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# Britain's Post-Colonial Foreign Policy Towards Persian Gulf Security (1971-1991): An Alternative Approach

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## Abstract

British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in 1971, started a new era in the region with new political order and new security map. Iran and Saudi Arabia emerged as the guardians of the status quo to be filling the power vacuum left by the British in behalf of the West. Britain adopted a new post-imperial role in the region along with new post-colonial foreign policy in the post-withdrawal context. British policy towards the regional security is analysed in this article with central focus on the shift emerged in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in the British policy. After 1979, Iran, no longer a Western ally, has been defined as the major internal threat for the regional security following the major external threat of the Soviet expansion in the British foreign policy. This paper argues that the shift in the British policy came along with a sectarianist approach towards the region. The sectarianization emerged with the securitization of the Gulf based on "Iran threat" within the determinants of the Anglo-American alliance on the regional security. The sectarianist discourse adopted by the British foreign policy was employed as an effective tool of the securitization of the Gulf that was deepened during the regional conflicts, the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War.

**Keywords:** Persian Gulf, Britain, Security, Iran, Sectarianization

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# İngiltere'nin Körfeze Yönelik Post-Kolonyal Dış Politikası (1971-1991): Alternatif Bir Yaklaşım

Esra Çavuşoğlu\*

## Öz

İngiltere'nin 1971'de Basra Körfezi'nden çekilmesi ile bölgede yeni bir siyasi düzen ve güvenlik haritasının ortaya çıktığı yeni bir dönem başlamıştır. İran ve Suudi Arabistan bölgede İngiltere'nin bıraktığı güç boşluğunu doldurma yolunda bölgesel statükonun korunması görevini üstlenmişlerdir. İngiltere bu yeni dönemde yeni post-kolonyal dış politikası ile birlikte bölgede imparatorluk sonrası yeni bir rol üstlenmiştir. Bu makalede İngiltere'nin Körfez güvenliğine yönelik dış politikası özellikle İran Devrimi sonrasında ortaya çıkan politika kaymasına odaklanarak incelenmektedir. 1979'dan itibaren batı ile olan ittifakı sona eren İran, İngiliz dış politikasında bölgesel güvenliğin önündeki başat iç tehdit olarak tanımlanmıştır. İngiltere'nin dış politikasındaki bu değişim mezhepçi bir söylemin benimsenmesi ile ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu makalede İngiltere'nin bölgeye yönelik dış politikasında, Körfez'in Anglo-Amerikan ittifakı çerçevesinde "İran tehdidi" ekseninde güvenlikleştirilmesi paralelinde benimsenen mezhepçi yaklaşıma dikkat çekilmektedir. İngiltere, mezhep ayrımcılığını provoke etmeye yönelik bir söylemi Körfez ülkeleri ile ilişkilerinde, özellikle İran-İrak Savaşı ve onu takip eden Körfez Savaşı ile derinleşen bölgenin güvenlikleştirilmesinde etkin bir araç olarak kullanılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Basra Körfezi, İngiltere, Güvenlik, İran, Mezhepçilik

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## **1. Introduction**

Britain withdrew its troops from the Persian Gulf in 1971, by ending its 150 yearlong presence and a new era started in the region with new political order and in the British foreign policy with new 'post-colonial' term. British withdrawal resulted with the emergence of new security architect in the Gulf shaped by the emergence of the small Gulf States, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE and Oman, the former British protectorates, and a power vacuum due to the absence of the super power military presence. The indigenous powers of the region, Iran in the Persian side and the Saudi Arabia in the Arabian side of the Gulf, both assumed regional leadership with the mission of guarding the West led status quo in the post-British withdrawal context. Iraq had kept its place as the aggressive and anti-Western state of the region at the political architect in the continued Cold War context. The Soviets-influenced movements arose in the South Gulf with the emergence of the Dhofar rebellion (1972-1975) against the Omani Sultanate and in Yemen by the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) with lasting impact.

The withdrawal resulted for the Great Britain itself with substantial consequences as well. It was the end of the British Empire who left the last remnants of its colonial territories in the East of Suez in 1971. Britain's hegemonic role and imperial position now replaced by the US hegemony as of the global superpower. Therefore, by the withdrawal, Britain adopted a new role and position in the international arena including the Persian Gulf through a post-colonial foreign policy. The post-imperial British role and position was shaped by the main determinants of the British foreign policy; British interests and colonial ties in the Gulf, the Anglo-American special relationship, Britain's commitment with the EC and NATO that defined the UK as a strong power of the Western alliance. The Persian Gulf security occupied a unique and vital importance in the post-colonial British foreign policy based on the substantial enduring colonial ties in the Gulf, within the determinants of the Anglo-American and Anglo-European alliance.

It is argued in this work that despite the fact that the *Pax-Americana* replaced the *Pax-Britannica* in the region by the British withdrawal, the British influence had significantly been maintained in the regional affairs based on the enduring colonial ties especially until the Gulf War by which direct and permanent American military presence started in the Gulf. Brit-

ain's post-withdrawal foreign policy towards the region has considerably been neglected by the scholarly works as studies mostly focused on the American policy in the field of the Gulf Studies.<sup>1</sup> Due to the remarkable gap exists in the literature on the post-withdrawal British foreign policy, this article provides an original study based on extensive use of the British foreign policy documents as the primary sources. The critical and alternative perspective adopted in this article contributes to the originality and the significance of the article.

This article highlights the emergence of a significant shift in the British foreign policy towards the Gulf security in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution. While Iran was a major British and Western ally until the fall of the Shah resulted by the Iranian revolution in 1979, after the revolution Iran turned out to be a major source of threat for the regional security, especially for the security of the Gulf regimes in the British foreign policy. It is argued in this paper that the policy shift presented a sectarianist approach adopted by the British foreign policy in the aftermath of the revolution. It is aimed to define the roots and strategic backgrounds of the British sectarianist approach to the region. The sectarianization is conceptualized by the alternative approach of this article as a significant tool of the securitization of the Persian Gulf by the Anglo-American hegemony to design the regional order. The Persian Gulf has turned out to be the focal point of Western security project and been commonly defined with constant insecurity in the literature. This article adopts a critical approach on the overrated security conception attributed to the Gulf and remarks the securitization project behind it. The securitization theory defines securitization not a neutral but a political process. K. Fierke redefines the notion of security based on power relations and points out that the securitization of fear constructed particularly in the Cold War context by the Western hegemony.<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, it is aimed to demonstrate how the sectarianist approach ad-

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<sup>1</sup> Besides the only comprehensive work by Rosemarie Hollis, "*From Force to Finance Britain's Adaptation to Decline: Transforming Relations with Selected Arab Gulf States, 1965-1985*" (PhD Dissertation, Washington University, 1988), few studies focus on the post-withdrawal British foreign policy within the conception of the Anglo-American Policy such as Jeffrey R. Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf, Anglo-American Hegemony and Shaping of A Region* (Routledge, 2010), and Tore Peterson, *Anglo-American Policy towards the Persian Gulf 1978-1985* (Sussex Academic Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> See, Karin M. Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security* (Wiley, 2015).

opted in the British foreign policy contributed to the cultivation of today's phenomena of sectarianism under the broad scheme of the securitization of the region since the Iranian Revolution.

In the second part, the main parameters of the British policy towards the regional security are outlined and the Anglo-American designed regional system in the first decade of the British withdrawal is portrayed. In the third part, the policy shift emerged in the British foreign policy towards the regional security in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and its repercussions in Britain's relations with the regional actors are defined and evaluated. In the fourth part, the securitization of the region is analysed in the lights of the regional conflicts, the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War, with special emphasize on the role of sectarianist approach by assessing the roots and results.

### **1.1. Britain's Post-Colonial Foreign Policy in the Persian Gulf Before the Iranian Revolution (1971-1979)**

British Labour government announced in 1968 the decision of the withdrawal that it would leave the East of Suez by the end of 1971. Although the new Conservative Government, selected in the 1970 elections did not approve the decision, it realized that it had no choice but to follow the Labour's decision of withdrawal under the changing regional circumstances.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Britain by withdrawing its troops from the Persian Gulf in 1971, was ending its 150 year-long hegemonic presence in the region, the last remnant of the British colonial territories. It became a watershed in the regional politics as well as in the British foreign policy. As a result of the British withdrawal, a new era started in the regional political order that was reshaped with the participation of the new five small Gulf States. The

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<sup>3</sup> The decision of the British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf was controversial. While the Labour Government justified the decision by economic reasons, the Conservatives as well as the prominent members of the Labour Government were sceptical about the decision. See, Simon C. Smith, *Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf: Kuwait, Bahrain Qatar and the Trucial States 1950-1971* (Routledge: Curzon, 2004), p.2-30. The Conservative Government taking over the authority in 1970 aimed to renounce the decision of the withdrawal but soon realized that it was too late to retrieve as the regional circumstance had already settled in accordance to the British withdrawal. See, Gregory Gause, "British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf 1968-1973," *Review of International Studies*, Volume 11, No: 4 (October, 1985): 253-258.

regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia claimed leadership in the absence of the hegemonic power.

In terms of the British foreign policy, British withdrawal has started a new era as well by changing the imperial status of Great Britain not only in the region but also in the international arena. Britain opted to assume a middle power status in the regional affairs that was defined within the framework of Anglo-American alliance.<sup>4</sup> By refraining from assuming a super power status, Britain aimed to get freed of being the target of anti-imperialist criticisms by staying under the shadow of the new hegemonic power, namely the United States. In other words, Britain aimed to guise the colonial implications of its foreign policy to gain a free riding ability in the region with the secondary role in the Anglo-American alliance. Despite the secondary role, Britain was able to exert considerable influence on the US policies in the regional affairs based on its long-established ties in the region and its advanced diplomacy tradition as the recently declined greatest imperial power. British commitment with the European Community (EC) that started in 1973 and with NATO and Britain's status as a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations led Britain to emerge a strong Western ally and to occupy the key position in transatlantic cooperation through Anglo-American special relationship.

Although Britain had to withdraw from the Persian Gulf, substantial British interests in the Gulf remained. Gulf's importance in the British foreign policy even increased based on the increasing British interests in the aftermath of the British withdrawal. British interests in the Gulf during and after the withdrawal can be defined in relation to the oil resources of the region mainly in three categories. First one is direct oil interests that are formed in two ways. The first one was the British imports of the Gulf oil which was supplying about 45% of total British oil need only by the Arabian Gulf in the 70's.<sup>5</sup> It meant an extensive British dependency to the

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<sup>4</sup> British policy was defined in several policy papers as seen in an example by the Defence Ministry as *'The UK should not aspire to 'super-power status in the area she should, in concert with the Americans and with the other partners in Europe maintain close political relationships with the countries concerned and encourage them to stand on their own feet and co-operate on themselves in matters of external and internal security.'* (FCO 8/3292), UK Defence Policy in the Gulf, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Saudi Arabia's oil 21.3 %, Kuwait's 16.8 %, UAE's 6.2 %, Qatar's 0.6 %, Oman 0.3 % and Bahrain's was 0.3 % of the total British oil imports in 1978. (FCO 8/3291).

Gulf oil. The second one was the British exports of the Gulf oil as the producer. Major British oil firms such as BP and Shell (British-Dutch) were the great partners of the several national oil companies in the Arabian Gulf as they retained their shares beyond the withdrawal. Second category is indirectly oil related interests which were economic interests depended to the oil revenues of the Gulf States. Increasing massive oil surpluses created substantial commercial and financial interests for the British economy. The oil boom resulted by the oil crisis in 1973 multiplied the oil revenues of the Gulf States in the mid 70's and substantially increased the importance of the region for the British interests. Third category referring to the Strategic interests in the Gulf was not independent from the oil factor either. Gulf's geo-strategic location bridging the Indian Ocean to the West had historically been the vital of importance for the British trade. By the 70's, the Persian Gulf had become one of the most strategic hub of the world oil trade where about 40 % of total world oil was transported through the Hormuz Strait. Therefore, the security and stability of the Gulf was significant for the British interests for the stability of the oil flow and price. In that regard, British policy was identified with the Western interests extensively in the British foreign policy texts. Britain, to preserve these interests maintained its control and influence in the region after the withdrawal in the post-colonial context. Based on the substantial British interests and colonial ties in the Gulf<sup>6</sup>, Britain adopted post-colonial foreign policy approach in the relations with the Gulf States in the first two decades of the post-withdrawal period.<sup>7</sup> The post-colonial British foreign policy towards the region was implemented based on remarkable balancing strategy overall; between the Anglo-American, Anglo-Europe commitments to pursue British national interests.

The main objectives of the post-withdrawal British policy in the Gulf defined by the Defence Ministry as: *'to contribute by all possible means to the creation of the conditions which will ensure peace and stability; to preserve as much influence as possible with a view to maintaining that sta-*

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<sup>6</sup> See, Gerd Nonneman, "Constants and Variations in Gulf-British Relations," in *Iran, Iraq an Arab Gulf States*, ed. Joseph Kechichian (Palgrave, 2011), 325-330.

<sup>7</sup> See for detailed analysis, Esra Cavusoglu, *"From Protectorate to Partnership, British Foreign Policy towards the Persian Gulf 1971-1991"* (PhD Thesis, Marmara University, 2018).

*bility and to limit communist influence in the area to the greatest possible extent; to maintain the uninterrupted flow of oil on reasonable terms; to increase British exports to a rapidly growing market.*<sup>8</sup> The major sources of threats to affect the stability of the region and British interests were defined as the expanding Soviet and communist influence and radical Arab Nationalism along with the Arab-Israel dispute. Regime securities of the Gulf States were considered the major factor to be affected by these threats and to be protected in the British policy. Arab Gulf states' regimes were supported by the British and they were defined as 'moderate Arab States' for being committed with the West in the British foreign policy. Any conflict between the Gulf States would result the instability of the region. Arab Gulf States-Iran relations was another significant factor to be affected by the Arab Nationalism and to be secured as revealed in the policy paper "*some of the traditional rulers are unwilling to come to terms with the Shah, a factor which conflicting British interests.*"<sup>9</sup> There had been border disputes between Iran and the UAE and between the Saudi Arabia and the UAE that Britain had tried to resolve. However, it failed to reach a solution in favour of the UAE.<sup>10</sup> It was the consequent of the British intention to exert influence on Iran and Saudi Arabia to strengthen its regional alliances.

Although Britain withdrew its troops from the region in 1971, it retained military presence in the Gulf to a considerable extent. In Oman, Britain directly involved its military presence in 1972-1975 during the Dhofari rebellion against the Sultan. In the national forces of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Iran, British military presence took place in form of military assistance, mostly by the Loan Service Officers in advisory, training and military equipment supply.<sup>11</sup> British naval presence was retained in the Gulf waters by the naval visits to keep the Gulf security under control.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> UK Eyes A, Defence Relations-United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain, 1973 (FCO 8/1961).

<sup>9</sup> FCO 8/1961.

<sup>10</sup> Rosemary Hollis, "Britain's Strategic Approach to the Gulf," in *International Interests in the Gulf Region*, ECSSR, 2004, 138.

<sup>11</sup> UK's personnel and military involvement in the Gulf, (FCO 46/856), Sales orders and future prospects in UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain, 1973, (FCO 8/1961), UK Defence Commitments As At 31 December 1978, (FCO 8/3292).

<sup>12</sup> Political Briefing, HM Ships visiting the Gulf, 17 February 1972, (FCO 46/856).



On the security map emerged in the Gulf beyond the British withdrawal, the Anglo-American security system which had two dimensions was applied to maintain the status quo and power balance in the region in favour of the Western interests in the light of the Cold War. The major threat to the security and stability of the region was the Soviet influence and the potential Soviet expansion in the region. One dimension of this system was the policy of fortifying of the Western alliance with the regional actors. It was formed into the 'twin pillar' strategy by the American President Nixon based on employing the regional powers, Iran and the Saudi Arabia with the task of guarding the status quo and the Western interests in the region. Iran particularly was provided substantial armaments by the US during the 70's.

The other dimension of the Anglo-American security projection in the region was retaining British influence on the Gulf States as much as possible through direct or indirect military presence. Britain's retained post-colonial presence in the region was favoured by the US to some extent for that the region, as the most strategic energy and financial hub, to be maintained under the control of the West against the Soviets expansion since the US was not eager to involve militarily in the region in the 70's.<sup>13</sup> Therefore the Anglo-American alliance was reinforcing for both the US and the British policies towards the region. The Anglo-American naval base, Diego Garcia, established in the Indian Ocean was a great indication of the Anglo-American policy cooperation to contain the Persian Gulf.<sup>14</sup> The common Anglo-American interests in the Gulf were outlined in three main points by Jeffrey Macris, "maintaining interstate order, safeguarding the oil flow and trade, and keeping the Soviet Union out of the region."<sup>15</sup> Iraq was the regional source of threat for the Western interests in the Anglo-American

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<sup>13</sup> During the Anglo-American discussions in September 1968, American officials expressed their expectations to the British counterparts that beyond withdrawal "Britain would maintain as large a 'non-military' presence as possible and would on no account wash its hands of the area." See Simon C. Smith, "America in Britain's place?": Anglo-American relations and the Middle East in the aftermath of the Suez crisis". *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, (Sep 2012), Vol. 10 Issue 3, 260-261. The Vietnam syndrome was effective factor on the American reluctance to have military presence in the Gulf.

<sup>14</sup> Hollis, "Britain's Strategic Approach to the Gulf", 139

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey R. Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf, Anglo-American Hegemony and Shaping of A Region* (Routledge, 2010), 248-250.

policy as the pro-Soviet state with anti-Western and Pan-Arabic ideology. Britain's leadership in the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) was a strengthening factor on the British influence in the region in wider terms and supported by the US in the Cold War context. The Camp David Accords initiated by the President Carter caused Gulf States' reaction and refusal against potential US military involvement. The situation provided better circumstances for Britain to increase its influence in the Gulf.

In the British defence policy towards the Gulf, enhancing the relationships with Iran and the Saudi led Arabian Gulf to increase the British influence on them was essential. Iran emerged as the major Western ally in the region assuming regional leadership and role of guarding Western interests beyond the British withdrawal. The Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pehlevi, with his ambitions and military capabilities was considered the "policeman" of the Anglo-American alliance and constituted the one pillar of the President Richard Nixon's "twin pillar" policy, which was the strategy of using proxy powers to fill the power vacuum by maintaining the US influence. For the British government as well it was essential to use the assistance of Iran and the Saudi Arabia to retain as much influence as possible in the region within the compatibility with the US strategy.<sup>16</sup> British Prime Minister of the Conservative Party Government (1970-1974), Edward Heath, tried to develop close relations with the Shah to maintain the Anglo-Iranian commitment in the region. Iranian regime was significant not only for maintaining a political ally of Britain but also for maintaining substantial British oil interests in Iran. Britain had leading position in Iranian market and British oil companies had privileged position in Iran oil industry.<sup>17</sup> Iran was Britain's largest export market in the Middle East and thence a valued source of foreign exchange in the mid 70's.<sup>18</sup> British government invited the Shah and his wife for a visit to London in June 1972. Shah's aspirations and ambitions in building an imperial and royal

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<sup>16</sup> Tore Peterson, "Richard Nixon, Great Britain and the Anglo-American Strategy of Turning the Persian Gulf into an Allied Lake", in *Imperial Crossroads. The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf*. Eds. Jeffrey R. Macris and Saul Kelly (Naval Institute Press, 2012), 79.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Parsons, "The Middle East", in *British Foreign Policy under Thatcher* Ed. Peter Byrd (Philip Allan Publishers Limited, 1988), 82.

<sup>18</sup> Rosemary Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 Era* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 21.

statue for the King of the 2,500-year-old Persian nation calling himself as “shahanshah” (king of the kings) was fulfilled deliberately by the British during the visit. The Shah and his wife were hosted by the Queen as royals in London and the Prime Minister Heath showed his tributes to the Shah for the historic glory and significance of Iran.<sup>19</sup> During the Labour Party government in the second half of the decade Iran continued to be a strategic British and Anglo-American ally in the Gulf despite the oil related conflicts between the Shah and the British government.

In conclusion, the status quo established in the region in the post-withdrawal context by the Anglo-American alliance was essential to be maintained for Britain to preserve overall British interests. The post-withdrawal period (1971-1979) was considered the most stable period for the Gulf security in accordance with the Western interests.<sup>20</sup> The security of the Gulf monarchies and the Iranian regime’s strong position as the West’s policeman granted military power were two main pillars of the regional status quo. Britain pursued the policy of keeping the Arab Gulf States-Iran alignment with the aim of ensuring them remain in the same political line to avoid any conflict between them for the consolidation of the regional status quo.

## **2. Changing British Foreign Policy in the Post-Revolution Context 1979-1991**

Iran Islamic Revolution was the milestone of the regional history that caused great changes in the regional dynamics and status quo, as well as in the British policy approaches towards the region. By the revolution, the Western ally Shah fell and was replaced by the anti-Western regime of the Islamic Republic. Iran was no longer a policeman protecting the Western interests in the Gulf. The Anglo-American led West lost its prominent ally in the Middle East. The collapse of the stronger pillar resulted with demise of the US’ twin pillars policy. The Revolution also resulted with the demise of the CENTO, by the absence of Iran that had central importance with greater implications particularly in the Gulf. Consequences of the revolution changed balance of power that tilted against the West in the region.

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<sup>19</sup> Peterson, “Richard Nixon Great Britain,” 83.

<sup>20</sup> Gregory Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 42.

Saudi Arabia emerged as the major power with Western orientation as the leader State of the Arabian Gulf while Iraq, Iran and PDRY in south Yemen were composing the anti-Western block of the region. Besides the historic changes in the regional geo-politics, Iranian Revolution had consequences also in the world oil markets. The sharp increase in the oil prices resulted with the second oil crisis of the decade. Britain realized substantial loses in the oil industry of Iran by the Iranian Revolution. British oil companies BP and Shell lost their dominated and privileged positions in Iran.

The historic Iranian Revolution was followed by series of other national and regional developments that had substantial impacts on the British foreign policy and changing dynamics in the region. In December of the same year the Soviets occupied Afghanistan, threatening the Western hegemony and escalating the Cold War in the region. As a reaction, the Carter Doctrine was announced in 1980 demonstrating the American interests to intervene in the regional security that was supported by the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.<sup>21</sup> In May 1979, Margaret Thatcher was elected as the first female British Prime Minister. The Conservative government under Thatcher, remaining in power for a decade, opened a new chapter in the British politics with much implications in relations with the Gulf States. A more assertive and pragmatic foreign policy approach was pursued by the Thatcher administration in the Persian Gulf with increasing importance for the British interests<sup>22</sup> and fruited with much deeper engagements especially in defence sales.<sup>23</sup> In 1980, the Iran-Iraq War erupted by Iraq's attack on Iran. Almost a decade long war (1980-1988) had substantial consequences for the regional dynamics and repercussions in the British foreign policy. In 1982, The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established and started

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<sup>21</sup> "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force." Jimmy Carter "The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress", January 23, 1980, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33079> 18.10.2017.

<sup>22</sup> In 1980, the surplus of the Gulf States was estimated \$ 117 billion, 85% of the OPEC surpluses. Oil in the Gulf, (FCO 8/3481).

<sup>23</sup> See, Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East*, p. 167-169; Parsons, *The Middle East*, 82-84; Tore Peterson, *Anglo-American Policy towards the Persian Gulf 1978-1985* (Sussex Academic Press, 2015) 29-38.

a new era towards the regional integration by adding a new dimension to the British foreign policy.

These developments taking place at the end of the first decade of the post-withdrawal period urged Britain to consolidate its defence commitments in the Gulf. The US' weak position at the time as a result of the hostage crisis following the Iranian revolution that left the Carter administration in hassle, provided Britain advantageous position to exert its military influence in the region. The policy paper by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) assessed the regional security after the Iranian Revolution and remarked the objective of further British security engagement: "*It may also lead the regimes of the area to look again for protection to the West, particularly ourselves and the Americans, seeking counsel and also help of physical kind in securing the status quo. They will no doubt treat the Royal visit in this light, and may use the occasion to press for more positive UK guaranties for future security.*"<sup>24</sup> In fact, the Royal visit of the Queen Elizabeth II to the Gulf States in February-March 1979, proved well timing in the light of the regional developments to cultivate further British influence on the Gulf States. Sir Anthony Parsons, the former British Ambassador to Iran reported that he had found "*a general satisfaction in the Gulf States at the existing low key UK defence effort, which was effective and tactful, in contrast to the more publicised US approach*" during his visit in the Gulf to assess the situation.<sup>25</sup> Although British military commitment with NATO was a limiting factor for the British military engagements, protecting the British interests in the Persian Gulf was a significant dimension of Britain's out-of-NATO-Area strategy. Britain took the advantage of first the US' reluctance to involve militarily in the regional security despite the Carter Doctrine and second Gulf States' attitudes against a potential US military intervention in the region because of the US policy towards the Arab-Israel conflict and the Camp David accords. Hence Britain assumed a more efficient and assertive role in the regional security in the 80's based on the grounds as stated: "*Britain has, as we see it, very special responsibilities and opportunities in the Gulf. Close and wide-ranging histori-*

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<sup>24</sup> UK Policy towards Arabia and Gulf in the Wake of the Iran Crisis, March 1979 (FCO 96/882).

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Defence Chiefs of Staff Committee, COS Meeting, Defence Policy in the Gulf Area, 19 June 1979, (FCO 8/3292).

*cal connections: but not a superpower; and not heavily dependent on the region's oil- thus capable of wider view and greater freedom of action.*"<sup>26</sup>

Iranian revolution which meant for Britain loss of a great ally in the region, resulted with a significant shift in the British foreign policy towards the regional security. While Iran was the major element of the power balance in favour of the Western interests until the revolution, it turned out to be major threat for the regional stability after the revolution in the British foreign policy. In the aftermath of the revolution, Iran was defined the major internal source of threat for the Gulf States and a sectarianist approach was adopted in the British policy. In the FCO report the regional security was described: "*The balance of power in the area after the Iranian Revolution and the consequent demise of CENTO has certainly tilted against the West. There is tension between Persian and Arab and between Sunni and Shia and even relatively minor incidents could have serious effects on oil supplies and hence on price and the entire world economic picture.*"<sup>27</sup> A sectarianist rhetoric was applied in the relations with the Gulf leaders by the British diplomats to manipulate them against Iran. The British bureaucrats tended to warn the Gulf States against the potential Iranian threat for their regime security based on the Shia minorities they had. The major concern for the British was potential Iranian attempt to "export" the revolution to the Arab Gulf States through its links to the Shia minorities. The population of %50 in Bahrain and % 25 in Kuwait and about 300.000 in the eastern province of the Saudi Arabia were consisted of the Shia communities.<sup>28</sup>

The sectarianist approach adopted by the British after the Revolution contained two basic inconsistencies. First one is the fact that Britain had never applied a sectarianist discourse before the Revolution. In the pre-revolutionary context, the sectarian division had already existed between the Persian and Arab societies of the Gulf as an historic phenomena part of the cultural difference such as ethnicity and language.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the security

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<sup>26</sup> (FCO 8/3828), 1981.

<sup>27</sup> Britain's Defence Policy Interests in the Persian Gulf, 19.11. 1979, (FCO 8/3292).

<sup>28</sup> Parsons, *The Middle East*, 85.

<sup>29</sup> Despite of the existing historic sectarian distinction between Arabs and Iranians of the Gulf, the sectarian difference had not been the source of conflict between these societies and they had historic relations in several realms. See, *Lawrence G. Potter; Society in the Persian Gulf: Before and After Oil*, Center for International and Regional Studies, (Georgetown University in Qatar, 2017).

fears of the Gulf States towards Iran had existed before the Revolution. Iran was always a threat for the Gulf Monarchies, especially in Shah's era they feared of Shah and his hegemonic intentions in the region.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the Shah had claim on Bahrain during the British withdrawal and other continued claims on the Islands that belonged to the UAE. However, the British foreign policy makers had not defined Iran as a threat for the Gulf regimes before the Revolution and nor highlighted the difference of the sects and any tension related to that before 1979. On the contrary Britain wanted a political consensus to be developed between Iran and the Arabian Gulf until 1979.

Although Iran had an attempt to export the revolution as seen in Bahrain in 1981, the Shia minorities in the Gulf States did not have a potency to undertake a revolution against the regimes through their links to Iran. Gause points out that "*the efficacy of purely Shi'i Islamic opposition has been limited*" to challenge the Gulf regimes with the exception of Bahrain and that Gulf rulers were able to contain the Shi'i communities in their countries throughout the 80's.<sup>31</sup> For instance, the British Ambassador in Doha reported in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution that the Qatari Amir stated to him about his confidence on the government's ability to contain Shia population in Qatar and that he was more concerned of Soviet expansion than Iran during his meeting with Amir.<sup>32</sup> Evidently the Gulf regimes were not much concerned with potential "Iran threat" because of Iran's links with their Shi'i populations as they were imposed by the British in the aftermath of the Revolution.

The other inconsistency of the sectarianist approach, laid in the ideological doctrine of the Iranian Revolution and its repercussions in the region and in the Islamic world. Iranian revolution was introduced not based on a sectarian manifestation but rather based on Islamic ideology with greater political implications. Although its constitutional and institutional background was theological and defined by the Shia doctrine, the ideological content of the Revolution was defined by anti-imperialist, anti-Western, anti-Com-

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<sup>30</sup> F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies, Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), 166.

<sup>31</sup> Gause, *Oil Monarchies*, 155-156.

<sup>32</sup> Telegram from Doha to the FCO, 2 Mart 1980, (FCO 8/3466).

munist, anti-Zionist and anti-racist political ideas.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the content of the revolution was political rather than theological.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it was a unifying movement initially addressing to the whole Muslims beyond the Shia community. The vision of the Islamic unity was clearly emphasized in the Constitution of Islamic Republic as: “*The Islamic Republic of Iran is to base its overall policy on the coalition and unity of the Islamic nation. Furthermore, it should exert continuous effort until political, economic, and cultural unity is realized in the Islamic world. (Principle 11)*”<sup>35</sup> Universalism as one of the dominant feature of the revolution was defined in the manifest of the revolution based on universality of Islam regardless of colour, race and culture as indicated in the Ayatollah Khomeini’s statement: “*the advancement of Islamic sovereignty does not mean the domination of Islamic Republic of Iran; rather it means the domination of Islam (...)*”<sup>36</sup>

In fact, the repercussions of the Revolution in the Islamic world reflected a wide spread enthusiasm and inspiration in the Sunni world with the perception of revolution as a source of hope for Muslim awakening.<sup>37</sup> The occupation of the Holy Mosque in Saudi Arabia, at the heart of the Islamic world by a revolution-inspired Salafi Islamist group targeting the pro-Western government of the Saudi Arabia in November 1979 was a significant incidence to indicate that the revolution motivated and inspired politically and it inspired Sunni Islamists rather than Shi’i communities in the Gulf States. In fact, besides a few unrests of the Shi’i groups occurred

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<sup>33</sup> See, Mehran Kamrava, *Iran’s Intellectual Revolution* (Cambridge University Press: 2008), 38-39; John L. Esposito, “The Iranian Revolution: A Ten Year Perspective”, in *The Iranian Revolution Its Global Impact*, Ed. John L. Esposito (Miami: Florida University, 1990), 17-30.

<sup>34</sup> The ideological architects of the revolution such as Ali Shariati, Jamal Ale-Ahmed and Daryush Shayegan constituted an ideology of political Islamist movement. See, Kamrava, *Iran’s Intellectual Revolution*, 129-143, <http://www.shariati.com/kotob.html>.

<sup>35</sup> John L. Esposito, “The Global Impact of the Iranian Revolution”, in *The Iranian Revolution, Its Global Impact*, Ed. John L. Esposito (Miami: University of Florida, 1990), 318-319.

<sup>36</sup> Farhang Rajaei, Iranian Ideology and Worldview: The Cultural Export of Revolution, in *The Iranian Revolution, Its Global Impact*, Ed. John Esposito (Miami: University of Florida, 1990) 66-67.

<sup>37</sup> See the chapters in *The Iranian Revolution: its global impact*, (ed. John L. Esposito) for the impact of the Iranian Revolution in the Gulf, African and Middle East countries as well as in the West.



in Bahrain and Kuwait, a further growth of the Shi'i unrest or a Shia-Sunni tension as predicted in the British foreign policy, was not the case in the Gulf states after the revolution.<sup>38</sup> It indicates that the actual fact behind the fear of Iran was not based on the issue of sectarian conflict for the British. The essential British concern stemmed from the potency of the political influence of revolutionary Iran on the Gulf States as the Iranian threat was referring to the threat of the "political Islam" defined as "*the threat to neighbouring states offered by the nature of the revolution in Iran*"<sup>39</sup> and was totally against the British political interests in the region. Since the Iranian project of "exporting" the revolution to the Gulf States based on its links with the Shi'i minorities could not promise a prospective achievement, the British aim in demonizing Iran was to prevent potential Iranian political influence on the Gulf regimes. An influential Iran on the Gulf States would change the regional balances of power against the Western interests. Gulf States with vital strategic, economic and energy-political importance for the West to be kept as Western oriented. Britain used the "sectarian conflict" as a useful pretext to keep the tension between Iran and the Gulf States by isolating Iran from the Gulf States for preventing a potential political influence of Iran.

On the other hand, regarding its hostility to the Soviet Communism and its denouncement of 1921 Soviet-Iran Agreement, the government of the Islamic Republic's Policy was favourable for the British as a restricting factor against the Soviet expansion in the region. While provoking the Gulf States against Iranian regime with sectarianist approach to cultivate a long term hostility, Britain tried to pursue good relations with Iran. Despite the American pressure on the British government to apply the US-imposed sanctions on Iran, Britain applied sanctions only to a limited extent along with the EC States and wanted to maintain economic relations with Iran<sup>40</sup> with a quite pragmatic approach based on the balancing strategy. Over the years, British approach in favour of promoting dialog with Iran along with Europe grow conflicting with the US policy of isolating Iran which was

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<sup>38</sup> See, David E. Long, "The Impact of the Iranian Revolution of the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf States", in *The Iranian Revolution Its Global Impact*, ed. John L. Esposito, 100-109.

<sup>39</sup> (FCO 8/3828), 1981.

<sup>40</sup> Parsons, *The Middle East*, 86.

considered as a cause to increase the hostility of Iran against the West by the British-European approach.<sup>41</sup>

## 2.1. The Securitization of the Gulf through Sectarianization

It is argued by this article that the emergence of the sectarianist approach in the British foreign policy by the revolution, coincides with the beginning of the era of Anglo-American project of securitization of the Gulf. The consequences of the Iranian revolution and following Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on the regional security map and the changing power balance against the Western security system, urged the Anglo-American led West to implement a new security system in the Gulf. The Anglo-American hegemony was to be maintained under the circumstances that not a direct and permanent military control was involved by neither powers. The armaments of the region had already started in the aftermath of the British withdrawal within the framework of the twin pillar strategy and the arms race followed the oil boom in the 70's.<sup>42</sup> However, a new security projection was implemented after the revolution for a long term securitization of the region to be sustained with internal conflicts. The securitization of the Gulf was deepened through the regional conflicts, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and the Gulf War (1990-1991) which brought extensive defence relations of the Gulf States with the West, both in increasing armaments and military presences. In this new security system, Iran was defined as the major internal threat for the security of the region particularly for the Gulf States. Both American and the British attentions were focused on the Arab Gulf States<sup>43</sup> that constituted very centre of the Anglo-American securitization in the region. The Arab Gulf States' security dependencies to the West was maintained by the creation of insecurity caused by "Iran threat". The sectarianization has been the major instrument of the securitization of the Gulf with a significant function of feeding the "Iranian threat" in the perceptions of the Gulf States. Thus, the Western States of the major arms industries would be able to maintain to secure the Gulf market for their arms sales. Therefore, Gulf States became increasingly exposed to the extensive armaments and defence contracts.

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<sup>41</sup> Nonneman, *Constants and Variations*, 330-332.

<sup>42</sup> See, John Muttam, *Arms and Insecurity in the Persian Gulf* (Radiant Publishers, 1984).

<sup>43</sup> Peterson, *Anglo-American Policy towards the Persian*, 79.

Substantial British arms sales were conducted to the Gulf States in the 80's under the Thatcher government. Margaret Thatcher as the first British Prime Minister visiting the Gulf states in the second year of her reign, personally involved in promoting arms sales to the Gulf States. It was fruited with the enormous arms sales through defence contracts such as the so called Al-Yamamah deal with the Saudi Arabia<sup>44</sup> as well as the other major Tornado and Hawk aircrafts sales to the smaller Gulf States.<sup>45</sup>

The Iran-Iraq War paved a substantial way to effectuate the securitization of the Gulf by the Anglo-American hegemony. The War was not defined a source of threat for the regional security and stability in the British policy. The British and American authorities did not attempt to end the War but on the contrary, the stalemate of the war was preferred for British interests as long as the oil flow was secured. The War provided a favourable situation for the British strategic interests and as of the West to weaken both Iran and Iraq, the anti-Western powers of the region, in the burden of the war. Anthony Parsons reports the indifferent attitude of the powers in the UN Security Council including the British towards the War: "*This drift towards war did not escape the attention of those of us who were serving in our national delegations to the Security Council (the UN), nor of our governments. But no one lifted a finger to mobilize the Council to take preventive action with either of parties (...)*"<sup>46</sup> British approach to the War was clearly described by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO): '*It is tempting to see the continuing stalemate as in British interests. The current regimes in Iran and Iraq are both unpleasant and their preoccupation with conflict keep them from more dangerous policies in the Gulf.*'<sup>47</sup> Minister of State at the FCO, Douglas Hurd, explains in his memoires that "*To us, both Iraq and Iran were run by unpleasant and potentially dangerous regimes. Total victory by either would increase the danger. In London, Peter Car-*

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<sup>44</sup> The agreement was signed in 1985 and valued per annum around £2 billion over a decade. See Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in 9/11 Era*, 167-168.

<sup>45</sup> PREM 19-1315 Arms Sales and Military Assistance to the Middle East States, THCR 3-1-42.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony Parsons, *From Cold War to Hot Peace, UN Interventions (1947-1995)* (Penguin Books, 1995), 45.

<sup>47</sup> UK-US Consultation on Iran-Iraq Conflict (FCO 8/5991), 6 Nov 1985 by A S Collins (MED).

rington and I argued for caution in supply of arms to both sides.”<sup>48</sup> The same approach was pursued by the US as well. Although the West’s position towards the belligerents was tilted on Iraq against Iran, the US did not want a victory by Iraq either. The US secretly supplied arms to Iran in the second half of the War, while it was supporting Iraq openly and providing Iraqi air force satellite pictures of Iran targets by CIA.<sup>49</sup> It can be argued that, the Anglo-American securitization system in the Gulf during the War presented the implementation of a form of the ‘dual containment’ of Iran and Iraq that was officially introduced in 1993 as the US’s policy by the Clinton administration.

While the aim of weakening both Iran and Iraq in the prolonged War was being achieved, the aim of increasing the Gulf States’ insecure positions and security dependency to the West was achieved as well in the securitization of the Gulf during the almost a decade long War. Iran was defined as the major threat to the GCC States during the Iran-Iraq War in the British policy as stated in one of the numerous British policy texts: “*The continuation of the War increases the threat to the 6 Gulf Cooperation Council States from Iranian subversion and/or military action and from domestic unrest caused by Shia communities. (...) It is difficult to predict to what extent post-war Iran will try to “export” the revolution to the GCC States by violent and other means.*”<sup>50</sup> This statement clearly indicates that the major British concern towards Iran threat was lying in the Iranian potential political impact on the Gulf States rather than a potential military attack of Iran to the Gulf States. If a potential Iranian military attack addressing to the Gulf States was the case, it would cause great danger for the security of the oil flow and resources in the Gulf States and urge the Anglo-American alliance to take preventative measures to end the War. The sectarianist approach during the War resulted with the cultivation of hostility to actuate the existing fault lines in the Gulf societies as Zahlan describes: ‘*One of the most serious consequences of the War in the Gulf States was the creation of the concept that their Shia citizens could potentially become Iran’s “fifth*

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<sup>48</sup> Douglas Hurd, *Memoirs* (Abacus, 2004), 301. Lord Carrington was the first Foreign Secretary of the Thatcher’s Cabinet (1979-1982).

<sup>49</sup> Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States* (Ithaca, 1998), 174-175.

<sup>50</sup> Plan Planning Paper on the Gulf, 1984, (FCO 8/5391).

column". This concept contributed to weakening social cohesion, particularly in Kuwait and Bahrain.<sup>51</sup> In fact, the Gulf states supported Iraq during the War against Iran especially by the financial aids of the Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

The prolonged War provided Britain opportunities to increase defence commitments in the region by supplying arms to the both belligerents as well as to the Arab Gulf States whose securities were challenged in the light of the War. Britain retained its military dominance with indirect military presence and continued its colonial role of 'safeguarding' the Gulf throughout the 80's in the wake of the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>52</sup> In 1981, the Defence Secretary, John Nott made a visit to the Gulf, to enhance the British defence relations. In the brief prepared for the Defence Secretary's visit, it is stated that '*The War between Iraq and Iran gave rise last autumn to fears among the smaller Gulf States for their security and renewed interests in British Defence assistance. Now that the War lingers on in stalemate, those fears and that interests have receded somewhat; while suspicion of American intervention has increased with advent of new administration.*'<sup>53</sup>

British arms supply to Iran during the War was publicly criticised by the US and Arab States. Although the US asked Britain to stop selling arms to Iran, Britain maintained arms sales to Iran as it promised very lucrative market for the British trade,<sup>54</sup> by employing diplomatic strategies to protect its interests in Iran. With a quite pragmatic approach, while using a sectarian based divisive discourse against Iran in the relations with the GCC States, Britain used the opportunities that the War provided to increase exports to Iran in both arms and civilian trade.<sup>55</sup> Not only Britain, it was reported that about 27 countries including the US supplied arms to both belligerents during the War to maintain the War showing the level of securitization through maintaining the War.<sup>56</sup> In the Arabian side of the

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<sup>51</sup> Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*, 177.

<sup>52</sup> The US had naval presence in the Gulf during the Iran-Iraq War and dispatched air force to the region for temporary tasks such as Reflagging the Kuwaiti Tankers in 1986. However, the US refrained from having permanent military presence in the region until the Gulf War. See, Macris, *The Politics and Security*, 211-219.

<sup>53</sup> Visit by Defence Secretary Mr Nott to the Gulf, Briefs, 1981, (FCO 8/3828).

<sup>54</sup> Arms Sales to the Gulf, 1983 (FCO 8/4983).

<sup>55</sup> Planning Paper on the Gulf, 1984, (FCO 8/5391).

<sup>56</sup> Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*, 175-176.

Gulf, Britain enjoyed using the opportunity of increasing its security commitments with the Gulf states with arms sales and military influence in the Gulf security.<sup>57</sup> Britain also maintained its naval presence in the Gulf waters to guard the security of shipping in the Gulf. Besides the ‘Armilla Operation’ patrolled in Oman<sup>58</sup>, a “*direct response to the Iran-Iraq War and a clear demonstration of the UK’s commitment to the security of the Gulf states and their economic interests*”, Royal Navy (RN) warships visited the Gulf ports frequently at regular basis.<sup>59</sup>

The Gulf War was the next stage in the securitization of the Gulf. The eruption of the Gulf war as a result of Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990, brought deeper Anglo-American military involvement and started the term of direct and permanent US military presence in the region. The Pax-Americana was established in the Persian Gulf in the wake of the Gulf War starting a gradual and continuing American military hegemony in the region.<sup>60</sup> The Gulf War was the major consequent of the Anglo-American policies pursued during the Iran-Iraq War in which the Saddam regime of Iraq was widely supported by increasing its aggressive attitude in the region. As a result, Saddam dared to invade one of the most strategic centre of energy and finance resources of the Gulf for the Western interests primarily as of the British. It was the first and direct attack to the regional status quo in the modern history by Iraq.<sup>61</sup>

The UK played a key role in the US-UK led Operation Desert Storm against Iraq, through Thatcher’s firm approach in supporting the US led military intervention relying on the British experience of defending Kuwait against Iraq.<sup>62</sup> The Anglo-American cooperation remarkably initiated the UN Res-

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<sup>57</sup> Gulf Military Cooperation, 1980, (FCO 8/3466), Defence Policy Gulf Area, 1980 (FCO 46/2229), Visit by Defense Secretary Mr. Nott to the Gulf, Briefs. 1981, (FCO 8/3828), Defence Exercise and Maneuvers in the Gulf, 1984 (FCO 8/541).

<sup>58</sup> Armilla operated during the War through Hormuz to point 40 miles north of Dubai, accompanying 60-200 British and dependent territory ships a month.

<sup>59</sup> Naval Deployments and the Gulf Naval visits, (FCO 8/3848), 1981.

<sup>60</sup> See, Macris, *The Politics and Security*, 226-247.

<sup>61</sup> Kuwait had historically been under the Iraq threat. The last attempt of Iraq to invade Kuwait took place in 1961 just after the British withdrawal from Kuwait and was prevented by the British. See, Helene Von Bismarck, “The Kuwait Crisis of 1961 and Its Consequences for Great Britain’s Persian Gulf Policy”, *British Scholar*, Vol. II, Issue 1 (September 2009), 75-96.

<sup>62</sup> See, Macris, *Politics and Security*, p.222-226., Hurd, *Memoires*, 430-434, Nonneman, *Constants and Variations*, 345.

olutions to mobilize the international community -which they would fail in the following years to do for Bosnia- to rescue Kuwait from Iraqi invasion. The US-UK led UN forces operated successfully to expel Iraq from Kuwait in a couple of weeks. Several US military bases were launched in Saudi Arabia by deployment of a half million troops. In the aftermath of the War, The Fifth Fleet of the US' naval forces was established in Bahrain. The GCC States turned out to be a hub for the US and UK military bases and the militarization became the norm of the region.<sup>63</sup>

The Gulf War resulted with remarkable increase in the British defence relations and military presence in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia, while hosting several US forces, also asked British military forces to be present in Saudi Arabia during the War. Following the War, Britain signed ten-year of memorandums of understanding defence cooperation with Kuwait, the UAE and Qatar.<sup>64</sup> Britain strengthened the presence of the Armilla Patrol in the Gulf waters in the light of the Gulf War.<sup>65</sup>

Significantly, the Anglo-American intervention during the War did not contain purpose of overthrowing Saddam or regime change in Iraq as a part of the mission of the operation after all. Gause remarks that a post-Saddam regime would have serious consequences for the regional security against the Anglo-American interests by increasing Iran's influence. The existence of Saddam regime was a significant factor to contain and isolate Iran for eliminating its potential political influence.<sup>66</sup> In both pre-Gulf War and post-Gulf War contexts Iraqi regime's position was deliberately supported and protected by Anglo-American policy against Iran. The Gulf States were manipulated towards Iraq and against Iran, the primary enemy as Oktav explains "*Washington gave them the message that in the absence of Saddam Hussein, Iran was the greatest threat to the Shikhdoms.*"<sup>67</sup> The ill-functioned policy of containing Iran by Iraq that resulted with the Iraqi

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<sup>63</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, "American Policy Toward the Persian Gulf", in *International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, ed. Mehran Kamrava (Syracuse University Press, 2011), 130.

<sup>64</sup> Nonneman, *Constants and Variations*, 345.

<sup>65</sup> Nonneman, *Constants and Variations*, 345.

<sup>66</sup> Gause, *Oil Monarchies*, 191-192.

<sup>67</sup> Özden Zeynep Oktav, 'The Gulf States and Iran: A Turkish Perspective.' *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVIII, No 2 (Summer 2011), 137.

invasion of Kuwait was consistently and since 1993 as part of *dual containment*, pursued until that the Saddam regime provided greatest pretext for the US to invade Iraq in 2003, in the post-9/11 context. The securitization of the Gulf remarkably deepened in the post-Gulf War context, particularly by the implication of the dual containment which meant “investment of considerable military resources in the region”<sup>68</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

The shift emerged on the British post-colonial foreign policy towards the Persian Gulf Security, in which the major ally turned out to be the major regional threat by the Iranian Revolution brought a sectarianist approach to isolate Iran from the Gulf States. Maintaining the perception of “Iran threat” as the central dynamic of the securitization of the region has functioned for two purposes. First one is to isolate Iran from the Gulf States for preventing potential influence of Iran by manipulating the Gulf States against Iran. Second one is to keep insecurity of the Gulf States under the presumed Iran threat for maintaining their security dependencies to the West. It provided the Anglo-American alliance led West the maintenance of lucrative arms sales to the oil rich Gulf states and a political and military control mechanisms on the Gulf States. In both terms, sectarianization has had indispensable role as principal instrument in keeping the Gulf States’ fears of Iran alive and in cultivation of hostilities for decades since the Revolution.

Sectarianization is not claimed to be a British product, however the contribution of the British sectarianist approach to the securitization of the Gulf within the Anglo-American cooperation is remarked in this article. As the Arab Gulf States’ importance grow for the British interests, Britain wanted to protect the Arab Gulf States from potential Iranian political influence while enhancing its defence relations with the Gulf States. As a result, the sectarianist approach remarkably worked out to effectuate securitization of the Persian Gulf based on the constant “Iran threat” since 1979. Especially after the end of the Cold War in the 90’s, by the collapse of the Soviet Union Iran was promoted to the major and constant threat.

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<sup>68</sup> Ayooob, *American Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, 131.



The continued securitization process of the Gulf has been deepened in the regional conflicts each decade following the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, the US Invasion of Iraq and the post-Arab Spring context, with increasing numbers in the military bases and arms sales in billion dollars in the Gulf states, whose security dependencies have been maintained under the constantly fed perception of “Iran threat”. GCC States’ military expenditures increased from \$20 billion to \$80 billion between 1997-2014.<sup>69</sup>

Sectarianization has resulted with the fact that sectarianism has become a phenomenon and one of the main determinants in the regional affairs. Based on sectarianism, the dichotomy has been developed in the region between Iran and Arab States with increasingly aggressive and sectarian policies in both sides. Saudi Arabia has become the major enemy of Iran along with the UAE. As a result, sectarianism has turned out to be primary source of legitimacy for the conflicts and proxy wars in the post-Arab Spring context towards destabilization of the Middle East. Consequently, cultivation of sectarian based hostility fruited with the regional Wars in Yemen led by the SA-UAE coalition and other conflicts in Iraq and Lebanon. Today the policy of demonizing and isolating Iran is escalated by the current US government within further provoking of the Gulf States against Iran and it indicates the continuity of the deepening securitization.

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<sup>69</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *Military Spending and Arms Sales in the Gulf*, CSIS Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 28 2015. p.10-15 [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/150428\\_military\\_spending.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/150428_military_spending.pdf) 12.9.2018

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