

Centurions and Chieftains: Tank Sales and British Policy towards Israel in the Aftermath of the Six Day War

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Britain's attempt to distance itself from Israel as London sought to conciliate the Arab world in the aftermath of the Six Day War has entered the historiography of Anglo-Israeli relations. A neglected aspect of the development of British policy towards Israel has been the intense debates among British decision-makers regarding the supply of tanks to Israel following the 1967 conflict. British reluctance to export the powerful Chieftain tank to Israel stemmed not only from an unwillingness to fuel an arms race in the Middle East, but also from a determination to protect ongoing and extensive British economic interests in the Arab world, especially oil supplies. In keeping with efforts to dissociate itself from Israel, Britain also sought to downplay, and even conceal from the Arab world, ongoing sales of the less sophisticated Centurion tank to Israel. In many ways, British policy towards Israel culminated in the decision during the 1973 Yom Kippur War to maintain an arms embargo to the region which, while not extending to all Arab countries, hit Israel especially hard as it desperately sought ammunition and spares for its Centurion tanks.

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The historiography of Anglo-Israeli relations identifies a distinct cooling of the relationship between the two countries in the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War.¹ As Britain sought to limit the damage which could be inflicted on its fragile economy by the actions of Arab oil producers, a palpable effort to distance itself from Israel took place. Even before the ceasefire on 10 June the British Cabinet concluded: 'Our aim must continue to be to seek to improve our relations with the Arab States and we must be seen publicly to be opposed to any extreme proposals which Israel might put forward following her victory.'² In line with this approach,

Labour Foreign Secretary George Brown informed the United Nations General Assembly on 21 June 1967 that Britain had neither taken part in, nor actively backed, Israeli military action, provoking Israel's Foreign Minister Golda Meir to brand him a 'Judas'.³ Israeli premier Levi Eshkol, moreover, portrayed Brown as an 'enemy' of Israel, adding that the British government 'seemed to be taking the lead in every effort to whittle any Israeli position: First over Jerusalem and ... in the United Nations'.⁴ Not only did Britain seek to adopt a position sympathetic to the Arabs regarding the territories occupied by Israel during the 1967 conflict, but also sponsored United Nations Resolution 242 which called for Israeli withdrawal from these territories.⁵

A neglected aspect of Britain's attempts to distance itself from Israel and conciliate the Arab world in the aftermath of the Six Day War, however, relates to arms sales.⁶ Given Israeli's dependence on foreign supplies for weapons deemed vital for its defence and national survival, arms sales arguably became the touchstone of British attitudes towards the Jewish state. Using official British sources, this article focuses on the development of British policy on tank sales following the 1967 conflict. This issue reached the highest levels of British government, Prime Minister Harold Wilson recalling that it took up a 'great deal of my time and that of the Cabinet Defence [and Oversea Policy] committee'.⁷ The question of tanks sales consumed so much ministerial (and prime ministerial) time since it became entangled in the wider Arab-Israeli conflict and as such had the potential to inflict severe damage on key British interests in the Middle East. Britain's reluctance to export the powerful Chieftain tank to Israel, and attempts to downplay ongoing sales of the less sophisticated Centurion, was symptomatic of a re-orientation of British policy towards Israel which stemmed from Britain's determination to safeguard its extensive economic interests in the Arab world, especially oil supplies from Arab producers. **It also reflected the erosion of the broad pro-Israeli consensus in British politics which was symbolized, for instance,**

by the formation in 1967 of the cross-party Arab lobby group, the Council for Arab-British Understanding.⁸ In the short term the damage to Anglo-Israeli relations was mitigated by the continuation of Centurion sales and by Israel's acquisition of American M60 main battlefield tanks instead of Chieftains. It would take another upsurge in Arab-Israeli tension, culminating in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, to expose fully the degree to which British policy, not least on arms sales, had shifted decisively in the direction of the Arabs to the detriment of Israel.

I

As early as 1953, Israel had requested 30 Centurion tanks.⁹ Although Britain eventually agreed to provide six, this was revoked in response to Israel's Gaza raid in February 1955.¹⁰ Subsequent Israeli attempts to secure Centurions over the next eighteen months were also rebuffed by Britain which feared the reactions of its Arab allies, not least Jordan. Zach Levey has noted that 'London's refusal to deliver the Centurion tank, the military item Israel most wanted to purchase from Britain, meant that in Israeli eyes, Britain had failed the litmus test of willingness to ensure the security of the Jewish state.'¹¹ From the late 1950s, however, Britain became a major provider of tanks to Israel, supplying some 660 Centurions by 1970.¹² Indeed, the Centurion became Israel's main battlefield tank, a significant development against the background of the intractable Arab-Israeli dispute and Israel's ongoing sense of insecurity.

The British decision to sell Centurions signified a palpable warming of Anglo-Israeli relations since the chill that had entered them at the time of the 1956 Suez crisis, triggered by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. Despite 'colluding' with Israel to bring about a military solution to the crisis,¹³ British Prime Minister Anthony Eden and his inner circle sought to dissociate themselves from Israel's attack on Egypt which began at the end of October 1956. Indeed, operational commanders

were told: ‘You will not treat Israel as our Ally.... you should avoid any co-operation or co-ordination of operations with the Israeli forces’.¹⁴ With indignation, Israeli Minister of Defence Moshe **Dayan** recalled: ‘Britain hated the very idea that her name might possibly be smeared as partners with Israel in military action against Arabs, but at the same time she would welcome the chance of exploiting Israel’s conflict with the Arabs to justify her action against Egypt’.¹⁵

An improvement in Anglo-Israeli relations followed the 1958 Iraqi revolution as both Israel and Britain perceived advantages in co-operating, not least in stabilizing the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan.¹⁶ Israeli premier David Ben-Gurion, in particular, sought to use the improvement to acquire arms from Britain, especially tanks.¹⁷ The Foreign Office recognized that ‘the Centurions are really the touchstone of our relations as far as the Israelis are concerned’.¹⁸ For its part, Britain recognized the benefits of improved relations with Israel, symbolized by the invitation extended to Golda Meir to visit London in August 1958, followed by the decision in December to lift the former embargo and supply Israel with Centurion tanks.¹⁹ Although Britain agreed to provide Israel with 60 Centurions, the Foreign Office stressed that ‘the possession of Centurions by Israel should remain secret for as long as possible, and that in any case the total number to be supplied should not be known’.²⁰ Mrs Meir had already issued firm instructions regarding secrecy, warning that ‘heads would fall’ if they were infringed.²¹ In April 1960, agreement was reached to increase the number of Centurions exported to Israel to 90²² and although a subsequent request for a further 90 was whittled down to 45,²³ Britain found itself in the position of having supplied some 135 heavy tanks to Israel by 1963. In September 1964, shortly before the fall of the Conservative government, ministerial consent was provided for the sale of a further 250 Centurion tanks and related equipment over a three-year period.²⁴

During talks with Levi Eshkol in March 1965, the new Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, confirmed that, when the deliveries of Centurions were complete, his government would be 'perfectly ready' to discuss the further supply of military equipment, the only stipulation being that talks on arms deliveries would remain 'confidential'.²⁵ Subsequently, Foreign Office officials chided their counterparts in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs when Eshkol let slip that British Centurions would be on display at Israel's independence day celebrations.²⁶

At the beginning of the Six Day War, triggered by President Nasser of Egypt's closure on 22 May 1967 of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, the *Times* estimated that Israel possessed some 250 British-made Centurion tanks.²⁷ The Centurions played a major role in the land war, especially in the Sinai Peninsula.²⁸ Despite imposing at the start of the conflict a 24-hour delay on arms supplies to the region, including 10 Centurion tanks destined for Israel, Britain quickly resumed shipments. As the Cabinet conceded: 'some other countries, and especially the Soviet Union, were continuing to supply arms and the continued imposition of a delay on our part might lead to Israel suffering greater difficulties than the Arab states in maintaining her forces'.²⁹ Moshe Gat points out that Britain had 'stood by Israel since the Suez Campaign, supplying it with the weapons that it needed before and during the June 1967 War'.³⁰ However, the widespread perception in the Arab world that Britain had favoured the Israelis in the 1967 conflict, and the consequent imposition of an oil embargo by Arab producers,³¹ contributed to a more circumspect approach by Her Majesty's Government towards arms sales to Israel. Although it was decided at the end of July 1967 that a further 18 Centurions could be despatched to Israel, this was balanced by a simultaneous determination to supply British-made Hunter aircraft to Jordan.³² Further Israeli requests for large consignments of tanks placed Britain in a dilemma which threatened its relations with both Israel and the Arab world.

Despite Israeli victory in the Six Day War, the Egyptian leadership, as Ahron Bregman points out, did not ‘lose its appetite to reorganize itself to hit back at the Israelis’, an aim facilitated by the Soviet Union’s decision to re-equip the Egyptian armed forces.³³ It was against the background of ongoing Egyptian-Israeli hostilities,³⁴ especially along the Suez Canal, that the Israeli government asked Britain in November 1968 to provide a further 200 Centurions, as well as 250 Chieftain tanks, over a four-year period. Unsurprisingly, the request stimulated lively debate among British decision-makers.

Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart argued in favour of supplying the Centurions, but against the supply of the more powerful and up-to-date Chieftains which at the time boasted the most powerful main gun and heaviest armour of any tank in the world. While accepting that a refusal would result in the loss of a valuable export order and the advantages for the possible sale of Chieftains elsewhere which an Israeli order might produce, Stewart argued that ‘it would avoid putting at risk our large military and civil export orders to the Arab countries and setting back the improvement in our relations with these countries which we had achieved since the war in 1967’.³⁵ Bolstering his argument still further, the Foreign Secretary recorded that, since there was no evidence that the Soviet Union intended to furnish the Arab countries with T62 tanks which were comparable in performance to the Chieftain, ‘it would be contrary to our policy to be the first to introduce weapons into the Middle East which had a greater offensive power than those already there’.³⁶ Recalling that a major objective of British policy was a peace settlement in the Middle East, Stewart also noted that ‘At present the attitude of Israel was the main obstacle to progress, and it would not be wise to encourage her to believe that we were ready to supply all the arms that she requested.’³⁷

Defence Secretary Denis Healey, by contrast, favoured the sale of Chieftains to Israel. On the commercial side, he pointed out that were Britain to refuse to supply the Chieftains, the whole of the Israeli order might be lost. He also cast doubt on whether Britain would lose

orders in the Arab world as a result of the sale of Chieftains to Israel. As regards military arguments, he stressed that in the opinion of the Chiefs of Staff, the military balance in the region had moved to Israel's disadvantage since the 1967 war. In consequence, Healey suggested that the sale of Chieftains to Israel would 'merely restore the military balance between the two sides'.³⁸ The Defence Secretary's arguments proved influential among his colleagues, the Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy Committee recommending that Britain should supply not only the Centurion tanks to Israel, but Chieftains too. The Foreign Secretary, however, was invited to investigate further the likely effects of Chieftain sales to Israel on civil and military exports to Arab countries.

In his report to the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee on 13 November 1968, Stewart stressed that orders from Arab countries that might be imperilled by the sale of Chieftains to Israel amounted to some £500 million.³⁹ This compared with the value of the Israeli order of just £30 million over four years, possibly rising in the longer term to £80 million. While Stewart accepted the unlikelihood of the whole of the £500 million being lost, he stressed that 'the cancellation of only a small part of it would more than counterbalance any advantage to be derived from the Israeli order'.⁴⁰ Stewart also disputed the claim that the military balance had moved against Israel since the Six Day War, pointing out that in June 1967 Israel been at a quantitative disadvantage of one to five in tanks, whereas by the end of 1968 the figure was one to four. The Foreign Secretary also averred that to supply Chieftains in the absence of any solid evidence that the Soviets were planning to provide T62s to the Arabs would give an 'upward twist to the arms spiral and might even precipitate a Soviet decision to supply T62s'.⁴¹ Given the delicate state of Arab-Israeli relations, moreover, Stewart emphasized that 'To agree to supply the Chieftains at this moment might suggest that we were encouraging the Israelis in their intransigence and in particular their refusal to withdraw from the occupied territories'.⁴²

The Defence Secretary, nonetheless, continued to argue the case for the supply of both Centurions and Chieftains to the Israelis. While accepting that the disparity in tank strength may have moved slightly in Israel's favour, Healey underlined that it was 'still very great'.⁴³ He also questioned the damaging effects of the sale of Chieftains to Israel on the grounds that in the past orders had been received from Arab countries even at times when they knew that Britain was also supplying Israel.

Once again, Healey's arguments proved persuasive, the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee agreeing that the balance of advantage rested with supplying both Chieftains and Centurions to Israel. Summing up, nevertheless, Harold Wilson stressed the merit of maintaining secrecy in order to minimize any 'damaging consequences'.⁴⁴ The importance of avoiding publicity soon became evident against the background of a French trade drive in the region. Referring to the putative sale of Chieftains to Israel, the British Political Resident in the Gulf, Sir Stewart Crawford, remarked that it would be 'most unfortunate if French efforts to penetrate this market were given in the near future a considerable fillip by our taking a decision which outraged the Arab countries'.⁴⁵ More specifically, Crawford fretted that the Ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zaid, might cancel a recent order for British Hunter aircraft in favour of French Mirages. Anticipating Britain's formal withdrawal from the Gulf by the end of 1971, moreover, he urged that 'the longer we can keep the Gulf States following the good habit of buying British the better', something that a delay in supplying the Israelis with arms would facilitate.⁴⁶

The British Ambassador to Kuwait, Sam Falle, also entered the debate. Basing his judgements on the belief that it was the Arab states which were 'now ready for peace if only somebody could show them a way to it which did not look like surrender', the Ambassador asserted that it was 'Israel upon whom such pressure is going to have to be brought if such a way is to be found'.⁴⁷ 'In these circumstances', continued Falle, 'it is surely the crassest folly

to increase the armed strength of Israel by the supply of further tanks – not in themselves a particularly defensive weapon, but one which is calculated to increase their arrogance and their belief that time is on their side.’⁴⁸ Referring explicitly to land occupied by Israel in 1967, the Ambassador opined: ‘I do not see how we can ever hope to get them out of that territory if we make them so strong that they need fear nothing’.⁴⁹

In further discussions at the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee in May 1969, Foreign Secretary Stewart maintained his opposition to the sale of Chieftains, arguing that a decision in favour would not only increase regional tensions, but also reduce the prospects of a successful outcome of the four-power talks between the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and Britain aimed at settling the ongoing Arab-Israeli dispute.⁵⁰ In response, Denis Healey raised the fear that if Israel did not obtain more modern tanks, it might be tempted to embark on a preventative war or even press ahead with nuclear arms development.⁵¹

In spite of the improvement in Anglo-Israeli relations from the late 1950s, British fears about Israeli nuclear capability persisted. With French assistance, a nuclear facility had been built at Dimona in the Negev desert.⁵² When pressed on its uses by British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in 1961, the Israeli premier, David Ben-Gurion, focused on the imperative to provide cheap power.⁵³ The British remained unconvinced, however, about the pacific aims of Israel’s nuclear policy and feared that in fact it represented a threat to Middle Eastern stability.⁵⁴ British concerns had been heightened by reports in 1964 of co-operation between the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel in the nuclear field. ‘It strikes one as ethically indefensible’, thundered one Foreign Office mandarin, ‘for the Germans to try to expiate their crimes towards Jewry by helping Israel to construct weapons of mass destruction.’⁵⁵ The fact that Argentina had confirmed the sale of uranium to Israel provided another cause for

concern.⁵⁶ The Foreign Office concluded in 1966 that ‘the only prudent course is to continue to assume that the Israelis wish to maintain a nuclear option’.⁵⁷

Despite longstanding fears of Israel’s nuclear ambitions, Healey’s apocalyptic visions did not sway his colleagues on the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee and, indeed, there was a perceptible weakening of support for the sale of Chieftains. In discussion, members of the Committee recognized that representatives of Arab countries were constantly probing Britain’s intentions towards Israel.⁵⁸ The signing of a formal memorandum of understanding with Israel would prevent Britain from deflecting such enquiries with the platitude that no decision had been made. Stress was also laid on the ‘very great economic damage’ which could result from Arab hostility. With the winding down of Britain’s formal military presence in the Gulf in mind, moreover, the possibility of the harassment of Britain’s remaining forces there was also a cause for concern. Summing up the discussion, Stewart recorded that although it remained Britain’s intention to supply Chieftains to Israel, it would be ‘unwise to enter into any further commitment with the Israelis at this stage’.⁵⁹

During subsequent discussions with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in June 1969, Labour Cabinet minister Richard Crossman admitted that ‘we were enormously aware of our Arab interests and the pressure they were exerting on us’.⁶⁰ Wilson himself explicitly informed Mrs Meir that ‘News of a decision to supply would affect the Four Power talks⁶¹ and our relations with the Arabs.’⁶² **Despite his reputation for being a strong supporter of Israel,⁶³ Wilson also stressed the importance, from the point of view of these talks, of Her Majesty’s Government not putting themselves ‘out of court with the Arabs’.**⁶⁴ During subsequent discussions with Denis Healey, Mrs. Meir characterized the British decision to hold up a decision on the signature of the memorandum of understanding on the Chieftains as a ‘form of sanctions designed to bring Israel into line’.⁶⁵ She added that she felt

‘most deeply about the decision, not only as an Israeli, but as a Socialist who had looked to a British Socialist Government for help’.⁶⁶ However, her suggestion that Britain and Israel in effect become defence production allies was rebuffed by Stewart who told the Israeli premier that ‘If H.M.G. were to agree to manufacture or assembly in Israel – a continuing process – the strain on Anglo-Arab relations would be that much greater.’⁶⁷ Complicating matters still further, the Israeli Ambassador in London, Aharon Remez, set about lobbying back-bench Labour MPs on the supply of Chieftains, thus undermining the principle of secrecy which the Wilson government had strongly favoured.⁶⁸

Sensing that the tide was turning against the Chieftain deal, Britain’s Ambassador in Tel Aviv, E. J. Barnes, sent a seventeen-page letter to Michael Stewart in August 1969 in which he made a strong appeal for the sale to go ahead.⁶⁹ If Britain capitulated over Chieftains, he argued, ‘we should be subjected to further Arab attempts to curb the sale of equipment of a military nature or possible military application’. He estimated that Britain stood to lose £100 million in defence contracts alone, quite apart from the likely adverse effects on its civilian trade with Israel. He also queried the strength of the Arab reaction in the longer term to a decision to supply Israel with Chieftains. ‘I know the Arabs are quite capable of cutting off their economic noses to spite their political face’, he observed, ‘but experience shows that they usually graft it on again fairly soon. They need our goods and they need to sell their oil.’ In addition, Barnes was sceptical about the impact of the Chieftain deal on Britain’s ability to influence the two sides in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict: ‘I am frankly doubtful whether we are in a position to persuade either Israel or the Arabs to accept an unwelcome settlement, or even a settlement with some unwelcome aspects. Certainly, if the Russians cannot persuade the Egyptians, nor the Americans the Israelis, I do not see how we could be in any better position to do so with either side.’ In an effort to find a compromise solution to the Chieftain dilemma, Barnes advocated Britain’s agreement to partial

manufacture and assembly in Israel itself, coupled with a verbal undertaking to the Israelis, rather than the signing of a full-blown memorandum of understanding. Concluding his essay on the Chieftain deal, Barnes warned that ‘the government and people of Israel will undoubtedly regard our attitude on this as a shibboleth by which they will judge the sincerity of our friendship for this small and embattled country ... which shares so many of our own political and social ideals’.

Despite the eloquence of Barnes’ appeal, FCO mandarins were not swayed by his arguments. A. A. Acland of the Near East Department was an especially stern critic, questioning whether the Israeli response to a refusal to supply Chieftains would spread as rapidly or as deeply as Barnes feared to other forms of cooperation.⁷⁰ Acland also pragmatically pointed out that British interests in the Arab world far outweighed those in Israel. In particular, he noted that ‘British investments in the Arab world are £166 million, in Israel £2.5 million; average British exports to the Arab world are £211 million, to Israel £64 million. Imports from the Arab world are £302 million, from Israel £30 million.’⁷¹ Moreover, Acland emphasized that the Chieftain sale had become an ‘emotional issue’ on which the Arab world had focused and that the supply of a new type of tank, while Israel remained in occupation of Arab territory, was considered by Arabs to be ‘particularly offensive’.⁷² He also dismissed the idea of a partial manufacture of Chieftains in Israel with the observation that it would ‘compound the offence in Arab eyes and would ensure sharper action against British firms involved through the Arab boycott machinery’.⁷³ Conversely, Goronwy Roberts, Minister of State at the FCO, was sceptical about the dangers of an Israeli boycott of British goods, recalling that ‘at the height of Israeli resentment of British policy in the late ‘40s, no such boycott developed’.⁷⁴

II

By the time the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee considered the matter again in the autumn of 1969, the context in which ministers were making decisions had altered markedly. First, Britain had received a number of representations from Arab governments.⁷⁵ Britain's Ambassador to the United Nations, Lord Caradon, had also confirmed that 'quite apart from the damage which would be done to our relations with the Arabs by the supply of tanks, the whole credibility of his position in the discussions of the Middle East issue in New York would be destroyed'.⁷⁶ Reiterating in the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee his earlier assertion that Britain's commercial stake in the Arab world was many times greater than that in Israel, Michael Stewart stressed that the Arabs would be in a position to 'damage our economy through their holdings of sterling and through interference with the flow of oil'.⁷⁷ Furthermore, he raised the fear of attacks on British lives and property in Arab countries should the sale of Chieftains go ahead, as well as warning his colleagues of the Israelis' intention of committing Britain 'irrevocably' to their side, one consequence of which would be that 'we should be able to exercise no influence in the Four Power talks'.⁷⁸ Significantly, Denis Healey, hitherto a strong advocate of selling Chieftains to Israel, turned decisively against the sale, arguing that it was 'out of all proportion to the possible gain'.⁷⁹ In particular, he conceded that 'we would put in jeopardy our future arms sales to the Arab countries and the future of our training facilities in Libya, and we might create for ourselves a very unpleasant situation in the Persian Gulf at the time of our withdrawal'.⁸⁰ The question of supplying Israel with Chieftains, however, became entangled with the situation in Libya.

Since the revolution on 1 September 1969 Libya had been in a state of flux. Before the revolution, Britain had signed a contract to supply Libya with Chieftains against which Britain had already received £10 million. Ministers feared that a cancellation in response to the decision not to supply the Israelis risked jeopardizing Britain's military training facilities

in Libya, as well the termination of an existing air defence contract with Libya worth some £155 million. 'It would be illogical,' agreed ministers on the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 'having decided to deny Chieftains to Israel for reasons which were substantially economic, to deprive ourselves of a large part of the economic benefits of that decision by jeopardising both the Libyan arms contract and Libyan oil supplies'.⁸¹ In his diary, the Secretary of State for Social Services, Richard Crossman, confided that his colleague on the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, President of the Board of Trade Roy Mason, had been 'fanatically in favour of as much trade as possible and of our unloading £500 million-worth of the most modern kind of armaments on the these poor Arabs, which is perfectly safe because they are not fit to use any of them'.⁸² There was general support in the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee for the view that Britain's commercial interests in the Arab world were far greater than in Israel and that 'earlier experience illustrated the speed and bitterness with which the Arab countries might retaliate against those interests if we supplied Chieftain tanks to Israel'.⁸³ As a result of such considerations, Barnes was instructed to inform the Israeli government of a further delay on whether or not to supply Chieftains.⁸⁴ During discussions with Golda Meir and her Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, British Cabinet member George Thomson confessed that 'great sacrifices' had been made to put Britain's economic affairs to rights and 'We simply could not afford to set all this at risk again.'⁸⁵ He added: 'Our experience in 1967 when even a short-term denial of Arab oil had done us grave damage could not be overlooked.'⁸⁶

By the time the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee met again at the beginning of November 1969,⁸⁷ events had moved on with dizzying speed, the new revolutionary government in Tripoli requesting negotiations for the early withdrawal of British forces stationed in Libya which in turn lessened the chances of the retention of Britain's training facilities there. The prospects for establishing co-operative relations with the new regime

were also vitiated by the anti-British demonstrations in the capital which had resulted in damage to British property, including the embassy itself.⁸⁸ Summing up the mood of the meeting, Harold Wilson remarked: 'If the Libyans insisted on unconditional evacuation by British forces of their territories and also sought to confine the arms supply contract to the controversial Chieftains, the Committee might well consider that the political disadvantages of agreeing to supply outweighed the benefits.'⁸⁹

With respect to the contemporaneous Israeli request for Chieftains, the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee comforted itself with the thought that the Israelis were 'sufficiently sophisticated to understand that, just as they were preoccupied with their physical survival, the requirement for which dominated all aspects of their policy, so we, for our part, had to concentrate on economic survival. They would recognise the very great economic damage which the Arab countries could inflict in reprisal for a firm commitment to supply Chieftains to Israel.'⁹⁰ Roy Mason had gone so far as to declare: 'The effect on the Arab world of the sale of Chieftains to Israel would be so great on our economy that it would knock us back for two years.'⁹¹ As a result of such considerations, it was decided to inform the Israelis that in existing circumstances a memorandum of understanding on the supply of Chieftains could not be signed and that, in consequence, HMG would understand if they sought to meet their tank requirements from other sources.⁹² In response, Eban criticized what he considered to be a 'growing tendency of the British government to yield to Arab obduracy in matters affecting Israel's security and her central political interests'.⁹³ The Israeli Ambassador in London, Aharon Remez, had earlier informed Michael Stewart that his government was 'very uneasy at the turn of events were now taking. The present decision showed how economic pressures could be used on future occasions. Arab threats could lead to Israel's interests being overruled'.⁹⁴

As regards Libya, Foreign Secretary Stewart made a powerful case against the supply of Chieftains on the grounds that ‘In present circumstances it would be wrong to introduce into the Middle East a powerful new weapon held by no other Middle Eastern country, and which was not being supplied to Israel.’⁹⁵ His arguments proved persuasive. In March 1970, the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee came out strongly against the idea of supplying Chieftains to Libya.⁹⁶ Summarising towards the end of 1970 the dilemma which had faced British decision-makers, the principal private secretary to the Foreign Secretary, J. A. N. Graham, recalled that

In theory, it might have been possible to supply Chieftains to both sides simultaneously, but in practice such a transition would have been difficult, if not impossible, to arrange and might well have left us, while enjoying the commercial fruits, suffering many of the political and physical disadvantages and dangers of supplying one side or the other.⁹⁷

As regards Anglo-Israeli relations, the damage inflicted was mitigated by American willingness to sell M60 tanks to Israel which prompted the Israeli Deputy Minister of Defence, General Tsur, to declare that the Chieftain problem had been ‘solved’.⁹⁸

The British decision to withhold Chieftains from Israel left unresolved the question of the supply of further Centurions. When the Israeli Ambassador was informed at the end of 1969 that the sale of Chieftains could not proceed, Foreign Secretary Stewart had pledged to continue supplying Centurions.⁹⁹ A subsequent approach by the Israeli defence attaché for the purchase of an additional 200 Centurions presented Britain with the problem of honouring this commitment. As one Foreign Office mandarin observed with respect to the Arabs: ‘any sign that the supply is continuing while Israel shows no sign of withdrawing from the occupied territories will be pounced on by them, or brought to their notice by the Russians’.¹⁰⁰ In an effort to mitigate the presentational problems of continuing to supply

Centurions under existing arrangements – 10 used tanks a month surplus to the needs of the British army – ministers refused to be drawn regarding an overall figure.¹⁰¹ Even with this limited commitment, the Foreign Office was eager to maintain as much secrecy as possible, underscoring the ‘grave damage which any leak might do to our relations with the Arab world’.¹⁰²

III

On 19 June 1970 the Conservative Government of Edward Heath came to office. Assailed by economic problems, the new administration was equally, if not more, determined to avoid alienating the Arab world than its Labour predecessor had been. In a speech in Harrogate at the end of October 1970, Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home called for the implementation of Resolution 242 and Israeli withdrawal from the territories seized in 1967,¹⁰³ sentiments which Geraint Hughes has depicted as ‘closer to those of “moderate” states such as Egypt than those of Israel and the United States’.¹⁰⁴ Certainly, the Harrogate speech was well received in Cairo,¹⁰⁵ but poorly so in Israel.¹⁰⁶ In the event of President Nixon referring to Douglas-Home’s statement during Edward Heath’s forthcoming visit to Washington, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office advised the Prime Minister to explain that

our interests in the Middle East are different both in nature and in proportion from those of the Americans. We do not have the same responsibility for Israel and for persuading it to move towards a settlement as the Americans: and our material stake in the region is more important than is that of the Americans to them.¹⁰⁷

Despite Douglas-Home’s Harrogate speech, he did recommend a positive response to the Israeli defence attaché in London’s request for further deliveries of second-hand Centurion tanks after January 1971 when deliveries under the existing arrangements were due to cease.¹⁰⁸ In justifying this position, Douglas-Home pointed out that Britain had supplied

Jordan with 100 Centurions in the previous eighteen months and was in the process of concluding an agreement to provide a further sixteen. He also pragmatically noted that ‘The Arabs know that we have been supplying Israel with Centurions since the June War and must suspect that supply is continuing.’¹⁰⁹ **Secretary of State for Defence Lord Carrington, who later was to acquire the reputation of being sympathetic towards the Arabs during his tenure as Foreign Secretary in the first Thatcher government,¹¹⁰ concurred with Douglas-Home’s analysis. He added that, while the Israelis had come to accept that Britain would not supply Chieftains to countries involved in the Middle Eastern conflict, ‘they would certainly not understand a refusal (or an undue delay in giving them an answer) by us to continue to supply them with 10 second-hand Centurions per month.’¹¹¹** Carrington also commented that the Centurions which Britain had been supplying to Jordan were in fact later marks with lower mileage. While supporting the continued supply of second-hand Centurions to Israel, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry John Davies cautioned that ‘It should go without saying that publicity in any form, whether by us or the Israelis or anyone, should as far as possible be avoided, but perhaps the point is worth making.’¹¹² Having satisfied himself that there was ‘not likely to be a really dangerous reaction by the Arabs if news of the decision should get out’, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Anthony Barbour, backed the supply of Centurions to Israel.¹¹³ A broad consensus among ministers having been reached, Heath approved Douglas-Home’s original proposal.¹¹⁴ Shortly after this, the Prime Minister revived the debate about the supply of Chieftain tanks to the region, observing with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict that ‘both sides will end up getting tanks equivalent to the Chieftain from other sources and that we shall lose out to no good purpose’.¹¹⁵

In a full-scale review of British policy on arms sales to the Middle East produced for the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee in February 1971, Foreign Office officials set out

a number of options from one extreme – removing all restrictions on all categories of military equipment to Israel and Arab states – to the other – unilaterally placing a total embargo on the supply of military equipment to these states.¹¹⁶ Douglas-Home favoured a pragmatic policy, akin to the government's Labour predecessor, but applying clearer and more consistent principles.¹¹⁷ Elaborating on this point, Douglas-Home suggested that in considering each request for the supply of military equipment, the British government should take account of the effect of any decision on the prospects for achieving a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and, conversely, the likelihood of a resumption of large-scale hostilities; the relative military capabilities of the countries of the region; and Britain's political and commercial interests in all the countries of the region.¹¹⁸ The Defence and Overseas Policy Committee endorsed the Foreign Secretary's recommendations, Prime Minister Heath introducing the caveat that 'in applying these principles we should maintain a clear view of our own commercial interests and seek to serve these as far as possible'.¹¹⁹ With conflict once more looming in the Middle East, these principles were soon to be tested.

At the time of the Six Day War, the Cabinet agreed not to hold up arms to the Israelis so long as the Soviet Union was continuing to supply the Arab states.¹²⁰ The Cabinet subsequently pointed out that 'if we were to default, both to Israel and to the Arab States, on orders which had been placed with us, we should cease to be regarded as a reliable source of supply and might put at risk large long-term orders already placed with us'.¹²¹ During the 1973 Yom Kippur conflict, by contrast, Britain maintained a strict arms embargo on Israel, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Libya, Douglas-Home informing the Cabinet that 'We would sacrifice our ability to influence the peace moves and Arab policy on oil if we were to reverse our policy on the embargo.'¹²² Nevertheless, the embargo did not extend to all Arab countries. Explaining this apparently anomalous position, the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Lord Balniel, stressed that it was done 'for reasons of Gulf

security, to protect our major arms sales interests in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Gulf, and above all to protect our oil interests'.¹²³ The Israeli Ambassador to the UK pointed out that since the Russians were supplying the Arabs, the European arms embargo was in fact 'one-sided'.¹²⁴ Israeli Foreign Minister Eban subsequently declared that Britain's policy of selling Centurion tanks but then refusing to provide spares parts 'was not Israel's idea of either political or commercial morality'.¹²⁵

Despite Israeli (and American) pressure, the British refused to yield. When US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger asserted that disaster for Israel had to be avoided, the British Ambassador in Washington, Lord Cromer, responded: 'U.S. re-supply of Israel could lead to much greater disaster. Europe would not be content to go without Middle East oil because of American actions.'¹²⁶ While the Nixon administration undertook a massive airlift to re-supply the beleaguered Israelis,¹²⁷ the US Ambassador to London, Walter H. Annenberg, accurately warned Washington that in the light of British determination that the UK 'should not be involved or appear to be involved in any way with Israel nor with any actions in support of Israel', the British government's response to a request for the use of British bases for logistical support or transit point to the Middle East would be 'negative'.¹²⁸ Assistant Under-Secretary at the FCO, J. A. Thomson, had in fact already requested US assurances that the UK would 'in no way' be involved in the US effort to re-supply Israel.¹²⁹

In discussions over the lifting of the British arms embargo towards the end of 1973, policy-makers were chary about doing anything which would enflame Arab opinion. Douglas-Home pointed out that criticism by Israel and its friends of the British embargo had contributed to Arab perceptions that it amounted to an anti-Israeli step by Britain; the corresponding concern was that the Arab world would regard the lifting of the embargo as a pro-Israeli one. He warned that resuming the supply to Israel of Centurion ammunition and spares 'would lead to Arab action against our oil supplies'.¹³⁰ Reviewing the arguments

against lifting the embargo, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary subsequently focussed on ‘Criticism from Arabs when it comes out that supplies for Israel are involved.’¹³¹ Although King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat had pledged to try and protect Britain from measures being taken by Arabs against British interests, Douglas-Home emphasized that neither had been able to offer a guarantee. In these circumstances, he cautioned, ‘we risk losing our “friendly” status and with it the special arrangements we hope to make bilaterally for oil supplies’.¹³² Conversely, Douglas-Home dismissed as ‘not powerful’ the argument against lifting the embargo on the grounds that it would provoke criticism from Israel and its supporters when they realized that arms supplies were going to the Arabs.¹³³

In discussion at the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee at the end of 1973, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary noted that if Britain lifted the ban on Arab countries it would have to do the same for Israel. Reiterating previous arguments, he counselled that ‘The sale of arms to Israel at this stage ... would most likely cause an adverse reaction in certain Arab states with possible consequences for our oil supplies’.¹³⁴ Impressed by the strength of Douglas-Home’s presentation, his colleagues on the Committee supported the maintenance of the arms embargo until there was an agreement on the disengagement of forces.¹³⁵ Adding his voice to the debate, FCO Under-Secretary of State, Anthony Parsons, advised against an early lifting of the embargo since oil supplies would be put at ‘severe risk’ if Britain resumed sending Centurion ammunition and spare parts to Israel.¹³⁶

IV

In some senses, the British approach to the Yom Kippur War represented the culmination of its approach to the region since the Six Day War, namely a growing dissociation from Israel and a corresponding effort to conciliate the Arab world. Although ethical issues, not least

British policy-makers' reluctance to give the regional arms race an 'upward twist', played a part, the principal reason for the British approach stemmed from growing dependence on oil supplies from Arab states, something which the 1967 conflict had served to underline. The British refusal to supply Israel with advanced Chieftain tanks should be seen in this context. Although the disruption to Anglo-Israeli relations should not be exaggerated, and indeed was softened by Britain's willingness to continue supplying Centurions and by Israel's acquisition of alternatives for Chieftains in the form of the American M60 tank, the 1973 Yom Kippur War underlined Britain's palpable tilt towards the Arab world. In many ways this approach was vindicated, Britain avoiding the indignity of the Arab oil embargo applied to the United States at the time of the 1973 conflict and the more extreme aspects of the Arab producers' restrictions on oil production.¹³⁷ 'Who would have thought', marvelled the British Ambassador to Lebanon, P. H. G. Wright, 'that from another round of hostilities Britain would emerge – thus far at any rate – with her reputation in the Arab world (not to speak of her assets) not only intact, but enhanced.'¹³⁸ Britain's distancing itself from Israel, and indeed disengaging itself as far as possible from the Arab-Israeli dispute, was assisted by the proven ability of the Israelis to defend themselves and also by the knowledge that, in extremis, the United States would come to Israel's rescue.¹³⁹ 'This may not sound an heroic stance', George Brown had admitted in the immediate aftermath of the Six Day War, 'but it corresponds to the realities governing our economic interests in the area.'¹⁴⁰

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Notes

¹ In particular, see Gat, 'Britain and Israel before and after the Six Day War, June 1967', 54-77; Gat, 'Britain and the occupied territories after the 1967 war', 68-80; Levey, 'Britain and Israel, 1950-1967', 102-03; Louis, 'Britain: The Ghost of Suez and Resolution 242', 236.

² Cabinet conclusions, 8 June 1967, CC(67) 37th conclusions, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), CAB 128/42, Part 2.

³ Gat, 'Britain and Israel before and after the Six Day War, June 1967', 64, 65. In the course of his 21 June speech, Brown also addressed the post-conflict refugee problem in the hope of winning 'points among Arab countries' (Kochavi, 'The US, Britain and the Palestinian Refugee Question after the Six Day War', 537).

⁴ Gat, 'Britain and the occupied territories after the 1967 war', 76.

⁵ Louis, 'Britain: The Ghost of Suez and Resolution 242', 241.

⁶ Mark Phythian provides a brief overview, but his analysis does not extend beyond the end of 1968 (Phythian, *The Politics of British Arms Sales since 1964*, 195-8).

⁷ Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-1970*, 650.

⁸ <http://www.caabu.org/about/history>.

⁹ 'Centurion tanks for Israel', Minute by J. E. Powell-Jones, 20 Oct. 1953, TNA, FO 371/104227/E 1192/319.

¹⁰ Minute by Nutting, 7 March 1955, TNA, FO 371/115558/V 1192/137; 'Brief for Minister of State: Centurion tanks for Israel', Minute by C. A. E. Shuckburgh, 4 July 1955, TNA, FO 371/115564/V 1192/294.

¹¹ Levey, 'Anglo-Israeli strategic relations', 787.

¹² Minute by S. L. Egerton, 14 May 1970, TNA, FCO 17/1303.

¹³ For accounts of 'collusion', see Bar-On, 'Lies or self-delusion?', 199-211; Shlaim, 'The Protocol of Sèvres', 119-43.

¹⁴ Ministry of Defence to Allied Forces Headquarters, 1 Nov. 1956, TNA, AIR 8/1940.

¹⁵ **Dayan**, *Story of My Life*, 161.

¹⁶ Shlaim, 'Israel, the Great Powers, and the Middle East Crisis of 1958', 185-8; Levey, *Israel and the Western Powers*, 112, 115.

¹⁷ Tal, 'Seizing opportunities: Israel and the 1958 crisis in the Middle East', 150-1.

¹⁸ Levey, *Israel and the Western Powers*, 110.

¹⁹ Almog, 'The end of an era: The crisis of 1958 and the Anglo-Israeli relationship', 61, 67.

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- ²⁰ Telegram from the Foreign Office to Paris, 5 Dec. 1958, TNA, FO 371/133859/V 1194/326.
- ²¹ Telegram from Tel Aviv to the Foreign Office, No. 620, 3 Oct. 1958, TNA, FO 371/133858/V 1194/248.
- ²² ‘Tanks for Israel’, Minute by J. G. S. Beith, 22 July 1960, TNA, FO 371/151240/VR 1192/132.
- ²³ Brief for meeting of ministerial committee on strategic exports, November 9, 1961, Eastern Department, 8 Nov. 1961, TNA, FO 371/157796/ER 1192/79/G.
- ²⁴ Phythian, *The Politics of British Arms*, 191; Telegram from the Foreign Office to Tel Aviv, No. 394, 10 Sept. 1964, TNA, FO 371/175832/ER 1192/117.
- ²⁵ Record of a conversation the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Eshkol, at No. 10 Downing Street, 25 March 1965, TNA, PREM 13/2174.
- ²⁶ Phythian, *The Politics of British Arms*, 193.
- ²⁷ *The Times*, 7 June 1967.
- ²⁸ Hammel, *Six Days in June*, 165-279.
- ²⁹ Phythian, *The Politics of British Arms*, 195.
- ³⁰ Gat, *In Search of a Peace Settlement*, 17-18.
- ³¹ See Yergin, *The Prize*, 555.
- ³² Cabinet conclusions, 8 June 1967, CC(67) 37th conclusions, TNA, CAB 128/42, Part 2.
- ³³ Bregman, *Israel’s Wars*, 93-5. See also Glassman, *Arms for the Arabs*, 66.
- ³⁴ These hostilities culminated in President Nasser’s launching of his ‘war of attrition’ in March 1969 (Gat, *In Search of a Peace Settlement*, 4).
- ³⁵ Minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 7 Nov. 1968, TNA, CAB 148/35 OPD (68) 20th meeting.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ Minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 13 Nov. 1968, TNA, CAB 148/35 OPD (68) 21st meeting.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Letter from Crawford to G. G. Arthur, 4 March 1969, TNA, FCO 17/913.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Letter from Falle to Arthur, 31 March 1969, TNA, FCO 17/915.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 1 May 1969, TNA, CAB 148/91 OPD (69) 6th meeting.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Golani, *Israel in Search of a War*, 196.

⁵³ Minute from Macmillan to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 2 June 1961, TNA, PREM 11/3399.

⁵⁴ Letter from J. G. S. Beith to R. S. Scrivener, 31 Oct. 1963, TNA, FO 371/170579/ER 1241/29/G.

⁵⁵ 'German/Israel co-operation in the nuclear field', Minute by C. McLean, 9 Nov. 1964, TNA, FO 371/175844/ER 1241/35.

⁵⁶ Letter from H. D. V. Pakenham to A. C. Goodison, 19 Jan. 1964, TNA, FO 371/180901/ER 1241/3/G.

⁵⁷ Letter from Goodison to D. Arkell, 15 Aug. 1966, TNA, FO 371 186864/ER 1241/7/G.

⁵⁸ Minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 1 May 1969, TNA, CAB 148/91 OPD (69) 6th meeting.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Volume Three*, 514 (diary citation from 11 June 1969). Within the confines of his diary, Crossman, who had the reputation of being a pro-Zionist, confessed that 'We were trying to get the best of both worlds, to placate the Arabs by postponing the decision and keep the Israelis tagging along' (ibid).

⁶¹ Initiated in April 1969, the talks, involving Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union, sought to bring about a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict (see 'The four power talks on the Middle East, 3 April 1969-9 September 1971', Foreign and Commonwealth Research Department paper, TNA, FCO 51/357).

⁶² Record of a meeting between the Prime Minister and Mrs. Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel at No. 10 Downing Street at 4.30 p.m. on 11 June 1969, TNA, PREM 13/2736.

⁶³ Ziegler, *Wilson*, 387-8.

⁶⁴ Mrs Meir had earlier told Michael Stewart that ‘The United Kingdom’s participation in the four power talks already had negative consequences for Israel, and Israel only. The Soviet Union would not send one less bullet to the Arabs’ (Record of a conversation between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Prime Minister of Israel held at the Commonwealth Office on Monday 13 June 1969 noon, TNA, PREM 13/2736).

⁶⁵ Record of a meeting between the Secretary of State for Defence and H.E. Mrs. Golda Meir, 13 June 1969, TNA, PREM 13/2736.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Record of a meeting between the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Mrs Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel at 10 Downing Street at 12.45 p.m. on Tuesday, 17 June 1969, TNA, PREM 13/2736.

⁶⁸ Note by Harold Wilson, 23 June 1969, of a meeting with Golda Meir in Eastbourne, TNA, PREM 13/2736.

⁶⁹ Letter from Barnes to Stewart, 27 Aug. 1969, TNA, PREM 13/3329.

⁷⁰ ‘Chieftain tanks for Israel’, Minute by Acland, 4 Sept. 1969, TNA, PREM 13/3329.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Minute from Roberts to the Secretary of State, 5 Sept. 1969, TNA, PREM 13/3329.

⁷⁵ For instance, the Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdul Mun'im al-Rifai, had impressed upon Stewart his hope that Britain would not make any substantial arms deliveries to Israel, referring especially to Chieftain tanks (Record of a conversation between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Secretary and the Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Secretary of State’s room at the Waldorf Hotel, New York, 19 Sept. 1969, TNA, FCO 17/811).

⁷⁶ ‘Chieftain tanks’, minute to the Prime Minister, 19 Sept. 1969, TNA, PREM 13/3329.

⁷⁷ Minutes of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 15 Oct. 1969, TNA, CAB 148/91 OPD (69) 16th meeting.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Volume Three*, 685 (diary citation from 15 Oct. 1969).

⁸³ Minutes of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 16 Oct. 1969, OPD(69), 17th meeting, TNA, PREM 13/3329.

⁸⁴ Telegram from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to Tel Aviv, No. 396, 17 Oct. 1969, TNA, PREM 13/3329.

⁸⁵ Telegram from Tel Aviv to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, No. 742, 3 Nov. 1969, TNA, PREM 13/3329.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Minutes of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 4 Nov. 1969, TNA, CAB 148/91 OPD (69) 20th meeting.

⁸⁸ ‘Anglo-Libyan relations’, Foreign and Commonwealth Office note for Wilson, Nov. 1969, in Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth, 1964-1971: Part I*, 441.

⁸⁹ Minutes of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 4 Nov. 1969, TNA, CAB 148/91 OPD (69) 20th meeting.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1964-7*, 725 (diary citation from 4 Nov. 1969).

⁹² Letter from Stewart to Eban, 10 Nov. 1969, TNA, PREM 13/3329.

⁹³ Telegram from Tel Aviv to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, No. 806, 19 Nov. 1969, TNA, PREM 13/3329. Eban also complained that ‘Arab governments have now been virtually told that they may sometimes have a strong influence, amounting in this case to something like a veto, over a sovereign decision by the British government’ (ibid).

⁹⁴ Telegram from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to Tel Aviv, No. 457, 10 Nov. 1969, TNA, PREM 13/3329.

⁹⁵ Minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 25 March 1970, TNA, CAB 148/110 OPD(70) 9th meeting.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Letter from Graham to P. J. S. Moon, 31 Dec. 1970, TNA, FCO 17/1006.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Telegram from Foreign and Commonwealth Office to Tel Aviv, No. 457, 10 Nov. 1969, TNA, PREM 13/3329.

¹⁰⁰ Minute by S. L. Egerton, 14 May 1970, TNA, FCO 17/1303.

¹⁰¹ Telegram from Foreign and Commonwealth Office to Tel Aviv, No. 293, 12 June 1970, TNA, FCO 17/1303.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Khadduri, *International Documents on Palestine: Volume 4: 1970*, pp. 359-62. In 1969, Harold Wilson had told Golda Meir that 'Although the other side had been strongly pro-Israeli at the time of Suez they did appear now to be moving slightly more towards the Arabs' (Record of conversation between the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Mrs. Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel at No. 10 Downing Street at 12.45 p.m. on Tuesday 17 June 1969, TNA, PREM 13/2736).

¹⁰⁴ Hughes, 'Britain, the Transatlantic Alliance, and the Arab-Israeli War of 1973', 11.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from P. R. H. Wright to M. A. Holding, 11 Nov. 1970; Letter from R. A. Beaumont to R. M. Evans, 11 Nov. 1970, TNA, FCO 17/1211.

¹⁰⁶ Hughes, 'Britain, the Transatlantic Alliance, and the Arab-Israeli War', 11.

¹⁰⁷ 'Visit of the Prime Minister to Washington, 17-18 December 1970: Arab-Israel dispute', Brief by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 30 Nov. 1970, TNA, FCO 17/1211. A dissenting voice had been sounded by the British Ambassador in Tel Aviv, E. J. W. Barnes, who pointed out not only that had Britain an economic stake in Israel, but also the Americans were 'pretty important in our scheme of things' (Letter from Barnes to Sir Philip Adams, 18 Nov. 1970, TNA, FCO 17/1211).

¹⁰⁸ 'Centurions tanks for Israel', Minute from Douglas-Home to the Prime Minister, PM/70/133, 19 Nov. 1970, TNA, PREM 15/497.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Miller, *Inglorious Disarray*, 83; Carrington, *Reflect of Things Past*, 334-47.

¹¹¹ 'Centurion Tanks for Israel', Minute from Carrington to the Prime Minister, MO 26/9/4, 25 Nov. 1970, TNA, PREM 15/497.

¹¹² 'Centurion tanks for Israel', Minute from Davies to the Prime Minister, 25 Nov. 1970, TNA, PREM 15/497.

¹¹³ 'Centurion tanks for Israel', Minute from Barbour to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 27 Nov. 1970, TNA, PREM 13/497.

¹¹⁴ Letter from Moon to Graham, 7 Dec. 1970, TNA, PREM 15/497.

¹¹⁵ Letter from Moon to Graham, 3 Jan. 1971, TNA, PREM 15/497.

¹¹⁶ ‘Policy for supply of British military equipment to Israel and the Arab States’, Foreign Office memorandum, 10 Feb. 1971, TNA, CAB 148/116 DOP(71)12.

¹¹⁷ ‘Policy for supply of British military equipment to Israel and the Arab States’, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 22 Feb. 1971, TNA, CAB 148/116 DOP(71)12.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 5 March 1971, TNA, CAB 148/115 DOP(71)7th meeting.

¹²⁰ Cabinet conclusions, 6 June 1967, CC(67) 36th conclusions, TNA, CAB 128/42, Part 2.

¹²¹ Cabinet conclusions, 8 June 1967, CC(67) 37th conclusions, TNA, CAB 128/42, Part 2.

¹²² Cabinet conclusions, minute 2: confidential annex, CM(73) 48th conclusions, 18 Oct. 1973, TNA, CAB 128/53.

¹²³ Letter from Balniel to Ian Gilmour, 29 Oct. 1973, TNA, FCO 93/291.

¹²⁴ Record of a meeting between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Israel Ambassador at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Monday 15 October at 4.15pm, TNA, FCO 93/265.

¹²⁵ *The Times*, 25 October 1973.

¹²⁶ Telegram from Washington to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, No. 3208, 13 Oct. 1973, TNA, FCO 93/260.

¹²⁷ The Israeli Prime Minister, Golda Meir, told Nixon that the decision to assure the flow of US military materiel would have a ‘great beneficial influence on our fighting capability’ (Letter from Simcha Dinitz to Nixon enclosing a message from Gold Meir, 10 Oct. 1973, United States National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), Nixon Presidential Materials, National Security Council Files: Henry A. Kissinger (HAK) Office Files, Country Files – Middle East, Box 136). During their meeting on 1 November, Mrs Meir expressed her appreciation for American assistance: ‘There were days and hours when we needed a friend and you came right in. You don’t know what your airlift means to us’ (*ibid.*, Memorandum of conversation, 1 Nov. 1973).

¹²⁸ Telegram from American Embassy, London, to Secretary of State, No. 12022, 16 Oct. 1973, NARA, RG 59, Electronic Telegrams, 1/1/1973 - 12/31/1973.

¹²⁹ Telegram from American Embassy, London, to Secretary of State, No. 11901, 25 Oct. 1973, NARA, RG 59, Electronic Telegrams, 1/1/1973 - 12/31/1973.

¹³⁰ 'Middle East arms embargo', Draft memorandum by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, 27 Nov. 1973, TNA, CAB 148/138 DOP(SE)12.

¹³¹ 'Policy on arms sales to the Middle East', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 17 Dec. 1973, TNA, CAB 148/131 DOP(73)76.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 19 Dec. 1973, TNA, CAB 148/129 DOP(73)24th meeting.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ 'Arms embargo', Minute by Parsons, 19 Dec. 1973, TNA, FCO 93/294. Even before the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Parsons had asserted that, 'without being preposterously pro-Arab', the British would protect their own interests in the Arab world (Louis, 'Legacy of the Balfour Declaration: Palestine, 1967-73', 111).

¹³⁷ Shwadran, *Middle East Oil: Issues and Problems*, 72; Shwadran, *Middle East Oil Crises since 1973*, 49; Venn, *Oil Crisis*, 121; Yergin, *The Prize*, 623; Pietrantonio, 'The year that never was', 169.

¹³⁸ Letter from Wright to Douglas-Home, 7 Nov. 1973, TNA, FCO 93/285.

¹³⁹ The US decision at the end of 1968 to supply Israel with F-4 Phantom aircraft signified an enhanced American commitment to Israeli security, as well as a preparedness to supply Israel with more sophisticated weapons than those possessed by its Arab foes (Rodman, 'Phantom Fracas', 130-44).

¹⁴⁰ 'Arab attitudes and British economic interests in the Middle East', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 7 July 1967, C(67)123, TNA, CAB 129/132.

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