked at specific cases since the end of the Cold War, Calabrese has seen a high degree of coordination, cooperation, and policy convergence. In the case of Iran, however, convergence appeared to be more the exception than the rule during the 1990s. After the end of the first Gulf War, Britain hewed closely to the European Union preference for critical dialogue and direct engagement with Tehran. Nonetheless, it did not invest all its diplomatic capital in this approach, and instead left “wobble room” between voices in Brussels that called for aggressive engagement on a multitude of fronts (diplomatic, economic, cultural, and so on) and those in Washington that advocated continued isolation of the Iranian regime. Calabrese argued that London’s ability to force a moderate implementation of the Iran–Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) was an example of Britain’s success in playing out its self-appointed role as a bridge between America and Europe.

Convergence does not reside only within the realm of interstate policymaking, as the recent case of British Petroleum’s activities in Iran seems to indicate. In early 2003, BP admitted that it was becoming “a major crude oil and oil products client of Iran,”<sup>32</sup> by participating in joint ventures with the National Iranian Oil Company and other Iranian oil firms. BP’s future plans for investment in Iran’s liquefied natural gas sector—an area ripe for rigorous exploitation—had the goal of turning that company into a significant player in the Iranian energy industry.<sup>33</sup> In early 2005, BP changed course dramatically, however, deciding not to enter into contracts with Iranian state-controlled oil and gas entities. Signaling the fact that US foreign policy preferences conditioned this change, BP’s CEO Lord Browne of Madingley explained, “To do business with Iran ... would be offensive to the United States” and that “[BP is] very heavily influenced by [its] American position.”<sup>34</sup> What Lord Browne left unsaid is that the Ilsa was in force in February 2005 and is still in force.<sup>35</sup> Considering no company had ever been sanctioned under this law, it is hard to imagine BP felt it would be the first to draw a fine. It is more likely that some aspect of the special relationship was at play, specifically, the part that suggests British interests are best served by supporting American foreign policy preferences.

Policy coordination between London and Washington was also evident during the immediate post-Cold War years as a result of the challenges posed by Iraq. Although President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister John Major held significantly divergent policy preferences in many issues areas, on Iraq their thinking dovetailed. Both men

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31 Calabrese, 65.

32 Peimani, H. (2003), “BP Marches Back into Iran,” *Asia Times Online*, February 27, available at [www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/EB27Ak06.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/EB27Ak06.html).

33 Ibid.

34 Boxell, J. and Morrison, K. (2005), “BP to Eschew Deals with Iran,” *Financial Times*, February 2, 2.

35 The original bill, passed in 1996, was due to be revised for a second time in August 2006. However, competing bills have delayed a final vote and a stopgap bill extended coverage until late September 2006. See Katzman, K. (2006), “The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act,” *CRS Report for Congress*, August 8, available at <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/71856.pdf>.

believed in the use of force as a primary tool against Saddam Hussein's regime, and both believed that the sanction regime put into place in 1991 needed continuous support. Calabrese has argued that Britain's military and diplomatic backing for sanctions imposed on Baghdad lent international credibility to US goals. The costs Britain incurred for support of America's foreign policy toward Iraq in the 1990s were significant: both Russia and many of Britain's EU partners were not keen on sanctioning an important source of energy and a burgeoning trade market. However, if one accepts the logic proposed by Calabrese, despite the apparent imbalance of the Anglo-American relationship vis-à-vis Iraq in the 1990s, Britain was compelled to play this part in order to keep the US engaged with the Iraqi question.

### **The UK–EU Relationship and European Policy Preferences for the Middle East**

Britain's relationship to the EU is on par with its relationship to the US in many respects, although significant disparities emerge upon examination. For instance, Britain does not look to Europe for security guarantees. France is the only other European power with a serious military capability, but it cannot provide what Britain needs in terms of intelligence and muscle that would allow the UK to project force with any degree of efficacy. Thus, the UK–US relationship towers above the one between the UK and the EU in the area of security and defense. However, Britain is a member of the Union, with both rights and responsibilities that come with membership. Although the UK has formal commitments to NATO, Britain shares an *acquis* with its EU partners that legally binds it to the Union. No such conventions exist between the UK and the United States. Obviously, there are a host of other differences in the two alliances—mostly concerned with formal versus informal structures—that are not germane to this discussion. Paul Williams made a significant argument in 2002 maintaining that British policymaking has become “Europeanized” to a remarkable degree, in content, mechanics, and ideological underpinning.<sup>36</sup> While Williams would no doubt admit the Iraq War has damaged his thesis somewhat, when one investigates the extent of British engagement with EU policies—especially those concerning the Middle East—it is obvious that British officials give due diligence to policy ideas prevalent on the Continent.

In the 1990s, foreign policy analysts pointed out that although American and European foreign policy objectives in the Middle East appeared to go hand in hand, the US and Europe differed over the preferred means to reach those goals. Geographic proximity had something to do with these differences in approach. From a security standpoint, Europe's closeness to the Middle East has made it more sensitive to the region's relative stability or instability. In addition, European-Middle Eastern trade has greater potential than that between American and Middle Eastern states. This combination of interests has conditioned European diplomats—with

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36 Williams, P., *The Europeanization of British Foreign Policy and the Crisis in Zimbabwe*, Draft Paper for Workshop at the London School of Economics, available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/intrel/pdfs/EFPUEuropeanizationofBritForPol.pdf#search=%22The%20Europeanization%20of%20British%20Foreign%20Policy%20and%20the%20Crisis%20in%20Zimbabwe%22>.

British officials providing no exception—to keep lines of communication open to their Middle Eastern neighbors. However, Britain has been the most likely of all its fellow member states to defer to American mediation in regional conflicts, including the Middle Eastern Peace Process.<sup>37</sup>

### Oil Security Issues and the British Response

Facing a world in which oil was being correctly perceived as the future lifeblood of both commerce and international security, Winston Churchill advised “safety and certainty in oil lie in variety and variety alone.”<sup>38</sup> Long after Churchill left the political stage and demand for energy reached epic levels, national leaders no longer had the luxury of relying on the type of diversification scheme the British statesman had envisioned. Reflecting the increasingly important dynamic between energy sources and traditional statecraft, one international relations scholar has noted, “[o]il politics is no longer just an industrial matter or a regional matter, but a worldwide security matter. Oil politics is at the core of world politics.”<sup>39</sup> Another observer, giving due recognition to the geographic and political nexus of energy suppliers and those making the most demands, has written, “[i]f the chief natural resource of the Middle East were bananas, the region would not have attracted the attention of ... policy makers as it has for decades.”<sup>40</sup> Finally, the following concise statement put a fine point on the energy security concerns facing the world’s most voracious consumers:

Most of the world’s exportable surplus of oil actually lies in the gargantuan reservoirs of two countries, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Not China, nor the United States, nor Japan, nor Britain, nor any other knowledgeable country dependent upon that supply could tolerate a hostile, unreliable government in control of those fields.<sup>41</sup>

With this declaration, Charles Doran appears to have laid down a gauntlet to the leaders of the world’s largest economies, placing accountability for the management of Saudi and Iraqi oil in their hands.

In general, the UK is concerned about oil—and, increasingly, natural gas—for two reasons. First, the Government must ensure UK access to oil for domestic consumption. Second, guaranteeing international access to energy supplies is necessary in order to facilitate the growth—or at a minimum, stability—of the world economy. These two concerns broadly compose the UK’s conception of *energy security*. The Labour Government has addressed the salience of energy

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37 Stein, K.W. (1997), “Imperfect Alliances: Will Europe and America Ever Agree?” *Middle East Quarterly* 4/1, available at <http://www.meforum.org/article/339>.

38 Winston Churchill quoted in Yergin, D. (2006), “Ensuring Energy Security,” *Foreign Affairs* 85/2, 69–82.

39 Doran, C. (2005), “Oil Politics is World Politics,” *Nitze School of Advanced International Studies*, Johns Hopkins University, available at <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/pubaffairs/publications/saisphere/winter05/doran.html>.

40 Richman.

41 Doran.

security as part of its overall energy strategy. In agreement with preceding British administrations, the Blair government has noted its belief that “security of supply requires that [the UK] have good access to available fuel supplies.”<sup>42</sup> Since Britain’s North Sea oil and gas fields are in decline, future supplies increasingly will come from the international marketplace.<sup>43</sup>

The fact that the world’s largest gas and oil reserves are in the Middle East, Russia, Central Asia, and Africa; that OPEC’s share of exports to the UK will be around 50 percent come 2030; and that world demand will continue to rise in the coming decades—thereby increasing competition among the world’s oil and gas consumers—leads the Government to speculate ambiguously that future international energy transactions will promote “increased political intervention.”<sup>44</sup>

### *British Energy Security Strategy and Iraq*

Aside from market issues, the UK has been faced with constraints posed by international conflict and regional instability. In the Middle East, of course, the single biggest issue British leadership faced was in Iraq. Critics of Anglo-American intervention have argued that bald-faced pragmatism prompted the invasion, that the US and UK instigated a “war for oil.” At least one analyst has noted that if cost-benefit analysis concerning potential gains from Iraqi oil were basis for the decision to go to war, no troops would ever have been committed to combat.<sup>45</sup> Most experts agree that Iraq’s proven oil reserves are fourth in the world behind Saudi Arabia, Canada, and Iran.<sup>46</sup> However, even the most optimistic post-conflict scenarios indicate that returning Iraqi oil to the world market will provide only a miniscule increase in relation to current world demand.

A host of factors led to war in Iraq. To re-iterate, the primary rationale driving the US and its partners concerned the Iraqi regime’s possession, intent to produce, or intent to proliferate weapons of mass destruction that would further destabilize the region and threaten global expectations for stability and peace. For over a dozen years, Iraq had been singled out by the world community as a potential proliferator, and after 9/11, as a nation that sponsored or otherwise condoned terrorism. Some

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42 “The Energy Challenge”, (July 11, 2006) HM Government Publication, available at <http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file32001.pdf>, 18.

43 This report makes the distinction that gas does not have a global market comparable to oil, since gas is usually delivered to regional markets via pipelines. Meanwhile, the government estimates that though the UK only imports about 10 percent of its current gas needs, by 2020 that share could increase to 90 percent. Obviously, concerns about gas supplies are as vital as those regarding oil, but the discussion is complex. Regarding oil, the primary goals are to reduce consumption, maintain current production, encourage new development, and keep the market as open and predictable as possible. Regarding gas, the goals are to reduce consumption, encourage delivery and storage infrastructure (the building of more pipelines and LNG holding facilities), and keeping regional markets open.

44 “The Energy Challenge,” 19.

45 Hepburn, D.F. (2003), “Is it a War for Oil?” *Middle East Policy* 10/1, 29–34.

46 “Rank Order: Oil: Proven Reserves,” *CIA World Factbook*, available at <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/rankorder/2178rank.html.pdf>.

leaders stressed humanitarian reasons as well, correctly noting the regime of Saddam Hussein was an exceptionally brutal transgressor of fundamental human rights. Though these goals were of paramount importance in arguments advocating military intervention, strategic goals also must have entered the calculus of key decision-making units.

Certainly, one such strategic and time-honored concern was energy security, though political leaders are loath to admit this fact. It is likely that the US and UK were not calculating short- or mid-term returns from increased Iraqi oil production. Rather than securing Iraqi oil for their own exploitation, per se, their overarching goal may have been to ensure that Iraqi oil would become part of increased global supply. In this way, one could argue that as far as oil was concerned the coalition's actions were aimed at perpetuating the rules-based norms of international trade—something that coalition members like the UK could readily condone. Simon Bromley has made the argument that when it fashions policy to ensure free flow of energy supplies, the US acts not only out of self-interest, but also out of the desire to “create the general pre-conditions for a world oil market.”<sup>47</sup> This study extends this preference to the UK as well. Britain does not bear the majority of costs for shaping the energy trading system, but neither does it get its preferences fulfilled to its exact liking. Partnering with the US, however, allows the UK to realize its overarching goal of encouraging global free trade. From a realist perspective, China should also welcome these Anglo-American efforts.

### **The Special Case of Israel-Palestine and the Peace Process**

The formulation of British interests in regard to Israel and the “Palestinian question” may be considered a special case when one compares it to the UK's goals in the broader Middle East. Not overlooking the region's possession of vast oil reserves, the ongoing conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors is the seminal element conditioning political behavior in the region. Compared to other Western states, Britain holds a truly unique position vis-à-vis Israel: having both directly and indirectly facilitated the creation of the state, at many points since Israel's creation—and for the sake of British interests—the UK has appeared to reject the state it helped to create.

#### *A Tale of Two Orientations*

In actuality, Britain has never “rejected” Israel. Rather, shifting interest calculations have caused variations in Britain's conduct toward the Jewish state. Over time, divergent voices in British foreign policymaking institutions have tended to consolidate around discernable pro-Arab or pro-Israeli centers of gravity. According to recent analysis, the pro-Arab viewpoint has been most prevalent in decision-making units favoring a *diplomatic orientation* toward foreign policy. Jonathan

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47 Bromley, S. (2005), “The United States and the Control of World Oil,” *Government and Opposition* 40/2, 225–55, especially 254.

Rynhold defines this orientation as one that values good relations with existing power structures (or those about to assume power), avoids confrontations, shuns overly close association with American policies in the region, views Israel as the region's pre-eminent "irritant," and hews close to the dominant EU perspective on the subject. It is not surprising that this approach predominates at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, home to the UK's diplomatic corps.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to the diplomatic orientation, the *strategic orientation* finds its greatest expression in the Prime Minister's Office. The strategic school tends to divide regimes into categories (differentiating between those that are moderate and those that are hostile), focus on threats (military, economic, and ideological) emanating from these regimes, look approvingly upon American policies in the region, and show appreciation for Israel as an important democratic ally in the Middle East.

### *British–Israeli History: Ins and Outs*

Having examined the dichotomous orientations toward Israel-Palestine in the UK, it is instructive to look at Britain's relationship to the forces and factors angling for control of Palestine since the end of the Second World War in order to ascertain the UK's interests there today. Of course, Britain's historic connection to the region predates 1945. The British government signalled its commitment to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in 1917 with the so-called Balfour Declaration, and while Palestine was under British Mandate, Diaspora Jews moved to the region in significant numbers.<sup>49</sup>

By the 1930s, British strategists became concerned with the prospect that Arab populations could gravitate toward the *Axis* Powers. Thus, in the run up to war against Nazi Germany, the fate of Jewish settlers, with Zionist preferences, was of minimal interest to London. When after the war Britain decided to exit Palestine and delegate the management of growing Jewish–Arab territorial contestation to the nascent UN, British relations with the Zionists were severely strained. War between proto-Israeli forces and the Arabs in 1948–49 further weakened ties binding the emerging Israeli state to Britain, with policymakers in London signaling their preference to support the Arab status quo in the Middle East by playing a key role in the formation of the Arab League. In 1949, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin equated support for Arab regimes with a fundamental British interest when he opined, "It would be too high a price to pay for the friendship of Israel to jeopardize, by estranging the Arabs, either the base in Egypt or Middle Eastern oil."<sup>50</sup>

By 1956, however, strategists at Whitehall came to see Arab nationalism as a threat to British interests in the region—particularly, access to oil, regional stability, and commercial investments. This threat recognition caused a change in thinking about Israel's role in the region. By supporting and strengthening Israel, British

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48 Rynhold.

49 Youngs, T. (2005), *The Middle East Peace Process: Prospects after the Palestinian Presidential Elections*, International Affairs and Defence Section, House of Commons Library, March 29.

50 Bevin quoted in Spyer, 8.



policymakers hoped to stem the tide of pan-Arab nationalism linked with the perceived growth of Soviet influence in the Middle East. Using this logic, Britain was able to enlist Israeli support in what became a foreign policy debacle for the former colonial power: the Suez Crisis. Though the trilateral (British/French/Israeli) attempt to take the canal back from Egyptian control ended in failure when US diplomatic pressure brought it to a halt, until 1967 Britain viewed support for the Jewish state as a means to ensure stability and avoid regional conflict. Thus, London was considering its own goals when it facilitated transfers of British arms to Tel Aviv beginning in 1960. As one British statesman noted:

We do not give the Israelis arms because they are pro-Western or because we admire their achievement. We give them arms because our interests in the Middle East are to keep peace and quiet, and to prevent war. Anything which makes war more likely is against the interests of the Western powers.<sup>51</sup>

Of course, one must place this operating logic in the context of the Cold War, a time when the ultimate threat to Britain sprang from Soviet Russia and broader communist ideology.

By 1967, however, London was forced to change course when it appeared it would have to take sides in an impending conflict spawned by the closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. Of course, by not responding to such an affront, Britain risked the weakening of international norms concerning free trade—that being *another* longstanding British interest. According to Jonathan Spyer, Britain's policymakers at the time were more afraid of the harm "open identification with Israel might do to British political and economic interests in the region."<sup>52</sup> Spyer has written that the diplomatic pattern one finds in the run up to the 1967 Arab–Israeli War exemplifies enduring British–Israeli relations. He has also noted that pragmatism guided British policymakers in their relations with Israel and its Arab neighbors. Hence, the decision to keep an open connection to Yasser Arafat during the early years of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (which later became the PLO) was based on the belief that at some point in the future British strategists and diplomats would have to deal with him in a meaningful way.

Another consistent British concern vis-à-vis Israeli policy was oil access, an interest put in jeopardy by the Arab-imposed oil embargo against the West in reaction to the second Arab–Israeli War in 1973. Since the late 1970s British policy toward Israel has been in close alignment with the European Union-led consensus predicated upon the belief that conflicts are universally amenable to negotiated solutions.<sup>53</sup> When Britain supported the EU's 1980 Venice Declaration calling for a joint PLO–Israeli diplomatic approach to solve the Middle Eastern impasse—a move consistent with its decades-old goal of upholding its honest broker status in Arab capitals—Washington policymakers criticized their British ally. However, with the pan-Arab threat seemingly in the past, Britain may have found it easier to pursue an interest-based policy track that diverged from American preferences. After all,

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51 This quote is attributed to an unnamed British Ambassador to Israel by Spyer, 10.

52 Ibid., p. 11.

53 Ibid., p. 15.



in the Thatcher era trade relationships between the UK and several Arab states in the Middle East blossomed—especially when one considers the importance of arms sales to Saudi Arabia (over \$40 billion from the al-Yamama deals alone). From a realist point of view, Britain was following a prudent course relative to its state-defined interests.

When the communist threat to Western interests in the Middle East ended with the fall of Soviet regional hegemony, British leaders were able to formulate policy toward Israel that again differed from their counterparts in Washington. For instance, Conservative Prime Minister John Major traveled to the PA to meet with Chairman Arafat, and also lent the UK's financial support to the project of building up the proto-Palestinian state.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, however, bilateral trade between the UK and Israel grew dramatically, to the point that in 2000 Israel became the UK's number one Middle Eastern trade partner (a position it has since relinquished). A significant component of increased trade was in the defense sector. For instance, Israel Aircraft Industries cracked what traditionally had been a closed British arms market when it sold combat training systems to the Royal Air Force.<sup>55</sup> Not forsaking its trade and investment relationships with Arab states in the Middle East, in the immediate post-Cold War era Britain had to carefully manage its relationship with Israel since commercial ties were not the UK's only significant interest there—defensive and security interests were in play as well.

### *Britain and the Middle East Peace Process*

The UK has always preferred that the US lead the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). Though other EU members have sought active roles in fashioning a Brussels-based approach to the MEPP—most notably France—Britain has embraced the EU's rhetorical stance while simultaneously hoping to leverage the Union's diplomatic assets in support of Washington's consistent engagement. As in so many other issue areas, London has sought to find a balance between American and European preferences.

British efforts to keep the US focused on resolution of the peace process promised some measure of success, first under the auspices of the Oslo Accords, later with the passage of UNSC Resolution 1397 (the first official Council endorsement of an independent Palestinian state), and most recently with the introduction of the Quartet's Roadmap to Israeli–Palestinian Peace.<sup>56</sup> However, violence in the region between Israel and various Palestinian militias in PA territory, the Syrian Army in the Golan, and Hezbollah militants in southern Lebanon—as well as the destabilizing

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54 The Foreign Office has reported that in the years 2001–2005 it spent almost £150 million to finance its *Palestinian Programme*. See “UK Financial Support to the Palestinian Authority,” UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, available at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1115140443221>.

55 Spyer, 17.

56 The *Quartet* is composed of representatives from the US, Russia, the EU, and the UN, all tasked with bringing international pressure to bear on the parties responsible for final settlement of the peace process.

effect of Palestinian suicide bombers during the second *intifada*—presented obstacles to a diplomatic solution regardless of American engagement. Still, London saw promising potential in Israeli Prime Minister Sharon’s plan to disengage—albeit unilaterally—from Gaza, a move ostensibly hastened by concerns in Tel Aviv about the costs of occupation. The Blair Government gave the plan verbal support, indicating the belief that *any* disengagement would “be a real opportunity for progress” along the Roadmap.<sup>57</sup> It is important to note that although the UK sought a primary role for America in the MEPP, London felt free to express its own concerns about Israeli policies in a way that challenged Washington’s official pronouncements. For instance, the FCO consistently aired its view that Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories (Gaza and the West Bank) was in violation of international law, as was the Israeli barrier wall then under construction. According to the Foreign Office, the bottom line was that “Israel must withdraw from Palestinian areas on a permanent basis.” Again, these British preferences aligned more closely with EU rhetoric than the rhetoric emanating from Washington.

The death of Yasser Arafat spawned guarded optimism that a negotiated settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority could bring the Middle East Peace Process to an appropriate conclusion. The January 2005 election of Mahmoud Abbas as president of the PA also fueled high expectations at both Whitehall and 10 Downing Street, although concerns still existed regarding Abbas’ ability to consolidate his authority and quell irredentist militias operating outside PA control.

Despite—or perhaps, because of—pessimism related to Abbas’ efficacy as a peace broker, the UK hosted a conclave of high-ranking Palestinian officials in London during late winter 2005. At the meeting, the British hosts stressed the need to renew institutions that Fatah had controlled since the PA was formed. It was also in London that the Palestinians announced new legislative elections intended to expand the mandate of the Authority, as well as to increase participation and, hence, bolster the PA’s legitimacy as a practitioner of “good governance.” Later that year, Abbas told the audience at the 10th Anniversary European-Mediterranean Summit meeting that took place during Britain’s EU presidency: We in the Palestinian National Authority are committed to ... holding the parliamentary elections on time ... to building democratic institutions, and to enhancing the rule of law.<sup>58</sup>

Of course, these Palestinian aspirations closely dovetailed with British means-levels interests regarding successful exportation and adoption of values deemed necessary to ensure stability. Irony reared its head when the January 2006 Palestinian legislative elections delivered a majority for Hamas, the political/military faction simultaneously responsible for fueling the second *intifada* and building a social and political network of sufficient legitimacy to democratically defeat the corrupt Fatah party. With this outcome, the British means-levels interest of inculcating democracy in the Middle East came in direct conflict with its ends-level interest of ensuring stability via resolution of the peace process. Hamas had traditionally rejected all talk

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57 Youngs, “The Middle East Peace Process,” 44.

58 “President Abbas Addressing EuroMed Summit,” *Palestine News Agency*, November 28, 2005, available at <http://english.wafa.ps/body.asp?id=4730>.

of a two-state solution ('an independent Palestine alongside a secure Israel'<sup>59</sup> located at the terminus of the Roadmap), and according to many commentators its primary *raison d'être* has been to eliminate the Israeli state and reclaim Palestinian territory annexed by the UN and subsequently occupied by Israel since 1948.<sup>60</sup>

Most Western states reacted to the Hamas victory by reminding Palestine's new leaders that violence and democracy were incompatible. The leadership of Hamas must choose, Tony Blair said, "between a path of democracy or a path of violence."<sup>61</sup> In a move that appeared to guarantee continued *instability* in the region, Britain supported the Quartet's dictate to Hamas that it renounce violence against Israel or risk losing Western monetary support. When Hamas failed to comply, the Palestinian Authority stopped receiving euros, dollars, and pounds that before the election amounted to over \$1 billion per year and almost entirely constituted the Authority's annual budget. The UK alone had been contributing £33 million per annum directly to the Palestinian Authority, and another £49 million a year via the EU.<sup>62</sup> In April 2006, Britain's International Development Secretary Hilary Benn told Parliament, "Without progress against the Quartet's conditions, the UK Government cannot provide direct financial aid to the Palestinian cabinet or its ministries."<sup>63</sup>

Eventually, in July 2006, the EU sent \$130 million to Fatah to help meet basic needs in what had become a dire situation; however, not only was the EU's goal to reduce suffering, but also—and perhaps even primarily—to support President Abbas. The irony in this situation was that both the US and the EU found themselves on the same side, as prior to the election Brussels sought to engage Hamas while Washington tried to isolate it. However, as long as the elected government was dead in the water, the military wing of Hamas was bound to exercise its only option: more aggression against Israel.

The increase of Kassam rocket attacks emanating from Gaza, as well as the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier in June 2006, precipitated greater instability in the region, especially when Hezbollah in Lebanon chose the occasion to instigate its own military confrontation with Israel. It would appear, then, that British actions in this instance were inconsistent with the country's avowed interest in stability. Tony Blair's embrace of transformational Middle Eastern foreign policy makes it unlikely that Britain has demoted the goal of stability in the face of the MEPP or any other Middle Eastern variable. The UK still honors the potential US role for

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59 Youngs, T. (2006), *The Palestinian Parliamentary Election and the Rise of Hamas*, International Affairs and Defence Section, House of Commons Library, March 15.

60 Ibid.

61 Henderson, S. (2006), "European Policy Options toward a Hamas-Led Palestinian Authority," in Satloff, R. (ed.), *Hamas Triumphant: Implications for Security, Politics, Economy, and Strategy*, Policy Focus #53, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 54.

62 *Countries and Regions: Middle East Peace Process: Frequently Asked Questions: Palestinian Issues*, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, available at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1115148832197>; Also, Pan, E., "Hamas and the Shrinking PA Budget," Council on Foreign Relations, available at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/10499/>.

63 Hansard (April 18, 2006), *Column*, 529W.

peacemaking in the region—even though by the Fall of 2006 prospects for peace were not good—and Tony Blair’s Government was forced to accept the American decision not to push Israel too hard for a ceasefire in light of fighting in Lebanon between Hezbollah and the Israeli military in July 2006. Thus, the UK’s preference set *appears* little changed. Perhaps a look at the UK’s response to global Islamic terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction can shed more light on British interests in the Middle East.

### **The British Perspective on Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism**

London’s willingness to commit to military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq attests to Britain’s strategic concern with both Islamic terrorism and the proliferation of WMDs. The same concern has stirred the UK to help lead intensive negotiations with Iran over Tehran’s likely nuclear weapons ambitions. In its 2004–05 session, Parliament reiterated its support for the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee and the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1540. That resolution calls on all states to criminalize the proliferation of WMDs, to clamp down on the export of potentially lethal material components and technologies, and to make sure “sensitive materials” stay inside their borders.<sup>64</sup> In the Foreign Office’s response to the House report, Secretary Straw declared that UNSCR 1540 was not meant to supersede or supplant existing multilateral anti-proliferation regimes such as the NPT. Instead, the resolution was meant to complement existing proliferation safeguards.<sup>65</sup>

Iran has concerned both the Foreign Office and members of the Foreign Affairs Committee for some time, primarily due to its WMD threat. In testimony before Parliament in early 2006, Secretary Straw noted that out of four potential nuclear states on the 1990 horizon—Israel, Iran, Iraq and Libya—the programs of the latter two had been eliminated from concern thanks to Anglo-American efforts. Straw also declared that Iranian desires to develop a nuclear arsenal would cause other large Middle Eastern states to quickly obtain that capacity as well. In terms of the menace to regional stability posed by nuclear weapons, the Secretary reminded the Committee that the region’s other nuclear power, Israel, has not threatened to wipe Iran off the map, whereas Iran has threatened Israel with that fate. Straw re-iterated that the British Government’s preferred method for applying pressure on the regime in Tehran was the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Straw also displayed confidence that the US was as committed to finding a diplomatic solution to the stand off with Iran, as was the UK and its EU partners. He went so far as to say that he acted as an intermediary between Washington and Tehran by communicating “confidence building measures” that the US was willing to extend to the Iranian leadership. In this case, it appears that the Blair notion of “bridge building” may end up working better *outside* the European

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64 “Sixth Report of Session (2004–05): Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terror,” House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (March 22, 2005).

65 “Response of Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,” UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (June 2005).

venue, or even that London has been successful in moderating US preferences in the Middle East, substituting multilateral diplomacy for unilateral force projection.<sup>66</sup>

### *The Threat of Terrorism*

In a report issued by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in 2005, Iran and Syria were singled out as states that show little effort in curtailing terrorist activity in both *Iraq and Israel/Palestine*. The EU's paltry effort to put effective anti-terrorism measures into place also drew the ire of Committee members.<sup>67</sup> In oral testimony given to the same Committee later in the year, Straw redefined the government's perspective of the terrorist threat facing Britain as the difference between upholding good and eradicating evil.<sup>68</sup> However, when addressing audiences in the Muslim world, representatives of the Foreign Office have eliminated good vs. evil rhetoric from their speeches, preferring to speak of terrorists who act in the name of Islam as fanatics who possess a "distorted vision of Islam."<sup>69</sup>

The FCO's Kim Howells has stated that extinguishing the violence spawned by terrorism—ostensibly the definitive goal of the UK's approach to counter terrorism—could have a profound effect on international stability. The stability of the Middle East is certainly of paramount interest to the UK, as the discussion of energy security bears out quite graphically. However, terrorism emanating from the Middle East has threatened Britain's internal security, just as 9/11 threatened the internal security of the US. In both nations, stability as an overarching interest has received strong competition from the goal for which every state ultimately strives—survival. The fact that survival has—at least to some extent—supplanted stability as the overarching goal sought by both Tony Blair and George W. Bush became obvious as soon as those leaders committed their nation's resources to intervention in Iraq. Certainly, even the most optimistic strategists in Washington and London understood that under the best of circumstances, sending 200,000 troops into Iraq to disarm and unseat the ruling regime would cause regional instability—if only in terms of cross-border migration, let alone its potential to ratchet up anti-Western sentiment and produce more jihadists in the region. Perhaps instability was recast as a virtue, not a vice: Iraqi instability would put pressure on Iran and Syria. The argument against fomenting instability in Iraq, however, would have been the potential deleterious effect upon NATO member and EU aspirant Turkey.

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66 "Oral Evidence given by Rt Hon Jack Straw, a Member of the House, Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs, and Dr David Landsman OBE, Head of Counter-Proliferation Department, Foreign & Commonwealth Office," House of Commons Committee on Foreign Affairs (February 8, 2006).

67 "Sixth Report of Session (2004–05)."

68 Testimony of Jack Straw, David Richmond, and Dr Peter Gooderham to the Foreign Affairs Committee, October 24, 2005.

69 "Counter Terrorism: The UK Approach," Speech by Kim Howells, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (July 22, 2005).

## The Role of Religion in Shaping British Interests

Despite the potential pitfalls inherent in assessing what effect religious identity has on determining UK foreign policy or interests, examining the intersection of British foreign policy and religion does reveal a few topics worthy of consideration. One topic is the potential effect upon British interests by the rise of political activity that is decidedly “Muslim” in orientation. Why would the extent of Muslim participation in politics or policy formation be of serious academic interest when the country under examination has an overwhelming legacy of Judeo-Christian thought and practice, and where identity with Christianity is the rule for over 70 percent of its citizens? In other words, why single out Muslim identity as a potential variable in a nation primarily composed of self-identified Christians? A plausible answer is two-fold: first, Huntington’s thesis regarding a clash of civilizations cannot be discounted, and the fact that some interpretations of Islam stress the incompatibility of Western democratic polities with Koranic exhortations indicates the existence of some degree of cultural collision; second, the rise of Islamic-based political advocacy in Britain is noteworthy both for its aims and its growing visibility in British politics. As one analyst has noted, “establishing international links and affecting international issues are ... some of Muslim organizations’ explicit aims and interests.”<sup>70</sup>

### *The Reach of Islam in Britain*

Muslims in Britain number approximately 1.8 million, or roughly 2.9 percent of the British population. Robert Pauly has noted the most prevalent characteristic of British Muslims is their diversity. A host of variables such as ethnicity, nationality, economic status, level of commitment (religiosity), and age render a heterogeneous Muslim community in Britain that makes references to “Muslim opinion” or “Muslim voting habits” problematic.<sup>71</sup> However, British Muslims often refer to a homogenous Muslim community in making their appeals to the rest of Britain’s cultural divisions, as well as to the Government. This is especially true for groups of Muslims who have formed social and political advocacy groups such as the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) and the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPAC). That literally hundreds of organizations purporting to advance Muslim preferences exist in the UK reflects the diversity of Islam in Britain. However, groups such as the MAB and MPAC attempt to speak for a unified British-Muslim voice that transcends differing interpretations of Islam—especially differences based upon the embrace or rejection of modernity. The extent to which these groups have been successful in their endeavor is a topic beyond the scope of this examination. Nonetheless, from an intuitive standpoint one surmises that Muslim voices *are* making themselves heard based on the sensitivity to Muslim concerns emanating from governmental

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70 Radcliffe, L. (2004), “A Muslim Lobby at Whitehall? Examining the Role of the Muslim Minority in British Foreign Policy Making,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 15/3, 368.

71 Pauly, R.J. (2004), *Islam in Europe: Integration or Marginalization?* Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited.



and public safety institutions across Britain. Perhaps heterogeneity is less damaging to the promotion of Muslim preferences—at least domestic ones—than some commentators have speculated, especially if those receiving the Muslim message are not attuned to the diversity in Britain’s Islamic community.

Islam has become a seminal force in shaping the identity of young Muslims raised in the West—especially Western Europe. In Britain the revised identity of second- and third-generation immigrants from “Asian” to “Muslim” has come about in conjunction with growing distrust of established Muslim leaders who are considered part of a Government-dictated status quo. Commentators from within the Muslim community have suggested that younger Muslims, feeling underrepresented politically, can come under the influence of imams “from deeply entrenched patriarchal traditions”<sup>72</sup> who stress the interconnectedness of global Islam and urge local action to counter perceived injustices suffered by their coreligionists in Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir, and elsewhere. Such injustices are directly linked to US and British foreign policy, which is also increasingly perceived as the genesis of strident Western bias against Islam, increased military conflicts (in the war against terrorism), and domestic security measures that unfairly target Muslims living in the West.<sup>73</sup> On the one hand, mobilization of a new generation of British Muslims for the purpose of expressing political opposition seems perfectly compatible with representative democracy. On the other hand, concerns emanating from both non-Muslim British citizens and some government officials have centered upon the extent to which such opposing views will be displayed outside of political channels—in other words, through homegrown terrorist activity like the London transit bombings on July 7, 2005, the attempted attack of the same target a few weeks later, and the thwarted airliner attack of August 2006. In addition to this existential domestic terrorist threat directly linked to forms of Islam preached and practiced in Britain, Muslim groups with no intention of using the UK’s political framework to create change, such as *Hizb al-Tahrir*, continue to call for the imposition of *khilafa* (Islamic rule) throughout the world—including, of course, in Britain. For such groups entering the secular political process is *haram* (forbidden).<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusion

This examination has revealed that British interests in the Middle East have remained fairly consistent over the last half-century. Energy security still exercises significant influence over those who are in charge of protecting Britain’s core interests, as does the demand of facilitating commercial trade. However, a significant change in the means by which those interests are obtained is now occurring, hastened by threats to security emanating from the region. In response to global Islamic terrorism and the fear of both regional and worldwide instability that it is capable of producing, Tony Blair’s Government has endorsed the seemingly incongruous concept of

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72 Sardar, Z. (2006), “Can British Islam Change?,” *New Statesman*, July 3.

73 Ibid.

74 Hussain, D. (2004), “Muslim Political Participation in Britain and the Europeanization of the FIQH,” *Die Welt des Islams* 44/3, 387.



transformational foreign policy that seeks as its long-term goal political and social reform in the greater Middle East—even at the expense of short-term instability.

Questions remain concerning the scope and pace of regional transformation. Here, as in many other issue areas, the UK finds itself somewhere between EU and US preferences. While the EU currently prefers an organic and unhurried pace for Middle East reform—even to the point that it is willing to halt expansion of the Union—the US seeks quick results, especially where security concerns are the most pressing. By taking on a major role in the Iraq War, Britain signaled that its position tilts toward faster transformation. However, as the case of Britain’s relationship to Saudi Arabia has shown, the reform impetus seems to be selectively applied. Though many in the EU—Britons among them—believe Saudi Arabia represents a serious future threat to regional—and even world—security, Britain does not pursue a policy of accelerated reform in Riyadh. It would also appear the Saudis understand that the Western states have no great desire to push them toward rapid reform.

This investigation has also revealed that domestic politics, religious ideology, and concern for human rights have minimal influence on the ultimate arbitration of Britain’s national interests. However, where they *do* have influence is in the difficult to decipher area between rhetorical argumentation and measurable behavior, between impassioned debates in Parliament regarding its ally’s treatment of terrorist detainees, and decisions made at 10 Downing Street to moderate the expression of such concerns while continuing a joint military mission. It is actual British behavior—not rhetoric—that tells the observer volumes about the nation’s intent to pursue its eternal interests tied to security, trade, and prosperity—even when those interests are promoted as representing globally beneficial goals. Perhaps as interests become increasingly contested in the future, a communitarian ethos will come into prominence, and strains of British thought already trumpeting the notion that British power and influence can only be used for ‘good’ will hold sway. Certainly, such a shift would also have to coincide with a particularly secure interval when the types of threats experienced today are much less prevalent, or nonexistent. Although the thought of such a world is appealing, one sees no sign of its approach on the horizon.