

Britain's Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf: A Pattern Not a Puzzle

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The reasons for the British decision to withdraw from the Gulf are highly contentious. While some scholars have focussed on short-term considerations, especially the devaluation of sterling towards the end of 1967, in the British determination to quit the Gulf, others have concentrated on longer-term trends in British policy-making for the region. This article sides with the latter. Britain's Gulf role came under increasing scrutiny following the 1956 Suez crisis as part of an ongoing debate about the costs and benefits of Britain's Gulf presence. In this sense, British withdrawal fitted into a wider pattern of British decolonization. By the 1960s, the Treasury, in particular, strongly questioned the necessity and cost-effectiveness of the maintenance of empire in the Gulf to safeguard British economic interests there. Recent interpretations which seek to disaggregate the British decision to leave South-East Asia from the decision to depart from the Gulf are also questionable. By mid-1967, it had already been determined that Britain would leave both regions by the mid-1970s, the only difference being that this decision was formally announced with respect to the South-East Asia, but not with regard to the Gulf. The devaluation of sterling in November 1967, therefore, merely hastened and facilitated decisions which had already been taken. Despite the end of formal empire in the Gulf, Britain did seek, not always successfully, to preserve its interests into the 1970s and beyond.

The British decision, announced in January 1968, to withdraw from the Persian Gulf arguably represented one of the last major acts in British decolonization. Musing on the ostensible relinquishment of Britain's identity as a world power ushered in by the impending departure from East of Suez, of which the presence in the Gulf was a key component, Labour Cabinet minister and diarist, Richard Crossman, observed: 'the status barrier is as difficult to break through as the sound barrier; it splits your ears and is terribly painful when it happens'.¹ Reflecting on the determination to withdraw, former Labour Foreign Secretary, Patrick Gordon Walker, characterized it as 'the most momentous shift in our foreign policy for a century and a half'.² How far this 'momentous shift' stemmed from either a longer-term assessment of British interests, or rather a response to short-term domestic British exigencies, is a contested issue. Some historians, in particular Saki Dockrill, Matthew Jones, Wm. Roger Louis, and also myself, have focussed on the gradual erosion of the commitment East of Suez over an extended period.³ More recently, others have paid attention to short-term domestic political changes in Britain, especially those following the devaluation of sterling in November 1967. A re-examination of Britain's decision to withdraw from the Gulf is, therefore, timely.

Shohei Sato has been in the vanguard of those scholars seeking to cast doubt on the significance of longer-term trends in British policy-making towards the Gulf in the decision to withdraw. He has preferred instead to concentrate on the domestic political imperatives which influenced the Labour government of Harold Wilson following sterling devaluation in November 1967. Referring to the economic retrenchment necessitated by devaluation, Sato claims that ‘The ulterior motive behind the decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf was to justify the social cuts that were putting the *raison d’être* of the Labour government at risk’.⁴ As such, Sato remarks upon the paradox that ‘Britain was making an important foreign-policy decision not for reasons of international relations but in order to justify domestic social expenditure cuts’.⁵ In a similar vein, Geraint Hughes argues that ‘The decision to end the “world role” was not so much the result of a strategic reappraisal, but the action of a government mired in a series of political and fiscal crises, reacting to events beyond its control’.⁶ Also focussing on the short-term domestic aspects of British decision-making, Tore Petersen stresses: ‘The withdrawal from the Persian Gulf had little to do with saving money, but was essential to get left-wing acceptance for cuts in social spending to balance the budget after the pound was devalued’.⁷ Equally, Catherine Schenk observes that the East of Suez commitment was ‘sacrificed to ameliorate the balance of payments in the longer term and to appease public opinion as domestic spending cuts and wage freezes hit voters’.⁸ Writing somewhat earlier, Denis Judd 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.⁹

Identifying a link between the devaluation of sterling and the closure of the Suez Canal following the 1967 Six Day War, Steven Galpern contends that ‘denial of oil from the Middle East helped finish off sterling as a prominent trading and reserve currency. The upshot was the end of empire itself.’¹⁰ While placing greater emphasis on political considerations, Jeffrey Pickering also concentrates on the immediate influences on British policy-making. In particular, he examines the part played in the withdrawal decision by alterations in the balance of power in the Labour Cabinet following devaluation, especially the resignation of James Callaghan as Chancellor of the Exchequer and his replacement with the pro-European Roy Jenkins.¹¹ Similarly, W. Taylor Fain notes that following devaluation the view that it was time for the British government to ‘renounce its policies in the Gulf and

bring its military forces home ... acquired a much wider following than it enjoyed before, and found proponents not just among Labour's backbench but in the Cabinet as well'.¹²

Interpretations which prioritise short-term considerations following sterling devaluation in explaining the decision to withdraw from the Gulf, however, give insufficient weight to the longer-term patterns of British policy-making towards the region which sought to assess the pros and cons of a continuing British presence. While it would be misguided to see the process by which Britain departed from the region as an inexorable one, the decision made in early 1968 to leave by 1971 should be seen in the context of an on-going debate stretching back to 1956 in which policy-makers weighed the costs against the benefits of a continued British presence. In this sense, those who stress the short-term determinants of British policy following devaluation risk failing to place their interpretations in a wider pattern of British decolonization in the region.

I

That Britain's diplomatic reverse at the hands of Egypt's President Nasser by no means marked finis for the British Empire and, in fact, sounded an uncertain note in British decolonization, has been increasingly recognised.¹³ Nevertheless, it did trigger the first serious re-assessment of the British presence in the Gulf which had been laid down by a series of treaties in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries establishing British 'protection' but leaving the ruling families of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the Trucial States¹⁴ with considerable internal autonomy. The post-Suez review of British relations with the Gulf States was led by Sir Roger Stevens and Sir Michael Wright, respectively Britain's ambassadors in Tehran and Baghdad from 1954 to 1958.

With the liquidation of Britain's Indian empire, coupled with the loss of Britain's traditional footholds in Palestine, Egypt, and Jordan, observed Stevens in December 1956, the Gulf had become a 'double-ended cul-de-sac'.¹⁵ The Ambassador in Tehran proceeded to question whether Britain's formal presence in the Gulf was necessary to secure its commercial interests, pointing out with reference to the disruption of oil supplies as a result of the Suez crisis, that 'recent events have shown that our token military presence in the Gulf does not ensure the flow of oil, any more than a military occupation foothold in the Plate would guarantee our supply of beef'. Addressing the view that it was Britain's obligations to the Gulf Sheikhs that kept it there, Stevens called for an 'an objective assessment of local loyalty to the British connexion and, secondly, our ability to satisfy the demands of that

loyalty'. As regards the question of 'face', Stevens urged that 'It is surely better to devise a constructive way out of this dead-end, even at the loss of a little prestige, rather than wait to be overwhelmed by events and thrust onto the inevitably disastrous defensive'. From his vantage point in Baghdad, Sir Michael Wright concurred with Stevens' scepticism towards a static policy in the Gulf. Reflecting at the beginning of 1957 on the growth of nationalism and xenophobia in the Arab world, Wright indicated that the British presence in the Gulf was widely regarded as "'imperialistic" and anachronistic', and that if Britain did not take a 'new line' it would risk being charged with 'clinging to the past'.¹⁶

The stridency of the two ambassadors' views unsurprisingly stimulated a lively debate among British policy-makers. Britain's Political Resident in the Gulf, Bernard Burrows, set out to rebut the notion that Britain's position there required fundamental revision, emphasizing that 'It is surely a principle borrowed from the Americans and alien to our own system of political thought that anything which has existed for a hundred years, such as our relations with the Gulf States, must necessarily be wrong or must necessarily change.'¹⁷ While accepting that the Gulf States were being subjected to pressures for change, he argued that these could principally be traced to 'outside influences imported by the press and radio or by the natives of other Arab States who have temporarily settled in the Gulf'. Britain's existing relations with the Gulf States, he insisted, should 'continue to be regarded as a major British interest', and it should be recognized as 'normal for them to develop internally in their own way with such advice as we may from time to time find it necessary to give'. Burrows concluded that neighbouring countries should be 'persuaded to accept our position here as one of the facts of life and as representing the general wishes of the legitimate Rulers and most of peoples of the area'.

Burrows found a sympathetic audience in the Foreign Office which accepted that the maintenance of Britain's position in the Gulf was essential in order to prevent the spread of communist influence and the influence of non-communist countries, such as Egypt, whose interests were antithetical to Britain's. The FO also supported the maintenance of empire in the Gulf in the interests of preserving sea communications through the Straits of Hormuz and the air route from the UK to South and South-East Asia, and protecting British oil interests bearing in mind the importance of that commodity for the stability of sterling.¹⁸ Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd's June 1957 Cabinet memorandum on the Gulf very much followed the FO's line of reasoning.¹⁹ Paying particular attention to oil, Lloyd stressed the need to ensure the supply of oil from the region, as well as to strengthen Britain's balance of

payments to which the operations of British oil companies in the Gulf made a significant contribution. Although the Foreign Secretary conceded that Britain should seek to uphold its position in the Gulf by political rather than military means, he came down strongly on the side of maintaining the status quo, implicitly rejecting the appeals of Ambassadors Stevens and Wright for a more root-and-branch review of Britain's approach to the region in the aftermath of Suez.

Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, who had famously called for a 'profit and loss account' for Britain's colonial possessions following the Suez crisis,²⁰ told Selwyn Lloyd with respect to the Gulf that 'When one is in such a situation it is generally best not to do very much, but certainly it looks as if our military strength there should not be allowed to drop.'²¹ In the aftermath of the Iraqi revolution in July 1958, Lloyd even floated the idea of the creation of 'a smaller edition of what the United States has in the Mediterranean in the shape of the sixth fleet'.²² The value which was still placed on the Gulf was reflected in Macmillan's depiction of Kuwait as the 'key to the economic life of Britain and of Europe'.²³ Lloyd concurred, declaring in early 1959 that the 'irreducible interest of the United Kingdom in Kuwait is that Kuwait shall remain an independent state having an oil policy conducted by a Government independent of other Middle Eastern producers'.²⁴

With such considerations in mind, Britain acquiesced in the Sheikhdом's movement towards independent status culminating on 19 June 1961 in the termination of the 1899 agreement which had governed Anglo-Kuwaiti relations since its conclusion. Nevertheless, Britain still pledged the 'readiness of Her Majesty's Government to assist the Government of Kuwait if the latter request such assistance'.²⁵ Indeed, the Sheikhdом continued to be prized by Britain as a major source of oil, two-fifths of Britain's total oil requirements being provided by Kuwait alone by 1961.²⁶ The fact that Kuwaiti oil could be purchased for sterling helped to conserve Britain's often precarious dollar reserves, while the fact that the Kuwait Oil Company was half-owned by British Petroleum served to contribute to Britain's balance of payments. However, as Nigel Ashton and Steven Galpern have observed, Kuwait's large sterling balances, which by the early 1960s had reached over £300 million, were both an asset and a liability: while representing an investment in the British economy, there was also a risk that their sudden withdrawal or diversification could inflict damage on the British economy and the stability of sterling itself.²⁷ Reflecting Kuwait's importance to Britain in early 1961, a Foreign Office mandarin noted: 'The preservation of arrangements under which we secure oil from Kuwait and are assured that Kuwait's investment policy is helpful from the sterling area

point of view are the linchpin of the whole structure of our position in the Gulf.’²⁸ Therefore, when the Iraqi dictator, Abdul Karim Qasim, declared that Kuwait was an ‘integral part of Iraq’²⁹ just days after the termination of the 1899 Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement, the government of Harold Macmillan was quick to respond by sending troops to the Amirate to deter an Iraqi move. ‘The importance of Kuwait to the Western world is such ... that we cannot take the risk of allowing Qasim to seize it unopposed’, remarked the Foreign Office.³⁰ The dangers of a prolonged British occupation of Kuwait were, however, recognized at the time. In July 1961, the Political Resident in the Gulf, Sir William Luce, pointed out that the longer Britain kept troops in Kuwait the greater would become the pressure to force it out of the Gulf area altogether.³¹ This possibility was particularly disquieting for the British not only in the context of Kuwait’s ongoing importance to Britain, but also with respect to the potential for oil wealth among the British-protected states of the lower Gulf, especially Abu Dhabi.³² The replacement of British troops with an Arab League force, coupled with Kuwait’s membership of that organization, appeared to foreclose any immediate threat to the British position in the Gulf. Doubtless with the recent Iraqi threat to Kuwait in mind, the 1962 annual conference of British Political Agents in the Gulf agreed that a policy of disengagement would result in political and military chaos giving numerous opportunities to Russia, Egypt, Iran and Iraq.³³

Despite his keenness to oversee the timely withdrawal of British forces from Kuwait, Luce also extolled the virtues of a continued British presence in the Gulf. Revisiting the conundrum raised by Sir Roger Stevens in the aftermath of Suez, Luce argued that Britain could not afford to rely solely on normal commercial processes to ensure the uninterrupted supply of oil from the Gulf.³⁴ This would have to await, he asserted, a time when not only the Arab world had made the transition from instability to stability, but also the stresses of the Cold War had been lifted to the extent that the West could trust the Soviet Union not to penetrate the Gulf region. Luce also rejected the proposition that economic self-interest would oblige Arabs to sell their oil with the observation that they were ‘quite capable of damaging themselves economically for political reasons, and, in any case, if they were under Communist influence they would not have the final say’. Luce proceeded to juxtapose the dangers of a power vacuum developing in the Gulf with his belief that ‘Our position here is not a tottering one nor is it in danger of rapid erosion by any internal influences.’ He concluded: ‘It remains acceptable to most of the people of the area and particularly to those in power, and provided we play our cards skilfully, I see no reason why it should not remain so for many years’. British diplomats in Arab capitals, nevertheless, contested Luce’s line of reasoning.

In February 1963, Britain's Ambassador in Amman, Sir Roderick Parkes, questioned the durability of a policy founded on preserving Britain's commercial interests in the Gulf through its military presence. '[W]e should now be thinking', he ruminated, 'in terms of an orderly withdrawal, and the avoidance of a series of last-ditch retreats that might win us weeks of breathing space, at the cost of years of diplomacy undoing the damage done'.³⁵ In support of his contention, Parkes opined: 'I simply cannot see, in 1963, a tight community of friendly, contented Arabs going about their business in the Peninsula under Western protection and casting no side-long glances at the fomenting Arab world outside.'

Parkes' opposite number in Kuwait, Sir John Richmond, was of a similar opinion. 'An island of British paramountcy, evolving very slowly towards limited political autonomy, protected by constitutional monarchies,' he argued, 'seems to me a last-ditch defence of the 19th century which cannot possibly succeed in the second half of the 20th century.'³⁶ Challenging the traditional British policy of seeking to insulate the Gulf from external influences, Richmond pragmatically noted: 'In the 20th century outside forces cannot be kept out of an area where wealth is rapidly growing.' Unsurprisingly, Richmond did not favour the indefinite retention of Britain's military and political position in the Gulf, preferring instead to transform it into a 'mutually profitable and equal relationship'. Seeking to overturn Luce's arguments, Richmond contended that in future Britain would have to depend 'solely on normal commercial procedures backed by increasing international inter-dependence, for the uninterrupted supply of oil'. In a similar vein, J. O. Wright (Private Secretary to Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home) stressed that the 'true security of our Middle East supplies of oil is the purely commercial consideration of willing buyer and willing seller'.³⁷ He proceeded to depict the military defence of Kuwait as merely providing 'secondary protection'.³⁸

Britain's military presence in the Gulf also came under the omniscient gaze of the Treasury. Officials cast doubt on the effectiveness of the British military presence in the Gulf in maintaining British economic interests there. Assistant Secretary R. L. Sharp was a particularly trenchant critic of traditional British policy.³⁹ As regards the security of supply, Sharp observed that, since Middle East oil producers were dependent on their revenue from oil production for ordinary expenditure and to finance development programmes, these countries 'could not afford any protracted stoppage of oil production'. He also pointed out that Britain's oil supplies came from a number of Middle Eastern producers with the result that it was 'inconceivable that the totality of our supplies should be threatened at one and the same time in any way that could be dealt with by the military means at our disposal in the Persian Gulf area'. The formation in 1960

of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), in Sharp's opinion, had provided another challenge to the rationale for the British military presence in the Gulf. 'If O.P.E.C. can make full use of its bargaining power', he asserted, 'it will be much more likely to affect the oil companies' position in the Middle East than Iraq's seizure of Kuwait.' Summing up, Sharp baldly stated that 'the oil companies' profits are more likely to be affected by other factors, such as pressure from producing countries, and increasing competition, than they are by anything that our military presence in the Gulf area will protect them from'.

In March 1963, Sharp's Treasury colleague, J. E. Lucas, also expressed reservations about the efficacy of Britain's military and political presence in the Gulf in protecting its interests there.⁴⁰ Referring to an interdepartmental report produced in 1961, Lucas recalled that the additional costs to Britain's balance of payments resulting from the exclusion of British oil companies from the Middle East could be as much as £200 million per annum. Nevertheless, he pointed out that the complete exclusion of British companies from the region was unlikely. 'Even if the production of oil in the Middle East were completely nationalised...', he averred, 'the Western companies would still fulfil an essential role as middlemen and it would not be possible for the Middle East producing countries to take over the essential transportation, refining and marketing operations of the Western companies.' In which case, Lucas speculated that the loss to the UK balance of payments might be in the order of £100 million a year, or less. He also indicated that 'this potential loss must be measured against the very large and increasing cost of the U.K.'s defence effort'. As regards this defence effort, Lucas questioned whether a British military presence was necessary to maintain the flow of oil. 'The Middle East oil producing countries themselves', he noted, 'have the strongest possible incentive to increase production and therefore the revenues which they derive from oil and their major markets are, and will remain, in Europe.' Lucas also cast doubt on whether the British military presence in the region would have any value against a major Russian attack and also whether it would be capable of preventing 'violent internal changes in the Middle East'. He concluded that 'considered from purely the financial and economic standpoint, there is no need for a U.K. military presence in the Persian Gulf after 1970'.

Despite growing Treasury scepticism, Sir William Luce remained unbending in his support for a continued British military role in the Gulf.⁴¹ He characterized the argument that it would be better to withdraw British forces and let the Arab desire to sell oil do the rest as 'dangerously facile and naive'. Luce proceeded to contend that the political and economic stability provided by the British presence was 'essential to the continued flow of oil on

reasonable terms both on the present scale and even more in the greatly increased quantities which will be required in the future'. Seeking to justify his thesis, Luce remarked that 'without the stability we provide in this power vacuum the area would become a jungle of smash-and-grab'. 'A chronic state of hostilities between Iran and the Arabs on the one hand and revolution and internecine disputes in and among the Arab States on the other', he warned, 'would create a situation of such chaos that I simply cannot believe the flow of oil would remain unaffected'. In conclusion, Luce implored that any reassessments should not lead to the withdrawal of visible military support for Britain's political position and influence in the Gulf, underscoring that 'it is an obvious truism that it is better to deter trouble than to have to intervene to cure it'.

Luce's forthright views stimulated a lively debate in the Foreign Office from the summer of 1964. Some officials considered that the odium produced by Britain's special political position in the Gulf risked producing the very instability and threats to oil interests that it was designed to prevent,⁴² while others supported Luce's contention that Britain's economic interests could not be maintained without it.⁴³ Ultimately, the Foreign Office came out in favour of Luce's approach. In July 1964, a memorandum by the FO for the Official Defence and Oversea Policy Committee's Long-term Study Group emphasized that British forces contributed towards the maintenance of 'physical order' thus ensuring oil production and transportation continued smoothly and that the stability necessary to encourage further exploration and investment of capital was provided.⁴⁴ The Foreign Office further noted that the stability provided by British forces gave Western oil companies 'the best chance they can have of ensuring that oil is available to their Western and other markets in growing quantities and on reasonable terms'.

Treasury reservations were not overcome, however. The profits of British oil companies from the sale of Middle East oil were estimated in 1964 to rise to £200 million, which had to be juxtaposed with the annual cost of 'defending' Middle East oil of £190 million.⁴⁵ Treasury Assistant Secretary G. S. Downey commented that this seemed a 'disproportionately high premium, even if U.K. forces could provide 100% insurance. But in fact they could not prevent a peaceful change which might adversely affect the bargaining power of the oil companies vis-a-vis the producing countries'.⁴⁶ His Treasury colleague, Assistant Secretary P. H. F. Dodd, agreed that the 'bare figures give rise to grave doubts whether the present scale of military expenditure is not to [sic] large in relation to our economic interests'.⁴⁷ Returning to one of his earlier contentions, moreover, R. L. Sharp observed that 'the peaceful combination of the

producing countries in OPEC is already extracting a larger share of the profits from the oil companies, and may continue the process, in which military force is entirely irrelevant'.⁴⁸

II

The Labour Party returned to power at the October 1964 general election. While this did not immediately result in a renunciation of Britain's remaining responsibilities in the Gulf, it did set a process in train which led to the withdrawal announcement at the beginning of 1968. The new Foreign Secretary, Patrick Gordon Walker, advocated working towards a situation in the protected Gulf States which 'would be broadly analogous with Kuwait, where we had a Defence treaty but no more'.⁴⁹ He did, nonetheless, accept that 'we could not move at the same pace on all fronts, and that progress would be quicker in some States than in others'.⁵⁰ While Gordon Walker recognized that it was 'essential' to retain the British military presence on strategic grounds, he was not persuaded by the argument that a military presence was necessary to defend Britain's oil interest.⁵¹ He was also dissatisfied with the character of Britain's relationship with the Gulf Rulers. 'The difficulty', he observed, 'was that we had a position which had been inherited from the former Indian Imperial Government, of apparent power without real control'.⁵² Consequently he urged that Britain had to be seen to be moving in the direction of modernizing its relationships with the Gulf States.⁵³

Gordon Walker's failure to win the Leyton by-election in January 1965, coming on top of the loss of his Smethwick seat at the 1964 general election, led to the cutting short of his period as Foreign Secretary and his replacement with a more cautious successor, Michael Stewart. Indeed, Stewart felt that any alteration in Britain's relationship with the Gulf should be done in such a manner as neither to alarm its friends nor weaken its ability to maintain its position and defend the integrity of the Gulf States.⁵⁴ The annual Political Agents' conference held in January 1965 had already recorded that the new British government had reviewed its policy towards the Gulf and reached similar conclusions to its predecessor, namely that the 'stability of the area' continued to be regarded as a 'very important British interest' and the British military presence would 'certainly be retained'.⁵⁵ The re-affirmation of the conventional British approach to the Gulf was also strengthened by events in Bahrain.

In early March 1965, disturbances broke out on the island. Initially taking on the appearance of an industrial dispute sparked by the Bahrain Petroleum Company's redundancy scheme, protestors soon began to widen their campaign to include demands for the

establishment of trade unions. From the Foreign Office's viewpoint, the troubles were intended 'more as a trial of strength with authority than to achieve any particular objective'.⁵⁶ Luce promptly requested authority to quell dissent.⁵⁷ In response, an FO official conceded that 'it is very much in our own interest to avoid prolonged disturbances which might jeopardise British lives and would certainly attract hostile publicity'.⁵⁸ Against the background of such assessments, Luce was authorized on 13 March to commit British forces to the maintenance of internal security if so requested by the Ruler. A day later, having received such a request, the Political Resident ordered the use of naval helicopters to assist local police in identifying demonstrators and, where necessary, to drop tear gas to disperse them.⁵⁹ By 18 March order had been restored sufficiently to permit the withdrawal of the helicopters. It was in the immediate aftermath of the Bahrain disturbances that Stewart warned the Cabinet with respect to the Gulf: 'In our absence there would be a security vacuum which would be likely to do grave harm to political stability throughout the area and to the production and transportation of oil, as well as encourage a renewal of Soviet southward pressure.'⁶⁰

In order to compete with Arab League offers of economic aid to the poorer Trucial States, Stewart successfully persuaded the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee to set aside £1 million for development projects. Justifying this renewed commitment to the Gulf, Stewart cautioned that 'if we withdraw we should leave a power vacuum which would result in the embroilment in conflict of the neighbouring countries with consequent serious risk to our oil supplies'.⁶¹ Projecting into the future, however, the Defence and Oversea Policy Official Committee predicted that 'Sometime after 1970 the loss of our predominant position must be expected, and our political strategy in the 1960s must prepare the way for this change with a view to making it as painless as possible for all concerned'.⁶² British policy towards South Arabia underscored the sagacity of this analysis.

Aden, which had joined the British-sponsored federation of South Arabian states in January 1963, formed a key link in Britain's military set-up in the Middle East and had played a vital part in British defence plans for the Gulf in general and Kuwait in particular.⁶³ In keeping with other British attempts at closer association in the era of decolonization, nevertheless, the South Arabian Federation proved an unstable structure. As the Governor of Aden, Sir Charles Johnston, was forced to concede: 'the entry of Aden into the Federation is not an easy matter to provide for. It is a bringing together not only of urban and rural, but of different centuries as well: modern Glasgow, say, and the 18th century highlands.'⁶⁴ Revolution and civil war in neighbouring Yemen, moreover, merely contributed to the instability, not least due to the

intervention of Britain's inveterate foe, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, on the side of the Yemeni republicans. Against the background of mounting violence, the decision was taken not merely to grant Aden independence, but also to repudiate any ongoing British commitments for the defence of southern Arabia. As the Foreign Office noted in December 1965: 'we do not believe that we shall be able to maintain a base at Aden once South Arabia is independent, since we could only do so at the prohibitive price of a commitment to defend South Arabia. Even in that case the situation in Aden would most likely make the base untenable; at best we should be defending South Arabia to maintain a base which we could not use for any other purpose.'⁶⁵ As a result of such considerations, the Defence White Paper of February 1966 announced Britain's intention not merely to leave South Arabia, but also abandon the Aden base by 1968.⁶⁶

Impending British withdrawal from Aden and South Arabia left Britain's Gulf presence vulnerable. As early as June 1964, Sir William Luce had prognosticated: 'it would not be politically feasible locally, nor I imagine in H.M.G.'s wider interests, to build up a military base in the Gulf area in any way comparable with the present base in Aden'.⁶⁷ In mid-1967, the Defence Review Working Party for the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee emphasized:

After our decision to withdraw militarily as well as politically from Aden by 1968, no one really believes that we shall be able (or even wish) to stay indefinitely in the Gulf. By the mid-1970s we must expect a world where almost all colonial and quasi-colonial traces have disappeared and the overseas deployment of British power has contracted further than at present. If we have not gone from the Gulf, the pressures on us to go are likely to be very severe indeed.⁶⁸

Predicting that a continuing British presence in the Gulf would present a 'tempting target for the rising forces of Arab nationalism', the Working Party recommended: 'we should clearly be wise to go before the consequences of staying become more dangerous to local stability than the consequences of departure'. Addressing the persistent fear that a British withdrawal would lead inexorably to the concentration of the region's oil resources in fewer hands, the Working Party asserted: 'unity has managed over the last twenty years to elude the best efforts of the Arab world, and centralised control of Arab "oil power" seems unlikely to follow an orderly British departure from the Gulf'.

The British decision neither to maintain defence commitments to, nor military facilities in, South Arabia after independence meant the closure of the Aden base which Jesse Ferris has convincingly depicted as 'removing the principal pillar of British military might east of Suez'.⁶⁹

Ferris also points out that the shift in British policy towards Aden and South Arabia announced in early 1966 created a 'new rationale for the perpetuation of the Egyptian occupation of Yemen'⁷⁰ thus inflating Britain's problems in the region. Despite British acceptance that withdrawal from Aden would undermine the foundations of the British presence in the Gulf and its long-term viability, there was also recognition that an indication of Britain's intention to leave the Gulf by the mid-1970s would be 'politically disastrous'.⁷¹ The Labour government, therefore, despatched Minister of State Goronwy Roberts to the Gulf in early November 1967 disingenuously to reassure nervous Rulers of Britain's fidelity and intention to stay. This was little more than window dressing designed to retain the confidence of Gulf Rulers as the increasingly chaotic withdrawal from South Arabia reached its denouement. Looking to the post-imperial future of the protected Gulf states, Roberts himself urged that 'We must decide as soon as possible what form a closer association should take and, having decided, press forward with advice, encouragement and even pressure to this end.'⁷² Just two months later the hapless Roberts was sent back to the Gulf to notify the Rulers of Britain's intention to depart by 1971. Despite the Rulers' incredulity and sense of betrayal, Roberts was in effect merely informing them of a decision to withdraw, albeit under an accelerated timescale, which had been made in July 1967 and itself represented the culmination of an intense policy debate about costs and benefits of the British presence stretching back to the reviews undertaken in the aftermath of the Suez crisis.

III

In the light of the evidence presented in this article, Shohei Sato's attempts not only to downplay the significance of the conclusions reached by the middle of 1967 regarding Britain's Gulf presence, but also to disaggregate these from the contemporaneous decision, outlined in the Defence Review Studies Report published in July, to withdraw militarily from Malaysia and Singapore by the mid-1970s,⁷³ are not entirely convincing. Sato contends that the British government had reached only a 'vague consensus' of its intention to withdraw from the Gulf at some point in the mid-1970s and places significance on HMG's failure to make a public announcement of this aim.⁷⁴ Far from being merely a 'vague consensus', British military withdrawal from the Gulf by the mid-1970s had been accepted by policy-makers by the time of the publication of the Defence Review Studies Report, the only real difference being that it was not formally announced as it was with respect to South-East Asia. This can be explained partly by the different British military dispositions in the two regions, and partly by the political

circumstances in the Gulf in the light of Britain's impending departure from South Arabia. As regards the former, the Cabinet recorded in early July 1967 that there was general agreement that no date for egress from the Gulf should be given since departure 'did not involve serious logistic problems for the forces, nor lengthy planning preparation such as were involved in the Far East'.⁷⁵ With regard to the latter, the Head of the FO's Arabian Department, M. S. Weir, stressed the importance of not allowing the impression to develop that HMG might be reconsidering their Gulf policy a propos events in South Arabia as to do so would 'destroy confidence, promote instability, and make it harder for us to disengage'.⁷⁶ The decision to announce the withdrawal from South-East Asia by the mid-1970s, while keeping silent on this with respect to the Gulf, did not alter the fact that both regions were set on the same trajectory by July 1967. Indeed, the general commitment to the maintenance of the presence East of Suez, both in the Gulf and the Far East, had become vulnerable to the growing determination among Labour ministers to ensure that commitments matched resources. This was especially pertinent in view of the decision taken shortly after Labour returned to power of putting an upper limit on defence expenditure of £2000m at 1964 prices until the end of the decade.⁷⁷ As the Secretary of State for Defence, Denis Healey, prophetically remarked: 'if we are to maintain any aspirations to a world role in the 1970s on a defence budget restricted to £2000m, we cannot at the same time maintain the full range of military capabilities that we might otherwise plan to have'.⁷⁸ The devaluation of sterling merely served to bring forward the timetable for withdrawal from both the Gulf and South-East Asia from the mid-1970s to 1971. In Cabinet, Foreign Secretary George Brown underlined that this did not represent a fundamental alteration in policy. '[I]t would be wrong', he observed, 'to suppose that any new major change of policy was now in question. That change had been made as a result of the last Defence Review in July 1967 when the decision had been taken to withdraw our forces East of Suez, although it had not been announced at the time from the Gulf'.⁷⁹

With regard to the end of empire more generally, John Darwin's celebrated 1984 article, 'British Decolonization since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle', contends that 'the transfer of power and the retreat of British influence followed a bafflingly wayward course that had little to do with any of the criteria for imperial withdrawal to which British leaders appealed'. 'To that extent', he concludes, 'it was a puzzle.'⁸⁰ While this might have been the case in other parts of the empire, it was less so with respect to the Gulf. In the ongoing debates, initiated by Sir Roger Stevens and Sir Michael Wright in the wake of the 1956 Suez crisis, the pros and cons of the retention of Britain's special position in the Gulf had been exhaustively evaluated. While key

British officials in the Gulf, especially Burrows and Luce, had made the case for a continued presence, other voices, not least from the cost-conscious Treasury, questioned the need for maintaining Britain's military commitments, preferring instead to rely on normal commercial processes for the preservation of Britain's economic stake in the region.

What appears to have swung the argument in favour of those who backed relinquishment was the related decision to withdraw from Aden, coupled with the ineluctable consequences which flowed from the ceiling placed in 1964 on future defence spending. Although initially the commitment to the Gulf was restated, the erosion of the military infrastructure upon which British influence had in large part been based undermined the long-term viability of Britain's presence in the region. Events not directly connected with the Gulf - most notably the devaluation of the pound - merely served to truncate the timetable for withdrawal. Indeed, to explain the decision to leave the Gulf principally in terms of sterling devaluation risks oversimplifying a complex historical process. By the time of devaluation, the commitment to the Gulf had been eroded by an intense debate in British policy-making circles about the costs and benefits of a continuing British presence. If one decision did tip the balance of arguments, it was the contemporaneous one to withdraw from Aden which weakened the durability of the British presence. This, coupled with a growing determination on the part of the Labour government to match commitments to resources,⁸¹ made the Gulf presence untenable, despite the last-ditch attempts of desperate Sheikhs to pay for the maintenance of British troops. As one Treasury official commented, the Sheikhs' proposal had the 'makings of a useful red herring to defer a decision on withdrawal from the Gulf', which would be 'totally unacceptable to the Chancellor's requirements for cutting our commitments'.⁸² Another Treasury mandarin subsequently underlined Prime Minister Wilson's 'oft repeated statement that we can no longer afford to act as a World policeman'.⁸³ As if to emphasize the point, he stated: 'we do not accept that a military presence is necessary or desirable to protect British commercial interests and investments overseas (the Japanese, Germans, Swedes, Swiss and many other countries manage very well without such burdens)'.⁸⁴ George Brown had earlier conceded that 'our forces could not defend our oil supplies and that the oil producing states needed us as customers for their oil'.⁸⁵

IV

If the British decision on withdrawal from the Gulf should be seen as less of a puzzle and more of a pattern in which British decision-makers sought to weigh up the costs and benefits of a continuing presence, it also forms a pattern in terms of British attempts to maintain interests and

influence after empire.⁸⁶ In this sense, Darwin's observation that the 'pragmatic ingenious adaptation of British policy was geared, above all, to the preservation of British world power in increasingly adverse circumstances',⁸⁷ is applicable to the Gulf.

Shortly after the announcement in early 1968 of Britain's intention to withdraw from East of Suez, the Political Resident in the Gulf, Sir Stewart Crawford, counselled that although British forces would be withdrawing earlier than planned, it would 'remain an important British interest on both political and economic grounds that peace and stability should be maintained in the Gulf in the long term'.⁸⁸ In a similar vein, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Paul Gore-Booth, remarked: 'It was clear we could not simply retire into our shell once our troops left the regions in question. We had a general interest in the peace, stability and prosperity of the areas and we had also a substantial economic stake, in the form of investments and export markets, which were important for our future solvency and standard of living.'⁸⁹ The Secretaries of State for Foreign and for Commonwealth Affairs (Michael Stewart and George Thomson) subsequently produced an extensive appraisal of non-military means of preserving British influence which included the strength of the British economy and of the pound sterling, and what they termed 'political power' exercised through British membership of the Commonwealth, political alliances, and other associations and informal groupings.⁹⁰ The importance, and indeed necessity, of maintaining influence was underlined by the recognition that 'other powers, whether friendly or hostile, compete with us for influence. Reluctance on our side to take part in the competition will not make our competitors slacken their efforts; it will only increase their success.' Stewart and Thomson pragmatically concluded that 'Our political influence will be reduced and the nature of our influence will change from that of a power with a global military role to one with world-wide economic interests. We need to maintain these interests if we are going to restore our economic position.' Indeed, in no real sense was there an acceptance that the end of formal empire would equate with a concomitant abandonment of Britain's global economic interests, represented most explicitly by the £1 billion British investment in Persian Gulf oil production.

The fact that, as Jeffrey Macris in particular has noted, the American administrations of Lyndon Baines Johnson and Richard Nixon, both mired in the Vietnam conflict, refused to countenance 'replacing' the British in the Gulf and actually tried to keep the British engaged there,⁹¹ provided Britain with scope to retain a leading position in the region. Moreover, far from being pessimistic about British prospects, the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee

highlighted in July 1968 some of the positive aspects which had flowed from Britain's decision to withdraw from East of Suez: '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.'⁹² Tangible evidence of the benefits which stemmed from formal withdrawal was subsequently brought to light by Shaikh Khalifah bin Sulman, the prime minister of Bahrain, who in 1973 informed the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister of State, Lord Balniel, that Anglo-Bahraini relations were 'better now than when British troops had been in Bahrain' and that 'a better basis for dealing with Britain had been established'.⁹³ Khalifah also impressed upon Balniel that 'Britain must not desert the Gulf area'.⁹⁴ When Iraq attacked the police post at al Samita on the border with Kuwait in March 1973, moreover, the British Ambassador, A. J. Wilton, recorded that 'we were the first to whom the Kuwaitis turned for advice and help'.⁹⁵

The British Ambassador in Tehran, Sir Anthony Parsons, expressed relief that Britain had departed from the Gulf when it did, observing that 'we thus avoided the damage to our quest for business as a result of having to compete on an increasingly anomalous and unequal basis with Iran for influence in the Gulf'.⁹⁶ Indeed, the removal of the shackles of formal empire arguably proved beneficial to Britain, in the short-term at least. Equally, the legacy of British ties with the region provided British commerce with distinct advantages in certain circumstances. In 1978, Parsons referred to Britain's ability to 'exploit our historical ties with Iran and consequent familiarity with the Shah to commercial advantage'.⁹⁷ In the same year, the British Ambassador in Qatar, C. T. Brant, recorded that 'the historical links with Britain have accustomed the older generation of Qataris to doing business with us', adding: 'the combination of history and experience seems to have induced in the Qataris a feeling of affinity with Britain and the British which defies analysis.'⁹⁸ In 1981, furthermore, Brant challenged the notion that Britain had 'left the Gulf' ten years earlier, pointing out that such a description 'does less than justice to the work of our missions in the area, and the efforts of countless firms and commercial representatives who have worked to maintain their and the British connection with the Gulf States in the past decade'.⁹⁹ In a similar vein, his counterpart in Bahrain, M. J. Copson, argued that the extent of British withdrawal in 1971 had been 'exaggerated'. 'The ending of the special treaty relationship and the military withdrawal', he

explained, ‘were necessary but our diplomatic effort, trade relationships and a large British community remained and have continued to flourish.’¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, there is evidence that, following the British departure from the Gulf, there was a real erosion of British commercial advantage which historical ties alone could neither conceal, nor compensate for. A Foreign and Commonwealth Office official was quick to point out in response to Brant’s upbeat assessment that Britain had, in fact, lost first place to Japan in Qatar’s import market.¹⁰¹ In the field of arms, Britain also suffered at the hands of other suppliers, most notably France which established strong positions in Qatar¹⁰² and Abu Dhabi¹⁰³ at the expense of the British. Reviewing arms exports to Qatar, Brant lamented in 1980 that ‘where we could compete, we were up against “France Incorporated”, and especially the close Government-Industry co-ordination orchestrated in support of defence sales’.¹⁰⁴

In Dubai, by contrast, the British Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, D. J. McCarthy, reported on a ‘remarkable continuum’ whereby the ‘key positions in the government and around it which the British had held before independence remain in their hands’.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, even the Anglophile ruler of Dubai found himself under pressure from the younger generation which felt, according to McCarthy, that ‘Shaikh Rashid is in commercial collusion with expatriate interests and that the British officials as well as the British commercial representatives are instruments as well as beneficiaries of that collusion’.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, McCarthy prophesied that Shaikh Rashid would be ‘forced ... to move faster than his judgement or the optimum pace of Arabisation would dictate’.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, regional politics and influences, along with the challenge presented by the encroachment of other suppliers of arms and investment, demonstrated the limits on Britain’s ability to preserve interests after the end of formal empire.

Towards the beginning of 1980, K. J. Passmore of the FCO’s Middle East Department observed that ‘The Gulf rulers’ future is very much what they (not we) make of it. Our strongest asset used to be our ability to “advise” them. Even if we tried to do that, they would not now listen.’¹⁰⁸ With the passing of Political Agents, who had acted as advisors and guides to Gulf rulers in the imperial era, Britain lost a key source of influence. As McCarthy admitted with respect to his predecessor, Jim Treadwell,¹⁰⁹ the latter had ‘successfully bridged from Political Agent to Ambassador while retaining his personal intimacy despite the transition’.¹¹⁰ However, McCarthy noted with respect to the Abu Dhabi ruler that ‘I had little doubt that Zaid would watch me, a post-independence arrival, against any presumptive

tendencies reminiscent of the former role'.¹¹¹ The enthusiastic response to the visit of 'legendary' former Political Agent, Anthony Parsons, to Bahrain at the end of 1973¹¹² served to draw a contrast between the imperial era and the more prosaic, functional post-imperial one. That British influence and interests rested on commercial, rather than military or political ties, also proved problematic in terms of the sluggish performance of the British economy in the 1970s. In 1976, for instance, UAE President Shaikh Zaid told Ambassador McCarthy that 'he was worried about our apparent lethargy in pushing ourselves forward. Here in the Gulf we had a quite different position from everybody else. Yet he was always getting German and French and Japanese missions but Britain seemed to be sitting back'.¹¹³ As McCarthy conceded in 1977: 'After six years of independence the UAE has naturally got away from the apron strings. Her politics are those of the Arab world and we, having withdrawn all power from the area, have little effect upon them.'¹¹⁴

A clear example not merely of the UAE's responsiveness to Arab politics, but also that of Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, had already been provided by their participation in the collective action undertaken by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, which included progressive cuts in oil production starting with a 5 per cent reduction announced on 17 October.¹¹⁵ Such cuts fell heavily on the Western industrial nations, including Britain. Despite receiving assurances from the Crown Prince of Kuwait that his government did not wish to hurt its friends, it soon imposed what Ambassador Wilton described as 'an arbitrary system of cuts which reflected the consuming country's pattern of oil imports rather than its political attitudes'.¹¹⁶ When Wilton protested, the Kuwaiti Minister of Finance and Oil remained unmoved and proceeded to recall 'past grievances against their victims, from the Balfour Declaration onwards and to invent a few new ones'.¹¹⁷

Upheaval in Iran, which by the late 1970s had become Britain's most important export market in the Middle East,¹¹⁸ introduced a further element of uncertainty to the region. The fall of the Shah at the beginning of 1979, a catastrophe which the British signally failed to predict or plan for,¹¹⁹ arguably represented a greater blow to British interests than the relatively peaceful military withdrawal from the region a little over seven years earlier. Despite the replacement of the comparatively compliant Shah with the irredeemable hostility of the Islamic Republic of Iran,¹²⁰ Britain continued to play a prominent role in the Gulf, symbolized by the deployment of the so-called Armilla patrol of Royal Navy ships during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war.¹²¹ In this sense, British decolonization in the Gulf conformed to a

pattern in which the preservation of interests and influence after empire – not always successfully achieved – formed an essential facet of British decision-making.

Notes

¹ Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, 297.

² Wrigley, 'Now You See it, Now You Don't', 133.

³ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*; Jones, 'A Decision Delayed', 569-95; Louis, 'The Dissolution of the British Empire', 5; Smith, *Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf*.

⁴ Sato, 'Britain's decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf, 1964-68', 112.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁶ Hughes, *Harold Wilson's Cold War*, 111.

⁷ Petersen, *The Decline of the Anglo-American Middle East*, 74.

⁸ Schenk, *The Decline of Sterling*, 174.

⁹ Judd, *Empire*, 377.

¹⁰ Galpern, *Money, Oil and Empire in the Middle East*, 286.

¹¹ Pickering, 'Politics and "Black Tuesday"', 154-5.

¹² Fain, *American Ascendance*, 167-8.

¹³ For instance, see Stockwell, 'Suez 1956', 227-38; Petersen, 'Post-Suez Consequences', 216-19; Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser*, 112; Pearson, *In the Name of Oil*, 77-85; Smith, 'America in Britain's place?', 252-70.

¹⁴ Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras al Khaimah, Umm al Qaiwain, and Fujairah.

¹⁵ Letter from Stevens to Selwyn Lloyd, No. 140, 8 Dec. 1956, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), FO 371/120571/EA 1055/17.

¹⁶ Letter from Wright to Lloyd, No. 5, 4 Jan. 1957, TNA, FO 371/126923/EA 1071/1.

¹⁷ Letter from Burrows to Lloyd, No. 12, 24 Jan. 1957, TNA, FO 371/126915/EA 1051/2.

¹⁸ See Minute by John B. Denson, 9 March 1957, TNA, FO 371/126915/EA 1051/11.

¹⁹ 'Persian Gulf', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 7 June 1957, C. (57) 138, TNA, CAB 129/87.

²⁰ 'Future constitutional development in the colonies', Minute from Macmillan to Lord Salisbury, 28 Jan. 1957, in Hyam and Louis, eds., *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire*, 1.

²¹ Prime Minister's personal minute to the Foreign Secretary, 11 June 1957, TNA, FO 371/126916/EA 1051/17/G.

²² 'The Persian Gulf', Minute from Lloyd to Macmillan, 9 May 1959, cited in Hyam and Louis, eds., *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire*, 241.

²³ Catterall, ed., *Macmillan Diaries*, 137 (diary citation from 18 July 1958).

²⁴ 'International Status of Kuwait', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 26 Jan 1959, ME (M) (59) 3, TNA, CAB 134/2230.

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- ²⁵ *Exchange of Notes regarding Relations between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the State of Kuwait, 19 June 1961* (London: HMSO, 1961), Cmd. 1409.
- ²⁶ Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq*, 107; Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf*, 126-7.
- ²⁷ Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser*, 229; Ashton, 'Britain and the Kuwait Crisis', 164; Galpern, *Money, Oil and Empire in the Middle East*, 198-267.
- ²⁸ Minute by R. S. Crawford, 6 March 1961, TNA, FO 371/156834/BK 1051/13.
- ²⁹ Khadduri, *Republican Iraq*, 166.
- ³⁰ Joyce, 'Preserving the Sheikhdum', 287.
- ³¹ Letter from W. H. Luce to Sir Roger Stevens, No. 1035/61, 16 July 1961, TNA, FO 371/156884/BK 1193/212.
- ³² The discovery of oil in Abu Dhabi prompted Britain's Political Resident to remark in 1960 that this British-protected state would soon be 'in the "big money"' (Letter from Sir George Middleton to Beaumont, No. 1535/1, 11 Feb. 1960, TNA, FO 371/149084/B 1534/7).
- ³³ Political Agents' conference, 3-5 December 1962: Part I: Summary record of discussions: General discussion, TNA, FO 371/168632/B 1052/6.
- ³⁴ The following is based on Letter from Luce to Sir Roger Stevens, No. 1040/63, 17 Jan. 1963, TNA, FO 371/168632/B 1052/5G.
- ³⁵ Letter from Parkes to Stevens, No. 1053/63, 1 Feb. 1963, TNA, FO 371/168632/B 1052/9/G.
- ³⁶ Letter from Richmond to Stevens, No. 1059/63G, 3 Feb. 1963, TNA, FO 371/168632/B 1052/9/G.
- ³⁷ Minute from Wright to Sir Alec Douglas-Home, 8 April 1964, in Hyam and Louis, eds., *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire*, 640.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ The following is based on 'Middle East Oil and Defence', Minute by Sharp, 24 Jan. 1964, TNA, T 317/41.
- ⁴⁰ 'Middle East Oil and Defence', Note by Lucas, 13 March 1963, TNA, T 317/42.
- ⁴¹ Letter from Luce to Crawford, No. 1040G, 17 June 1964, TNA, FO 371/174488/B1052/13/G.
- ⁴² Minute by M. S. Berthoud, 1 July 1964, TNA, FO 371/174488/B 1052/13/G.
- ⁴³ Minute by J. A. Snellgrove, 2 July 1964, TNA, FO 371/174488/B 1052/13/G; Minute by D. J. McCarthy, 14 July 1964, TNA, FO 371/174488/B 1052/13/G.
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- ⁴⁵ 'Standing defence economic brief', attached to P. J. Kitcatt's minute to Marshall, April 1964, TNA, T 317/508.
- ⁴⁶ 'Western oil interests in the Middle East', note by Downey, July 1964, TNA, T 317/663.
- ⁴⁷ 'Middle East oil', Minute by Dodd to Morton, 30 Sept. 1964, TNA, T 317/663.
- ⁴⁸ 'Middle East oil and defence', Minute from Sharp to Morton, 1 Oct. 1964, TNA, T 317/663.
- ⁴⁹ Letter from Geoffrey Harrison to Luce, 10 Nov. 1964, TNA, FO 371/174489/B 1052/29.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Record of a meeting in the Secretary of State's office, 3 Dec. 1964, TNA, FO 371/179749/B 1051/1/G.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*

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- ⁵⁴ Letter from Stewart to Luce, No. 21, 1 April 1965, TNA, FO 371/179749/B 1051/9.
- ⁵⁵ Political Agents' Conference January 20-23, 1965: Summary Record of Discussions: Part I: General Political Discussion, TNA, FO 371/179749/B 1051/5/G.
- ⁵⁶ Telegram from the Foreign Office to certain of Her Majesty's representatives, No. 135, 2 April 1965, TNA, FO 371/179789/BB 1015/30.
- ⁵⁷ Telegram from Luce to the Foreign Office, No. 186, 13 March 1965, TNA, FO 371/179788/BB 1015/4.
- ⁵⁸ 'Disturbances in Bahrain', Minute by T. F. Brenchley, 13 March 1965, TNA, FO 371/179788/BB 1015/10.
- ⁵⁹ 'The use of tear gas in Bahrain', Arabian Department minute, 25 March 1965, TNA, FO 371/179788/BB 1015/21.
- ⁶⁰ 'The Middle East', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 24 March 1965, C. (65) 49, TNA, CAB 129/120 Part 2.
- ⁶¹ Defence and Oversea Policy Committee minutes, 26 May 1965, TNA, CAB 148/18, OPD (65), 27th meeting.
- ⁶² 'Defence review studies: Middle East policy', Memorandum by the Defence and Oversea (Official) committee, 15 Oct. 1965, TNA, CAB 148/45, OPD (O) (65) 67.
- ⁶³ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates*, 67.
- ⁶⁴ Letter from Johnston to Reginald Maudling, No. 726, 20 May 1962, TNA, FO 371/162785/B 1051/21.
- ⁶⁵ 'Briefs for the Prime Minister's visit to Washington: The Defence Review', Note by the Foreign Office, 3 Dec. 1965, TNA, CAB 148/45, OPD (O) (65) 79.
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- ⁶⁷ Letter from Luce to Crawford, No. 1040G, 17 June 1964, TNA, FO 371/174488/B 1052/13/G.
- ⁶⁸ The following is based on 'Defence expenditure no. 6: long-term policy in the Persian Gulf', Report by the Defence Review Working Party, 7 June 1967, TNA, CAB 148/80, OPDO (67) 8.
- ⁶⁹ Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 252.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 253.
- ⁷¹ Bismarck, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 195.
- ⁷² 'Visit to the Persian Gulf and Iran by the Minister of State, Mr Robert, October 31-November, 12 1967', Note by G. O. Roberts, 17 Dec. 1967, TNA, FCO 8/31.
- ⁷³ Sato, 'Britain's decision to withdraw from the Gulf', 111.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.
- ⁷⁵ Cabinet conclusions, 6 July 1967, CC (67) 45, TNA, CAB 128/42 Part 2.
- ⁷⁶ 'The Persian Gulf', Minute by M. S. Weir, 22 Sept. 1967, TNA, FCO 8/41.
- ⁷⁷ Dockrill, 'Britain's Power and Influence', 224.
- ⁷⁸ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, 141.
- ⁷⁹ Cabinet conclusions, 4 Jan. 1968, CC (68)1st conclusions, TNA, CAB 128/43.
- ⁸⁰ Darwin, 'British decolonization since 1945', 206.
- ⁸¹ Telegram from Bruce to the Department of State, 9 Jan. 1968, cited in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968: Volume XII*, 599; Bismarck, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 210.
- ⁸² 'Withdrawal from the Gulf', Minute by P. Nicholls, 12 Jan. 1968, TNA, T 225/3144.

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- ⁸³ 'Persian Gulf', Minute by P. S. Mews to Nicholls, 10 Oct. 1969, TNA, T 225/3404.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ Cabinet conclusions, 4 Jan. 1968, CC (68)1st conclusions, TNA, CAB 128/43.
- ⁸⁶ Wm. Roger Louis has referred to the 'imperialism of decolonization', by which he means the 'reversion to indirect control or influence rather than direct colonial rule' (Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism*, p. 28).
- ⁸⁷ Darwin, 'British decolonization since 1945', 206.
- ⁸⁸ Despatch from Crawford to Brown, 27 Jan. 1968, cited in Ashton and Louis, eds., *East of Suez and the Commonwealth*, 145.
- ⁸⁹ Minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee, 10 June 1968, TNA, CAB 148/83, OPDO(68)4th meeting.
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- ⁹¹ Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf*, 173-82; Macris, 'Why didn't America replace the British in the Persian Gulf?', pp. 65, 74.
- ⁹² Minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 26 July 1968, TNA, CAB 148/35, OPD (68) 14th meeting.
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- ⁹⁵ Letter from Wilton to Douglas-Home, 6 Jan. 1974, TNA, FCO 8/2188.
- ⁹⁶ Letter from Parsons to Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 12 April 1978, TNA, BT 241/3045.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Letter from Brant to David Owen, 1 May 1978, TNA, FCO 8/3222.
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- ¹⁰¹ 'First impressions of Qatar', Minute by K. J. Passmore, 22 May 1978, TNA, FCO 8/3222.
- ¹⁰² Letter from Brant to Lord Carrington, 31 Dec. 1979, TNA, FCO 8/3668; 'Visit by DMAO to Qatar 28-29 Oct. 1980', Minute by K. Perkins, 3 Nov. 1980, TNA, FCO 8/3670.
- ¹⁰³ Letter from D. A. Roberts to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 1 January 1978, TNA, FCO 8/3139.
- ¹⁰⁴ Letter from Brant to Patrick Moberly, 11 Nov. 1980, TNA, FCO 8/3674.
- ¹⁰⁵ Letter from McCarthy to P. R. H. Wright, 24 June 1974, TNA, FCO 8/2359.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁸ 'Strengthening our allies in Arabia and the Gulf', Minute by Passmore, 5 March 1980, TNA, FCO 8/3443.
- ¹⁰⁹ British Political Agent, Abu Dhabi, 1968-71; Ambassador, United Arab Emirates, 1971-73.
- ¹¹⁰ Letter from McCarthy to Wright, 21 April 1974, TNA, FCO 8/2359.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Letter from R. M. Tesch to Douglas-Home, 30 Dec. 1973, TNA, FCO 8/2181.

¹¹³ 'UAE and the UK', Minute by McCarthy, 8 April 1976, TNA, FCO 8/2667. Similar criticisms of British industry were expressed by the Rulers of Qatar and Kuwait (Letter from D. G. Crawford to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 20 Jan. 1974, TNA, FCO 8/2524; Telegram from John Cambridge to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, No. 115, 8 Feb. 1981, TNA, FCO 8/3825).

¹¹⁴ Letter from McCarthy to Owen, 16 July 1977, TNA, FCO 8/2889.

¹¹⁵ 'The main effects of the Middle East War', Report by the Joint Intelligence Committee, 7 Dec. 1973, TNA, CAB 186/15, JIC(A)(73)34. See also Venn, *Oil Crisis*, 18.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Wilton to Douglas-Home, 6 Jan. 1974, TNA, FCO 8/2188.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Parsons, *Pride and the Fall*, 140.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 134.

¹²⁰ In a post-mortem on Iran originally commissioned by Labour Foreign Secretary David Owen in March 1979, N. W. Browne of the FCO lugubriously noted: 'Iran is no longer an ally of Britain favouring close political and military co-operation with the West; instead it is at best distrustful of and at worst highly hostile towards the West and leans to radical Islamic states for friendship' ('British policy on Iran, 1974-1978', by Browne, 65, TNA, FCO 8/3601).

¹²¹ Jones and Stone, 'Britain and the Arabian Gulf', 6.

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