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Can Policy Succeed through Inactivity? A Case Study of UK Foreign Policy after the Gulf War

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Can policy succeed through inactivity? Why does some inactivity lead to policy success, whilst others lead to policy failure? Whilst traditional approaches to policy success and failure have focused upon the impact of active policy interventions, this article draws together literature on policy failure and inactivity to develop hypotheses and a new conceptual framework to engage with the problem of inactivity in foreign policy. These are then applied to the case study of UK foreign policy in the Middle East after the 1990–1991 Gulf War. During this time the British government established four key policies; two would succeed, whilst two would fail. Using the new framework, extensive archival research, and documents received under the Freedom of Information Act, conditions for policy success and failure are revealed. As a result, this article argues that inactivity can be highly consequential and deserves much greater attention within foreign policy scholarship.

¿Puede tener éxito la política a través de la inactividad? ¿Por qué, en ocasiones, la inactividad conduce al éxito de las políticas, mientras que en otras ocasiones la inactividad provoca el fracaso de las políticas? Si bien hasta ahora los enfoques tradicionales con respecto al éxito y al fracaso de las políticas se han centrado en el impacto de las intervenciones políticas activas, este artículo reúne literatura sobre el fracaso y la inactividad de las políticas con el fin de desarrollar nuevas hipótesis, así como un nuevo marco conceptual con el que poder abordar el problema de la inactividad en la política exterior. A continuación, aplicamos estas hipótesis y este marco al estudio de caso de la política exterior del Reino Unido en Oriente Medio después de la Guerra del Golfo, que tuvo lugar en 1990 y 1991. Durante este tiempo, el Gobierno británico estableció cuatro políticas clave, de las cuales dos tuvieron éxito, mientras que las otras dos fracasaron. Utilizamos este nuevo marco, así como una amplia investigación de archivos y documentos recibidos en virtud de la Ley de Libertad de Información, lo que nos permite revelar las condiciones para el éxito y el fracaso de las políticas. En consecuencia, este artículo argumenta que la inactividad puede tener una gran importancia y, por lo tanto, merece mucha más atención dentro de los estudios de política exterior.

Une politique peut-elle réussir grâce au manque d'action ? Pourquoi certains types d'inactivités conduisent-ils à la réussite politique, tandis que d'autres mènent à l'échec ? Quand les approches traditionnelles de la réussite et de l'échec politique se concentrent sur l'effet de l'intervention active en politique, cet article rassemble la littérature sur l'échec et l'inactivité politiques pour développer des hypothèses et un nouveau cadre conceptuel afin de traiter du problème de l'inactivité en politique étrangère. Ils sont ensuite appliqués dans l'étude de cas de la politique étrangère britannique au Moyen-Orient après la guerre du Golfe de 1990–1991. À cette époque, le gouvernement britannique a mis en place quatre politiques clés ; deux seront des réussites, deux des échecs. À l'aide du nou-

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veau cadre, d'une recherche archivistique poussée et de documents reçus en vertu du Freedom of Information Act, l'on dévoile les conditions de la réussite et de l'échec politique. Par conséquent, cet article affirme que l'inactivité peut s'accompagner de conséquences importantes et mérite qu'on lui accorde bien plus d'intérêt au sein de la recherche en politique étrangère.

Introduction

The assessment of policy—whether it be a success, failure, or in-between—has long been of interest to policy and political scientists; to understand the cause and effect of the process of policymaking in an endeavor to move towards betterment (Kerr 1976; Ingram and Mann 1980; Fisher 1995; Bueno de Mesquita 1999; Bovens, 't Hart, and Peters 2001). However, this body of work has always been dominated by cases that examine the causes and consequences of intentional policy activity. For academics, examining policy through activity is appealing because of the plethora of case studies available and because interventions usually leave a trail of evidence ripe for the analysis of causation and the attribution of blame (Hood 2002, 2010; Howlett 2012). As McConnell and 't Hart (2019, 645) argue, despite differing understandings of what constitutes policy, "a common denominator in the policy sciences. . . is a bias towards the study of policy activity." This has been mirrored in the discipline of International Relations, where the analysis of foreign policy usually hinges upon the study of active decision-making and behavior within the international arena. As a result, policy and political sciences have focused upon policy engagement at the expense of developing clearer ideas around the impact of inactivity. This has left a significant blind spot in the overall understanding of policy success and failure. The purpose of this paper is to remedy this oversight and advance the understanding of policy failure by considering the impact of inactivity. At the same time, this work seeks to contribute to the literature on British foreign policy after the Gulf War. Much of the current work on this topic has focused upon activity in Iraq specifically, or taken a broader approach to examine the attempt to establish a "new world order" in a post-Cold War era. Instead, this research considers the regional perspective and offers further insight into UK priorities and challenges in the region at this time.

This article proceeds in three parts. It begins with an examination of the existing literature on policy success and failure, which provides a working definition for the purposes of this paper, and scholarly work on inactivity, which highlights the current focus on the causes rather than the consequences of inactivity. Secondly, hypotheses for the impact of inactivity are developed, and a new conceptual framework is presented, which disaggregates between different levels of intentionality and activity. Finally, this paper draws upon extensive British archival material and previously classified documents, received under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), to test the hypotheses and utilize the conceptual framework in the analysis of British foreign policy after the 1990–1991 Gulf War. In so doing it reveals that combining the conceptual framework with a disaggregation of active and inactive policy strategy provides an explanatory and predictive function for policy success and failure. As a result, this article argues that inactivity is highly consequential and is deserving of much greater attention within the agenda of policy failure, foreign policy, and

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public policy scholarship. It also posits that the findings have significant implications for policymakers and urges more conscious decisions about inactivity in the future.

Policy Success and Failure

Complete success in politics and policy is extremely challenging. The complexity of issues, processes, and stakeholders faced by policymakers inevitably leads to areas of compromise and imperfection. These complexities are often increased further when dealing with the multifaceted arena of the international system. As a result, attempting to assess success or failure can present a false dichotomy that ignores the reality of outcomes often falling somewhere across the success-failure spectrum. Indeed, McConnell (2010a) states that there are "grey areas in-between" with varying types of success, from resilient success to precarious success. Nonetheless, definitions of success and failure have tended to fall within three categories, loosely based on the different stages of the policy process and closely aligning with McConnell's understanding of three different dimensions of success and failure: process, programmatic, and political. First, success has sometimes been argued as the creation of the policy itself. This offers a bureaucratic approach to policy, whereby success and failure are dependent upon an agent's ability to navigate through the complex bargaining processes of the policy process maze (Lindblom 1959). Therefore, policy is deemed a success if it completes the creation process and is approved for implementation, but a failure if it gets permanently halted along the way.

A second definitional approach has been to focus upon policy implementation (Smith 1973; Hudson, Hunter, and Peckham 2019). In this approach success and failure are rationalist, programmatic, and defined by what governments do to enact policy to achieve policy goals. The focus, therefore, is on outputs or outcomes, and failure occurs when the strategy set to achieve a policy is either not implemented, not implemented as intended, or implemented but without achieving the intended consequences. The final approach to defining policy failure moves from a rationalist and objectivist approach to a constructivist and interpretivist viewpoint to consider the response to policy. As such, post-positivists argue for the importance of normative justification and public and political support within the definition of success and failure. In this sense, a positive public and political response can be deemed a success whilst a negative public, political, or public *and* political response can be deemed a failure. This has led to policy failure being examined in terms of a negative impact on position, reputation, or electoral outlook, regardless of its creation and implementation success (Edelman 1988; Brandstrom and Kuipers 2003; Boin, McConnell, and 't Hart 2009; Oppermann and Spencer 2016; Hinterleitner 2018).

A further definitional challenge is that policy can be successful in one of these approaches but deemed to be a failure in another. As a result, some academics have attempted to blend two different approaches within their own definitions. McConnell (2015, 221), for example, defines policy as having failed "if it does not fundamentally achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve, and opposition is great and/or support is virtually non-existent." Bovens and 't Hart (1995, 1996, 2016) have similarly looked to blend the rationalist and constructivist approaches in their definition of failure, which they further delineate between success, tragedy, farce, and fiasco based on the impact on reputation (a political assessment) and the impact on performance (a programmatic assessment). There have been many other distinctions within the concept of failure which include different emphases on the creation, implementation, and reception of policy. These include blunders, catastrophes, and disasters (Dunleavy 1995; Moran 2001; Crewe and King 2013). For McConnell (2010a), there are nine different ways in which policy can be claimed to have failed which cover all different definitional approaches, whilst Howlett (2012) identifies six variations of failure.

In addition, any definition of policy failure has the further challenge of time—short- versus long-term analysis. The dominant approach to the study of failure—especially in foreign policy—has been to examine events. As a result, scholars are more likely to examine short-term occurrences or the cause of critical junctures (Capoccia and Keleman 2007; Soifer 2012; Horgan 2019). However, policy failure can be long-term, cumulative, or systemic. Famously, Peter Hall (1982) declared the building of the Sydney Opera House to be a "great planning disaster" because of its escalating costs and failure to meet policy objectives. However, over time, the Opera House has become a cultural icon, bringing significant economic benefits to the city of Sydney (Dunleavy 1995, 52). In the security and foreign policy space the term "blowback" has come to explain the opposite effect, whereby initial success soon leads to negative fallout (Bergen and Reynolds 2005).

With all these challenges in mind, this article will take a programmatic approach to the definition of policy success. This is because the bureaucratic approach is too limited to the beginning of the policy cycle and ignores the challenges of implementation. It also often assumes policy creation to be at the legislature level, rather than at a ministry level, and in this case study, policy is agreed amongst those with interest in the Middle East within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), not at the parliamentary level. Finally, engagement within the bureaucratic process demonstrates activity, whether the policy is created or not, and therefore is not suitable for examining inactivity. This article will also not focus on the response to policy. Although this can be an important contributing factor to the amount of time, resources, and ultimate success of a policy, examining this part of the process is outside the scope of this article. Instead, it shall take a rationalist approach and focus upon policy implementation, whereby success and failure are defined by whether a policy achieves the goals set by the policymakers themselves.[1] The only requirement, therefore, for this analysis, is that policy is explicit, in order to assess whether it has been achieved. Therefore, "policy" will be understood as *what* the government wishes to accomplish and "strategy" as *how* it will be realized or implemented.

Beyond the challenge of definitions, there have been significant academic efforts to determine *why* some policies fail whilst others prove more successful. This analysis has included the exploration of the impact of structure, agency, process, and ideas across different stages and actors within the policy process (Edelman 1977; Gupta 2001; Peters 2015). However, the analysis of policy failure has always been dominated by cases that examine the causes and consequences of intentional policy activity. In these cases, policy success and failure have a direct link to active, conscious, and purposeful engagement within the policy process (Tullock, Seldon, and Brady 2002; Walsh 2006; Wallis 2011). Whilst there is some existing literature on policy inactivity, this has focused upon the causes, rather than the consequences of inactivity (Hill 2015, 124–6). For example, in Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations "inactivity" is embedded within the realist explanations of power balancing to trade off risks and rewards (Kennedy 1984; Gellman 1989). This includes discussions around isolationism and "non-interventionism" (Krasner 1989; Rathburn 2008; Kupchan 2020), including analysis into why Western states fail to intervene in certain humanitarian and conflict situations (Mouritzen 2013; Peltner 2017).

In 2019, McConnell and 't Hart argued for inactivity to become part of the mainstream research agenda and began the process by developing five different typologies for understanding the drivers behind policymaker inactivity (2019, 647). Since then, this work has been extended by Brown and Stark who have used the conceptual framework to analyze the implementation of lessons from policy evaluations and inquiries to identify four "moments" that cause inactivity (Brown and Stark

[1] This is similar to the definition of McConnell (2010b, 62) who defines policy failure as "a policy fails insofar as it does not achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve and no longer receives support from them."

2022). However, work in this field remains embryonic and continues to be focused upon causes rather than the impact of inactivity—or an assessment as to whether it leads to policy success or failure.

The work does, however, build upon scholarship in other disciplines, which examines similar, but different, concepts. In particular, Policy Studies have given consideration to "non-decisions" as a form of inactivity. In the 1960s and early 1970s scholars interested in contemporary societal grievances sought to understand why they had not become part of the policy agenda. Robert A Dahl's 1961 work, *Who Governs*, ignited a debate about the nature of power in politics and how certain interests were blocked or issues prevented from arising (Frey 1971; Wolfinger 1971; Debnam 1975). In response, Bacharach and Baratz (1963) developed a conceptual framework and utilized case study analysis to identify how power was articulated through control of the political agenda and denial of issues to the public forum. Following on from this work, scholars found the concept of "non-decisions" and "agenda denial" helped to explain how and why some issues failed to become policy and, in response, developed further frameworks for analysis (Crenson 1971; Cobb and Ross 1997). These works provide a methodological approach to the study of inactivity, albeit focused upon policy creation rather than the success or failure of policy implementation.

The concept of inactivity also resonates with a broader literature on barriers or resistance to change, which again seeks to explain the cause of inactivity. For example, the idea of inertia runs rife in organizational studies, led by the work on Hannan and Freeman's (1977, 1984) structural inertia theory, which looks to explain why organizations maintain the status quo in response to changing environmental factors (Schwarz 2012). In political science, path dependency draws upon different forms of institutionalism to explain the choices of stability over change (Arthur 1994; Hall and Taylor 1996; Pierson 2000). More recently, the idea of self-reinforcing feedback loops has led policy scientists, economists, and geographers to develop the idea of behavioral lock-in, whereby approaches, agents, and institutions create an environment for stability over change (Barnes, Gartland, and Stack 2004; Klitkou et al. 2015).

There is also literature that considers inactivity to be deemed a success, demonstrating that inactivity cannot be assumed to equate to policy failure. Research on "non-events" is a regular feature in Security Studies, where deterrence and counterterrorism theorists and practitioners must engage with the measurement of inactivity to demonstrate success (Dahl 2011; Gruenewald et al. 2016). In deterrence theory, there has been considerable debate about theoretical models and research designs, with an acknowledged difficulty of inferring the intentions of a would-be attacker if no threat occurs (Huth and Russett 1990; Leblow and Gross Stein 1990).[2] In counterterrorism, studying non-events is even further complicated by the secrecy of activity, especially if conducted by the intelligence services (Nalbandov 2017). Nonetheless, even non-event research in this field continues to focus on the causes, rather than the consequences, of inactivity (usually because the consequences can be assumed to be negative).

In contrast to this literature, this paper seeks to extend work on inactivity and related concepts by moving beyond their drivers to consider their impact, and specifically, whether inactivity can contribute to policy success or failure. It will do so by following a similar methodological approach to Bacharach and Baratz; by developing a conceptual framework and testing it against a case study.

A New Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses for the Impact of Inactivity

Policymakers and civil servants are expected to be active participants in the policy process—it is, after all, a key part of their job. This article terms conscious and de-

[2]For some of the controversies, see the 1989 *World Politics* special issue (41).

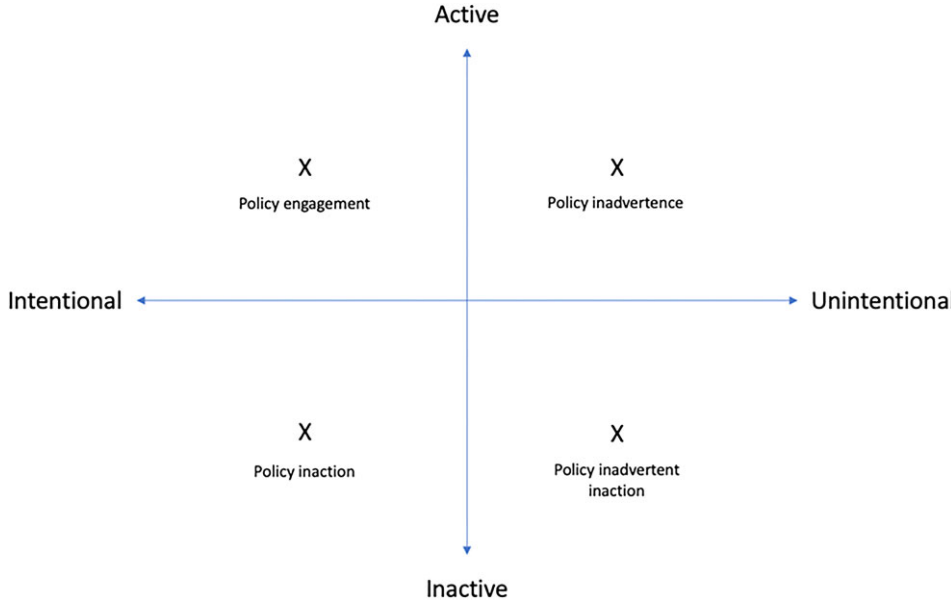

Figure 1. New conceptual framework for determining types of policy implementation.

liberate policy interventions by different actors as *policy engagement* (see figure 1) because it is both intentional and active. However, the way in which actors do or do not interact with policy is much more complex and dynamic than this one conception that has dominated the policy literature. Instead, policy interaction takes place across a spectrum of intention and activity. At one end of the intention spectrum, the intention is understood as being purposeful, planned, conscious, deliberate, or by design. At the other end, unintention is considered to offer the opposite, as being without purpose or a plan. The lack of intention may have come from being without thought or from the thought being only available in the subconscious but, in all cases, intention is about cognitive processes. Activity, however, is about behavior. To be active there must be the pursuit of an endeavor (albeit that the endeavor may be unknown). The activity may be in public and visible, but also private, allowing the inclusion of governmental activity that occurs behind the scenes in the bureaucratic sphere. On the contrary, inactivity is a demonstration of inertia or a lack of movement.

In considering policy implementation in terms of intentionality and activity, four typologies emerge (see figure 1). Whilst *policy engagement* occurs when there is intentional policy activity, *policy inadvertence* occurs whereby policy activity continues but without the same level of intentionality or conscious engagement. For example, in the formulation of policy, assumptions and precedents can run rife leading to *policy inadvertence*. In British foreign policy, such assumptions can include the primacy of Anglo-American relations or that global interests must equate to global activism (Nailor 1991; Otte 2011; Gaskarth and Langdon 2021). However, *policy inadvertence* can occur for a few reasons, including resource limitations for regular reviews or the result of automated systems and processes that remain continuously active and only receive intentional engagement if a problem presents itself. Tradition and culture can also play a key role in the lack of challenge or intentionality whereby activity that has always happened a certain way continues to do so without any critical engagement. *Policy inadvertence* has been presented in the literature in different forms and analyzed using several concepts. For example, "groupthink" can capture some of the unintentional approaches to policy creation, whilst "mission creep" exam-

ines how activity can progress without conscious engagement ('t Hart 1980; 't Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 1997; Dobbins et al. 2014; Piiparinen 2016). It also speaks to much of the barriers to change literature previously discussed and particularly the different institutionalist approaches to path dependency.

On the other hand, in many cases, there is a lack of policy activity by policy actors. In some cases, there is an intentional and conscious decision to be inactive and *policy inaction* may be the right, best, or only option—aligning with the Napoleonic mantra of "never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake." In other cases, *policy inaction* can occur due to bandwagoning, when alternatives are not available or further time is required to "wait and see" on existing approaches or data availability. In fact, the first four of McConnell and 't Hart's (2019) five typologies for inactivity—calculated, ideological, imposed, and reluctant—are all forms of *policy inaction* that assume conscious decision. The first two focus upon decision-making. Calculated inaction considers a strategic or tactical decision not to act, or not to act at a certain point in time. This is a rational decision often based on risk analysis and management. On the other hand, ideological inaction is driven by values and convictions. This can be about left-right divides along the political spectrum or beliefs about the role of the state to interfere in individual's lives. These can include issues about liberty, such as surveillance, or state interventions, such as welfare.

McConnell and 't Hart also discuss *policy inaction* due to institutional limitations. Imposed inaction derives from the recognition of power and political difficulties of navigating through other actors and important institutions. Finally, *policy inaction* can be reluctant, based on the understanding of the lack of time and resources to successfully pursue a certain policy. These could include, for example, military constraints in supporting security in multiple states, fighting on multiple fronts or in multiple theatres.

McConnell and 't Hart's final typology—*inadvertent inaction*—sits separately from the others. *Policy inadvertent inaction* exists at the opposing end of the spectrum to *policy engagement* and occurs when policy is unintentionally left with little to no activity. McConnell and 't Hart take a cognitive approach to their *inadvertent inaction* typology and expand the previous focus on inaction from agenda management to consider it as coming "from policymaker's cognitive processes in coping with the manifold, voluminous and ambiguous data and information they are routinely exposed to" whereby it is driven by rationality constraints and institutional blind spots (2019, 652). However, the concept remains underexplored and significantly less disaggregated in understanding than *policy inaction*.

Having determined four types of policy implementation and their causes, it is now to determine their consequences. To do so, this article argues that understanding the strategy, as well as the type of policy implementation is vital for predicting policy success or failure. In other words, how the policy is intended to be realized or implemented is just as important as the implementation itself—and how these two align will determine the outcome. For simplicity, strategies will be determined as "active" or "inactive." Active is when the strategy for implementation requires activity, whereas inactive is where the strategy is to "do nothing" and can include behaviors such as deferral, boycotting, or refusing to participate in a process.

To examine the argument further, this article puts forward three hypotheses for testing. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) note the benefit of using hypotheses in historical research, whereby they assist in the analysis of considerable data that the researcher has not generated and over which they have little control. Since this research uses governmental archival data across 10 years, hypotheses have been utilized to keep the study focused in the examination of a large amount of data.

The first hypothesis (H1) is that policy success is never guaranteed, even with ongoing *engagement*. This hypothesis seeks to test the relationship between success, activity, and intentionality in policy implementation. It acknowledges that policy implementation is an imperfect process, made even more complicated in the foreign

policy space by the number of competing actors and agendas. It also recognizes that policymakers may be attempting to implement policy but still fail due to incompetence, misallocation of effort, or inability to persuade others to implement as required.

The second hypothesis (H2) is that an inactive strategy can be successful through *policy inaction* or *policy inadvertent inaction*. This hypothesis considers the relationship between success, inactive strategies, and inactive policy implementation. In so doing it challenges the idea that all inactivity leads to policy failure. It also recognizes that success could be achieved without intent, meaning that an inactive strategy could be implemented accidentally.

The third hypothesis (H3) argues that an active strategy will fail with *policy inaction* or *policy inadvertent inaction*. This hypothesis considers the relationship between success, active strategies, and inactive policy implementation. Whereas H2 acknowledges the potential for success (recognizing that success is never guaranteed as per H1), this hypothesis assumes that an active strategy requires active implementation—and therefore *policy engagement* or *policy inadvertence*—to have a chance of being successful. Consequently, inactivity—and therefore *policy inaction* or *policy inadvertent inaction*—will lead to failure.

Method and Case Study Selection

The ability to test hypotheses around inactivity is challenging. After all, inactivity, by its definition, is when something does not happen and its non-existence provides an ontological challenge by providing no object of inquiry. The ability to know that something does not happen and lacks empirical evidence also raises epistemological questions and will often require researchers to question absences in evidence. Nonetheless, these issues are not insurmountable. Ontologically the lack of an object becomes the mode of inquiry, and epistemologically inactivity can be observed when there is an anticipation to the contrary. In other words, if there is an expectation of an action, it can be observed that it does not occur within a given time frame. Similarly, as intentionality is a cognitive process it also provides challenges for observation. For this research, the expectation of an action and/or intentionality will be determined by a statement of policy and strategy, with data mined for observable evidence of a responding action and/or intention. However, if no evidence is found, inference will be used to determine whether the best explanation for the unobservable, or lack of evidence, is inactivity and/or unintention.

For this article, the case study of UK foreign policy in the Middle East after the 1990–1991 Gulf War has been selected because it provides a critical juncture from which the United Kingdom reevaluated its foreign policy towards the Middle East (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Berins Collier and Collier 1991; Capoccia and Keleman 2007). The events had taken the United Kingdom by surprise and, although military action had been successful in liberating Kuwait, the challenge of the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, remained (Kettle 2018, 129–68). Less than two months after the 1990–1991 Gulf War had ended, senior figures from the UK's FCO Middle East Department, as well as the Policy Planners and Middle East Heads of Mission, were called to a conference. The event, held over 2 days on April 17–18, 1991, was established to consider the future direction of British foreign policy in the Middle East region. Papers from the conference reveal that four key policies were agreed to become the basis for the UK's future approach towards the region ([Redacted] to Planners 1991; Policy Planning Staff to [Redacted] 1991). These were to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD); increase arms control; establish a stronger regional security architecture; and make progress on the Middle East Peace Process. These policies were debated, written down in policy reports, updated through diplomatic cables, and scrutinized through the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC). Consequently, they provided a clear statement of

British foreign policy, revealing intent for activity and allowing for a programmatic assessment of subsequent policy success and failure. Ten years later, 9/11 changed the international security environment again, forcing a further reconsideration of the UK's Middle East policy. As a result, the end of the Gulf War and 9/11 provide the opportunity for longitudinal analysis of policy success and failure, but within a clearly defined 10-year period—which overcomes some of the challenges of short-term analysis, provides a clearly defined time frame and aligns with the 5–10-year focus of UK foreign policy planning (Kettle 2020).

This article has used archival research and documents received under FOIA for analysis. Archival research allows for the examination of government documents to discover stated policies and strategies (as required to determine success or failure by a programmatic definition) as well as a fixed and limited (if large) source to mine for expected actions and intentions for policy implementation. It is also appropriate, in this case, because it is historical in nature, with archival sources now available as released by the FOIA.[3] In so doing, analysis is conducted using the new conceptual framework to test the three hypotheses. In addition, this article seeks to contribute to the limited literature that exists on British foreign policy during this period. Whilst a considerable amount has been written about the Gulf War and its immediate aftermath (De la Billière 1992; Danchev and Keohane 1994; Munro 2006), especially through the lens of a post-Cold War "new world order" (Freedman 1991; Herrman 1991; Nye 1992), little has been examined on policy in-between these two key moments for the Middle East or focused upon the regional perspective (Cockayne and Malone 2006; Malone 2006; Dodge 2010). Consequently, this analysis will provide further context to the challenges and ideas of the time.

Case Study: UK Foreign Policy in the Middle East after the 1990–1991 Gulf War

Eliminate Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction

The first UK policy was to eliminate Iraq's WMD. When the Gulf War started there was significant concern over Iraq's chemical and biological weapons, as it had become clear during the Iran–Iraq war that Iraq possessed these capabilities. Intelligence reports also suggested that Iraq was seeking to develop a nuclear weapon or acquire WMD through its extensive procurement network (Kettle 2016, 213–4). After the Gulf War, the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) confirmed the existence of mustard agents, nerve agents, a program on anthrax and botulinum toxin, and chemical delivery systems in the forms of bombs, artillery, rocket launchers, and missile warheads (House of Commons Defence Committee 1994, 26). They also advised that the scale and effort of progress with nuclear weapons had been understated by the intelligence community.

The terms of the ceasefire between Iraq and the multinational force included an obligation for Saddam to destroy, remove, or render harmless WMD under a UN weapons inspection team (UNSCOM, later UNMOVIC). It was the UK's strategy to support this process through the UN and use the armed forces to ensure Iraqi compliance. This was an active strategy that required demonstrating *policy engagement*. This was achieved through intentional activity in the UN process, working on and supporting forty-six different Security Council resolutions on Iraq that were passed between the end of the war and September 2001, with fourteen relating to weapons inspections.[4] In addition, in 1998, in response to perceived Iraqi non-compliance towards these resolutions, the United Kingdom supported the United States in a

[3]However, this is not the only method suitable for the examination of inaction, as contemporary foreign policy can be examined through observational methods and interviews.

[4]Of particular note are UN Security Council resolutions 687 (1991) of April 3, 1991, 707 (1991) of August 15, 1991, 715 (1991) of October 11, 1991, 1,060 (1996) of June 12, 1996, 1,115 (1997) of June 21, 1997, 1,154 (1998) of March 2, 1998, 1,194 (1998) of September 9, 1998, and 1,284 (1999) of December 17, 1999.

military campaign against Iraq. Operation Desert Fox was a 4-day bombing campaign that aimed to damage or destroy military targets associated with Iraq's WMD program (Condron 1999; Fatchett 1999).

The United Kingdom was also active in other areas, albeit not always with the same success. British diplomats worked to strengthen the Missile Technology Control Regime, instigating cooperation on the secure transportation and storage of nuclear weapons, and putting aside financial support for export control training (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) 1994). A conference was held in January 1991 to try to convert the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty into a comprehensive ban (to ban all nuclear explosions in all environments) and was followed by a similar attempt at the Conference of Disarmament in September later that same year (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs n.d.). Eventually, in September 1996, a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was adopted by the UN, although this treaty remains unenforced due to the lack of state ratification. Diplomats in the FCO also worked to secure the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which came into force on May 11, 1995, and the signatory of the Chemicals Weapons Convention, which was established on April 29, 1997.

Overall, it was uncertain if the strategy of WMD agreements would be an effective approach to secure the elimination of Iraqi WMD as Iraq had been part of the NPT for over 20 years whilst flouting its restrictions. Nonetheless, by the time of the 2003 invasion of Iraq all of the WMD had been eliminated, albeit that this was unknown by the UK intelligence community (Chilcot 2016, 69–77). As a result, this policy was programmatically successful although it remains unclear as to whether its success was a consequence of direct UK *engagement*. However, whilst the policy strategy had been active, it had also been multidimensional, with several implementation routes working towards policy success simultaneously through *engagement*. This relates to H1, demonstrating that an active strategy with *engagement* can lead to policy success.

Increased Arms Control

The second policy was on greater arms control. The Middle East was the largest developing market for conventional weapons. In 1991 the region spent $4 billion on conventional weaponry (Clarke to Munro 1993). The permanent five (P5) of the UN Security Council supplied 85 percent of the world's conventional weapons, with the United Kingdom, America, France, and Russia the principal suppliers to the region. As a result, it was proposed that the P5 should instigate supplier restraint and meetings took place to discuss potential guidelines (FAC 1991, xxiii–iv). The FAC also suggested that the United Kingdom and the European Community (EC) could make arms restriction a more prominent part of their relationship with suppliers, including Czechoslovakia, China, and the Soviet Union (FAC 1991, xxiv). However, strategic and commercial considerations meant that the P5 were unwilling to accept arms control beyond the voluntary exchange of information on major weapons sales. There was also the tension of preventing the rearmament of certain nations, such as Iran or Syria, whilst simultaneously building up the defensive capacity of others: notably Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Egypt, and Turkey.

The UK's strategy for this policy was to create an international register of conventional arms transfers and the FCO worked hard to lobby this idea through the UN. On December 9, 1991, the UN General Assembly approved the initiative, which began recording in 1992. Since its inception, the register has received reports from over 170 states with over 90 percent of the global transfer of arms captured annually (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs n.d; Wezeman 2003). However, despite *engagement* with the strategy, the overall policy failed. In opposition to the policy, Middle East states embarked upon a mass arms build-up as a means of reassurance and protection (Policy Planning Staff to Munro 1993, 5–6). Within four

months of the 1991 ceasefire, the Egyptians were looking to add aircraft and tanks from the United States whilst Syria was buying new air defense systems and planes from the former Soviet Union, Scud missiles from North Korea, and tanks from Czechoslovakia. The United States also announced arms deals with Saudi Arabia, the UAE (focused upon Apache helicopters), and Israel (for F-15 fighter jets and a new missile system) (FAC 1991, xxiv). Despite some initial concern, the United Kingdom soon looked to capitalize on the financial opportunity too. In 1992, the United Kingdom exported 29 armored combat vehicles, a combat aircraft, and 446 missiles and missile launchers to the region. By 1993, this had increased to 65 armored combat vehicles, 17 combat aircraft, and 526 missiles and missile launchers (United Nations Register of Conventional Arms n.d). By 1994, the FAC concluded that the Middle East had become "characterised by a complex general arms race and several differentiated local arms competitions" caused by the Arab–Israel conflict, anti-status quo powers (Iran, Iraq, and Libya) seeking to gain leverage in the international system and a responding local arms race between their main rivals (FAC 1994, xiv).

Therefore, this policy had an active strategy and *engagement* but still resulted in policy failure. This aligns with H1, that policy is never guaranteed, even with ongoing *engagement* because of the complexity of the process. In this case, the register was successful, but this resulted in transparency of arms transfers, rather than increased arms control; the policy failed because the strategy did not directly equate to the policy. In part, this was because achieving the policy would have been incredibly difficult, given the requirement for universal buy-in for it to be successful, reiterating the challenge of successful foreign policy in a competitive international arena.

Establish a Regional Security Architecture

The third policy was to establish a stronger regional security architecture. The speed and ease with which Iraqi forces had invaded Kuwait and threatened Saudi Arabia had exposed the security weaknesses of many of the Gulf states and the overreliance on Western security backing. From a British perspective, it had also forced the launch of Operation Granby, the largest deployment of its forces since the Second World War (Parry-Evans 1991, 31; National Audit Office 1993, 27). In total, the operation cost £2.5 billion at a time when states were looking to reduce their defense spending in response to the expectation of a post-Cold War peace dividend (Central Office of Information 1993a, 32).

In the short term, the UN had deployed guards to monitor the situation on the ground, and a residual coalition force, with a British contingent, was left in Turkey to act as a deterrent whilst the Iraqi regime regrouped after hostilities. In the longer term, a more sustainable structure was required. The British policy was that future security arrangements had to be initiated by Arab states but that the United Kingdom would support the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as a forum to improve regional defense (N.A. n.d.a). In fact, the GCC had been established in 1981 to reduce rivalry and encourage closer cooperation following the joint shock of the Iranian revolution and the Iran–Iraq war. Prior to the Gulf War, the GCC had failed to achieve any meaningful regional organization, but it had created an environment for the six Gulf states to meet regularly and therefore offered a natural forum for better coordination and to begin building joint security structures and confidence measures, despite each member having a border dispute with at least one other member. The longer term hope was that the GCC would start to draw the Middle East towards a "Helsinki model" of Accords, similar to that agreed in 1975 on Security and Cooperation in Europe and that the GCC would form the basis of a balance of a tripolar power between itself, Iraq and Iran (N.A. n.d.a).

Initially, this policy seemed possible. On March 6, 1991, the foreign ministers of the six GCC states, along with Egypt and Syria (dubbed the 6 + 2), had begun

to build on their wartime alliance by setting out new principles for cooperation and coordination on economic, political, and military issues through the Damascus Declaration (Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General 1991). It was agreed that—in the short term—Egyptian and Syrian forces would remain stationed in the Gulf as the primary protection force against a threatening Iraq (Foster and Hollis 1991). In the longer term, the GCC would look to enlarge its own combined forces from 8,000 to 100,000 which would avoid overreliance on Egyptian and Syrian troop deployment in the future (N.A. n.d.b).

However, the optimism around the use of the GCC for defense did not last very long. There was considerable nervousness about the overreliance on Syrian and Egyptian forces, particularly from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. As a result, the military provisions first proposed in the Damascus Declaration did not come to fruition. By mid-May, Egypt had announced that it was withdrawing its forces (FAC 1991, xxi). On July 16, 1991, the 6 + 2 met again in Kuwait and agreed on a revised and "final draft" of the Damascus Declaration that removed any mention of Arab forces remaining in place from the Gulf War (N.A. 1993, 38). There were also disagreements as to how any new force should develop. The GCC established a Committee under Sultan Qaboos of Oman to iron out these issues, but the Qataris soon complained about the lack of progress, whilst the Omanis argued that they had been left without guidance from their GCC partners. In the end, there was difficulty in getting agreement over the force's rationale, its funding, its location, the command structure, and even some debate about what the force was securing against, especially since the biggest threat appeared to be another Arab state; Iraq (N.A. 1991). As a result, the 6 + 2 met again in November 1991 and the GCC annual summit took place in December 1991 without any further progress (N.A. n.d.a). The scheduled 6 + 2 meeting in May 1992 was postponed until September when it was agreed that a committee of states' economics ministers needed to be formed to work out future financing arrangements. This committee was to be coordinated by the Qatari government, but within weeks the Qataris had suspended the 1965 Saudi–Qatar border agreement, causing a flurry of diplomatic activity from the other 6 + 2 members to try to restore relations. By the time of the GCC annual summit in December 1992, the FCO had reached a new conclusion, with the Policy Planning Staff describing the GCC as a "largely paper alliance" with an unwillingness amongst the Gulf nations to cooperate with each other (Policy Planning Staff to Nixon 1992, points 14 and 15).

During this time there was initial *policy engagement*, with small steps towards implementation. The United Kingdom already had a formal defense commitment with Oman and a friendship and cooperation agreement with Kuwait, but it was agreed that no further offer of security guarantees should be given in the region, to nudge the GCC into closer cooperation (N.A. n.d.b). Beyond this, it was clear that the United Kingdom had only a consultative role. Consequently, Britain sought to advise the Qataris and the Omanis. They also supported the G7 and EC in their discussions around the Damascus Declaration and recognized that the United States, the United Kingdom, and Egypt needed to provide encouragement and push for decisions to be made promptly, whilst momentum remained (N.A. n.d.a).

However, interest in pursuing the policy soon fizzled out. Discussions in the GCC rapidly moved onto the security issues of Iraq and ongoing territorial disputes. In the United Kingdom, focus was on managing the ongoing threat of Saddam Hussein internally and externally as well as the new project for international arms control. By May 1991, the FAC reported that there had been no progress on the security architecture policy and no further strategic approach to ensure its implementation (FAC 1991, xxii). By December, the European Middle East Working Group admitted that there had been "little progress in following up on the Damascus Declaration" (Middle East Department to Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1991). Instead, *in-*

advertent inaction left the policy to slowly slip off the agenda. It was not an intentional decision, but the issues and the politics moved on. Over a year later, in January 1993, the Middle East Heads of Mission held a conference to discuss the current policy challenges for the region. Whilst it was noted that "there are limits to what we, the UK, can do" there was also a recognition that "more attention" could be paid to the calls for a broader security dialogue. However, there was no discussion of the Gulf. Instead, the focus had moved onto the Mediterranean and the Maghreb (Clarke to Munro 1993).

As a result, security quickly defaulted back to how it had been before; traditional, post-colonial bilateralism with external powers. By September 1991, the United States and Kuwait had signed a 10-year defense agreement. On February 11, 1992, the United Kingdom followed suit and signed a memorandum on security cooperation with France in Kuwait. On December 2, 1992, Britain and Kuwait signed a further agreement for the purchase of British defense equipment and services (N.A. 1993). It was not long until others followed. The UAE finalized an agreement with France in September 1991, followed by an agreement between Bahrain and the United States in October and Qatar and the United States in June 1992. Since Oman already had defense commitments it did not need to form any new agreements. As a result, the regional security architecture remained much as it had before and there were no structures in place to either contain or deter the two dominant powers in the region: Iraq and Iran. Overall, the policy had failed. After some initial engagement, activity, and intentionality dissipated and there failed to be any strategic realignment when it became clear that the GCC was not going to be able to deliver, leading to *inadvertent inaction*. Instead, the inactivity left a policy void, resulting in defaulting back to an old policy. There was no discussion about this change, instead it occurred in a manner akin to falling back into a bad habit, without a conscious decision and implemented with *policy inadvertence*. This aligns with H3; that an active strategy requires *policy engagement* or *policy inadvertence* to be in with a chance of being successful, whereas *policy inaction* or *policy inadvertent inaction* will lead to failure.

Progress on the Arab–Israel Conflict

The final policy was that "a serious effort must be made to break the Arab/Israel logjam" (Policy Planning Staff to [Redacted] 1991). Following the UN's decisive action over Kuwait, there was optimism that peace could be pursued in other areas. There was also a recognition that the Arab–Israel conflict offered the key to unlocking many other problems in the region around political instability, over-armament and Arab hostility to the West. In fact, during the Gulf War, Saddam had tried to use the Arab–Israel conflict to his advantage by attacking Israel with Scud missiles in the hope of drawing it into the war and recapturing some Arab support. He had also argued that the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait should be treated in the same way as Israel and the Occupied Territories, and there was some criticism of double standards in the enforcement of UN resolutions against Iraq whilst ignoring Israel's violation of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 (FAC 1991, xv–vi).

Although the problems behind a diplomatic settlement of the Arab–Israel and Palestine disputes remained unchanged, there were different dynamics at play. The end of the Cold War had seen a reduction in the importance of Israel as a mainstay for the United States in the region against the Soviet threat. Similarly, Arab states had lost their Soviet sponsor leaving the dispute to revert to being a regional argument, with new dealings between the Arabs and Americans and relations between Russia and Israel. The Gulf War had also highlighted the strategic importance of the Gulf to the United States, thereby promoting Saudi Arabia as a key ally. Furthermore, the United States had established goodwill in the region and a stronger position in the Arab world whilst simultaneously feeling that it wanted to

reward its Arab partners for their support. In addition, the trauma of the Gulf crisis had increased the sense of urgency in Arab governments to address regional problems, whilst the Israelis were recovering from the shock of the first major attack by an Arab state since 1973. A further dynamic was that the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) had backed Iraq in the war, therefore alienating many Arab nations and losing influence with Palestinians, leaving them in a position of diplomatic weakness. This allowed the Americans to persuade Arab leaders and Palestinian representatives from the Occupied Territories to drop demands that PLO officials and Palestinians from East Jerusalem participated in the negotiations, instead leaving representation to delegates from the Occupied Territories and as part of a joint Palestinian–Jordanian delegation (Office of the Historian 1991). Finally, America had increasing financial influence over Israel that could be levied for negotiations, as Israel's economy was struggling to support its increasing population; the United States was providing $3 billion a year of aid, constituting 7 percent of Israel's GNP (Policy Planning Staff to [Redacted] 1991, 5; FAC 1991, xviii). In the event, the United States withheld $10 billion of loan guarantees in order to put pressure on Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to drop the insistence on bilateral negotiations (Office of the Historian 1991).

During this time the British strategy to achieve progress on the Arab–Israel conflict was to defer the issue to the Americans and provide diplomatic support where necessary (N.A. 1991; Rynhold and Spyer 2008). Consequently, the strategy was inactive—a conscious decision to leave the problem to the Americans, with minimal activity on the British side. Although not constituting a "serious effort" in many ways this approach had been imposed upon the British. The US Secretary of State, James Baker, had taken a proactive line and was "pushing hard" in the region (N.A. 1991). It was also noted that "The Americans did not want advise" as to how to move the Middle East peace process forward (N.A. 1991). The conclusion, therefore, was that the United Kingdom should "give the US space" (N.A. 1991; FAC 1991, xvi). Instead, the FCO would focus its work on acting as the bridge between the United States and the EC, and continuing contact with the PLO to encourage moderates to assert themselves (Policy Planning Staff to [Redacted], 6–8; Policy Planning Staff to Nixon, point 6 (iii); Rynhold and Spyer 2007, 144–6; Central Office of Information 1993b, 67).[5]

There was some initial success in the new process. The Madrid Conference in October 1991 brought together the parties of the Arab–Israel conflict for direct negotiations, leaving Syria talking to Israel for the first time since 1949, and involvement from Egypt whilst successfully maintaining its peace with Israel. Bilateral talks continued in Washington, followed by multilateral talks in 1992 but by 1993 deadlock in talks led to secret negotiations between Israel and the PLO—rather than the Palestinian delegation who were required to wait for Yasser Arafat's approval—culminating in the Israeli–Palestinian Declaration of Principles (also known as the Oslo Accord) in September 1993, and between Israel and King Hussein, leading to the Israeli–Jordanian peace treaty of October 1994. The British continued to leave most of the work to the Americans and worked through the EC on the periphery to offer support to the peace process, including through economic assistance to Jordan (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1991, 6).

This approach suited the British. *Inaction* allowed the UK government to focus on other areas of concern and interest in the region whilst bandwagoning their way to policy success (Keohane 1969; Walt 1990). It also demonstrated that an inactive strategy with *inaction* could result in policy success, aligning with the hypothesis that an inactive strategy can be successful through *policy inaction* or *policy inadvertent inaction* (H2). In part this may have been because the policy was modest, focusing

[5]Ministerial contact with the PLO had been suspended in 1990 after their support for Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Relations were resumed in March 1993.

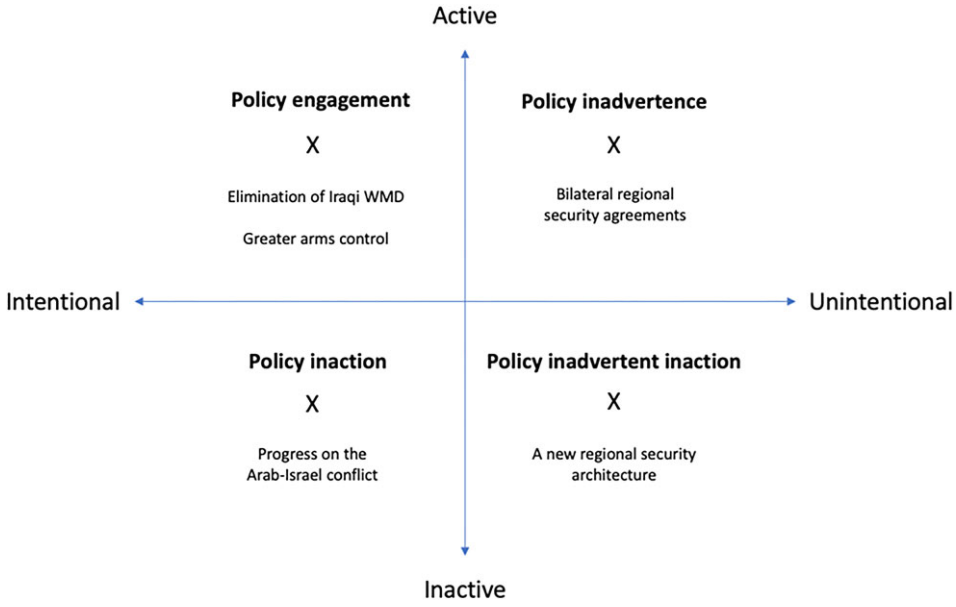

Figure 2. Engagement with UK foreign policies after the Gulf War.

on achieving "progress" rather than a settlement (Hood 2002; Howlett 2012), but it was also because the United Kingdom had a willing participant in the Americans, who were happy to take on the responsibility of the issue and whose policy aligned with the British. It worked particularly well because the British recognized that the United States was the only state that could act as a credible broker to Israel because Britain did not feel the need to assert itself, or a European, presence into the process and because it was keen to support an "American orientation" in the region (Rynhold and Spyer 2008, 295; The Atlantic Council and The German Marshall Fund 2002). When the US administration changed over from President Bush to President Clinton there were some initial concerns that the United Kingdom may have to offer more activity, but this soon proved to be unnecessary (Clarke to Munro 1993).

Conclusion: Inactivity and Policy Success and Failure

Policy can fail for many reasons. The creation, implementation, evaluation, and learning of policy is a complex process with many actors and variables involved in success and failure. Furthermore, the way in which a policy fails, including the extent, duration, and visibility of the failure, will often depend on the type of policy itself. Nonetheless, a considerable amount of literature on failing has focused upon the impact of active interventions, and particularly *policy engagement*, at the expense of considering the impact of inactivity on policy failure. Therefore, this article has looked to conceptualize and explore if and how inactivity leads to policy failure. It has done so through the case study analysis of British foreign policy in the Middle East after the Gulf War. The UK approach was complex, but it sought to focus upon four key policies: to eliminate Iraq's WMD, to increase arms control, to establish a new regional security architecture, and to make progress on the Arab–Israel peace negotiations. These policies and strategies were engaged with, and acted upon, to different extents (figure 2).

This article also put forward three hypotheses (table 1) which proposed a link between the policy strategy and the type of implementation for the success or fail-

Table 1. Summary of hypotheses

H1	Policy success is never guaranteed, even with ongoing *engagement*.
H2	An inactive strategy can be successful through *policy inaction* or *policy inadvertent inaction*.
H3	An active strategy will fail with *policy inaction* or *policy inadvertent inaction*.

Table 2. Summary of findings

Policy	Type of strategy	Type of implementation	Programmatic success/failure	Relating to hypothesis
Elimination of Iraqi WMD	Active	Engagement	Success	H1
Increased arms control	Active	Engagement	Failure	H1
New regional security architecture	Active	Inadvertent inaction	Failure	H3
Progress on the Arab–Israel conflict	Inactive	Inaction	Success	H2

ure of a policy. Overall, across all four policies, two can be claimed to have been a programmatic success; progress on the Arab–Israel conflict and the elimination of Iraqi WMD. Whilst it is not surprising that an active strategy with *policy engagement* can produce policy success, the approach to eliminating Iraqi WMD did reveal that it was possible for some strategies to fail and policy still succeed if there are multiple approaches to achieving the same end goal. However, the analysis of the Arab–Israel conflict highlighted that *policy inaction* and *inadvertent inaction* can also produce policy success under certain conditions, thus evidencing H2. In particular, policy can still be successful through inactivity if the implementation strategy is inactive, either because of inactivity or in spite of it. In this case, the policy was deferred to the Americans, which can add further levels of complexity based on the relationship between the two different actors.[6] However, the United Kingdom had a willing, able, and active partner in the United States, where interests aligned and who were able to make progress on the conflict. This may be a form of calculated inaction, but deferral does not currently form part of McConnell and 't Hart's explicit typologies and therefore opens a route for the extension of their work (2019).

The other two policies—increased arms control and a new regional security architecture—failed (table 2). The case of increased arms control demonstrated how even *engagement* and successfully implemented strategies do not guarantee policy success, evidencing H1. In fact, for policies to succeed the correct strategy has to be chosen, it then requires appropriate implementation, the implementation has to achieve its intended consequences and the policy has to survive against changing and competing political dynamics. In the case of the policy for a new regional security architecture, it was hypothesized (H3) that *inadvertent inaction* would lead to policy failure for an active strategy, but deeper examination also revealed that inactivity would create a policy void that may result in defaulting back to the old policy. In the case of *policy inaction*, a rejection of policy implementation may suggest a preference for the old policy. This may be because the implementation actors gauge it to be easier, more viable, or more productive. Either way, it is likely that *policy inaction* of a new policy can resolve to *policy engagement* with an old policy. However, where there has been *inadvertent inaction*, the old policy will likely be revisited with *policy inadvertence*.

[6]Deferral is distinguished from a proxy relationship because there is no necessity for a relational interaction between actors.

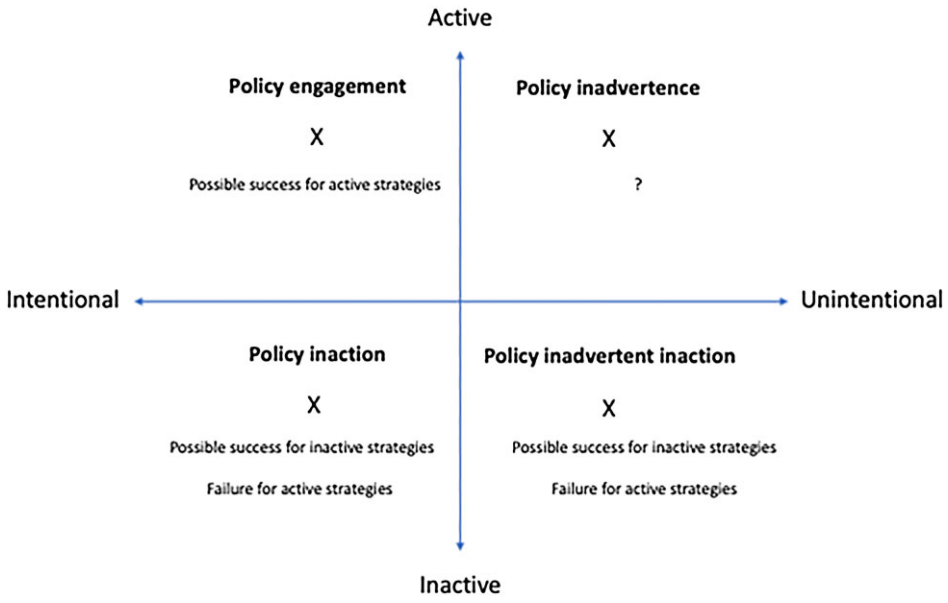

Figure 3. Success and failure for policy strategy.

Overall, an examination of the UK policies after the Gulf War presented evidence to support H1–3. This provides an initial indication that understanding the type of strategy and type of implementation can provide explanatory and predictive functions for policy failure and understanding the consequence of inactivity (figure 3), hence validating the argument and revealing that inactivity deserves much greater attention than it currently holds within the literature on policy failure and policy sciences.

There is much more work to be done on this topic. Further case studies are needed to test the findings of this paper. This article has primarily utilized cases of active strategies and has not tested *policy inadvertence*. Furthermore, policy success through *inadvertence* and *inadvertent inaction* needs to be tested over time, as the lack of intentionality will negate any ongoing evaluation and learning process that may secure ongoing success. This work is important. As well as contributing to the policy literature, policy success or failure has real-world consequences and can have a significant impact on people, property, the economy, security, and the power and influence of states, as well as political careers and the electoral prospects of individuals and political parties. Whilst this work reemphasises how difficult it can be to achieve policy success, and how many prospects there are for policy failure, developing a further understanding of the windows of opportunity for success can help policymakers avoid failure and use inactivity more strategically in the future.

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