

Reassessing Britain's Withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in 1971 and its Military Return in 2014

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Abstract

The primary concern of this research is to reassess the British foreign policy, focusing on its military withdrawal in 1971 from the Persian Gulf and its return in 2014. The Persian Gulf, as a region of geo-strategic importance, has always been at the center of attention for the UK and other great world powers. This study will therefore attempt to answer the following question: what are the realities behind the British retreat from the Persian Gulf in 1971, and its return to the region after 43 years? Britain, which has a significant history of military presence in the Persian Gulf, decided to keep a low profile in the Arab hosting countries since 1971. The UK has been working to manage interstate conflicts among Arab-speaking countries, deter Iran, and maintain its 'special relationship' with the U.S. In terms of the theoretical framework of the study, realist theory will be used by focusing on the defensive and offensive realism as the instrument of analysis. Britain's military withdrawal from the Persian Gulf can be analyzed through defensive realism, whereas its military return to the region could be explained by offensive realism. The case study method has been helpful in arriving at the conclusion that the main motivation for the British military presence in the Persian Gulf has been to strengthen an alliance with the Gulf's periphery Arab States.

Keywords: Balance of power, Britain, Foreign policy, Military policy, Persian Gulf

1. Introduction

The main objective of this research is to reassess the British foreign policy, focusing on its military withdrawal in 1971 and its return in 2014 to the Persian Gulf. The study will answer the following question: what are the realities behind the British retreat from the Persian Gulf and its return to the region? Britain, which has had a significant history of military presence in the Persian Gulf, decided to keep a low profile in the Arab hosting countries since 1971. The related literature on the presence of the British military in the Persian Gulf has been rather limited. The main issue that needs to be considered is the controversial nature of Britain's military withdrawal, its return and its current presence in the Persian Gulf.

The hypothesis of the study is that the 1971 withdrawal did not represent a relinquishment of Britain's role in the Persian Gulf. The UK's domestic and economic crisis, along with international challenges in the period of post-Suez crisis, forced British policy makers to reevaluate the UK's role in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East and the Far East. It seems that Britain's presence in the region was gradually redefined in order to keep the balance of power intact. In this regard, the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established by the UK and six Arab countries' initiatives in 1981. In terms of Britain's balance of power, it seems that the rise of Iran as a regional power in the Middle East, the Arab Spring, the existence of various terrorist groups in the region, the ongoing wars in Syria and Yemen, and the uprising against the kingdom of Bahrain have intensified a new British military build-up in 2014.

In order to systematically examine the issue in question, the study will apply a relevant theoretical framework based on Defensive and Offensive Realism presented by John Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz. The case study method as an exploratory tool

has been used in order to analyze the UK foreign policy in the region. Case study is a relevant research method in the study of foreign policy because it not only examines independent and dependent variables, but also “tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (Yin, 1994, p. 41). The case study method, and in particular the multiple case studies design, offers researchers a proven tool for gaining a deep understanding of a specific phenomenon. In this article, multiple factors such as the Persian Gulf region, the British defensive and offensive foreign policy, and the Military return of the British forces to the region are considered as the specific cases to be studied. Sample selection, data collection, and analysis have been done through library research. In order to describe and clarify the phenomena, by using multiple British official sources of primary evidence from UK Parliament and the FCO¹, the study has juxtaposed the mentioned cases alongside one another to reach proper conclusion.

As an introduction for the British return to the Persian Gulf (PG), it should be mentioned that its first steps were taken in 2012, when the English Prime Minister David Cameron, signed the Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with Bahrain. Afterwards, on the occasion of the 2014 Manama Dialogue, the British foreign minister, Philip Hammond announced the issue of agreement, on which they agreed to have a military base in Port Salman of Bahrain. Much of the costs were going to be provided by the Bahraini government. After 40 years, the British were going to have a permanent base in the Persian Gulf. This return would create a special and complicated situation for the UK and in the balance of power in the region.

1. Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The British government followed a two-sided policy, which included a military and a political approach. They scheduled to take several steps to provide the underground for the return to the Persian Gulf. The initial steps was taken through the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981 as a political strategy in response to the Islamic Revolution of Iran, followed by the cooperation with the US at the time of Iran and Iraq war (1980-88), when the UK kept a low military presence alongside the American forces in the Persian Gulf. The subsequent steps were taken through the war of oil tankers (1984), and advisory and training programs for the Arabian States, and consequently, full cooperation in toppling Saddam Hossein (2003), which altogether welcomed the British Military return to the region in 2014.

In this context, the conceptual framework concerning Britain's relations with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf is used in the following three categories. The first is category is the 'British military withdrawal' from the PG, which refers to British forces' withdrawal of most of the ground troops, warships, military and equipment from the PG in 1971. The second category is 'British presence,' which refers to the UK's political engagement, ad-hoc, and mobile forces. The third category is the 'British military return' to the region, which alludes to the establishment of the British permanent military bases in the PG, specifically in Bahrain.

By applying a case study method, this article examines several variables of Britain's defensive and offensive foreign policy in the Persian Gulf. Factors that led to the British military withdrawal in 1971 are as follow: Economic factors, party politics, and international politics. In terms of Britain's offensive foreign policy on its return to the Persian Gulf, the following two major factors seem to have been the most influential elements in the context of Britain's foreign and military policy: Maintaining the balance of

power, and facing security and military challenges in the Persian Gulf.

2. Review of Related Literature

The literature concerning the British relations with the PG is mostly related to the historical challenges of the UK in this region. The related literature on Britain's withdrawal and its return to the PG is rather limited, fragmented, and mostly available under the keyword of 'East of Suez'. The literature has hardly ever addressed the British military policy, particularly in terms of its military return to the Persian Gulf. Therefore, the main issue that needs to be studied is the controversial nature of Britain's military withdrawal in 1971, and its political and military presence in the PG thereafter.

Three streams of studies have investigated the British relations with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf: The first stream refers to the British historical presence in the PG and mentions the importance of this period. The important issue investigated in this study is the current British presence in this region. One of the famous studies in this field in 2013 is 'British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1961–1968' by Helene von Bismarck. Helene's work illustrates the fact that for much of the decade, the British forces in the Gulf did not contemplate such a retreat. She argues that at the time of the substantial military deployment in defence of Kuwait in the summer of 1961, a British government review concluded that vital British economic interests were at stake (Bismarck, 2013).

Vaez-Zadeh, in his article "The Position of Geopolitical theory of Mackinder on British World Policy" (2016, p. 36), argues that the interactions of identified factors played a role in Britain's foreign policy development and geopolitical rivalries with other European powers. The UK's geopolitical considerations suggest

that the foreign policy decisions of British political leaders are largely influenced by geopolitical variables during the Empire and in the present time. As the power shifted from sea power to land power, British politicians worked to address and remedy the weaknesses of the location of Britain's island position through gaining power in the overseas land, especially in Asia and the Middle East (Vaez-Zadeh, 2016).

Another study that could be placed in this category is Macris and Kelly's book, titled *Imperial Crossroads* (Macris & Kelly, 2012), which covers more than 500 years of Western maritime power in the PG. The book consists of several essays that are organized in chronological order, and explore the policies of the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, the Americans, the Indians, and the Chinese politicians regarding the maritime power in the Persian Gulf. Written by experts from a broad range of disciplines, this book is an effort by Macris and Kelly to provide new looks towards great power involvements in the region (Valle, 2016). This study examines the contested history of the control of the Persian Gulf and its resources by different countries.

The second category refers to the British contemporary presence in the region and the situation in the existing challenges. In this regard, the article published in the *RUSI (Royal United Services Institute) Journal* under the name 'A Return to East of Suez' by Gareth Stansfield and Saul Kelly in 2013 (Stansfield & Kelly, 2013) investigates the current British presence in the Persian Gulf region. In this article, the focus is mainly on the British military deployment in the East of Suez; the paper raises pertinent issues as the government considers policy choices in the deployment of the UK's armed forces. The book by Askari et al. titled 'Militarization of the Persian Gulf', has not specifically discussed British policy in the region, however, the authors believe that heavy militarization of

the region is the result of foreign intervention including Britain and the US due to rich oil resource of the Persian Gulf. "Moreover, territorial disagreements in the region, which have been inherited from the colonial rule of Britain in the region, have often led to tensions and disputes between Persian Gulf countries"(Askari et al., 2009. p. 29).

Rosemary Hollis examines British foreign policy in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf after 9/11 events, focusing on how Britain's reacted to 9/11 under New Labour as Blair's path to war in Iraq. Hollis argues that in post 9/11, Britain heavily involved in arms sales, trade and finance bind to Arab states of the Persian Gulf under the US-regional security arrangements. According to Hollis, "after the war [Iraq 1991] most of the coalition troops returned home, but British forces joined the Americans in bolstering Kuwait's defenses and enforcing 'no-fly zones' over Iraq that endured until the invasion of Iraq in 2003" (Hollis, 2010, p. 167). This is a relevant assessment on the continuity of 'British presence' in the Persian Gulf which will be examined in this article.

The third category refers to the British relations and coordination with the Periphery Arab States around the Persian Gulf, especially Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In another paper published by the same RUSI journal, under the name: "Britain in Bahrain in 2011", the events of 2011 have brought to light the UK's inability to influence Bahrain's response to internal political and social unrest despite the close relationship between the two countries and Britain's sustained efforts. As Matthew Willis (2012) states in this article, "Britain's longstanding and complex relationship with Bahrain was put under intense pressure by the unrest that spread through the Gulf state in February 2011. The kingdom's regional strategic significance, and its enduring dependability, make it a key ally for the UK – yet Britain's values-

driven policy also compelled it to encourage negotiation and reform, rather than unconditionally support the Bahraini government's repressive approach" (Willis, 2012, p. 62). The UK has an insatiable intention to be in the Persian Gulf region. As it is implied in the mentioned sources, the British have always been after this region for securing their economic and political interests. However, the claim can be proven by referring to the due sources.

3. Theoretical Framework

In order to systematically examine the issue in question in this paper, a special theoretical framework is needed. This study will therefore use Defensive and Offensive Realism (DOR) presented by John Mearsheimer. Since the study will focus on Britain's military withdrawal and return to the PG, it is worth mentioning that the main components of the DOR consist of hard power, balance of power and security issues.

Mearsheimer actually contributes to the structural alliance theory and puts new focus onto the role of power and geography in world politics (Toft, 2005, p. 381). He makes a contrast between the measures of "power" in both offensive and defensive realism, and holds the role of power in offensive theory. He believes that "defensive realists argue that structural factors limit how much power states can gain, which works to ameliorate security competition. Offensive realists, on the other hand, maintain that the system's structure encourages states to maximize their share of world power, to include pursuing hegemony, which tends to intensify security competition" (Mearsheimer, 2006, p. 71).

In terms of Britain's military retreat, the paper will benefit from Mearsheimer's thesis: "Defensive realists like Kenneth Waltz

(1979) maintain that it is unwise for states to try to maximize their share of world power, because the system will punish them if they attempt to gain too much power" (Mearsheimer, 2006, p.72). In any foreign policy decision making, leaders' calculations and perceptions indicate their direction. In terms of Britain's foreign policy in the PG, the paper will argue how material power (military power) affects this decision-making context. In addition, domestic politics can have a negative impact on the foreign policy and it may limit the efficiency of a state's response to the external environment (Taliaferro, 2000, p. 131). Realists believe that on the first step, the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy are decided by its position and situation in the international system. More specifically, its relative material power capabilities decide on the country's most important policies (Rose, 1998, p. 146). In this context, the balance of power determines the position of the players as well as the military assets that states possess, such as armoured divisions and nuclear weapons (Mearsheimer, 2013, p. 79).

As a state's relative capabilities and its external environment will smoothly affect the foreign policy and shape the way the state behaves on the way of achieving its interests, in order to understand any particular behavior, we need to refer to the affective factors such as the states relative capabilities or the external environment (Rose, 1998, p. 145). Offensive realism highlights the impacts of the international system on state behaviour, which can also be called 'aggressive realism'.

Discussing Britain's offensive foreign policy, which is mainly related to the use of armed forces and military equipment, the issue of "balance of power", will be addressed. The question is how power is shared among the states because there is a self-help system and being selfish is the best choice in international politics. In addition, as every state considers its own interests and benefits,

what becomes important is maximizing the power and if every state wants to maximize the power, the power will logically not be shared equally among them. Such phenomena are the reasons that bring the issue of balance of power to the center of attention. Every state would use various means such as military, economic and diplomatic means to shift the balance of power in its favour (Mearsheimer, 2001 b pp. 54-66). On the bases of this utilization, Britain's military withdrawal in 1971 from the PG, and later its return to the region in 2014 will be analyzed by defensive and offensive realism respectively.

4. Factors of British Military Withdrawal in 1971

In the years before 1967, the UK naval presence in the PG was surprisingly minimal. Britain's base in Bahrain at that time has been described as a "miniature bastion for the Royal Navy," and the word "miniature" truly illustrates the navy's size and quality in the Persian Gulf (Rovner & Talmadge, 2014, p. 561). In spite of this minimal presence, until 1971, Bahrain depended on Great Britain for its security and London saw Bahrain as an ideal hub from which it could operate as needed (Willis, 2012, p. 63). Although the British presence in the Persian Gulf was light after the Second World War, it was successful in securing the region (especially oil security). However, the regional environment was relatively unthreatening. As a result of this protection, oil producers were safe and faced relatively few external threats; British presence was in fact a major factor to protect them from internal threats (Rovner & Talmadge, 2014, p. 560).

4.1. The Economic Factor

In 1968 and in Harold Wilson's questionable premiership, the

British decided to withdraw from the East of Suez, including the Persian Gulf; a decision, which is analyzed from different point of views and includes various reasons from different people's point of view. Saki Dockrill and Simon C. Smith in their books, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez* and *Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf*, argue that the decision of withdrawal was taken as a result of the series of Defence Reviews conducted by the British Government from 1965 onwards in reaction to the UK's long-term economic decline. They believe that the economic attenuation and budget deficits were the main factors for leaving the Persian Gulf (Dockrill, 2002; Smith, 2004).

Denis Judd (in Smith, 2016, p. 2) has asserted that "the Wilson government's urgent need to reduce its overall expenditure, while not appearing to undermine the funding of the Welfare State and the more popular forms of public spending, was the root cause of the decision" announced in January 1968 to withdraw from East of Suez. William Roger Louis underlines the impact of the devaluation crisis of November 1967 that led to the plan to abandon Britain's military presence in the East of Suez altogether (Louis, 2003). On the contrary, Tore Petersen stresses that "the withdrawal from the Persian Gulf was not related to saving money, but was essential to get left-wing acceptance for cuts in social spending to balance the budget after the pound was devalued" (Smith, 2016, p. 329). The devaluation of sterling towards the end of 1967 is one of the short-term considerations on which certain scholars have focused. However, the long-term issues should be kept in mind as well.

4.2. Party Politics

Looking inside Britain's party politics, it should be noted, however,

that after the Conservatives Party returned to power in 1970 under Edward Heath, they failed to follow their rhetoric in opposition, and instead proceeded with the military withdrawal. Harold Wilson, the British prime minister at the time of the decision in 1968 was against Britain's colonial policy and it may be because of this fact that he was one of the people who supported the departure. All eyes, whether on the Left or the Right, were glazing on a European future, as a revived opportunity in the EEC and NATO (Stansfield & Kelly, 2013, p. 6). On the other side, Jeffrey Pickering and Shohei Sato claim that the shift in power within the Labour Cabinet in November 1967 and Harold Wilson's premiership, who had anti-colonialism policies, as well as political changes inside the government, encouraged the diplomats to make such a decision (Pickering, 1998; Sato, 2009).

It is said that "Wilson's greatest foreign policy achievement was managing to keep British troops out of Vietnam. Wilson's 1964–70 governments were highly dependent on the United States in terms of keeping the British economy propped up – as we have seen, in 1964 the Americans put pressure on Wilson not to devalue the pound due to fears that as a consequence they would have to devalue the dollar" (Crines & Hickson, 2016, p. 264). Putting together the Labor Cabinet minister and diarist Richard Crossman's statement about the withdrawal might be astonishing: "the status barrier is as difficult to break through as the sound barrier; it splits your ears and is terribly painful when it happens". Reflecting on the determination to withdraw, former Labor Foreign Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker characterized it as "the most momentous shift in our foreign policy for a century and a half" (Smith, 2016, pp. 328-9). Therefore, Britain's foreign policy visions do not exist in a vacuum, the political parties are sometime convinced that such an approach in foreign policy would prove popular with the electorate.

Party politics should be considered as one of the factors which affected Britain's foreign policy decisions with regard to the withdrawal from the region.

4.3. International Politics

One of the main evidences representing the purpose of the withdrawal can be found in Wilson's words to the Commons shortly before Christmas of 1965: "I want to make it quite clear that whatever we may do in the field of cost-effectiveness, we cannot afford to relinquish our world role..." (Pimlott, 1992, p. 385). The UK wanted to remain in the region and the Persian Gulf by applying a less expensive policy and a more effective presence. In this regard, due to Britain's domestic and international challenges, London had to redefine the essence of its presence in the Middle East, and particularly in the Persian Gulf. The UK made a number of initiatives to redefine its presence in the Persian Gulf, supporting the creation of the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981 after the victory of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the start of Iran-Iraq war in 1981.

In terms of international factors, the rise of nationalism and anti-British sentiments in the Middle East can be seen as another variable that influenced the British withdrawal. Predicting that a continuing British presence in the PG would present a "tempting target for the rising forces of Arab nationalism" (Smith, 2016, p. 332), Wilson's party, which was at work at the time, recommended: "we should clearly be wise to go before the consequences of staying become more dangerous to local stability than the consequences of departure" (Smith, 2016, p. 332).

The Pan-Arabic ideal that the Arabs should unite under one single political unit, whose head is Nasser, was popular at that time

(Kurun, 2017, p. 21). Opposed to the British control of the Suez Canal Zone and concerned with Egypt becoming a Cold War battleground, President Nasser pushed for a collective Arab security pact within the framework of the Arab League (Kurun, 2017, p. 21). Under the shadow-point of Arab nationalistic movements and Dr. Musaddeq's nationalism in 1950s in Iran, the nationalist sentiments against Britain became stronger until the early 1970s. These factors finally influenced the British decision to retreat from the region (Roger, 1998).

In 1968, when the UK government announced that they would no longer honour staying in the East of Suez, the reactions of the littoral Arab countries of the Persian Gulf were expressed with sadness, not relief. This sadness could be because of the worries for the security dilemma that might had faced them after the UK's withdrawal. "Britain is weak now where she was once so strong" (Rovner & Talmadge, 2014, p. 564) lamented the Amir of Bahrain. "You know we and everybody else would have welcomed her staying" (Rovner & Talmadge, 2014, p. 564). In this regard, 30 leaders of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Saudi Arabia even offered to continue to provide the costs and fund British presence, but a retreat was inevitable (Rovner & Talmadge, 2014, p. 564). Finally, the British decided to subtract their defence commitments and military facilities from South Arabia, which meant the closure of the Aden base (Smith, 2016, p. 339).

In officers, diplomats, and analysts' point of view, London's decision to leave the Persian Gulf in 1971 was a milestone; the British forces' presence in the region was acting like a lid on regional hostility and their departure meant the removal of a force that kept the lid. In fact, the British government's calculations and perceptions, influenced by domestic and international politics limited the efficiency of Britain's response to the external

environment and its military presence in the PG. The UK officially made its retreat from the PG and based on this familiar narrative, the littoral Arab countries of the Persian Gulf soon descended into conflict and war, and the security of oil became increasingly precarious. It was understood then, that the British calm and inappreciable presence was of high importance for the periphery Arab states. It deterred them from knocking up one another; the British were successful in sympathizing each of the countries and states. As historian Jeffrey Macris believes, there was a time of “chaotic interregnum” between the period of the British departure and the return of large foreign forces in 1991 (Rovner & Talmadge, 2014, p. 550).

5. The Consequences of the Withdrawal and Britain's Presence

The second category of Britain's involvement in the Persian Gulf representing ‘British presence’ refers to its political engagement and the essential, ad-hoc and mobile forces in the PG. By the British withdrawal, London played a low-profile military role, and largely encouraged political and economic cooperation with Arabs in the Persian Gulf from 1971 onwards. One of the evidences supporting this model of presence is Harold Wilson's Labor government decision between 1966 and 1968 to abort the new power-projection platforms (the full-deck carrier CVA01, and the TSR-2 and then the F-111 aircraft) and to withdraw the British military forces from the major bases in Arabia (Aden and the PG), Southeast Asia (Malaysia and Singapore) and the Indian Ocean (the Maldives) by 1971 (Stansfield & Kelly, 2013).

Immediately after Britain decreased its military presence, security concerns and vulnerabilities occurred in the period between the British withdrawal in 1971 and the establishment of

the US Rapid Deployment Force in 1980. During that nine-month period, for different reasons, neither the United States nor Britain accepted to maintain their military forces in the region (Rovner & Talmadge, 2014, p. 555). During the 1980s, however, the United States built a rather light military presence to back a new commitment to secure the Persian Gulf against foreign domination. Following the so-called British withdrawal in 1971, Mohamad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran decided to have a power shift in his foreign policy orientation towards the United States. Saudi Arabia and Iran emerged as the guardians of the status quo under the U.S. hegemony to fill the power vacuum in the PG (Karsh, 1987, p. 84).

Britain's retreat from the Persian Gulf marked the change of an era in regional security. The major outcome of this withdrawal was the termination of the treaties that made the UK the Emirate's legal protector. Britain was therefore no longer a protectorate for the Emirates (Willis, 2012, p. 65). There is a significant difference between being an 'ally' or a 'protectorate'. At the time of the withdrawal, when the UK terminated its treaties, Emirate was no longer a protectorate for London, but simply an ally for Britain. After transforming from protectorate to ally, Bahrain drifted towards Saudi Arabia. Another outcome of this transformation was that the British government was no longer able to influence Bahraini domestic policy (Willis, 2012, p. 65). Certain scholars have mentioned that the retreat resulted in the collapse of the state system in the Persian Gulf (Stansfield & Kelly, 2013, p. 6).

However, the evidence indicates that following the British departure from the East of Suez, due to the psychological impact of the market, there was an erosion of British commercial advantage. According to Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Britain had lost first place to Japan in Qatar's import market. As a result, the other competitors used the upraised opportunity. Regarding

other arms suppliers, France had established strong positions in Qatar and Abu Dhabi at the expense of the British, which annoyed the British, and acted as an economic harm for the empire (Smith, 2016, pp. 343-4).

After 1971, Britain worked in cooperation with the US to export advanced weapons systems to periphery Arab states. These usually came with training teams, in addition to the military officers and the armed forces that were already stationed in these states. Based on the Anglo-Saudi Al-Yamamah I and II projects, these exports were of high benefit for the British defence industry and helped successive British governments reduce the costs of equipping the British armed forces (Stansfield & Kelly, 2013, p. 7). The important point is that the British military retreat from the East of Suez did not mean that this country had ignored this region completely. Based on this claim, Edward Heath, the secretary of state for foreign affairs in 1972 asserted in his meeting with CENTO ministers that “our military withdrawal does not necessarily mean that we don’t have any attention to this very important region. We have only modernized our terms with the Arab statesmen...” (Stansfield & Kelly, 2013, p. 6). Even at that period of economic decline, the British tried not to announce their complete military withdrawal from the region; they tried to preserve their low profile for years. “In 1979, the Royal Navy was back in the Gulf with the Armilla Patrol, performing its traditional role, in support of the US Navy, of policing the seas as the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq War spilled into the Gulf” (Stansfield & Kelly, 2013, p. 6).

After all, the British were aware of their own benefits. The Defence and Oversea Policy Committee highlighted a number of the positive aspects of this withdrawal in July 1968: “It was already noticeable that one of the results of our decision to withdraw from

the Persian Gulf and the Far East had been a substantial increase in our orders of arms to these areas. Another field in which we were already active and where there might be a case for expanding our effort when conditions allowed, was technical assistance and especially consultancy arrangements which often led later on to commercial contracts” (William Roger Louis, 2004, p. 96).

In terms of the second category of the British military presence, including the ad-hoc forces suggested earlier, it is worth mentioning that after the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq war, Britain and France sent troops to the Persian Gulf region in 1980 to help the American forces in controlling the region. In addition, to escort British tankers, British ‘Armillar patrol’ was based near the Strait of Hormuz (Acharya, 1989, p. 130) . These two military “presences” indicate that Britain did not completely pull out its military forces from the region.

The UK’s presence in this phase was not palpable and the UK was just acting on the side of its traditional ally. In this context, the initial factors, intensifying Britain’s new military build-up in the PG-, which are not much investigated by scholars-, are the implications of the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, the eight years of Iran-Iraq war, and the rise of Iran as a regional power, following the expansion of its nuclear program. However, one important question that remains is why did the UK not take its full military return in 1979? As mentioned earlier, the British internal problems inside the UK government under Margaret Thatcher, and the US role-playing in filling the power vacuum in the PG prevented Britain from full military return to the region at the time. This period can be considered as a British defensive foreign policy, in which London kept its low military profile in the region, willing to invest in Britain and Europe.

One major evidence on the British presence after its withdrawal is the creation of the GCC, a planar event that simultaneously served as a consequence for the British retreat from the region and at a same time, an influencing factor to encourage the British government for the military return to the region. In 1979, and after the establishment of the Islamic republic of Iran, Britain stimulated the Arabian states of the GCC, in order to compensate its absence in the PG. In comparison to the recent wars, the threats to oil in the first years of the war were modest; but the US, through the impalpable help of London was able to manage the conditions. "The British, even after their withdrawal East of Suez, provided a major advisory presence in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) and Kuwait. In 1984, Britain joined the US in convoying ships through the Strait" (Marschall, 2003, p. 195).

In terms of the nature of Britain's withdrawal, it would be more convincing to say that British policy-makers between 1971 and 1981 continued to create adequate political arrangements for the Persian Gulf states, a process that included the dispatch of combat missions to the civil war in Yemen and culminated in the creation of the United Arab Emirates in 1971 (McCourt, 2009, p. 468). This model of the British political-military involvement led to the creation of the GCC in 1981.

As mentioned earlier, in the 1950s and 1960s, the British had a light military presence and maintained their continuing political commitment to the region. This military presence consisted of both maritime assets, and intelligence and small rapid reaction forces ashore (Rovner & Talmadge, 2014, p. 555). As discussed earlier, a number of economic, political and international factors forced Britain as a declining empire to leave the PG. This shift in the UK's foreign policy posed a defensive behavior rather than an offensive

one. In the following section, the aims and implications of Britain's military return will be examined in detail.

6. Aims of British Military Return to the Persian Gulf

The third category of the conceptual framework of this study is the British 'military return' to the Persian Gulf, which alludes to the establishment of the British permanent military base in the PG in general and in Bahrain specifically. The two goals of the UK foreign policy, the 'evolution of Middle East states and the transformation of state power' are highlighted in Britain's official documents titled 'The Middle East: Time for New Realism'. It is mentioned that "the UK can play alongside its allies, to calm state conflict and pursue a stable balance of power, in which the UK can engage productively with as many regional actors as possible" UK (Parliament, 2017, May. 2). Among the several variables on Britain's offensive foreign policy, four major factors explain the nature the British military return to the Persian Gulf; these factors will be discussed in the following sections.

6.1. Maintaining the Balance of Power

To study Britain's offensive foreign policy, it is vital to understand the status quo of the 'balance of power' in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. According to Jack Donnelly, "it is not right to expect the world to maintain the balance once achieved, but that a balance, once disrupted, will be restored in one way or another" (Donnelly, 2004, p. 145). One of the main aims of the British military presence in the PG has been to maintain the old balance of power and deter Iran from advancing its nuclear program since 2010. The UK has considered itself as the essential status quo power, whereas Iran and Iraq, who are not the members of the GCC, are known as

revisionist states. Nevertheless, "any security commitments in the [Persian] Gulf put the UK in the path of the swirling social storms across the region – the ‘Arab awakening’" or some responses from Iran at least (Stansfield & Kelly, 2013, p. 2). In this context, Britain's military policy towards the Persian Gulf has sought to increase its security by boosting its military cooperation with the GCC member states, reflecting an offensive foreign policy of the UK in maintaining its dominance in the Middle East (Vaez-Zadeh, 2012, p. 18).

According to the principles of neorealism, every state in the Persian Gulf can be a threat to another, and since among these states, one superpower does not exist, each state primarily maintains and considers its own interests. The best way for each state to assure its survival is to remain or become powerful (Snyder, 2002), which explains the reason for which Britain would seek to work on the given balance of power at regional and international levels. The UK has traditionally been keen to protect the current balance of power in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East (UK Parliament, 2017, May. 2).

6.2. Managing Inter-Arab State Conflicts

Britain has been working to manage interstate conflicts among Arabs while at the same time retaining its ‘special relationship’ with the US. Moreover, the UK has been seeking to engage in conflict resolution and maintain the stability of the Arabian regimes.

Britain's conflict resolution benefited from different tools, including political, security and military initiatives. For instance, in the Kuwait invasion by Iraq in 1990, the excuse of war was the border conflict between these two states. In 1992 and 1994, the

border conflict between Saudi Arabia and Qatar resulted in military action. Furthermore, in the years 1995, 1997, and 1997, military tension fell out between Yemen and Saudi Arabia (Okruhlik & Conge, 1999). In addition to border conflicts among these Arab states, there was also regional conflicts between peripheral Arab States and the other countries of the region. Four decades of tensions between Iran and the UAE about the three strategic islands near the Hormuz Strait, including Abu Musa and Tomb islands can be considered as a relevant example in this regard (Askari et al., 2009, p. 29).

6.3. Connection between Oil and Arms Sales

The connection between oil and arms trade has heavily influenced the British foreign and military policy in the Middle East and the PG. Therefore, one of the main motivations for the British return to the PG has been to strengthen an alliance with the periphery Arab states and secure UK's access to oil. In this context, the UK maintains a significant military presence in all the Persian Gulf States. The control of the trade and oil supply routes around the PG and the Red Sea is also significantly important in the British maritime strategy, justifying a permanent naval presence in the region (Reeve, 2018).

The mutual relationship between Britain and the Persian Gulf periphery Arab states is not only based on oil imports, but also on Britain's armaments exports. For example, in 2017 "exports to Saudi Arabia rose by 66 per cent to £1.13bn and those to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) rose by 94 per cent to £260m", according to an analysis of defence exports cleared by Liam Fox's Department for International Trade (DIT) (Bove, 2018). In this regard, Prime Minister Theresa May identified Oman and Bahrain as the most important states for Britain's new presence (Iddon, 2018).

“About half of UK arms exports go to the Gulf, mainly to Saudi Arabia. Britain’s post-war strategic objective to remain a global military power despite the loss of empire requires it to maintain its own arms industry” (Wearing, 2018). On November 7, 2012, David Cameron signed ‘a long-term defence partnership’ with the United Arab Emirates; the ‘security of the UAE and the wider Gulf region’ was stated as the purpose of this agreement. It "involve[d] close collaboration around Typhoon and a number of new technologies" (Khawaja, 2012), an increase in the number of joint military and training exercises between the two countries, and a commitment to invest "in the British military presence in the UAE" (Khawaja, 2012). This agreement, along with the agreement with Bahrain, amounted to a "boosting of the British military presence in the Gulf" (Khawaja, 2012).

6.4. Security and Military Challenges

Relations with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf are of considerable significance to the UK, specifically as a result of which over 160,000 British nationals live and work in the countries surrounding the PG. According to the British government, the UK has a clear national interest in peace and security in the PG, and in the freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. One of the main reasons for this national interest, according to a policy adopted by the government, is the fact that the six states of the PG "have the largest hydrocarbon reserves in the world, and are playing an increasingly important role in Middle Eastern politics" (Department for International Development, 2015). According to the House of Commons, the significance of the Strait of Hormuz is one of the issues for which Britain is trying to develop its influence in the region (UK Parliament, 2015, Jan. 12). Based on the rising

tensions in the Persian Gulf, Iran has been seen one of the main candidates to close the Strait of Hormuz and block the UK shipping lines (BBC News, 2016).

Iran's rising power in the region must be mentioned as an important variable that has influenced the British policy to establish military bases in the PG, and has encouraged the UK's security cooperation with the Arab states (Vaez-Zadeh, 2012, p. 11). Moreover, according to official documents, London's relations with the six states of Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are broad and deep. They are considered as vital partners for the UK in working towards sustainable, long-term regional stability, in addressing direct threats to the UK from terrorism such as the ISIL, extremism and organized crime, and the security of energy. "Britain has devolved its cooperation on countering terrorist groups, promoting stability across the Middle East and North Africa, and providing humanitarian assistance to those most in need, while continuing to address issues on which our views differ. UK has encouraged greater trade and investment in both directions, working to end the conflict in Yemen through an inclusive political settlement" (SDSR, 2015, p. 55).

To assure security and military challenges in the PG, the UK and Bahrain have initiated further security and military cooperation. On October 11, 2012, the British Foreign Secretary Phillip Hammond, signed a defence co-operation agreement with Bahrain, which, according to the Minister for International Security Strategy, Andrew Murrison "provides a framework for current and future defence engagement activity, including training and capacity-building, in order to enhance the stability of the wider region" (Stansfield & Kelly, 2013). Therefore, it can be considered as a foreground for the main naval deployment in Bahrain in 2014

(Childs, 2016, p. 137). The agreement proves these two countries' joint determination to maintain regional security and stability in the face of recent and present challenges in the region (Fallon, 2014). Philip Hammond clearly addressed the littoral Arab countries of the PG as follows: "Your security concerns are our security concerns. Your security is our security, your prosperity is our prosperity, and your stability is our stability" (Hamond, 2014)

On December 2016, at the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain, the British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson delivered a speech on the UK's policy and asserted the following words:

Britain has in total 1,500 military personnel in the region and seven warships, more than any other Western nation apart from the U.S. We are spending £3 billion on our military commitments in the [Persian] Gulf over the next 10 years (Indeed, this 3 billion includes the costs of maritime land and air bases in Oman and Dubai) and that is deepening a partnership that is stronger than with any other group of nations in the world outside NATO" (Johnson, 2016). About the interests and motivations, he explained that "together with our allies in the [Persian] Gulf, we are fighting together to defeat Daesh in Iraq and Syria, and we are winning. The RAF is the second biggest contributors to the airborne strike missions after the Americans. And together we have helped dramatically to reduce the footprint of that terrorist organization" (Johnson, 2016).

The military and security benefits for British forces is that they would value the training areas, access to the PG and the Indian Ocean, as well as the benefits of collaboration with the Persian Gulf forces. It would also send the message of resolve to Iran, and others, that the UK takes the Persian Gulf security seriously and is

trying to resolve the dilemmas, encounter terrorism, and help the regions solve their security problems (Stansfield & Kelly, 2013). In order to have a deeper analysis of the above-mentioned factors about the British military presence in the Persian Gulf, it would be worthwhile to examine Britain's foreign policy behaviors.

7. British Foreign Policy Behavior in Returning to the Persian Gulf

Understanding the behavior of the British foreign and military politics should be sought in the policy process and the role of the Prime Minister and his cabinet, as well as the foreign ministry and defence of the country. In fact, this triangle plays a decisive role in the complex decision making of the British foreign policy in the Persian Gulf region (Vaez-Zadeh, 2012, p. 11). The specific foreign policy behaviors in this study include the relationships between the personal characteristics and the orientation of the country's foreign policy. In this section, the security, political, and military efforts of the British governments under the Conservative Party, which has held power since 2010, will be discussed. After winning the 2010 general election by the conservative party led by David Cameron, and forming the first coalition government after the Second World War, the British foreign and military policy assigned a noticeably focused plan on the Middle East and the PG.

In the four-year period of William Hague's authority in the ministry of foreign affairs, from 2010 to 2014, the return policy and the British military presence in the PG were scheduled. This was at a time when the Middle East was experiencing turmoil in Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain and Palestine, in a way that London's relations with the Gulf States were entering a period of tension. On the other side, during the ministry of William Hague

in the foreign affairs office, the aggressive policy of the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad created tensions with Britain including English sailors and leathernecks' arrest in the PG and attacks on the British Embassy in Tehran.

Before succession to the Foreign Ministry, Hague was well informed and trained on diplomatic affairs, having relevant experience in foreign affairs, since he served as the shadow minister of the Conservative Party from 2005 to 2010. Therefore, Hague should be considered as an effective figure in the process of encouraging the British foreign policy towards its military return to the PG (Hague, 2015).

David Cameron and William Hague were both seeking offensive foreign policy in the Middle East and the PG, a policy that would have led to the use of force and military power. Hague had more experience and knowledge of foreign policy than Cameron did; longstanding friendship with the prime minister had given him more legitimacy and power in the government cabinet. He was determined that the State Department's mission should return to its original position, which prompted him to propose with an operational plan in the government cabinet and quickly enact his foreign policy agenda, but there was no guarantee that he would be able to gain the approval of the House of Commons (Hope, 2013). In June 2010, William Hague announced his intention to redesign the British foreign policy into three spheres of influence consisting of the United States, the European Union and the Middle East. The interview, titled "Hague Tears up the Book on Foreign Policy" was published, and was a message to change Britain's foreign policy, including the return to the PG. Hague called this change "Distinctive British Foreign Policy" (Hennessy, 2010).

William Hague recommended an iron hammer policy and the use of pressure and threats, especially the use of NATO military

power against countries such as Libya, Syria and Afghanistan, and the use of force and support for Yemeni and Bahraini regime leaders in the civil war in these countries (Greaves, 2011). Hague had been calling for an increase in the British military budget and asserted that during the government of the Labor Party, this increase was not appropriate. He was able to draft a British military engagement in Libya in 2011, approved by the House of Commons. During the events of the Arab Spring in 2010–2011, Hague officially recognized Bashar al-Assad's opponents in Syria and believed that he should give weapons and military equipment to the opposition to overthrow Assad (Hope, 2013), but the plan was not approved in the British House of Commons in 2013. Hague called it the bitter event during his tenure, and went as far as resignation, being truly unhappy with this defeat (Hague, 2015).

Under William Hague and the government of the time, the FCO had two sets of priorities. He announced his three priorities for the department in July 2010: to "pursue an active and activist foreign policy, working with other countries and strengthening the rules-based international system in support of British values" (UK Parliament, 2011, May 12). Hague, as the British Foreign Secretary, had been seeking to strengthen Britain's influence in the region with the expansion of the ISIL and al-Qaeda, since Obama had announced that by 2012, the United States would withdraw its 33,000 troops from Afghanistan. Hague called for the hardest sanctions against Libya under Muammar Gaddafi's leadership, and if Gaddafi did not tolerate nuclear and chemical disarmament, he would propose military action against the country (Tisdall, 2011). Hague considered Iran's nuclear program "a threat to the nuclear arms race in the Middle East and a serious threat to peace in the whole world" (Hague, 2011). In addition, the draft of the UN Security Council's sanctions on Iran was proposed in William Hague's period. The British Foreign Ministry's rudder has been in

constant succession from 2014 to 2018. William Hague presented Britain's offensive foreign policy not only towards the Middle East but also with regard to the Persian Gulf, and that was, promoting British military buildup in the region.

To continue such an offensive policy, Philip Hammond was appointed as the British Foreign Secretary in 2014. He insisted on British military intervention in the Syrian war, and called this military presence, British interests in the region. However, the parliament was opposed to this plan. It is worth noting that Hammond, as mentioned before, just a few months after his appointment to the Department of Defence in 2011, planned the draft of the British military return to the PG by establishing its military base in Bahrain at a cost of 15 billion pounds (Burke, 2014). Hammond believed that the agreement would enable Britain to deploy more and bigger ships to the PG. These could include the Navy's new aircraft carriers and Type 45 destroyers. "Considering the fact that there had been no US carrier presence in the region for the first time since the last eight years", Hammond asserted his hope that the Royal Navy's new carriers would be sailing in the PG in the future (Childs, 2015, p. 137).

In December 2016, the British Prime Minister Theresa May arrived for the first time in the region at the occasion of the Gulf Cooperation Council in Bahrain. Her visit to the Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Bahrain, a country facing political crisis and massive protests, highlights Britain's efforts to support its military, political, and economic presence. The official document of the British Prime Minister's Office of December 7, 2016 states: "The Gulf Cooperation Council and the United Kingdom will build on existing bilateral relations and will expand the military cooperation to address current threats and strengthen defence in the region through joint exercises, including maritime and border security.

This includes British presence across the PG, including coordination by British regional defence personnel in Dubai" (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2016).

The British military base in Bahrain was opened at the end of 2016 by Prince Charles. It was published that the Royal Navy facility in Bahrain will house up to 600 UK military personnel and the whole cost of the base is operated to be more than 30 million pounds. Bahrain has paid most of the £30million-plus cost, with the UK contributing around £7.5 million (Brown, 2016). The First Sea Lord has spoken about the Bahrain base as a base providing a hub for operations that could extend into the Indian Ocean and the Pacific (Zambellas, 2015). According to the military forces located in Bahrain, more recently, the Royal Navy has maintained a strategically significant force of four mine countermeasures vessels and an auxiliary command ship, plus a one-star maritime commander, based in Bahrain, with destroyers and frigates repeatedly flaunting in the region (Childs, 2016, p. 137).

Phillip Hammond's seat at the State Department was not longstanding enough; after two years, he gave his place to the former London mayor, Boris Johnson in late 2016. Although Johnson, as Foreign Minister, did not have any experience concerning international relations and foreign policy like his predecessors, he travelled to the Arab Gulf states of the Persian Gulf to promote the British military return policy. Yet, surprisingly, he faced sharp criticism from the Arabic countries of the Persian Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Johnson's lack of knowledge of foreign policy and traditional diplomatic practices seemed to plunge Britain into an unintended crisis. In the midst of tension between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, he accused Saudi Arabia of launching a proxy war in the region, a matter that was immediately rejected by Prime Minister Theresa May. Boris

Johnson did not succeed in establishing an effective British policy during this period, and further tightened the tensions between the UK and the Arab Gulf states rather than solving them (Wintour, 2017).

This event illustrated the problems that surrounded the British foreign policy toward the Persian Gulf, and the fact that it lacked a coordinated foreign policy in this matter, especially at a time when the country was on the verge of starting historical negotiations to leave the European Union.

8. Implications of the British Military Return to the Persian Gulf

In addition to the above-mentioned benefits and advantages for returning to the PG, there is also an economic advantage for Britain on the high amount of arms sales to this region. As illustrated in the following chart, the UK has had a growing defence export performance in the Persian Gulf from 2008 to 2013, followed by a relative decline.

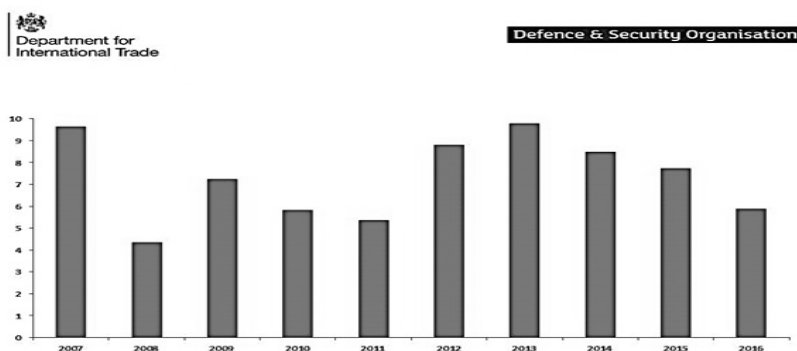


Chart 1: UK Defence Exports (2007- 2016) source: UK Department for International Trade, 2017, Oct. 24

This chart illustrates the annual UK defence export performance in the Persian Gulf for the past ten years. “The UK is one of the world’s most successful defence exporters, owning a great place in the global rankings on a rolling 10-year basis, making it Europe’s leading defence exporter in the period” (UK Department for International Trade, 2017, Oct. 24). The interesting element in this diagram is that from 2007 to 2011 there is only about 30 billion pounds of British arms exports to the region, while this amount reaches around 41 billion pounds between 2012 and 2016. If we divide the chart into two sections, we will see that from 2012 and the time the British decided to regain their footprint in the Persian Gulf, the amount of arms exports to this region has totally increased (in comparison to the previous five years), and the UK is preserving its economic interests in the region as well. As the evidence suggests, the main destination for the UK arms exports is the Middle East (ME). In the following figure, represented by SIPRI¹ (2017), the main destinations to which the British armaments have been exported are illustrated.

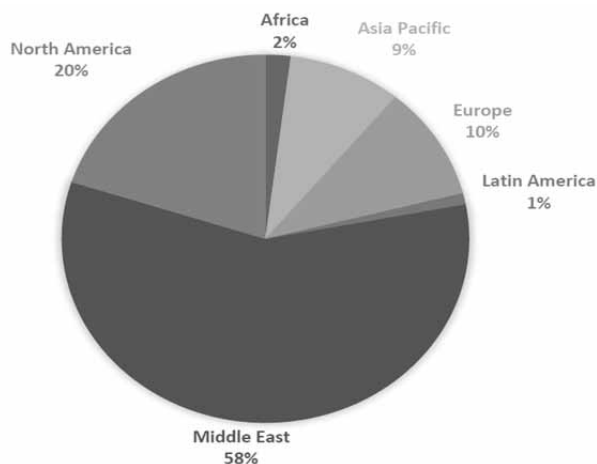


figure 1: Estimated total UK defence exports (based on orders/contracts signed) by region 2006-15 (Kift & Page, 2016, p. 6)

1. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

The figure illustrates the UK defence exports by region between the years 2006 and 2015. What is surprising in this figure is the share of the Middle East in the arms export of the UK. The first client for the UK arms in the Middle East and Persian Gulf States is Saudi Arabia. "Based on this, Saudi Arabia has consistently been the UK's top export market for the last 5 years, receiving two-thirds of the UK arms exports in 2015" (Kift & Page, 2016, p. 6).

The UK's return to the PG enables the country "to play a more substantial role in India and Pakistan, and possibly also to intervene in the current situation in Syria, in any post-2014 crises in Afghanistan, or even in Iraq" (Norton-taylor, 2013). "The UK is giving a new emphasis to its position in the [Persian] Gulf in order to maintain the special relationship with the US" (Stansfield & Kelly, 2013, p. 11). This relationship with the US, as said before, is also a less considered issue supporting the UK's re-engagement with the Persian Gulf.

9. Conclusion

This study has reassessed British's 1971 military withdrawal and its 2014 return to the Persian Gulf. According to the evidence, the study has ratified its hypothesis and has provided answers to the following question: What are the realities behind the British retreat from the Persian Gulf in 1971 and its return to the region in 2014. One of the major findings of the research is that instead of having a full military withdrawal, Britain decided to keep a low profile of its military presence and forces since 1971. In this article, the case study method was used to facilitate the authors' investigation of the topic. The study has examined Britain's defensive and offensive foreign policy in the Persian Gulf.

According to the official documents presented in this article, the 1971 withdrawal did not represent a relinquishment of Britain's role in the Persian Gulf. The UK's domestic and economic crisis, along with international challenges in the period of post-Suez crisis, forced British policy makers to re-evaluate the UK's role in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East and the Far East. As a result, Britain's presence in the region was gradually redefined in order to keep the balance of power intact.

One of the most important British initiatives in this matter was the creation of the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981. This policy was promoted in order to preserve the UK's balance of power in the PG at a time when Iran's regional power was rising in the Middle East. A gradual shifting of Britain's foreign policy from defensive to an offensive one, coincided with a number of events including the Arab Spring, the expansion of terrorist groups, ongoing wars in Syria and Yemen; and finally the uprisings against the kingdom of Bahrain, all intensified a new British military build-up in 2014.

In terms of the nature of Britain's withdrawal, it is more convincing to accept the claim that British policy-makers between 1971 and 1981 continued to create adequate political arrangements for the various Arab states of the Persian Gulf, a process that included the dispatch of combat missions to the region. This model of British political-military involvement in the Middle East led to the creation of the GCC in 1981.

Therefore, it is more relevant and convincing to claim that the withdrawal merely meant the partial retreat of the British military troops from the region. Thus, it did not mean the UK's military and political vacuum, neither in the Middle East nor in the Persian Gulf, as certain scholars have argued. In terms of Britain's

offensive foreign policy on its return to the Persian Gulf, maintaining the balance of power, and facing security and military challenges are considered to be of utmost importance. In terms of recent tensions on the British-Iranian Tanker conflicts, the UK is trying to overcome the security and military challenges and preserve its interests in PG by all possible means.

As initially discussed in the study, the British foreign policy was influenced by the succession of the British Conservative Party in early 2010; this party focused on the issue of military presence and return to the Persian Gulf. According to available documents, for the implementation of this policy, there was a consensus among the military and political institutions of the country, including the Ministry of Defence, the FCO and the army headquarters. The British military return program was immediately followed by the British Conservative Party on its foreign policy agenda from 2010 onwards, and when the plan was finalized in 2014. After a four-year period in the process of bilateral and multilateral British diplomatic relations, the first military base of this country was established in the Persian Gulf, in the most critical country of Bahrain.

The British incentives for the return include exacerbating military relations with Arab states, more arms sales, oversight interference in the resolution of territorial disputes among the Peripheral Arab states of PG, and political and military support for the internal stability of Arab regimes. In addition, through its military relations with Arab states, the UK could ensure the continuity and maintenance of the oil export artery from the Persian Gulf to the overseas countries, monitor and remain close to the strategic Strait of Hormuz, contain Iran's power, and counter terrorist acts in the region and the Middle East.

However, unlike France or Russia, today's Britain lacks the capacity of using its military forces overseas for its offensive foreign policy. The domestic politics necessities, such as the Brexit, Northern Ireland border, and Scotland's independence issue push the UK to spend as little as possible on its international ambitions.

According to the theoretical framework of Mearsheimer's defensive and offensive realism, the British foreign policy during the period of its military retreat from the region can be considered as defensive, in which Britain kept its low military profile in the region, working to ameliorate security competition and willing to invest its resources in Britain and Europe. Whereas, upon the UK's military return, Britain applied an offensive policy, which has maximized its share of military power to pursue hegemony, which tends to intensify the security competition in the Persian Gulf.

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