

## **Britain's Geopolitical Consideration in the Middle East during the Six-day Arab Israel War of 1967: A Reassessment**

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### **Abstract**

This study is reassessing the geopolitical consideration of the British government in the Sixth Days of the Arab-Israeli War, 1967. Based on declassified documents from the British's archive, this paper will analyze the geopolitical factor which shaped London's reaction towards the conflict. Middle East geopolitical position was very strategic to the British interests in the region. Hence, the focus of this paper is to re-examine the consequence of the war toward Britain's attitude in preserving her strategic military position and economic calculation in the Middle East between 1960s to early 1970s. These including the paramountcy of the British military bases in the region, arm trade commercial activities and a disruption of the oil flow from the region to the West. From historical perspective and analysis, this paper argued that the threats from the Soviet and Arab nationalist movements during the conflict had significantly influenced the British government's reaction towards the war. Although London did not involve directly in the conflict like in the 1956's Suez Crisis, yet British's response was still crucial since Britain was the prime architect in drafting and tabling the United Nation Resolution 242 after the war. Indeed, this research inclines to believe that the British equilibrium attitude as proclaimed during the conflict was not purely based on a principle of a just and lasting peace but it was very much relying upon geopolitical consideration of safeguarding British major strategic interests in the region.

**Keywords:** Arab-Israel War, Geopolitics, British, Soviet, Middle East, Military, Strategic.

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## **1. Introduction**

The Arab-Israelis War of 1967 was one of the major conflicts in the modern Middle East history. The war erupted in June and lasted for only six days. Nonetheless, the consequence of the short conflict was tremendous, and its legacy remains until today. The occupation of East Jerusalem by the Israelis, the seizure of Golan Height and the unresolved issue of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons because of the war were the major obstacles in formulating a comprehensive peace process in the region. In fact, the temporary truce which led to the endorsement of the United Nations Resolution 242 in the aftermath of the war failed to materialize into a lasting peace as expected. Thus, the unsuccessful resolution eventually triggered another bloody Arab Israeli's war in October 1973. Subsequently, the world led by Washington orchestrated the first peace accord known as the Camp David Accord in 1978 which again failed to create a comprehensive plan for a just and lasting peace in the region. The legacy of the dramatic 1967 war remained a painful thorn in all the peace initiatives. Despite series of diligent efforts from Carter to Trump (and his controversial plan of January 2020), all the peace plans turned into a deadlock and they are all far from achieving a comprehensive solution for a lasting peace.

Undeniably, Britain was not directly involved in the 1967 war like she did in 1956 campaign. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to mention that during the conflict, London was the broker that drafted and tabled the historic Resolution of 242 after the war. The resolution ended the confrontation temporarily and emerged as a fundamental principle of all the subsequent peace negotiations. In the process of tabling the draft, the British government continuously and openly declared that the purpose of the resolution was solely a bona fide idea, aimed for a genuine peace. It was claimed as an equilibrium approach for all parties concerned and it has nothing to do with preserving the British interest in the Middle East. Nevertheless, this study will unveil the hidden agenda of the British safeguarding her vital geopolitical interests in the region.

## **2. Literature Review**

This study reassesses the British's geopolitical interests in the Middle East during the Arab-Israel war of 1967. Compared to the 1956's Suez Crisis, British military was not involved in the war. Nonetheless, her geopolitical interests such as military base positions, oil and trade route and arms sales

remain significant. Consequently, all these geopolitical interests had influenced and shaped the British's reaction towards the war.

Undoubtedly, researchers had produced a few interesting studies were on the British interests in the Middle East between 1960s and 1970s. However, those studies did not emphasize solely on Britain since London's roles in 1967 war was overshadowed by the United States and Soviet. Thus, after the Suez Crisis, Britain's influence in the region from 1960s to 1970s began to wane and became less notable as compared to the role played by Moscow and Washington. William Wallace, a scholar, concluded that the study of the process in making British foreign policy has until recently been neglected, disowned by most students of domestic politics, and distantly acknowledged by scholars of international relations (Wallace, 1977). The same thought is shared by other scholars like David Vital (1968) who presumed that as compared to Britain, the US and Soviet dominated the Middle East affairs due to the intensity of the Cold War. This condition was admitted by the British government as stated by the Foreign Secretary in June 1967.

The UK stakes in the area are still important indeed to the national interest. Its main elements are relatively cheap oil supplies, a large and very profitable share of oil operation, big Arab investment in London, and a growing export market. In addition, we are concerned to have a secure communication by the sea and air to the east, and to deny effective control of the area and its resources to the Communist power. We must therefore persist with every possible effort, within the limitations imposed on us by the situation, to defend this stake. It is likely to be a long hard fight (Brown, 1967).

In the context of Middle East modern historiography, the academic writing of the British policy in the period of 1960s and after, was rare, if not impossible to find compared to the historiography during the First World War, the Mandate era until the Suez War of 1956. One of the historical works about the British in the Middle East conflict close to era of 1960s and 1970s is a book by Frank Brenchley (2005). However, Brenchley's discussion revolved only around the period of Gunnar Jarring's mission. His focus was more on the British 'action during the war' rather than analyzing the connection of the war with Britain's geopolitical interest of the region. Other notable writings neither have their focus on Britain and the Sixth Day

War nor the geopolitical related issues. Most of the authors were interested in the history of the war itself rather than to analyze the British attitude towards war or its policies. It is well understood since as mentioned in the above paragraph, a study of British in the Middle East or in regards of the June war attract less attention from scholars since after the Suez Crisis of 1956, British did not appear to play a dominant role in the Arab-Israel conflict. One of the famous studies related to the June War was written by Trevor N. Depuy (1978) and another well-known written material is *Swift Sword* by S.L. A Marshal (1967). Nonetheless both works did not pay attention on the British and its lack of archival documents. Richard B. Parkers (1993) in *The Politic of Miscalculation in the Middle East* could be considered as the first academic writing which relied upon archival documents. Others are William B. Quandt (1993) in *Peace Process*, Ritchie Ovendale (1984) in *The Origins of the Arab Israel Wars*, Hol Kasut (1968) in *Israel and the Arabs: The June 1967 War* and Walter Lacquer (1968) in *The Road to War, 1967*.

In early 2000, the remarkable study by Michael Ben Oren (2002) was considered as the most comprehensive academic work for a history of the June War. Ben Oren utilized a vast archival document in his writing and analyzed the event comprehensively. However, all these including the work by Ben Oren were focused on the event of the war and did not discuss exhaustively neither the British involvement nor its connection with the geopolitical consideration. For the more general historical written records of the June War, there are the writing by Nadav Safran (1969) in *from War to War: The Arab Israel Confrontation, 1948-1967*, Ahron Bregman (2000) in *Israel's War*, Chaim Herzog (1984) in *The Arab-Israel Wars* and Avi Shalaim (2000) in *The Iron Wall*: they are considered as among the best writing in this topic. Nevertheless, all these writings did not analyze the scope of British geopolitical consideration during the June War of 1967.

Regarding the academic works on the British affairs in the Middle East, irrefutably there are many outstanding studies had been written by scholars. One of the momentous resources was the book entitled *Britain Moment in the Middle East* by Elizabeth Monroe (1965). Subsequently there is another writing by Ronald W. Zweig (1986) in *Britain and Palestine During the Second War* and A. L Tibawi (1977) in *Anglo-Arab Question and the Question of Palestine*. Others are books by Paul L. Hanna (1942) in *British*

Policy in Palestine, Norman Betwisch (1931) in *England Mandate* and Andrew F. (1931) in *The Holly Land Under the Mandate*. Yet, all these deal with the British involvements in the early conflict before the Second World War. For more recent study a few studies by outstanding researchers could be evaluated too. A. J Baker (1964), for instance, wrote an interesting article entitled *The Seven Days War*, followed by Christopher Brady (1997) in *The Cabinet System and the Management of the Suez Crisis*, Donald W. Cameron (1956) in *British and the Suez Canal*, David Carlton (1988) in *British and The Suez Crisis*, Balfour G.P. (1991) in *The End of Empire in the Middle East* and Keith Kyle (2003) in *Suez British's End of Empire in the Middle East*. Despite all the remarkable work listed, a common thing to be concluded in the review that none of them have specifically addressed Britain's geopolitical consideration during the Six-Day War of 1967. In fact, most of the writings except Brenchley's, focus on the British roles or involvements before the June War of 1967 especially during the early stage of the conflict and ended with the Suez Crisis of 1956.

### **3. Methodology**

The methodology applied in this research is a historical research method. In the process of reconstructing the historical narrative, the researchers explored the archival documents which were recently declassified at the National Archive in London. The documents included British government's memorandum, minutes, parliamentary Hansard, telegrams and letters. Subsequently all the documents must be extracted, evaluated, and interpreted accordingly to build the historical narrative. Prior to this process, the literature review was undertaken to complete the comprehensive background of the issues. Whilst interpreting the archival documents, this research implemented the quantitative and qualitative methodology to achieve the final finding of the investigation.

### **4. Result and Discussion**

#### **4-1. British's Reaction of the Six-Day War**

When the third Arab-Israel war broke out in June 1967, the British government official policy was to avoid taking sides in the dispute as stated since 1958. The policy was reiterated by the Prime Minister prior to the War on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1966 that the British policy was to be impartial (Wilson, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1966). Although the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson on 3<sup>rd</sup> of June

criticized the provocative action by President Nasser at the Straits of Tiran. According to Wilson, the action to block Israelis' ships to the Port of Eilat via Tiran was unacceptable and that had triggered the war (Wilson, March 29, 1967). The same principle of unbiased and equilibrium in policy was restated by the British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, George Brown in the parliament in May 1967 and later at the United Nations in June 1967 (Brown, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967).

London's reaction as indicated in the policy comprised a long and short-term strategy to protect the British interests in the region. Hence, this objective was disclosed by the Foreign Secretary memorandum in 1967.

Our immediate objective is to defend of our direct national interest in the short term. Our broader aim is a reasonable eventual settlement, or 'modus vivendi' between the Arabs and Israelis as the basis of a more stable Middle East in which our interest can be secure (Brown, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967).

The same attitude was portrayed by the British government when it proposed the framework of peace plan after the war. The proposal was then known as UN Resolution 242. During the debate at the UN on 5 July 1967, Britain Permanent Representative to the UN, Lord Cardon reiterated the British's policy as the following points:

There must be disengagement and withdrawal; there must equally be final security against renewed hostility; there must be relief and rehabilitation on a new and imaginative scale never before contemplated...there must be demilitarized frontiers; there must be an end of arm race and there must be a restoration of international authority (UN General Assembly, 1967).

#### **4-2. Soviet and the Arab Nationalist's Threat**

One of the most critical threats during the conflict towards British's geopolitical interest in the region came from President Nasser of United Arab Republic (UAR) and his ally, the Soviet Union. Therefore, all sources were focused on curbing the spread of Nasser's influences in the region. According to McLaurin (1975), although most of these Arab countries were unnecessary a Communist nation, their anti-West and anti-Britain attitude was concurrent with the Soviet's strategy of supporting all nationalist movements against the West. In a secret memorandum in May 1967, the British Secretary of Foreign Affairs revealed London's view on Nasser roles in the conflict. In the opinion of the Secretary, 'Britain stand to be major losers if President Nasser's present cheap victories are acquiesced in. Nasser

enhanced prestige will enable him to intensify with greatly increased chances of success his campaign against “Arab reactionaries and Western imperialists” probably with increased Soviet support’ (Brown, May 28<sup>th</sup>,1967). This view was further described in the British strategy as unfolded by the British Foreign Secretary during the war:

Our strategy must be to avoid offering fresh targets for Soviet/Egyptian attacks, to weaken Nasser’s leadership in the Arab World and to concentrate on improving our position in the Arab countries where our material interests mainly lie. Our tactics must be flexible and realistic, and our arguments adapted to particular audience (Brown, June 21<sup>st</sup>,1967)

Suffice to mention that in the 1960s and 1970s era, Soviet influences were strong in the ‘revolutionary’ Arab countries like Iraq, Algeria, Syria, and Egypt. Moscow was actively involved in commercial and military activities in these nations. For example, the Soviet-UAR trade in 1967 had amounted to \$145.1 million and it increased to \$381.3 million in 1971. These activities in Algerian generated \$16.2 million in 1967 and rose to \$54.4 million in 1971, Iraq made \$5.1 million in 1967 and the amount increased to \$110.1million in 1971 (McLaurin,1975). In addition, to enhance Moscow’s influences towards the Arab, Soviet and the Eastern Block poured the region with economic aid since 1950s. For instance, based on the statistic from US Agency for International Development (1972) Soviet’s aid between 1954 and 1971 to the UAR estimated \$1,198 million whilst \$671 million came from Eastern Europe. The amount of \$549 million from Soviet and \$435 million from Eastern Block went to Iraq, \$421 million and \$246 million spent for Algeria respectively. (USAID,1972; Sick,1970).

The Soviet influences via Nasser’s leadership endangered the British position in the Arab trade and economic world. For example, the threat to the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) oil route to the Mediterranean via Syria. According to the telegram dated 7 Jun 1967 by the British’s Foreign Secretary:

Primary materials interest (in Syria) a pipeline and installation of Iraq Petroleum Company [IPC] valued £63.3 million. IPC is British, French, American and Anglo-Dutch company. British has a major share of 40%. No other major material interest in Syria (Secretary of FCO,1967).

The strategic location of the pipeline in Syrian soil was threatened when the Soviet influences intensified since 1954. Hence, when Syria merged with

Egypt to form the UAR in 1958, the Soviet threat increased dramatically. Although the Union was dissolved in February 1966, the intimate relation between Egypt and Syria remained unchanged under the Syrian premier, Yusuf Za'ayin. It was proven when Yusuf visited Moscow in April 1966 and the Soviet-Syrian Agreement was signed, followed with a financial credit of \$133 million from Moscow to Damascus for Euphrates Dam Project.

The British concerns over Soviet's influences re-emerged when Yusuf demanded the IPC to pay £100 million compensation to Syria in 1966 with an argument that Syrian had been unfairly treated by the IPC when they utilized Syrian soil. Consequently, the Syrian government claimed that Syrian should be paid 30/55 shares and not 3/8 shares as agreed in the Agreement of 1955. This issue came up since the 800 kilometers of the IPC's pipeline from Basra (Iraq) the Mediterranean via Baniyas (Syria) located at 300 kilometers of Syrian territory. Damascus accused the IPS had failed to pay Syria for the route since 1955. In fact, Syria demanded IPC to settle a compensation amounted £3.75 million in 1966 alone, followed by the rest of the compensation calculated since 1955. Yusuf's government demand was later supported by President Nasser of Egypt. Eventually, as a strategy to counter the demands, British subsequently directed the IPC to deal on commercial basis rather than G to G approaches (British Embassy in Damascus, 1966). In this case, British suspected that the Syrian's move was solely influenced by Nasser and Soviet. According to the report by the British Embassy in Damascus:

The Russian and their friends may or may not encouraged the Syrian to go for a company, but if Iraq and Syria take over [ the IPC's oil] I suspect that the Russian would not be able to resist the temptation of giving them [Syrian and Iraq] every possible help. (British Embassy in Damascus, 1966). Other than trades and economic assistance, Soviet also assisted the revolutionary Arab especially Egypt with military aid and equipment supplies. In October 1964, during the meeting between the Prime Minister A. Kosygin and President Nikolai Podgorny with General Ameer of Egypt in Moscow, more military aid was promised. This is a continuous military aid from Moscow since 1950s. For instance, based on the record of secret talk between UK and US in 1967, it was estimated that since 1956 more than 1,700 army tanks, 2,400 artillery equipment, 500 fighting jets and

1,400 military advisers were sent to Cairo. Prior to 1967 War, Moscow sent additional 200 MiG fighter jets and 1,200 tanks to Egypt. (US/UK Talks-FCO,1967). At the same time, Soviet placed her military bases across the region as a strategic position in the Mediterranean Sea. During the era, Soviet's military bases were located at Alexandria, Port Said and Mersa Matruh in Egypt as well as at Latakia and Tartus in Syria (Sick,1970).

Apparently, it is crystal clear that in the era of 1960s and 1970s, particularly with regards to the 1967's war, the Soviet influences on the Arab revolutionary leaders was one of the biggest threat to the British geopolitical positions in the Middle East. Undoubtedly, the Soviet and Nasser had aggravated London close relation with the Israel and the US during the war to retract Arab's trust on British balanced attitudes towards the conflict. The British Secretary of Foreign Affairs in 1967 when discussing the peace initiative at the UN in the aftermath of the war admitted this fact by concluding,

The Soviet Union's attitude especially in the UN, indicates that they have launched on all-out effort first to restore their position in the Arab world and then to exploit our and US difficulties in order to eliminate Western interests and influence from the Middle East and indeed the whole Arab world...Soviet strategy will be divided the Arabs irrevocably from the UK and the US by identifying these with the Israel position (Brown,1967).

#### **4-3. British Military Geopolitical Position**

Historically, Middle East region is vitally strategic to the British military communication to the East. The geographic location of the region is important for British military activities in Asia, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean. The military presence was to protect British interest such as the trade and the oil route to the West. Therefore, Britain retained its military bases in the Gulf area in 1960s era. In the Defense's debate of 1961, Secretary of State for Defense, Harold Watkinson affirmed this view and refused any attempt to abort the Middle East military base positions in the Arab peninsular and in the Middle East at large (House of Commons,1961). The military position in the Gulf was considered critical to protect the British strategic positions, especially to preserve the oil flows from Kuwait, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, and Qatar. Subsequently, when Kuwait declared its independences in 1961, British acquired a new military bases in Bahrain and Sharjah. This position was critical to protect Kuwait from

Iraq's invasion as promised by the British government to the Kuwait leader, Abdullah Salem al-Sabah (Abadi,1982). Furthermore, Kuwait was one of the biggest oil exporters to Britain in 1967, just second after Iran. In 1965, Britain spent £88.9 million to purchase oil from Kuwait, £92.7 million in 1966, the amount decreased in 1967 by about 18 per cent and escalated to £151.4 million in 1968 and 172.0 in 1969 (Brenchley,1989).

In 1962, the Prime Minister Harold MacMillan established the committee to study the British security in the Middle East. Based on the research findings of the committee as revealed by the Defense's White Paper of 1962, it was clearly asserted that permanent position of the 10,000 British troops was unavoidable and extremely critical to preserve the safety of British interest in the Middle East and in the Far East (Ministry of Defense,1962). Thus, the military position remains after the 1967's war. The most critical military position was in Bahrain and Muscat. According to the confidential report prepared by the Wing Commander on Mac 1968 based on the analysis undertaken by Joint Intelligence Staff, after the June's war of 1967, the military position at Bahrain had to be retained to protect London's interests from saboteurs and subversives patronaged by the radical Arab leaders and the Soviet. The report also stated the military position was very crucial to preserve the oil flows from the Persian Gulf to the West (Griffiths,1968). Prior to the 1967's war, Britain had at least four military bases in the region, namely:

- i. Muharrag-RAF station and military minor.
- ii. Jufair- the Headquarters of the British Forces, HMS Jufair and Royal Navy ships, Headquarters of Bahrain Garrison.
- iii. Sulmaniyah- the main administrative center for the Land Forces Gulf and Air Forces Gulf's head quarter.
- iv. Hamala Camp- infantry base, military battalion, and radar unit of RAF.

Other than Bahrain, the British military base also available at the Masirah Island in Muscat. From 1942 to 1967, there were at least two main interests of the military base in this location other than several places across the region. The location under Air Force Gulf Commander was the British Airforce (BA) base to monitor the air route from Aden to Karachi. In addition, the base was strategic for the Bomber Aircraft's route to the Far East, a fuel station for air-to-air combat aircrafts and a location for BA military aircrafts. In the 1970s the location was planned to be a base for a

Phantom fighter jet and the military protector aircrafts for the Marine Force. The Masirah Island's base had also functioned as a Diplomatic Wireless Relay Station (DWS) which replaced the former at Perim Island. The station was very crucial for military communication and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to broadcast Arabic tv program and news to the Middle East region and the Central Asia. The BBC station was particularly important to propagate British foreign policy in the region.

The Masirah Island was leased by the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman since 1942 to Britain. Nonetheless the subversive activities sponsored by President Nasser in 1960s in Oman and Muscat to dethrone the Sultan threatened the British position in the area. Based on the assessment by Major R. E. Fisher (1967) from the Ministry of Defense, any political changes in both countries would endanger British position in the Island, subsequently creating a bigger security issue of the Middle East in the future to Britain. Briefly, the Arab allies was considered as the moderate Arab nations such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and all the Gulf states. Since 1950s, the influences of the radical Arab led by President Nasser started to penetrate local politic in the moderate Arab countries including in Oman and Muscat where the British military bases located.

In Bahrain, the penetration of subversive movements emerged since 1950s under the flag of Bahrain Arab Nationalist Movement [BANM] led by Abdul Rahman Kamal. The BANM was highly active especially among teenagers and student unions such as Bahrain's Student Union [BSU]. They launched several subversive activities against the British interests. For instance, they sabotaged British interests in Bahrain Petroleum Company [Bapco] and Kuwait Oil Company [KOC] especially from 1964 to 1965. The same situation occurred in Oman to the extent that they organized a conspiracy to dethrone the Sultanate of Oman. Among the groups were the Dhofari Liberation Front [DLF], People's Organization for the Liberation of Oman [POLO] and the Omani Movement. They launched several attacks not only to the British economic interest but also the British military positions. For example, in 1959 the Omani movement sabotaged three British RAF Beverly aircrafts, exploded the British bank in Qatar and bombed three British Naval ships which one of them was S.S Dora with the casualties of almost 200 victims. All these subversive groups were backed and trained by Nasser's main organization, the Arab Nationalist Movement

(ANM). The British records identified more than 4,000 cadres were trained by the ANM to sabotage British interest in Muscat in 1967. Whilst at the same time, the UAR propaganda campaign through Cairo Radio always broadcasted the anti-Western/British campaign across the Arab nations. In fact, in 1965 the DLF had opened its operation office in Cairo. The report by British Joint Intelligence Committee [JIC] to the British cabinet 1968 revealed that the subversive movements under the patronage of Nasser and Soviet were continually active before 1967 (JIC,1968).

The geopolitical strategic of the Gulf nations like Oman and the importance of security protection was reaffirmed by the British diplomat, Sir Richard Beaumont to his counterpart in a secret meeting at the US State Department in August 1967. In the meeting, Beaumont explained the significance of geopolitical position for the UK and US security in the region, especially in regards of the 1967's War. According to him, peace and stability in the area is very crucial for trade, as source of oil and supplies as well as the profitable oil investment. Furthermore, the re-opening of the Suez Canal and its insulation from military and political obstruction affected trade, military communication, and oil traffic. He also briefed that the security of the area was also very crucial to protect the US/UK trades with Israel of which the exports worth one-seven of US/UK exports to Arab countries. Finally, Beaumont re-stressed the significance of preserving the security in the area to prevent Communist expansion in the Arab world (Beaumont,1967).

#### **4-4. The Economic Strategy Consideration**

Historically, the Middle East was a very strategic region for the British trade activities in Asia and Europe and it was the main British trade routes across the Red Sea, Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean. This area did not just produce cheap oil, but its location was very strategic for the oil flow and trade route to Britain and European countries. Suffice to mention that until 1970s, 40 per cent of the British sources of energy especially the industry depended on oil. Hence, 60 percent of the oil import came from the Arab countries (Ministry of Power,1968). The most important route was the Suez Canal which was the main oil route for the British shipping activity from Europe to Asia or vice versa. When the June War broke out, the Suez Canal was closed to international shippers including to the British companies. The Egyptian Army controlled the route in the strategy to block Israeli ships to go through Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba. The closure of Suez

Canal was a dramatic blow to the British trade activities since London was one of the major users of the Canal. According to the estimation by New York Brokerage Firm - Paine Webber, Jackson and Curtis on 24 September 1967, the closure of the Canal had tremendously increased Britain and European cost of oil transportation via Cape Town. For example, the single journey via the Suez Canal to Rotterdam with a capacity of 300,000 tons of oil was 34 per cent cheaper as compared to the route via Cape Town.

Furthermore, Britain and European countries had to purchase more ships to transport the oil via Cape Town. The Oslo R.S Platou Shipbroking Company from Sweden estimated that to navigate a longer route through Cape Town for a maximum oil capacity and cheaper cost, Britain and Europe must purchase bigger ships in large numbers. Eventually since July 1967, Europe and Britain purchased an additional 49 tanker ships with a capacity of 200,000 tons each and booked more than 136 tanker ships with a capacity of 150,000 tons each due to the war (Foreign Office's Report, 1967).

The additional expenses for a transportation caused a great impact on oil prices in Britain and Europe. Britain's oil import bills also had risen from over £300 million in 1960 to under £350 million in 1965, accelerated to over £400 million in 1967 and then shot ahead to over £600 million in 1968 (Brenchley,1989). This last jump was in part caused by the decision to hold larger stocks following the closure of the Suez Canal. The increment was unavoidable since the oil companies was forced to spend more money for transportation. For example, from the record by Inter-Departmental Working Part of the Energy Department (1967), it was indicated that the British Petroleum (BP) had to add tanker lease to 2.5 million of d.w.t (dead weight tons) during the war compare to 8 million d.w.t only in the normal period. Consequently, BP paid an additional cost of £60 million for bigger ships. British leaders were concerned with the closure of the Canal. At the same time, the increase in oil prices contributed to the decrease of approximately £100 million to Britain balance of payments in 1967. It is worth to state that up to 1971, BP contributed more than £170 million to Britain's balance of payments which they operated mostly at the Middle East oilfields. (BP Annual Report,1971). Consequently, the oil price accelerated not just in Britain but also in Europe due to a higher demand from domestic and industrial sectors. For example, in West Germany, the oil

price increased to £3 per tons, whilst average of increment was £2 per tons in all European countries. In Switzerland, the motorcar fuel increased to £2.5 and in \$5.50 per tons in France. In a sombre mood, the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson commented on the scenario:

The British government had gone out on a limb at the outset in support of the principle of free passage...as a result we had lost our Arab oil supplies for 3 months. We have been obliged to buy more expensive oil products elsewhere and to pay for higher rates for chartering tankers (Wilson, November 6<sup>th</sup>,1967).

Hence, when the British was in the process of negotiating the peace plan to be tabled at the United after the war, the issue of re-opening the Suez Canal appeared as their main objective. In the meeting between British's Foreign Minister, George Thomson and UK's Permanent Representative to the UN, Lord Caradon on 15 August 1967 admitted that the "the importance for us of getting the Suez Canal open". (Lord Caradon,1967). Meanwhile another senior diplomat, Sir Richard Beaumont in a dialogue at New York in August 1967 expressed the British government anxiety towards the impact of the war.

At the present time the loss of the Canal is adding a very considerable burden to our balance of payments. It is true that for each month that the Canal stay closed, the Egyptian economic situation gets worse and the pressure on both the UAR and Soviet Union to re-open it become stronger. But this is not a good enough argument on which to base our policies. If, as is likely, we have to wait a long while for these pressures to operate, the effects on our own economic situation will become increasingly severe the increase in freight charges resulting from the long haul round the Cape, the loss of earnings to British companies, and the like hood that as time passes other sources of supply will developed, all create problems both for the present and for the future (Beaumont,1967).

Other than the Suez Canal, the blockage of the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba during the war triggered the Israelis to launch attack and occupied the Sinai Desert from the UAR. The desert was rich with oil fields and was one of the major oil sources for the UAR before the war. Almost 4.5 million tons per year from 6 million tons of UAR production or 90, 000 barrels of oil per year were produced in this area. After the war, the Israelis government announced that Tel Aviv would reproduce oil from Sinai and

the contract was given to the Israelis company, Netivei Neft. The production was almost 8 million tons or 160,000 barrels of oil per year in 1975. Israel oil production was especially important as a substitute to the Arab oil for Britain. Thus, the reopening of the Strait of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba after the defeat of UAR was the lifeline for the British. Although the Suez Canal remains closed, the geo strategic location of Israel enables them to connect the oil route from Iran and Sinai to Europe via the Mediterranean. Eventually, the Israelis announced the development of oil pipelines from the Port of Eilat to Ashkelon in Mediterranean shore. (Trans Israel Pipeline). The capacity of the pipelines was 19 million tons, and it was estimated to increase up to 60 million tons per year. The opening of Israel pipeline gave great hope to Britain and Europe after the disruption of oil flows via the Suez Canal. The British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson praised the launch of the project by stating that,

Although it could not replace the Suez Canal for the passage of oil, it would have a number of substantial economic advantages in providing a shorter alternative route via the Suez Canal and a cheaper route than either the Suez Canal or even the journey round the Cape with super tankers (Wilson, 1967)

### **5. Conclusion**

Based on the above discussion it was clearly understandable that the British attitude during the Arab Israel War of 1967 was very much influenced by the geopolitical consideration. The Middle East was one of the most strategic and important regions to the British trade and military activities in the developing world. Undeniably the location of the region in the center of trading route, connecting Europe continent with Asia and it required a constant and exceptional attention from the British for ages. In this area, the geopolitical interests of London remained paramount and unchanged since the premodern era. Indeed, the cardinal significance of the region to the British was unaltered in the era of 1960s and 1970s.

When the Arab-Israelis War erupted again in June 1967, British experienced the eminence of anxiety, when all its traditional stakes were perilous and insecure. One of the vulnerable interests was the military position of the British troops at the Gulf. The insurgency of the Arab subversive activities during the war endangered British military positions, subsequently jeopardized other strategic interests such as the trades and the oil flows. The hostility of the domestic politics with the emergence of xenophobic

nationalist groups supported by Moscow created instability in the region. The condition then retrograded and crumbled with another unwanted Arab Israeli War. To make matters worse, the Suez Canal which was traditionally considered as numero uno to the British merchants was closed due to the displeasing and uncongenial war.

In the end, the British merchants had to spend huge additional expenses to cover the accelerated shipping cost for a longer route via Cape Town. Yet, the option was not cost effective and caused a bigger economic turmoil to Britain, particularly the compounded cost of fuel energy supply and the balance of payments. This point of interest was mentioned many times by the British leaders such as Sir Richard Beaumont, the British's ambassador to Iraq in his memo to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, George Brown after the war that 'the principle objective of British policy should be to safeguard British interests as far as possible in the Arab world by avoiding unnecessary opposition to the Arab countries' (Beaumont, July 17<sup>th</sup>,1967). Apparently, the reassessment of the June conflict in this study deduced the fact that the geopolitical consideration of the Middle East was evidently affected the British attitude in the Arab Israeli War of 1967.

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