BRITAIN'S POST-WAR DEFENCE POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ITS IMPACT ON TURKEY, 1945-50

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After the Second World War, the origins and implication of Britain's policy for securing her interests in the Middle East was designed to promote a regional perspective. Although the Middle East was still largely under British control, except for a decreasing French presence in Syria and Lebanon, Britain's position in the region was beginning to be threatened by growing Arab nationalism and Soviet intentions. Britain's security objectives in the Middle East can be traced to Britain's growing conviction, after the War, that a regional defence pact offered the best means of assuring the security of the region. Britain already enjoyed a considerable military role in the region, thanks to her bases in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Cyprus, Libya, Aden and Palestine, and she also enjoyed established bilateral defence arrangements with several local states, which she was anxious to strengthen and maintain. Moreover, in order to remain a world power, it would be necessary for Britain to continue to exercise 'political predominance' in the Middle East and 'overriding responsibility' for its defence. The concept of a regional defence pact which would involve Britain in multilateral arrangements with local states, and possibly with other major Powers, was something new, and the change in British thinking can be attributed to several factors. The first was Britain's new perception of the Soviet Union as the major threat to the security of the Middle East. After the War, Soviet policy towards the Middle East seemed to be aimed at end-

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ing British hegemony, preventing the United States taking over Britain's role and thereby allowing the Soviets to take control of the region as soon as conditions would allow. This led to consideration as to whether the objective of preventing the Middle East from falling under Soviet domination would be promoted by the conclusion of a Middle East pact, or alternatively by some other and new form of treaty or agreements.[1]

After the Second World War the Soviets had seemingly tried to force their way into the Middle East by direct pressure on the 'northern tier' countries, Turkey and Iran. As early as November 1940, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Molotov, in the course of secret negotiations for a projected Soviet-German-Italian-Japanese treaty, had stated that the Soviet Union would agree to such a treaty subject to certain conditions, one of which was that 'the area south of Batum and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf [i.e. Turkey, Iran, Iraq] should be recognised as the centre of the aspirations of the Soviet Union.' At the end of the war the Soviet Union renewed its attempts to realise these 'aspirations.'[2]

In August 1941, British and Russian forces had occupied Iran to provide a route for transport of military supplies to Russia, but in January 1942, Britain and Russia agreed with the Iranian government that they would withdraw their forces from Iran within six months after the end of the war. The British evacuated their forces in January 1946, but Russian troops remained in the north of Iran and gave aid to separatist movements seeking independence from Iran. In December 1945, the Soviets supported the establishment of an autonomous government in the Soviet-controlled province of Azerbaijan. Soon afterward an independent Kurdish republic was set up under Soviet auspices in Mahabad.[3]

1Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds.), Suez 1956: The Crisis and Its Consequences (Oxford, 1989), pp.19-29.

2Bruce R. Kuniholm, The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece (Princeton, 1980), pp.25, 130-211, 303-342, 383-399. Wm. Roger Louis, The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism (Oxford, 1984), pp.53-102. J. C. Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record, 1914-1956, Vol. II (Princeton, 1956), pp.228-231.

3Ibid. Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.232-234, 261-264, 280-281. For Iran see also Rouhollah Ramazani, Iran's Foreign Policy, 1941-1973 (Charlottsville, 1975).

In January 1946, the Iranian government appealed to the United Nations to get the Russians to withdraw their forces, but the appeal came to naught. However, the United States encouraged Iran to resist Soviet pressures and warned the Soviet Union against further aggressive actions. On March 6, 1946, the United States, in a note to Moscow, stated that Russia's action was a violation of the Anglo-Iranian-Soviet agreement of 1942, and that the United States "cannot remain indifferent." The United States requested immediate withdrawal of Soviet forces from Iran. Meanwhile, the Iranian Prime Minister, Qawam, went to Moscow in an attempt to negotiate a solution. On April 4, in return for a withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iran, Qawam agreed to give Russia oil concessions in the north of Iran, to offer portfolios in his cabinet to the communists, and to withdraw Iran's complaint from the United Nations Security Council's agenda. Soviet forces left Iran on 9 May 1946, more than two months after the stipulated deadline. However, the Iranian parliament (Majlis) rejected the oil agreement with the Soviet Union in October 1947, by which time the Iranian government had reasserted its sovereignty over Azerbaijan and Mahabad, and thus Iran's territorial integrity and political sovereignty had been fully restored.[4]

As to Turkey, the Soviets had meanwhile claimed the Turkish provinces of Kars and Ardahan, which the Turks had lost in 1878 and recovered in 1919, and pressed for a revision of the 1936 Montreux Straits Convention, which had allowed Turkey to remilitarize the Straits, ban enemy ships when at war, or if she felt threatened; and conceded the passage of foreign ships at her discretion. In March 1945, the Soviets denounced the Soviet-Turkish Treaty of Friendship and Non-aggression, which had originally been concluded in 1925 and which had repeatedly been renewed. From June 1945 on, the Soviets insisted upon four conditions for the renewal of the treaty, which were (1) the return to the Soviet Union of Kars and Ardahan; (2) the granting of military bases at the Straits; (3) a re-

4Ibid.

vision of the Montreux Straits Convention; and (4) a revision of the Thracian boundary in favour of communist-dominated Bulgaria. The first official demand for a revision of the Montreux Convention was made by the Soviets to the United States and Britain in June 1943, and the matter was discussed by the British, American and Soviet governments at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945. At Potsdam the Soviets obtained American and British consent to changing the convention without specification of the changes. In the event, the Soviets demanded that the Straits should come under the joint control of Turkey and the other Black Sea Powers, and that defence of the Straits should be jointly organized by Turkey and Russia. As a result, Turkey's security objectives after the Second World War were primarily affected by Soviet intentions.[5]

After the war Soviet intentions in Eastern and Central Europe served to heighten the tensions between the Soviet Union and the West. The development of the Cold War between the West and the Soviet Union had coincided with signs that Britain was facing increasing difficulties in maintaining her imperial or 'world' role. After the war Britain entered into a prolonged economic and financial crisis and had more than £3 billion of foreign debt. After the termination of American Lend-Lease in September 1945, the British government negotiated a loan with the United States for $3.75 billion. One of the conditions of the loan was Britain's agreement to the convertibility of sterling into dollars, set for July 1947. Although this was seen by the British Treasury as Washington's effort to dismantle the

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5Louis, British Empire..., pp.53-102. Kuniholm, Origins of the Cold War..., pp.6-72, 244-282, 342-383, 410-433. Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.142-143, 268-271.

For Turkey's search for security after the Second World War, see E. Athanassopoulou, 'Western Defence Developments and Turkey's Search for Security in 1948', Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 32, No.2, April 1996, pp.77-108.

For the Soviet demans see Necmettin Sadak,'Turkey Faces the Soviets', Foreign Affairs, vol.27 (1949), pp.458-461; Feridun Cemal Erkin, Türk-Soviyet İlişkileri ve Boğazlar Meselesi (Ankara 1968), pp.246-318, and Kamuran Gürün, Türk-Sovyet İlişkileri, 1920-1953 (Ankara, 1991), pp.277-311.

The Montreux Convention replaced the agreement on the Dardanelles and the Straits of the Bosphorous, appended to the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. It was signed by Britain, France, the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, Australia, Japan, and Turkey, and gave Turkey the right to remilitarize the Straits, and ban enemy ships when at war, or if it felt threatened, to allow the passage of foreign ships at its discretion. See Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.197-203. Also see, Ritchie Ovendale, The Middle East since 1914 (London, 1992), p.204.

sterling area, comprising the British Commonwealth, excluding Canada and Newfoundland, together with certain Middle Eastern countries, the British government was inclined to welcome convertibility as a sign of the strength of sterling. However, the British government overestimated its financial strength and faced a sterling crisis in 1947.[6]

Economic and financial crises in 1946-1947 forced the British government to reduce its defence expenditure and to cut some of its overseas responsibilities. In order to relieve its economic position, the British government decided to withdraw from India and Palestine. British rule in India came to an end in August 1947. In January 1948, Burma and Ceylon received their independence from Britain.. The following May, the British evacuated Palestine. Earlier, in 1946, Clement Attlee, the British Prime Minister, had even proposed withdrawing from the Middle East to Africa in order to avoid both the cost of a Middle East commitment and a possible conflict with the Soviets. However, Attlee was forced to give up his plan in January 1947 when the Chiefs of Staff threatened to resign. Indeed, the withdrawal from India enhanced the importance of the Middle East, which replaced India as the centrepiece of British strategy, and as the basis for Britain's imperial overseas role.[7]

Despite the termination of her presence in the Indian sub-continent, Burma, and Palestine, Britain still found herself burdened with commitments which she was increasingly unable to sustain, militarily or financially. One of the first crises for Britain arose on the northern fringes of the Middle East, where, since the end of the Second World War, she had been attempting to prop up the government of Greece in the face of armed communist subversion, and to provide military and financial aid to Turkey, to

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6David Reynolds, Britannia Overruled (London, 1991), pp.145-179. F. S. Northedge, Descent from Power: British Foreign Policy,1945-1973 (London, 1974), pp.38-67. Louis, British Empire..., pp.3-50. David Sanders, Losing an Empires, Finding a Role: British Foreign Policy Since 1945 (London, 1990), pp.46-49.

Lend-Lease aid, which began in March 1941 before the United States entered to the Second World War, allowed President Roosevelt to provide material aid to Allied states, particularly to Britain, without the need for repayment. It was extended to the USSR in November 1941. Aid was for war purposes and ended abruptly with the defeat of Japan in September 1945. See John W. Young, Cold War and Detente, 1941-1991 (London, 1993), p.177.

7Ibid.

assist the latter country in resisting Soviet pressure. At stake, potentially, was the security of Britain's whole position in the Middle East, but by 1947 it had become clear that Britain's economically straitened position in the post-war era would make it impossible for her to maintain her support for Greece and Turkey. The British government therefore referred the problems of Greece and Turkey to the United States, and in February 1947, in a note to Washington, warned that Britain was no longer in a position to give aid to Turkey and Greece.[8]

Britain's decision to terminate her aid to Turkey and Greece by the end of March 1947 forced the United States to act quickly. The United States was convinced that lack of action would result in a dangerous extension of Soviet power southward, where Britain's decision to withdraw her support from Greece and Turkey threatened to create a power vacuum. On March 12, President Truman, in a message to Congress which was later to be known as the Truman Doctrine, stated that the United States would 'support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure', and asked Congress for authority to provide assistance to Greece and Turkey in the amount of $400 million and to detail civilian and military personnel to both countries to assist and supervise the implementation of the aid programme.[9]

8Kuniholm, Origins of the Cold War..., pp.410-433. Louis, British Empire..., pp.53-102. Wm. Roger Louis and Hedley Bull (eds.), The Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations since 1945 (New York, 1986), Passim.

In the event of Soviet aggression against Turkey, Britain was bound, under the Anglo-French-Turkish Treaty of October 13th 1939, to go to the assistance of Turkey. Article 1 of the treaty reads: 'In the event of Turkey being involved in hostilities with a European Power in consequence of aggression by that power against Turkey, France and the United Kingdom will cooperate effectively with Turkey and will lend her all aid and assistance in their powers.' For the full text of the Anglo-French-Turkish Treaty of 1939, See Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.226-228.

The Greek government, which was the royalist government installed by Britain in 1944, was experiencing attacks from communist-led guerillas. For further information about Greek civil war, see Kuniholm, Origins of the Cold War..., pp.73-130, 399-433.

9Kuniholm, Origins of the Cold War..., pp.410-433. Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.273-275. Sanders, Losing an Empire..., pp.59-60. Michael J. Lacey (ed.), The Truman Presidency (Cambridge, 1989), pp.205-234, 299-338. For more detailed informations about U.S. policy toward Greece and Turkey, see Bruce R. Kuniholm, The Near East Connection: Greece and Turkey in the Reconstruction and Security of Europe, 1946-1952 (Massachusetts, 1984).

By 1947 the United States had already adopted a policy of 'containment' to deal with the problem of Soviet communist expansion. The Truman administration had been strongly influenced by the reports of diplomat George Kennan, who was a counsellor at the American Embassy in Moscow. Kennan had expressed his opinion of Russian intentions and how to deal with them. Kennan also wrote in 1947, under the pseudonym of 'X', an article entitled 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct' published in Foreign Affairs, in which he suggested a patient, but firm, long-term policy of resisting Soviet expansionism. See X [George F. Kennan], 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct', Foreign Affairs, 25 (July 1947), pp. 566-582. Also see George F. Kennan, Memoirs, 1925-1950 (Boston, 1967), pp.354-367.

The Truman Doctrine was but one manifestation of an emerging United States strategy of 'containing' communism and Soviet power worldwide. After the war, European recovery from the effects of the war had been slow. Economic difficulties that the European countries faced after the war had created a potential opportunity for communism which, with Russian support, had already taken over in Eastern Europe and threatened to take over in Western Europe as well, where corruption, inefficiency and poverty were still widespread. These created opportunities for communist agitation by the exploitation of hardship, chaos and discontent. In June 1947, in a speech at Harvard University, George Marshall, the United States' Secretary of State, proposed an aid programme for Western European countries, and for others if they wished to join. This would revitalize the economies of the European countries and strengthen them to resist communism.[10] The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan formed the main instruments of economic containment against Soviet communist expansion. The instrument of military containment was the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was formed in April 1949 by Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States.[11] The Truman administration, which had been conducting a general review of the situation created by the cold war in Europe and elsewhere, translated containment into a policy of military alliances and American bases abroad to contain the Soviet Union militarily. In April 1950, a secret National Security Council (NSC) study called NSC-68 called for 'a massive projection of American military power abroad' in the fight against communist expan-

10Lacey (ed.), Truman Presidency..., pp.205-234, 299-338. Sanders, Losing an Empire..., pp.59-60. For more detailed study of the Marshall Plan, see Michael J. Hogan, The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952 (Cambridge, 1987).

11For more detailed study of NATO, see Joseph Smith (ed.), The Origins of NATO (Exeter, 1990).

NATO was extended to Turkey and Greece in 1952, West Germany in 1955 and Spain in 1982. For the text of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), see Margaret Carlyle (ed.), Documents on International Affairs, 1949-1950 (London, 1953), pp.257-260.

sionism. The outbreak of war in Korea in June 1950 only confirmed the views expressed in NSC-68.[12]

For present purposes, what matters is what the outbreak of the Cold War, and the United States' assumption of the role of leader of the anti-communist camp, meant for Britain's position in the Middle East. This position, built up over many decades of successful imperialism, comprised a complex of interlocking military, economic and political interests. It consisted of militarily, bases and base rights, quantities and types of ground, air and naval forces normally maintained in the area, and special relationships with indigenous military establishments; economically, British investments in the area (oil fields, oil refineries, public utilities, banks and private industry), subsidies to local governments and British trade with the area; politically, special treaty relationships, the presence of British political advisers and administrators, and British influence on local governments. After the war, the British government continued to sustain an imperial policy in the Middle East, but in so doing, risked tensions with the United States, where there was an anti-colonial and anti-imperial strain in official thinking.[13] Moreover, Britain's precarious economic position made her commitments in the Middle East difficult to sustain. Wartime expenditure and the weakness of the pound restricted the amount that Britain could devote to the maintenance of troops and bases, and to economic and military aid for the Middle Eastern countries. But, the security of the region remained a paramount British concern, since it was strategically a focal point of communications, a source of oil, a shield to Africa and the Indian Ocean and an irreplaceable offensive base against the Soviet Union. Economically it was, owing to oil and cotton, essential to Britain's recovery.[14]

12FRUS, 1950, Vol. I, pp. 234-292. Sanders, Losing an Empire..., pp.61-63. For discussion of NSC 68, see John Gaddis, 'NSC 68 and the problem of Ends and Means', International Security, Spring 1980, pp. 164-170, and Paul Nitze, 'The Development of NSC 68', International Security, Spring 1980, pp. 170-176.

13For American anti-colonialism and the dissolution of the British Empire, see Wm.Roger Louis and Hedley Bull (eds.), Special Relationship..., pp. 261-285. Also see John Darwin, Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World (London, 1988), and Wm. Roger Louis, 'American Anti-Colonialism and the Dissolution of the British Empire', International Affairs, Vol. 61 (1985).

14CAB129/37 C.P.(49)209, 19 October 1949.

In June 1946, the Chiefs of Staff concluded that it was of great strategic importance to hold the Middle East in order:

a) not to prejudice the security of the United Kingdom, the other main support of areas of the Commonwealth and the communications between them;

b) to retain the necessary air bases from which to assume the offensive and attack areas vital to the enemy [the Soviet Union];

c) to secure [Britain's] essential oil supplies;

d) to deny to Russia the means of, firstly, securing her most vulnerable flank and, secondly, of establishing a formidable base from which to extend aggression towards [Britain's] main support areas and their communications.[15]

In March 1949, according to the Joint Planning Staff, Britain's major strategic requirements in the Middle East were:

a) an air base for the strategic air force;

b) a main base in Egypt;

c) a friendly Egypt and the cooperation of certain countries (Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iran) to the north-east of Egypt so that Britain (and Allies) would be able to deploy her forces to give the necessary depth the the defence of the Egyptian base and to secure the Middle East oil supplies.[16]

The main object of the British government was therefore that the Middle East should be stable, prosperous and friendly, and that Britain

15CAB21/2086 DO(46) 80, 18 June 1946.
16DEFE4/20 JP(49)29 (Final), 30 March 1949. CAB129/37 CP(49)209, 19 October 1949.

should have defence arrangements with some or all Middle East countries which would afford the best prospect of being able to deny as much as possible of the Middle East to an enemy in time of war. This was the established policy of the Labour government, which had accepted that the security of the Middle East was vital to the security of the United Kingdom.[17]

However, after the War, Britain faced new local threats to her dominance in the Middle East, including pressure for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine and emerging nationalist movements in the Arab countries, which demanded removal of the British forces from their countries and sought independence from British influence. Ernest Bevin, the Labour Foreign Secretary, tried to counter these threats with the concept of cooperation through 'equal partnership'. Britain would provide aid and promote economic and social developments, encouraging Middle Eastern states to continue their military and economic alliances with Britain. A regional defence pact was another element of Bevin's Middle East plans. Bevin's idea was 'interlocking pacts' that would allow Britain to defend her interests with the full cooperation of the Middle East states. The ultimate aim of the Labour government's policy towards Middle East countries was the formation of a strong Arab bloc or federation, pledged to mutual assistance for the defence of the Middle East and looking to Britain for the direction of its strategy and the provision of resources. Moreover, if Britain was to continue as paramount power in the Middle East, it would mean that Egypt would have to remain under British control. If Egypt were to go out of British control, the other Arab States might be expected to follow.[18]

17Ibid.

18CAB129/37 CP(49)209, 19 October 1949. Louis, British Empire..., pp. 3-50. David R. Devereux, The Formulation of British Defence Policy Towards the Middle East, 1948-56 (London, 1990), p.43. Ann Deighton (ed.), Britain and the First Cold War (London, 1990), pp.254-256. Alan Bullock, Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary (Oxford, 1985), passim.

One of Britain's agencies for bringing about improved social and economic conditions and for coordinating Britain's political, strategic and economic interests was the British Middle East Office (BMEO), which was set up in 1945. Its tasks were to give expert guidance to Middle East countries in economic and social matters, to make recommendations on political questions affecting the Middle East as a whole. However, Britain had neither the money nor the manpower to make this agency an effective institution. Also, the Arabs saw it as economic imperialism. See John Zametica (ed.), British Officials and British Foreign Policy, 1945-50 (Leicester, 1990), pp.228-249.

Britain already had treaties of alliance with Egypt (expiring in 1956), Iraq (expiring in 1957 with right of review in 1952), and Transjordan (expiring in 1968). These treaties provided for the stationing of certain minimum forces in peacetime, the right of re-entry in an apprehended emergency and the provision of facilities in wartime.[19]

Under the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, Britain was entitled to maintain 10,000 troops and 400 pilots (with supporting personnel) in the Suez Canal base until both parties agreed that the Egyptian Army could defend the area by itself. Moreover, in the event of war, Britain had the right of reoccupation and the unrestricted use of Egyptian roads, ports and airfields. This agreement, and the colonial status that it implied, had become anathema to Egyptian public opinion after the war. Successive Egyptian governments demanded immediate and complete evacuation of British troops from Egypt and the Sudan, and the unification of Egypt and the Sudan under the Egyptian crown when the war ended.[20]

In December 1945, in response to an Egyptian request, the British government agreed to open negotiations for revision of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. In January 1946, Bevin informed the Cabinet that he would try to revise the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty, 'should be bilateral in character, but should be drafted so as to fit into a regional defence system for the Middle East as a whole (such as I hope to bring about in due course.'[21] In the same year, Britain and Egypt reached an agreement, which would have provided, inter alia, for the replacement of the 1936 Treaty by

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19For the texts of these treaties, see Hurewitz,Diplomacy..., pp.178-181, 203-211.

20Louis, British Empire..., pp.226-265. Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.203-211.

Since 1899, the Sudan had been controlled through an Anglo-Egyptian Condominium Agreement. Cairo cited plausible historical, ethnic, and cultural reasons for union under the Egyptian crown, but her strongest argument was strategic; the upper reaches of the Nile should not be controlled by another nation. Standing steadfastly upon principle, London insisted that Sudanese should enjoy the right of self-determination. See Walter S. Poole, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, Vol. IV, 1950-52 (Washington, 1980), p.333.

21CAB129/6 CP(46)17, 17 January 1946. These thoughts formed the origins of the Middle East Command which Egypt rejected in 1951. The British concept of a Middle East Command, originally put forward by Bevin, was a regional security system including extra-regional members such as the United States, France as well as Turkey, which Bevin hoped would overcome Egyptian fears. See Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds.), Suez 1956..., pp.19-29.

a new Treaty of Alliance, and for the evacuation of all British forces from Egypt within a period of three years, by September 1949. Also, a joint Anglo-Egyptian Defence Board would have been set up to study the defence of Egypt. However, owing to a difference of interpretation of a protocol concerning the status of the Sudan, the agreement was never signed. The Egyptians wanted the Sudan united with Egypt, whereas the British insisted on self-determination for the Sudan. After 1946 further negotiations for treaty revision proved unsuccessful. In July 1947, Egypt referred the question to the United Nations Security Council, which could not reach any decision and suspended discussion of the dispute in September 1947. Britain continued to remain in Egypt and to maintain and build up her base in the Suez Canal Zone, justifying this under the 1936 Treaty. By 1950 Bevin came to the conclusion that it was impossible to bring Egypt into a regional defence organization run by Britain. As a result, he made modifications to the plan to include the United States, France as well as Turkey with the hope of attracting Egyptian co-operation.[22]

However, although the 1936 Treaty remained in effect, Britain proceeded with the withdrawal plan as agreed and evacuated Cairo and Alexandria, which she had occupied during the war, before the agreed deadline of March 1947. Thereafter, British garrisons were confined to the Suez Canal Zone. Britain was by now planning to shift the centre of Middle East defence from Egypt to Palestine, but this plan was destroyed by the Arab-Israeli war in 1948. Palestine was strategically of the greatest importance to Britain since the defence of Egypt could only be conducted effectively against Russian attack from the north by holding Palestine. Palestine was also important because of the oil refineries and pipeline terminals in the country. However, the loss of Palestine in 1948 forced Britain to consider Cyrenaica (the eastern province of Libya) as an alternative to the military installations in Egypt and Palestine, which the British Chiefs of Staff con-

22CAB129/45 CP(51)95, 30 March 1951. PREM8/1432, Alignment of US-UK policy in the Middle East, 11 September 1951. Louis, British Empire..., pp.226-265. Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds.), Suez 1956..., pp.19-29. Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.259-261, 271-273.

templated only with reluctance. The strategic importance of Cyrenaica was dependant on the outcome of both the Egyptian treaty negotiations and the Palestine problem. If Britain could not obtain the facilities which she required in Egypt, Cyrenaica assumed vital strategic importance as a peacetime location for British forces and stores, and as a base from which Britain could rapidly deploy forces for the defence of Egypt. Nevertheless, the British government decided to stay on in the Canal Zone, since it concluded that Cyrenaica could afford an adjunct, but not an alternative to Egypt as the main base in the event of war.[23] In March 1949, the Joint Planning Staff concluded that in either the short term or the long term, Egypt was the only country in the Middle East where the resources in manpower, both skilled and unskilled, industries, communications, port facilities and airfields were adequate for the British base. The minimum requirements in Egypt were therefore the right to maintain in peacetime the minimum facilities needed for use and expansion on the outbreak of war, and the right of re-entry of Allied forces into Egypt on the threat of war.[24]

Britain also had a Treaty of Alliance with Iraq, signed in 1930, under which Britain enjoyed facilities in Iraq, including the right to maintain air bases at Habbania and Shaiba. It came into force on 3 October 1932, the date of Iraq's entry into the League of Nations, and was due to run for twenty-five years. However, either side was entitled to ask for its revision after October 1952. Although it provided for Iraq's membership in the League of Nations and for the termination of the British mandate, which was based on the decision of the Allied Supreme Council in San Remo in April 1920, the treaty was not popular in Iraq. The Iraqis resented Britain's retention of air bases in Iraq and the right to use Iraqi facilities for the transportation of troops and arms across Iraqi territory. They regarded these provisions as contraventions of their sovereignty. Since the Anglo-Iraqi clash of 1941, it had been strongly felt by the Iraqi public and suc-

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23CAB21/2086 JP(47)130, Report by the Joint Planning Staff, 26 September 1947. Louis, British Empire..., pp.226-265, 265-307.

24DEFE4/20 J.P.(49)29 Final, 30 March 1949. Wm.Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds.), Crisis and its.., pp.19-29.

cessive Iraqi governments that the 1930 treaty was 'unequal' and out of date. The abolition or revision of the 1930 treaty had therefore always been a major political aim of successive Iraqi governments. An attempt to put this policy into action was made by the Iraqi Prime Minister, Saleh Jabr, in January 1948 when, as a substitute for the 1930 treaty, he signed with Bevin a new treaty in Portsmouth. The Portsmouth Treaty retained a major British defence presence in Iraq, though it returned the British bases in Iraq to Iraqi ownership. It gave Britain the right to send troops to Iraq in the event of war or threat of war. It also provided for the training and equipping of the Iraqi army by Britain. However, the treaty was repudiated by Iraqi opinion and the government of Saleh Jabr was driven from office.[25]

The only Arab country that concluded a new treaty of alliance with Britain, by entering into what Bevin defined as an 'equal' partnership, was Transjordan in March 1948. The new agreement replaced the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty of 1946, which gave Transjordan its independence. In return, Britain retained air bases at Amman and Mafraq, undertook to defend Transjordan against external aggression, to train Transjordan's armed forces and to give subsides to the Arab Legion, which had been established by Britain in 1921 and administered by British officers, especially by General John Glubb since 1938, and played an active role during the Arab-Israeli war in 1948. Under the new treaty Britain retained the same rights and also agreed to establish a joint defence board responsible for external and strategic planning.[26]

With hindsight, it can be argued that it was not so much the attitude

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25Louis, British Empire..., pp.307-344. CAB129/68 C(54)181, Future Defence Arrangements with Iraq, 31 May 1954. Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.178-181.

26FO371/115759/VQ1051/199, Wright to Macmillan, 17 May 1955. CAB129/68 C(54)181, Future Defence Arrangements with Iraq, 31 May 1954. Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.296-299. Louis, British Empire..., pp.331-339. George Lenczowski, The Middle East in World Affairs, 4th edn. (London, 1980), pp.276, 474. John Zametica (ed.), British Officials.., pp.121-155.

Rashid Ali, who was pro-German and hoped to use German aid to reduce the British position in Iraq, organized a military coup and seized power in April 1941. However, in May British troops ousted Rashid Ali and restored pro-British Iraqi leaders, regent Abdul Ilah and Nuri Said, to power. See Lenczowski, Middle East..., pp.273-275.

of Arab governments as of Arab public opinion which threatened Britain's position, and that it was above all the Palestine problem which rendered that opinion hostile to Britain. In Palestine, Britain faced the dilemma that had been present ever since the Balfour Declaration was issued in November 1917. The Declaration had promised a Jewish 'national home' in Palestine, but had also promised to protect the existing rights of the Palestinian Arabs. However, the Arabs were adamantly opposed to any Jewish state in Palestine. Britain found herself in the unenviable position of seeking to reconcile the incompatible aims of the Jewish and Arab inhabitants of Palestine. In 1939, Britain was forced to issue a White Paper limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine. However, migration of Jews to Palestine continued, particularly after the Second World War. Conflicts broke out between Arabs and Jews. Britain tried to negotiate a settlement between the factions, but negotiations failed to achieve agreement. By the beginning of 1947, the British government realised that Britain could no longer support the cost of occupation. Therefore, in February 1947, Britain refered the Palestine problem to the United Nations. After considerable discussions, the recommendation of the United Nations special committee on Palestine calling for the partition of Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews was adopted by the General Assembly in November 1947. Britain abstained on the vote, while the United States and the Soviet Union supported the resolution. However, the Arabs rejected the partition plan. On 14 May 1948, Britain terminated the mandate over Palestine as previously announced. On the same day, the Jews proclaimed the independent state of Israel and the creation of a provisional government. Shortly afterwards, the United States extended de facto recognition to the new state, followed by the Soviet Union. On May 14, the armies of Egypt, Syria and other Arab states invaded the Jewish-held area of Palestine, but the new Israeli state defeated the Arab armies, and as a result in 1949 the Arab League states signed armistices with Israel. However, during the war over 500,000 Arabs were displaced from their home, which became a factor of continued Arab-Israeli dispute in the Middle East. The creation of the state of Israel and the subsequent fighting that broke out between the Jews and the Arabs left a

legacy of Arab suspicion of the West, since the Arabs blamed the Western Powers for the creation of Israel. They regarded the creation of Israel against their wishes as a major injustice and as an example of Western imperial colonisation. Britain and the United States were criticised as being largely responsible for the creation of Israel.[27]

Behind the reactions provoked by the Palestine issue lay the growth of Arab nationalism and unity. However, any movement towards Arab unity had to face, among other obstacles, the jealousy and distrust between Saudi Arabia and the Hashemite Royal Houses of Iraq and Transjordan; the fact that Syria and the Lebanon were republics; the existence of a separate dynasty in Egypt; and the varying degrees of political and economic development in the various Arab countries. The Egyptians, Saudi Arabians and Iraqis each considered themselves to be greatly superior to either of the others and thus better qualified to lead any Arab nationalist movement. This naturally aroused jealousy and kept them apart. The Arabs were only united in their dislike and fear of Israel. They believed that Israel had been imposed on the Middle East and was acting as a puppet for the West. Arab unity and nationalism were kept alive by the absence of any solution to the Palestine problem. The creation of Israel was tending to promote Arab unity.[28]

27Louis, British Empire..., p. 383-571. Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.25-27, 218-226, 281-296, 299-304.

28FO371/133821/V1076/45, 'Arab Nationalism and Arab Unity', 12 June 1957. FO371/127749/V1051/71, 'Arab Nationalism', 20 March 1957. Also see Rashid Khalidi et al. (eds.), The Origins of Arab Nationalism (New York, 1991).

After the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, a widespread desire among the Arabs had been the unity of the Arab World, which had been a constant factor in Arab politics since the end of the First World War. The leaders of the Arab nationalist movement against the Ottoman Empire were pan-Arabs in a limited sense only. Based on Syria, they envisaged an Arab Empire stretching from the Taurus Mountains and consisting of the Arab Levant, Mesopotamia and the Arabian Peninsula. Egypt was not included. The height of their hopes was reached in 1918 when Faisal entered Damascus, which would have been the Arab capital, but for the intervention of the Western Powers. The subsequent arbitrary division of the Ottoman Empire into regional states altered the picture completely and led to the separate growth of local nationalist movements. The 1920s thus saw the pan-Arab idea driven into the background by groups of parochial nationalists in Iraq, Syria and Egypt and by the development of an independent Kingdom in Saudi Arabia. However, as the degree of independence of the individual Arab states increased, so did their leaders begin once more to perceive a certain community of interest between them, which the emergence of the Palestine problem in the inter-war years served to stimulate. In the 1930s, it was Iraq which took the lead in making proposals for greater measures of Arab unity, particularly those favouring the unification of the Fertile Crescent (Iraq, Syria, the Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan). This idea met with little success owing to the suspicion of all the others that Iraq

One further source of difficulty for the British in the Middle East was their potential rivalry with France in the region. With the break-up of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, Britain and France had divided the Middle East into spheres of influence, with Britain assuming mandates in Iraq, Palestine and Transjordân, while France took similar responsibility for Syria and Lebanon. Only Saudi Arabia, where King Ibn Saud overthrew Sharif Hussein in 1926, escaped the 'spheres of influence' settlement, while in addition, Britain enjoyed a privileged position in Egypt, Aden, the Gulf, and, to a degree, in Iran.[29] In the course of the Second World War, however, the British ejected the pro-axis Vichy authorities from Syria and Lebanon, and in so doing, struck a decisive blow against French influence in the region. Thereafter, the French blamed the British for the loss of their position in the Levant States (Syria and Lebanon), and they regarded with suspicion any move by Britain in the Middle East. They suspected that Britain would absorb the Levant States into a British controlled Greater Syria (union between Syria and Transjordan). After the war, the French attitude towards the Middle East was a combination of fear that the area might be given undue attention to the detriment of security arrangements in Western Europe; of desire to retain or partially recover France's interests (largely cultural) and prestige, especially in the Levant States; and of concern for continued or increased supplies of Middle East oil. France was

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would dominate the group. Similarly the later suggestion for the formation of a Greater Syria, consisting of Transjordan, Syria and Palestine, found no favour because of the intention of its author, King Abdullah of Transjordan, to head the new state.(Ibid.)

The Second World War brought Cairo to the fore as the main centre of all Middle East activities, military, political and economic. From 1942 Egypt's Prime Minister, Nahas Pasha, played a leading part in bringing the Arab states together with the encouragement of the British government, which wished to form an Arab bloc that would look to Britain for its strategy and the provision of resources. As a result, in 1945, the Arab League was set up with its headquaters in Cairo. However, the Arab League, in which the movement for Arab unity found its expression, soon became Egyptian-dominated. It had only shown cohesive power in opposing Western 'imperialist' states, for instance with regard to the independence of the Levant states and Anglo-Egyptian relations. It was unable to coordinate Arab operations in Palestine, which undermined its position. It was ineffective as an instrument of Arab unity. Therefore, the Fertile Crescent scheme gained greater impetus from the general disillusionment with the Arab League resulting from Palestine operations.(Ibid.)

The idea of Arab unity was brought once more to the fore by Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser in 1952. This time the idea had a far wider popular appeal than ever before, because linked with it was the new (in Arab political thought) idea of revolution and social reform.(Ibid.)

29Lenczowski, Middle East.., pp. 74-81. W. Scott Lucas, Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis (London, 1991), pp.5-6. CAB129/37 C.P.(49)209, 19 October 1949. Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.231-232, 236-237, 257-259.

also preoccupied with the risk of the growth of Arab nationalism in their North African possessions, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, and opposed to manifestations of Arab national unity in the Middle East, and in particular a revival of the Arab League for the realisation of plans for Greater Syria or the Fertile Crescent Union.[30]

The British had few illusions as to the challenges they faced in the Middle East. They recognized that the political regimes in the Middle Eastern countries, with the exception of Turkey, were relatively weak and inefficient, and politically and economically unstable. The local governments faced repeated outbreaks of violence, strikes, anti-government and anti-foreign, notably anti-British, demonstrations, and were experiencing a post-war wave of nationalism. Public opinion in the Arab countries, particularly after the partition of Palestine, became highly agitated. The British government did not expect the Arab states to offer effective resistance to communist infiltration to the Middle East in default of adequate Western support, nor to produce appeciable resistance movements in case of Russian aggression. The Chiefs of Staff did not envisage the use in the main battle against Russia of the armed forces of any of the Middle East countries except Turkey and Transjordan. Only Turkish forces were, with the help of Allied technical advice and equipment, capable of resistance to a Russian attack. For Britain, it was of great importance, therefore, that Turkish defence plans should be co-ordinated with those of the Allies. A strong Turkey capable, with Allied air and technical help, of offering substantial resistance to a Russian attack would be of great assistance to any defence of the Middle East as it would delay the advance of the Russian forces. The importance of Turkey's position in the Middle East, political

30Lenczowski, Middle East..., pp. 322-326. CAB129/37 C.P.(49), 19 October 1949.
In 1940, with fall of France, Syria and Lebanon came under control of the Vichy government, which collaborated with the Axis Powers and allowed them to use Syrian airfields. In June 1941, Free French forces under General Charles de Gaulle and British troops invaded Syria and Lebanon. Britain had agreed to help General De Gaulle oust the Vichy regime in Syria and Lebanon on the understanding that France would recognize the independence of Syria and Lebanon. Despite France's relactance, Syria and Lebanon, with British and American support, declared their independence in 1944. In May 1945, France sent troops to Syria and Lebanon and fighting broke out, but in December France agreed to evacuate her troops from Syria and Lebanon. See Lenczowski, Middle East..., pp.322-326.

and military as well as geographical, made it desirable that she should be associated with any Middle East defence arrangement. The Arab Legion of Transjordan, consisting of two Brigades, was well trained and officered, but was short of equipment. The Chiefs of Staff thought that the Arab Legion could play an important part in the defence of the Middle East, both in the short term and the long term. However, this would not be possible unless the necessary equipment could be made available. In the Chiefs' view, the remaining indigenous forces, except those of Israel, would not be capable of offering more than token resistance to a large scale Russian attack. They would, however, be able to fulfil useful roles in their own countries by helping to maintain internal security. Iran's armed forces were incapable of defending her frontiers if attacked by Russia, and owing to her geographical position it would not be possible for Allied forces to give her effective assistance unless they were already in position in Iran before the outbreak of war. However, this was not politically possible as it would give the Russians a pretext under the terms of the 1921 Treaty for occupying northern Iran. The only Allied requirement, therefore, was that a stable and friendly government should be maintained in Iran willing to withstand Russian diplomatic pressure and capable of preventing civil disorders, particularly in the oilfied areas in southern Iran. British strategic policy in Iran was directed towards ensuring the continued maintenance of Iranian independence, and the protection of British oil interest in southern Iran. Iran was the largest oil producer in the Middle East, and Iranian oil was vital to British economic recovery.[31]

The British government, after the War, realised that it would be difficult for Britain to hold the Middle East in a major war without the assistance of the United States. From the British point of view, it was therefore necessary not merely that the United Kingdom and the United States

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31CAB131/1 DO(46)22, 19 July 1946. DEFE4/20 JP(49)29 (Final), 30 March 1949. CAB21/2088 JP(50)5 (Revised Final), 17 June 1950. FO371/81964/E1193/43, Minute by the FO, 21 November 1950. Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds.), Crisis and its.., pp.19-29.

In July 1946, the Chiefs of Staff indicated that the supply of Middle East oil, in particular from the Iranian oil fields, was essential to Britain in securing the peacetime economy and financial position of Britain, and to sustain her effort in war. See CAB131/1 DO(46)22, 19 July 1946.

should not be rivals in the Middle East, working one against the other, but that the two countries should as far as possible have a common policy. Britain therefore perceived the idea of a regional defence pact as a way to share the burden of her defence commitments in the Middle East with her allies, primarily the United States. Obtaining United States support for the British position in the Middle East was the main goal of British policy after the Second World War. Britain tried to get the United States's policy into line with the British policy in the Middle East. After the war, much of American policy in the Middle East was based on the assumption that Britain should be primarily responsible for maintaining basic Western interests in the region. This was explicitly stated in strategic plans for the defence of the Middle East. However, the United States policy implicitly or explicitly provided for support of whatever British position existed and for utilization of British influence as an important adjunct to its own. The United States wanted to see the British position in the Middle East maintained because:

a) it was not considered to conflict with any fundamental American interest but, on the contrary, to be a safeguard for the interests of the whole Western community;

b) it was assumed that British experience and prestige in the area would enable Britain to protect Western interests more easily and more effectively than could be done by any other Western Power;

c) the United States had its own commitments in other parts of the World (in Europe and the Far East).[32]

From the United States' point of view, the Middle East problem had two aspects, political and military. The political aspect was compounded of rising nationalism, antagonism towards the West, the instability of cer-

32FRUS, 1947, Vol. V, pp. 485-626. NA-Lot 57 D298 Box 16 'Britain Position in the World and its implications for our [the United States] Middle East policy', 3 June 1952. Wm. Roger Louis and Hedley Bull (eds.), Special Relationship..., pp. 43-64, 249-293.

tain governments in the region, the Anglo-Iranian and Anglo-Egyptian disputes and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The military aspect arose from the vulnerability of the area to armed invation by the Soviet Union. The United States was devoting considerable thought, energy and resources to the political aspect of the problem. However, at the same time, the United States allowed the military aspect to go by default. It considered defence of the Middle East was primarily a British Commonwealth responsibility and that the United States could neither spare any forces for the defence of the area nor enter into any commitment to protect the Middle East if it was attacked.[33]

For the first time after the war, American and British military representatives met in Washington, in October 1947, to discuss Anglo-American collaboration in the Middle East. They reached the conclusion that the security of the Eastern Mediterranean and of the Middle East was vital to the security of the United Kingdom and the United States respectively; that this security would be jeopardised if the Soviet Union should obtain control of Greece, Turkey or Iran; and that the United Kingdon and the United States should each support the security of the Middle East and of the Eastern Mediterranean, and in particular should assist in maintaining the territorial integrity and the political independence of Turkey, Greece and Iran. However, although the American Joint Chiefs of Staff recognised for the first time that the security of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East was vital to the security of the United States, they were lukewarm to the idea of a regional defence pact in the Middle East. They considered the defence of the Middle East as primarily a British Commonwealth responsibility, and in their view the primary security interest of the United States lay in the North Atlantic area and the Far East. The United States' reluctance to commit any American forces for Middle East defence and its view that the defence of the Middle East was a British Commonwealth responsibility made the assistance of the Com-

33Ibid.

monwealth countries for Middle East defence very important. American unwillingness to make land forces available to the defence of the Middle East for the first two years of a global war made it necessary for Britain secure the maximum Commonwealth contributions to Middle East defence. However, only Australia, New Zealand and South Africa indicated willingness to provide land forces for Middle East defence.[34]

The United States Joint Chiefs of Staff also proposed to hold the Russians on the 'Outer Ring'of the Middle East (the defence line along the mountain passes leading into southern Turkey and western and southern Iran as far as Bandar Abbas). This would preserve the integrity of all Middle East countries and would achieve all the Allied strategic requirements, including the retention of the Middle East oil areas. In addition, it would prevent the deployment of a major threat against the Suez base. However,

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34FRUS, 1947, Vol. V, pp.485-626. DEFE/20 JP(49)29 (Final), 30 March 1949. CAB21/2088 JP(50)5 (Revised Final), 17 June 1950. CAB21/2088 CP(50)106 (Revised Final), 1 September 1950. FO371/81964/E1193/43, Minute by the FO, 21 November 1950. Devereux, Formulation of British Defence..., pp. 19-22, 43, 75.

Prior to the Second World War, American interests in the Middle East were mainly cultural and economic, focusing particularly on oil. American oil companies controlled substantial oil concessions in the region, particularly in Saudi Arabia. In May 1933, the Saudi Arabian government and the Standard Oil Company of California signed a sixty-year oil concession agreement and an operation company, known as the California Arabian Standard Oil Company, was established. When the Texas Oil Company, Standard Oil of New Jersey and Socony-Vacuum joined it in 1944, its name was changed to the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO). Despite the pressure of American Oil Companies to support their activities in developing Middle Eastern oil resources and to pursue policies that would ensure regional stability, the United States government had practically ignored Saudi Arabia until 1942. The strengthening of Saudi-American relations was accelerated in 1943 when the American legation in Jidda was established on a permanent basis. Moreover, the United States reached an agreement with the Saudi Arabian government to build a military base at Dhahran for use in the redeployment of American troops to and from the Far East. The agreement provided for a three-year use of the Dhahran air base by the United States, after which period the base would be handed over to Saudi Arabia. The construction of the base began in 1944 and was completed in 1946. By the time the three-year period for American operation of the base ended in 1949, the base, so close to an exposed frontier of the Soviet Union, had assumed strategic significance for containing Soviet aggression. In 1949, American efforts to extend the agreement met with a cool reception in Saudi Arabia, which was still smarting from the Palestine war. Therefore, the agreement was renewed with difficulty for comparably brief periods until June 1951. Meanwhile, in August 1950, Saudi Arabia demanded modification in the terms of the original oil concession of 1933. Before the year ended the Saudi Arabian government and ARAMCO concluded a new agreement establishing a fifty-fifty profit sharing formula. In June 1951, the United States and Saudi Arabia signed a new five years' agreement concerning the Dhahran air base, which enabled Saudi Arabia to buy military equipment in the United States and provided for the military training of the Saudi Arabian armed forces by American instructors. See Thomas A. Bryson, American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East, 1784-1975: A Survey (Metuchen, N.J., 1977), pp. 96-134, 149-160. Lenczowski, Middle East..., pp. 579-586. Hurewitz, Diplomacy..., pp.314-329.

from the British point of view, although the defence of the 'Outer Ring' would have outstanding strategic advantages, there was no prospect in the foreseeable future of achieving the Allied build-up which would be necessary to hold this line. The British Chiefs of Staff were in favour of the 'Inner Ring' of Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Egypt. This plan would achieve all Allied strategic requirements with the exception of retaining Middle East oil areas. They also held that the security of the Suez base was an essential requirement in any Middle East defence plan. From the British point of view, in the short term, lack of forces would compel the Allies to limit their aim to defending Egypt by holding the enemy in Palestine. In the long term, the British Chiefs of Staff agreed to examine plans to hold the Russians on the 'Outer Ring'. However, in the British view, in either the short term or the long term, Egypt was the only country in the Middle East where the resources in manpower, communications, port facilities and airfields were adequate for the defence of the region. Therefore, the security of Egypt was vital to the defence of the Middle East.[35]

In January 1948, the Ministry of Defence recommended that in the long term, joint defence on a regional basis was the best way for Britain to achieve her strategic requirements in the Middle East. The Chiefs of Staff wanted greater defence cooperation among the Arab states and the northern tier countries. The Foreign Office held a similar view, and envisaged a pact that would include France, Italy, Greece, Turkey and Spain, and that might eventually be extended to North Africa and Egypt. It was thought that this might offer a solution to the Anglo-Egyptian dispute over the Suez Canal base and help to secure Britain's strategic position in the Middle East. However, the United States was sceptical of the idea of a collective defence pact in the Middle East. In April 1948, Robert Lovett, the Acting Secretary of State, said that any pact linking Greece and Turkey with the Arab states or the United States and Britain should be avoided, at least until the Palestine problem was settled.[36]

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35 Idem.

36 DEFE4/10 JP(47)16, 13 January 1948. DEFE4/10 COS(48)8th meeting, 16 January 1948. DEFE5/7 COS(48)56, 4 May 1948. FRUS, 1948, Vol. IV, p.79.

In March 1949, Britain's Joint Planning Staff reaffirmed their previously expressed view that Britain's ultimate object should be to combine all the Middle East countries into one comprehensive security arrangement. It would be essential for any grouping of the Middle East countries to be backed by both the United States and Britain. The increasing interest of the United States in the Middle East, with particular reference to the security of the Middle East oil supplies, was a political factor of major importance. Every effort must be made to foster this interest and to secure the increasing participation of the United States in the defence of the Middle East. Until a Middle East pact was possible, however, Britain must continue to obtain her essential military requirements by bilateral agreements with the individual countries concerned or by joint agreements which include the United States.[37]

However, in August 1949, in conversation with the British Minister of State Hector Macneill, the State Department's Policy Planning Director, George Kennan, warned that a pact might not be the best means of forwarding British and American objectives in the Middle East, for it would be one-sided (that is, dominated by the United States and the United Kingdom) and would have difficulty in passing the Senate.[38] In November 1949, during Anglo-American talks on the Middle East in Washington, George McGhee, Assistant Secretary of State for Near East, South Asian and African Affairs, said that a Middle East defence pact based on the NATO model was excluded by present American policy in the Middle East. This was reaffirmed by the United States Chiefs of Mission in the Middle East, at their meeting in Istanbul in November 1949, where they stated that it would be premature for the United States to associate itself with any possible regional pact in the Middle East.[39]

37DEFE4/20 JP(49)29 (Final), 30 March 1949.

38FO800/477, Record of a conversation between Hector Macneill and George Kennan, 11 August 1949.

39George McGhee, Envoy to the Middle World (New York, 1983), pp.53-60, 80-87. FRUS, 1949, Vol.VI, pp.50-90, 165-179.

The British government realised that the United States was not coming along with the idea of a collective defence pact in the Middle East, and that without its support, a collective defence pact in the area would have no value. Therefore, in the short term, the British government gave practical priority to the bilateral treaties that Britain had with Egypt, Iraq and Jordan, believing that those provided the best way for Britain to preserve her strategic interests in the Middle East, and would enable Britain to proceed with planning Middle East defence.

In October 1949, Bevin told the Cabinet that it was by no means clear whether the conclusion of a Middle East defence pact would be the best means of promoting Britain's objectives in the Middle East, although in spite of the difficulties it might have to be so. He recommended that for the time being, Britain should continue to pursue her objective of a strong, prosperous and friendly Middle East bound to Britain by bilateral defence arrangements, maintaining an open mind about a Middle East pact. He added that a Middle East pact modelled on the Atlantic Pact would, to meet Britain's strategic requirements, have to be supplemented by additional bilateral or multilateral defence arrangements, otherwise Britain's strategic position in the Middle East would be weakened rather than strengthened. The obligations to be assumed by members of a Middle East pact would fall short of those under the Treaties of the British government with Egypt, Iraq and Jordan, and by the same token would fall short of the strategic requirements which Britain required from those and other countries in the Middle East.[40]

Bevin also told his cabinet colleagues that in peace and war the Middle East was an area of cardinal importance to Britain, second only to Britain herself. The Middle East, particularly the oil producing countries and Egypt (cotton), was an area of cardinal importance to the economic re-

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40CAB129/37 CP(49)209, 19 October 1949. CAB21/2088 JP(50)106 (Revised Final), 1 September 1950.

covery of Britain. It was hoped that by 1951 eighty-two per cent of Britain oil supplies would be drawn from the Middle East (as compared with twenty-three per cent in 1938), and this would present the largest single factor in balancing Britain's overseas payments. The Middle East was important strategically because it was a shield to Africa; was a key centre of land and sea communications; and contained large supplies of oil, particularly in Iran, the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Above all, in the event of attack on the British Isles, it was one of the principal areas from which offensive air action could be taken against the Soviet Union. The strategic key to this area was Egypt, to which there was no practical alternative as a main base, since she possessed the essential air bases, ports, communications and manpower. Britain's defensive preparations would be directed primarily to the retention of Egypt. Egypt was the political and geographical centre of the Middle East, and the natural base for forces operating in other areas of the Middle East. The security of Egypt was thus vital to the defence of the Middle East as a whole. Bevin concluded that if Britain failed to maintain her position in the Middle East, the plans for her economic recovery and future prosperity would fail.[41]

The idea of some kind of a Middle East defence pact, in which Britain and the United States and one or more of the Middle East countries would participate, had been considered by Britain after the Second World War. However, the British government realised that the Arab-Israeli dispute and inter-Arab frictions such as the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq and Jordan on the one hand, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia on the other, would render the formation of such a pact problematical. The prospect of the Arab countries and Israel joining together in such a pact was remote. The British government also realised that the United States was not willing to join such a pact in the near future, and without United States participation it would be of doubtful value. In these circumstances, the British govern-

41 Idem. Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds.), Crisis and its.., pp.19-29.

ment was not so sure about whether a Middle East defence pact would assure Britain of the strategic facilities which she possessed or required in the Middle East. It was considered, therefore, that better results might be obtained by separate approaches by the Western Powers to individual states, and by coordinated arrangements by the Western Powers in peace to defend the Middle East against Russian aggression, both in peace and war, particularly Egypt, Turkey and Israel. In 1940s, a collective defence pact in the Middle East was therefore not a real alternative, since neither Britain nor the United States was prepared to develop one. Britain continued to pursue her military objectives in the Middle East by her bilateral treaties with Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. However, Britain's ultimate object in the Middle East remained a comprehensive defence pact among all Middle East countries, backed by Britain and the United States.

ÖZET

Bu makalede II. Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra İngiltere'nin Orta Doğu da izlediği savunma politikası ve bu politikanın Türkiye üzerindeki etkileri incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngiltere, Türkiye, Orta Doğu.

ABSTRACT

The object of this article is to expose and analyse the gradual stages in the implementation process of Britain's defence policies in the Middle East after the Second World War, taking into account the impact of these policies on Turkey. Britain was concerned about the future of her bilateral defence agreements with local states, as the people of the region were struggling to free themselves from British colonial dependence. In addition, growing Soviet threats towards the region were a cause of concern. Britain's economic and financial difficulties in this period also had negative effects on her projected defence policies in the region. In order to overcome these difficulties Britain tried to secure the United States' cooperation. The article is based on archival material-British and American- as well as secondary sources in English and Turkish.

Keywords: Britain, Turkey, Middle East.