

QATAR UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ITS IMPACT ON SHAPING OMAN'S CONTEMPORARY

FOREIGN POLICY

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Title: National Identity and its Impact on Shaping Oman's Contemporary Foreign Policy.

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The aim of the thesis is to investigate the concept of national identity and its impact in the process of foreign policy decision-making by using a constructivist approach, with a particular focus on Oman's foreign policy. The thesis attempts to demonstrate the degree to which the components of national identity in the Omani case are highly influential in foreign policy decision-making. The reason of choosing national identity in this research refers to the fact that it might be difficult to understand Oman's contemporary foreign policy which is characterized by an independent and neutral approach, without first mapping the role of identity that shaped this approach.

The main question of the thesis is that; to what extent does national identity and its components influence Oman's foreign policy? In doing so, the study has conducted a qualitative research method and employed both primary and secondary resources. The findings of the study confirmed the argument that Oman's contemporary foreign policy is driven largely by the national identity and its components which include (historical dimension, geographical location, cultural and civilizational heritage, religious aspect). The research concluded by arguing that although the succession process in Oman is problematic and there is uncertainty of whether Oman will maintain its foreign policy orientation after Qaboos's reign; however it is unlikely that it will change its foreign policy dramatically as the components of its national identity will continue to determine

the action of any future leader in Oman.

DEDICATION

*To My Beloved Family; I Dedicate this Work with a Great Love and Appreciation for
Your Kindness and Encouragement.*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since 1979, the Gulf region has gone through different political phases and developments, being one of the most volatile areas of the world. The Iranian revolution in 1979, Afghanistan's invasion by the Soviet, the long conflict between Iran and Iraq (1981-1988), Kuwait's invasion in 1991 of so-called the second Gulf war, American attack on Iraq in 2003, and the Arab Spring are some of the important events the region has witnessed, since 1979 (Akseki, 2010). Political instability in the region has continued until recently, whereby the Gulf Cooperation Council is witnessing an unprecedented crisis in the form of the blockade imposed on Qatar and the division it has caused to the whole Gulf bloc. All these issues took place in one of the most important regions in the world due to the availability of large quantities of oil reserves. As such, any disruption of oil flow from this region would undoubtedly cause serious implications in other parts of the world. It is for this reason, the greater powers, mainly the US, UK and Russia are exerting numerous efforts to maintain their interests, and this cannot be achieved without preserving the stability of the region and their allies (Rieger, 2013).

Within this unstable and volatile area, Sultanate of Oman has pursued a balanced foreign policy orientation which is characterized by independence and neutrality. This policy has resulted in maintaining good relations with many countries (Al-Khalili, 2009). Investigating the real motives behind Oman's foreign policy deserves detailed academic attention due to its unique experiment as well as the presence of national identity components that cannot be found in its neighbors. In reviewing the preceding literature conducted in this field, it became clear that there is a common denominator in most of these studies. The majority of these studies are wondering about the real motives and dynamics behind Oman's independent foreign

policy, bearing in mind, its limited economic and military abilities. On many occasions, its political decisions have taken a contrary direction of its counterparts in the GCC and Saudi Arabia in particular. Many Scholars argue that Oman's political decision is based on what meets its interests and corresponds to the principles it believes.

There are many scholars that examine Oman's foreign policy. Studies such as; Kechichian (1995), Al-Khalili (2009) and Baabood (2016) are the most comprehensive and significant literature conducted in this field among many others like Akseki (2010), Lefebvre (2009) and AlRahma (2015). In his investigation, Kechichian (1995) contends that the historical dimension acts as a key element in the formation of current Oman's foreign policy. He further illustrates that due to its strategic location, it was subjected to colonial powers' rivalries such as Portugal, Holland and Britain. These foreign powers were competing to maintain control over the Muscat government either by signing a treaty of friendships with the Omani authorities or by force. Despite the fact that this rivalry and external interventions over Oman led to internal division, it had a greater impact, on the other hand, in developing social awareness of Omani people to defend their territories and being independent of any external influence. As such, by the early 18th century, the Ya'aribah Dynasty, ruling the country at that time, expelled the Portuguese and the Persians from Muscat and other parts of the Gulf (Lefebvre, 2010). During the mid-19th century, Oman's expansion reached its peak. This expansion helped Omani traders to export goods and other materials to other parts of the world. The growth of trade and other commercial activities had coincided with the flow of people and migration from numerous ethnic and tribal origins all the way to Oman (Bontebal, 2015). By the time, these people had taken from Oman as a place of residence and had lived there for generations which in turn, had created a sort of unprecedented shape of multi-culturalism that is rarely found in its neighbors. This

social harmony and ethnic diversity is the root cause of tolerance, acceptance others and peaceful coexistence that Oman enjoys at present. These values and principles have been further promoted and practiced by the Ibadhi doctrine, which is adopted by the majority of Omani people (Baabood, 2017).

Among the aforementioned factors that contributed to shaping Oman's contemporary foreign policy, Sultan Qaboos is the key figure that engineered the country's unique approach. Since he assumed power in 1970, he pursued a new vision to extract the state from isolation and restore its former glory. The main principles that distinguish Oman's foreign policy under his rule are independence, neutrality, solving conflicts through dialogue and peace talks, tolerance and non-intervention with the internal affairs of other countries (Kechichian, 1995).

All these components discussed above (historical dimension, strategic geography, cultural and civilizational heritage and religious aspect) combined together to form a distinctive identity to the state. Thereby, the main argument of this research study is that the current independent approach practiced by Oman's foreign policy is derived largely by the national identity and its various components. In investigating the influence of national identity on Oman's foreign policy, a qualitative method has been conducted of both primary and secondary resources. This will be further explained in the coming sections.

Research Problem

The main problem this thesis attempts to shed light on is the raising question of what influences Oman to pursue a neutral and independent approach. This approach has caused misunderstanding within the Gulf Cooperation Council states in particular, as Oman is accused of adopting agendas that hinder the interests of the GCC such as its position from the proposed unified currency as well as its rejection of being part of the

Gulf Union. Because of its position from the Gulf union in particular, a wide argument has been raised among some critics and analysts from neighboring countries claiming that the Sultanate is acting outside the GCC consensus (Baabood, 2017). In addition, Oman has strong ties with Iran compared to other countries that view Iran as a main threat to the region. Within this cloudy and blurry understanding of the real motives behind such political approach, this study attempts to shed light on the problem by addressing the missing link that prompts Oman to follow its independent foreign policy and illustrating the role of national identity in shaping this political approach. In addition, there are limited studies that examine and analyze Oman's foreign policy from the perspective of national identity, notably those related to the foreign policy of Arab countries and Gulf states in particular.

Research Significance

Given that there has been little research conducted to investigate the impact of identity on orienting the foreign policy of the states, this study attempts to provide a clear and extensive analysis to researchers and those who are interested in understanding the dynamics of the states' foreign policy. The study focus on the case of Oman, as it is one of the few states in the Middle East that enjoys a high level of independence in practicing its foreign policy. There are several examples that demonstrate Oman's independent foreign policy whether in the Gulf, regional, and international levels. The research will examine and analyze the role of national identity that shapes this unique foreign policy and the elements that structured this.

Besides, what reinforces to carry out such research is the need to bridge the gap between the divergent views towards Oman's foreign policy by clarifying the contradictions in this regard especially those who pose questions and criticism about its neutral and independent path. Meanwhile, the results and findings that will be obtained

through this research could be applied -to some extent- to other Gulf countries, given that these countries have some common characteristics such as; similar monarchical systems besides other cultural and religious denominators.

Moreover, the finding of this research might be useful as a reference for researchers and those who are interested in studying and analyzing the trends of states' foreign policy within the Arabian region and how identity is involved in shaping its approaches. In addition, the finding could be beneficial for those working in the research fields in Oman as well as those in the government political institutions as it presents a different perspective of understanding the fundamental driven factors behind Oman's foreign policy and how decision-making system is implemented in such environment. It is expected that addressing the concept of national identity and its role in shaping the behavior of any state would add a contribution to the preceding literature that study and analyze states' foreign policy. It will also open up new and exciting fields of comparative research with the Middle East and beyond.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the thesis is to examine the concept of national identity and its impact on shaping Oman's foreign policy. In doing so, the study employs a constructivist approach. This country has been chosen due to its unique approach in the region, which enabled it to establish good relations with many countries around the world. Furthermore, Oman acted as a mediator to solving some of the complicated issues in the region. There are many examples that support this argument, starting from Oman's contribution to solving the Iranian nuclear program and its role in releasing some of the western hostages.

Research Question(s)

In order to achieve the above mentioned objectives, this thesis attempts to provide answers to the following key questions:

The main question:

To what extent does national identity influence/impact Oman's foreign policy?

The secondary questions:

What are the factors or elements that have contributed to shape the national identity of Oman?

How does Oman and its leadership employ these factors in drawing the Sultanate's foreign policy?

Research Methodology

Based on the research question, the research methodology follows a qualitative case study method. Filstead's (1970) offers a simple definition of qualitative research method which is "firsthand involvement with the social world" (p.23). This initial and simple definition had been further analyzed and expanded by Goldstein (1991) arguing that "firsthand implies the context of the investigation, the immediate on-site setting in which qualitative method is employed, and involvement refers to the actual participation of the researcher to the social world being studied" (p.103). In contrast, Tutty, Rothery, and Grinnel (1996) provided a more expanded definition of qualitative research methods as "The study of people in their natural environments, as they go about their daily lives. It tries to examine how individuals live, how they talk and behave and more importantly, it strives to understand "the meaning peoples' words and behaviors have for them" (p.4). Contrary to quantitative methods whereby numbers and numeric outputs are its main characteristics, the data in qualitative methods are conveyed through words and text production (Creswell, 2013). These data involve direct quotations about people experiences, feelings and opinions of a certain issue taken through interviews, observations and documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2013). In the same context, Merriam (1998) identifies six criteria that differ qualitative research

methods from quantitative in terms of their focus, design, assumptions, goal, data collection and the findings. Patton (2015), according to Merriam and Tisdell, has discussed 16 types of inquiry within the qualitative research methods. Some of them are commonly used, whereas the majority are less common and rarely used such as semiotics and chaos theory. However, for this study, Merriam and Tisdell's classification has been used. They have chosen six of the more commonly used approaches to doing qualitative: basic or generic, grounded theory, case study, narrative analysis, ethnographic and phenomenology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2013).

In conducting this research, a qualitative case study method has been chosen. There are two reasons for this choice. First, the purpose of this study is to explore the role of national identity in shaping Oman's foreign policy. To do so, applying a qualitative research method is the appropriate manner that would help me to conduct this task, given that the major goals of qualitative research include description and understanding as well as explain and predict (Merriam, 1998). The second reason is related to personal considerations, as I feel more familiar to use qualitative method rather than quantitative. Using this method to discuss humanitarian issues and those related to state and society, largely fit my social personality. Exposing myself to peoples' life and understanding their culture and knowledge is really interesting for me and I see myself more creative in this area rather than dealing with numbers and analysis. Furthermore, besides the benefits I would gain from publishing my research, contributing to the field of social and political issues as well as providing suggestions and recommendations to decision-makers are also among the reasons that motivated me to do so. Thus, the qualitative method appeals to me and raise my satisfaction to a large extent. Merriam & Tisdell (2013) argue that as with the other types of qualitative research, a qualitative case study has some defining characteristics. It shares with other

types the search for meaning and understanding, an inductive investigative strategy and the end product being richly descriptive.

With regard to data collection, both primary and secondary sources have been used. Beside secondary literature that provides insights to the research study, a collection of documents have also been used. There are two types of documents used in this regard: one is considered as a primary source which comes in the form of official documents and archives. The other one is a secondary source which represents press or media products. While documents offer a valuable opportunity to deeply analyze and investigate the studied area, Meriam (1998) argues that the researcher has to evaluate the validity and authenticity of the document he wants to use.

Taking this into consideration, the objective of using documents in this research is to enrich the analysis. Many Scholars have argued that documents sustain and protect the memories of a certain state. For instance, Al Salimi & Michael (2012) argue that documents hold the legacy of individuals past and their activities practiced in a certain territory as well as the raw material of their history. Documents are valuable sources that could help scholars to search for the truths and correct the contradictions and shortcomings in some literature. In addition to their contribution to knowledge, documents' significance goes beyond that into recording the evolution of civilizations and the activities of people involved in a certain territory (Al Salimi & Michael, 2012).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Given that this research aims to examine the role of national identity in shaping Oman's foreign policy, it is essential then to investigate the contribution of the preceding literature in this area. In doing so, this Chapter is structured into two main parts. While, the first one focuses on the literature conducted to analyze Oman's foreign policy, the second section investigates how state identity is being perceived and described theoretically through different schools of international relations theories.

Literature Review

The literature review is separated into two main sections. Firstly, the literature surrounding Oman's Identity is reviewed and then the literature on Oman's foreign policy. Regarding identity, there is literature that examines how some states created their own identity to achieve their objectives and its influence on their foreign policy orientation (Barnett, 1999). It is worth noting that Oman's identity is characterized by three main elements: history, culture, geography. Thereby, some literature provides insight in this regard as will be discussed.

The second part of literature analyzes Oman's foreign policy during its modern history particularly, when Sultan Qaboos assumed power in 1970. These studies highlight the most important events that shaped Oman's contemporary independent and neutral approach by addressing the domestic, regional and international conditions, and analyzing Oman's policies towards these circumstances (Akseki, 2010). In addition to this, literature that is devoted to discussing a single case study will be used in analyzing Oman's foreign policy. For instance, Oman's behavior with the Iranian nuclear program or its behavior towards the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Indeed, it could be argued that most of the preceding literature conducted in this regard focus on analyzing Oman's foreign policy since its modern history which trace

the events after Sultan Qaboos assumed power in 1970 without taking enough consideration of Oman's legacy and its rich experiment before Sultan Qaboos' reign. Other literature like the study of Rippenburg (1998) titled: "Oman: Political development in a changing world" focuses on discussing the formation of the state through the history and the influence of this on developing its political experience without providing enough analysis of the real motives and factors behind Oman's contemporary foreign policy. It is worth mentioning that studies which are completely devoted to analyzing Oman's foreign policy are fairly limited with the exception of two important and comprehensive studies: "Oman and the World: The Emergence of Independent Foreign Policy" by Joseph Kechichian as well as the study of Majid Al-Khalili titled "Oman's Foreign Policy, Foundations and Practice". Despite their valuable contribution, both of them neglect to consider one of the main elements that shape current Oman's foreign policy which is national/state identity.

As stated earlier, and according to the research question, two main themes of literature are reviewed as follows:

1. The Interrelation between Identity and Foreign Policy

According to Sen (2007), Identity is "the reference that explains how a certain individual, institute, organization, company or state behave" (P. 18). Some argue that in order to analyze the behavior of individuals, one needs to concentrate on their identities which hold valuable information (Rutherford, 1990). Applying this concept is also helpful to understand how national identity may influence a certain state to follow a particular foreign policy approach. This identity is a mixture of cultural and social experiences that have grown throughout history and ended in forming a unique character to a certain nation. Identity, in turn, can be described as "a collection of cultures, customs, traditions, and civilization of a particular people or state and the code

by which the person can identify himself in relation to the social group to which he belongs" (Sen, 2007, p. 25).

It is important to understand the concept of identity in Oman before addressing what makes Oman's foreign policy unique in the region. Oman enjoyed good trade and communication with the outside world since early history, helped in creating a sort of multiculturalism due to the trade movement and people migration in and out (Jones, 2014). This has made the Omani culture cultivate the principles of tolerance and accepting others and aversion to sectarian conflict. Sen (2007) also explains the role of multicultural identity in maintaining better relations with individuals and others and the reflection of this on states' behavior. It is perhaps for this reason that the behavior of Oman's foreign policy is consistent with the culture of politeness prevailed in society. This has made it possible for Oman to deal with its neighbors and also maintain good relations with Iran and GCC states (Jones, 2014). Gubash (2014), in turn, explores the role of Ibadism in shaping the political life in Oman. One of the major achievement of this book is that it provides insight about the role of Ibadism as a unifying patriotic reference as well as the contribution of Ibadi school in developing the political awareness of the society. Ibadi thought is relying on the principle of electing the Imam and implement the idea of consultation as a key feature that distinguishes Ibadism from other schools in the region. The author also discusses the prevalence of peaceful coexistence within the Ibadi society as well as their willingness to being independent and maintain their sovereignty. This approach that has been experienced by Ibadism explain why Oman had resisted any kind of external power influence since the ancient days (Gubash, 2014).

Indeed, Oman's foreign policy is part of a national narrative that distinguishes it from its neighbors (Echagüe, 2015). In his attempt to employ the concept of identity

in the case of Oman, Valeri (2009) argues through his book titled "Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State that Oman's authority built its own national identity of so-called "Renaissance" which enables the government to widen its influence and hegemony over the society and in turn, ensure its continuity. Valeri further argues that creating this identity among society helped the Sultan to freely draw his own strategy of Oman's foreign policy. However, he is doubtful about the ability of the Omani government to maintain this identity due to the succession challenges of post-Qaboos as well as rising domestic challenges both economically and socially. However, Valeri's study has failed to find a link between Oman's social identity and its real motives and roots. This shortcoming has been covered by Echagüe (2015) who explains that the roots of Oman's moderate and pragmatic foreign policy stem from its long history, forming a unique identity of mixed population, different languages and a mix of religious backgrounds. These features contributed to creating a peaceful coexistence and tolerance within the society and as a consequence, had been reflected to determine the behavior of Omani government to its neighbors and other parts of the world, which is based on solving the conflicts through dialogue and peaceful manners to ensure regional security and avoid any domestic instability, the author argues. Echagüe agrees with "Marc Valeri" that Oman will witness internal challenges notably in the economy, which may cause a slight change in Oman's foreign policy, particularly with Iran due to the growing tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Given that there is no single study devoted to explain Oman's foreign policy from an identity perspective, it would be useful then to see the prevailing literature conducted in this area for other countries. In his attempt to show that identity plays a role in shaping states' foreign policy to achieve economic objectives, Badawi (2016) offers a valuable contribution in his dissertation about "The Role of Identities and

Interests in Iran's Foreign Policy Towards Syria and Iraq". The study examines the relationship between identity and Iran's interest by addressing the factors that contributed to the social construction of Iran's Islamic national identity. He focuses on Iran's trade relations with Syria and Iraq, taking into consideration that oil supplies have been used by Iran to influence Syrian foreign policy during several periods in the 1980s of the last century. In fact, much of the greater part of the Badawi's literature focuses on creating an identity to facilitate Iranian economic interest and ignores clarifying the creation of socio-political factors in this manner. Thus, Barnett (1999) employs the concept of identity to provide a partial explanation for the internal dynamics that led to Israel's embrace of the Oslo Accords. He analyzes the Israeli identity within the framework of four constitutive strands: religion, nationalism, the Holocaust and liberalism. He states that identity should not be perceived as a psychological or individual construct, but rather as the relational result of social interactions between actors in a given setting. Barnett enriches the discussion on identity by bringing to the table a new phenomenon which he terms "identity conflict". He argues that a situation of identity conflict arises when political actors at domestic level have alternative interpretations of the meanings underlying national identity, giving rise to an internal struggle over establishing a deeper definition of the collective self. Barnett pinpoints two ways in which identity informs foreign policy behavior of a state: identity conflict as a source of internal competitive dynamics, and identity itself as the primary source of national interests.

Besides, there are also constructivist theories that explain the relation between ideas and foreign policy making and how states' identities shape their international behavior (Mansour, 2016). In his study, Mansour (2016) makes a comparative study between six Middle East countries namely Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, Egypt,

and Syria to investigate the relation between ideas and foreign policymaking. The author uses constructivist theories to analyze how states' identities shape their international behavior. In turn, Yavuz (1998) uses the revival of neo-Ottomanism in Turkish politics as a case study to analyze the relationship between foreign policy and identity. Yavuz maintains that the interactions between domestic and external agency are mutual and specific to the context. In favor of a constructivist position that perception of national interest is a byproduct of social negotiations within the discourses of national identity, he rejects the neorealist view that international relations are shaped primarily through balances of power that emerge under the anarchical order of the international system. If identities, Yavuz argues, are the true bases of interest as Wendt (1992) claims, then the process through which national interest is constructed should be directly related to the politics of identity. Indeed, Yavuz's work is more than relevant to this study since the involvement of Islamic identity in shaping politics is a phenomenon hardly exclusive to Turkey.

Having discussed the preceding literature that analyzes the impact of identity on building the social culture and its reflection on the behavior of states' foreign policy, the following will provide insight about the related literature that describes Oman's foreign policy. These studies take into account the impact of history, economy, geography, culture, and religion on shaping its behavior and actions towards regional and international issues.

2. Oman's Foreign Policy

Given that Oman's foreign policy is somehow unique in the region, there are numerous efforts exerted by scholars to analyze the real motives behind such an approach. The literature mostly explains the significance of Oman's rich history in shaping this policy; there are some disagreements on when Oman's foreign policy began

to take its shape. For instance, some authors believe that Oman's approach took its shape after 1970, others date it back to the beginning of the 20th century (Kechichian, 1995). A clear example that illustrates these differences is Kechichian's study (1995). Despite his valuable contribution in analyzing Oman's foreign policy, the study is limited in that it allocates the Sultanate's external relations in the period (1970-1995). Therefore, there is somewhat an absence of analysis in the period (1930-1970) under the rule of Said bin Taimour, the father of the current Oman's ruler.

On the other hand, as an attempt to cover the shortcomings of Kechichian study, Al-Khalili (2009) offers a valuable and much more comprehensive insight. Al-Khalili believes that for a comprehensive understanding of Muscat's foreign policy, the analysis should date back to 1930 particularly during the era of Said bin Taimour considering his role as the seeds of Oman's foreign policy. He clarifies the internal political division in Oman as a consequence of competition between the Imamate and Al-Said dynasty in the early 20th century and the British interventions in this regard. Furthermore, Al-Khalili did not neglect to analyze the current Oman's foreign behavior and its reaction to various regional and international issues. However, Akseki (2010) has a different view than Kechichian and Al-Khalili with regard to analyzing Oman's foreign policy. He believes that regardless of the period taken to analyze the behavior of a certain state, examining domestic, regional and international environments and apply it to any period is sufficient to provide a clear understanding about the state's behavior. In doing so, Akseki (2010) identifies the determinants and the influence of each environment (domestic, regional and international) on shaping Oman's foreign behavior within the period (1970-2008). He finds that all three environments contributed to shaping Oman's foreign policy, but the level of contribution of each environment varies among each other according to the existing regional circumstances

and conflicts. Nevertheless, these prior studies have not been able to convincingly show the real motives behind Oman's foreign policy, given that there is fairly a complete absence of examining the geopolitical, religious and cultural factors.

As stated earlier, the current Oman's independent and neutral foreign behavior has been shaped through the interaction of different factors throughout history. Thus, in order to understand and analyze its approach, it important to address the factors that led to shape this approach. Indeed, there are several works of literature that focus on addressing these factors. To begin with, Baabood (2016) argues that Oman's foreign policy is an interaction of social level, state level, and system level. While he examines the role of political culture represented by "Ibadism" thought, other factors have also been considered such as Oman's geographical position and its limited economic capability. Lefebvre (2009) agrees and further discusses in depth the dynamics and motives behind Oman's foreign policy in the twenty-first century. He argues that there are three main factors that characterize Oman's behavior: strategic location, the post-petroleum economy and the Ibadi culture which is based on tolerance and peaceful coexistence. These three factors will continue to constrain and determine the orientation of any future leader with regard to Oman's foreign policy.

Moreover, Oman's limited economy has also a great influence that describes Oman current behavior which prompted it to conduct good relations with its neighbors (Lefebvre, 2009). To compare the findings of Baabood (2016) and Lefebvre (2009) studies, AlRahma (2015) demonstrates in her dissertation that Oman's foreign policy has been shaped mainly by a geopolitical factor more than any other factors. She argues that Oman was exposed to some great powers such as the Portuguese, the British as well as the Persian due to its strategic location on the opening of the Arabian Gulf and its closeness to different international sea lines, which contributed to raise the

awareness of Omani people about the external greed and thereby, developed their resistance and interaction against these powers (AlRahma, 2015). Therefore, the geopolitical factor is the driven factor that shapes Oman's foreign policy as AlRahma believes.

Having looked at the preceding literature that discusses Oman's foreign policy from its wider and general view, there are also several papers that are purely focused on analyzing Oman's reaction within a particular issue as a case study. In general, Oman's interaction with the regional crisis is based on solving conflicts through dialogue and peaceful manners rather than aggressive or escalated actions (Lefebvre,2009). This peaceful foreign policy appears in two studies that demonstrate how Oman reacted with the regional issues. In his study, Rabi (2005) explains Oman's independent approach in dealing with Camp David peace accords in 1978, unlike Arab consensus who cut their ties with Egypt. Oman's behavior, in this case, stems from its belief that Arab conflict with Israel could be solved through such agreement, nor through escalation and hostile actions (Rabi, 2005). Schmierer (2015), agrees and further provides another case study that demonstrates Oman's interest in solving the conflicts peacefully with regard to the Iranian nuclear program. The author perceives Oman's efforts to solve this complicated file as a reflection of its belief in defusing tension and conflict in the region. He illustrates that being independent and neutral in dealing with the regional crisis, is a helpful and a powerful tool that can be used in solving complex issues such as the Iranian nuclear program, and obviously a clear evidence that issues can be solved in a peaceful manner than military options (Schmierer, 2015).

After examining the related literature of either identity or Oman's foreign policy, it becomes obvious that there is very limited studies devoted to analyzing Oman's

foreign policy from identity platform like the studies conducted for Turkey, Israel and Iran discussed above. Thereby, providing insights about the main factors that shape Oman's foreign policy and emphasizing the role of identity in this aspect, is the main feature that distinguishes this study from the preceding literature related to Oman's foreign policy. Hence, adding a platform of identity to the research area will provide a comprehensive understanding and up -to- date analysis of Oman's foreign policy. Another fact is that despite the valuable contribution of some preceding studies that touch upon the motives and dynamics behind Oman's foreign policy, the role of identity in creating such approach is almost neglected or relatively addressed. Hence, the research attempts to cover the shortcomings of the preceding literature by involving the role of identity, so that it will be a valuable resource for scholars of Middle East studies and students as it will enrich the literature conducted in Oman's case. Therefore, further research will fill the gap in the literature by offering a clear and in-depth assessment of the real motives behind Oman's foreign policy.

The Theoretical Framework of the Study; Social Constructivism

There are different schools of international relations theories that describe states' foreign policy. Among all these different theories, this research uses social constructivism, one of the most prevalent theories of mainstream International Relations literature. In contrast with the conventions of neorealism and neoliberalism, social constructivism chiefly pursues to determine how ongoing processes of social practice and interaction can shape essential features of interactions between states, i.e. social construction (Adler, 1997). The ideas "that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature" comprise, according to Wendt (1999), the two progressively

recognized principal creeds of social constructivism. Based on this view, interactions between states are not only influenced by power politics, but also by identities. The fundamental structures underlying these interactions are not necessarily material, but rather, social (Wendt, 1999). This leads social constructivists to place heavier emphasis upon the notion of identity, how it feeds into the formation of interests of actors, and hence changes in the nature of social interaction between states (Wendt, 1999).

There are two main reasons for choosing a constructivist framework. Firstly, this theory has significantly contributed to my understanding of the dynamics underlying the formulation of Omani foreign policy. What particularly interested me was the irony that even though identity directly informs perceived interests, social constructivism does little in favor of them in his response to past theories. What social constructivism does instead is identifying neorealist and neoliberal institutionalist claims about state behavior, in the context of international relations theory (Adler, 1997). This is because clearing the social constructivist argument of false charges of earlier theories would immediately restore its explanatory potential. I call it potential because the social constructivist theory does not provide an explanation for practical matters. Rather, it is a set of principles which provide analysts with the potential to explain any-be it present, past, or hypothetical-situation of international relations. Secondly, once this is done, advocating the importance of identity in the formulation of foreign policy becomes irrelevant, because questioning the inherent functionality of foreign policy becomes irrelevant (Adler, 1997). The reason for this lies at the situation that whether the foreign policy of a given state in the case of this study, Oman-has a true promise under certain material conditions completely depends on the prevalent identities and interests present in a given social structure. In other words, when it comes to the question how one can explain the formation of Omani foreign policy within the

current social structure, social constructivism provides a suitable theoretical framework because we are living in a world of conflicting identities with conflicting interests (Rieger, 2013). Therefore, with regard to the case and nature of Oman, it is clearly obvious that the internal factors and social characteristics had a major role in influencing the state's foreign policy (Nonneman, 2015). Constructivism theory shows that each state is characterized by a distinct domestic nature resulting from different factors such as state's political system, economic capabilities, degree of political participation, religious and cultural heterogeneity, identity concepts and finally the history of society and the state (Rieger, 2013). The following sections provide an in-depth description of national identity and its role in influencing states' foreign policy.

The Concept of State Identity

The notion of identity has been examined through numerous scopes and presented in innumerable manners that mirror the methodological and theoretical orientations of different analysts. Some researchers approach identity as a foundational principle for developing constructivist theories that are commonly applied in the study of International Relations (Wendt, 1999; Weldes, 1996; Jepperson, Wendt, & Katzenstein, 1996). Other researchers have looked into empirical analyses with particular causative extrapolations that concentrate on identity: how state identity impact on their interests (Lee, 2006; and Banchoff 2009); how changes in the national identity contribute to changes in state policy; and subsequently, how these changes impact on the international system.

Numerous researchers have concentrated on the shared relations between international level actors and state identities, looking into, for instance, how the international environmental norms and institutions impact on state identities, how local notions of state identities and international norms interrelate, and if the dynamics of

state identities unavoidably result in conflicts. Other scholars have also addressed the issue of identity from multiple perspectives, which include the relations between political development of states and national identity conceptions, how identity is treated when viewed from the feminist theorist perspective, as well as how national identity is constructed (Dittmer & Kim, 2018; Ruane, 2006; Tickner, 2006; and Eyre & Suchman, 1996). These and many more research analyses that center on the concept of state identity and its relationship to the wider study of international relations shed more light on the nexus and impact to the larger IR framework.

The recent increase in research addressing the issue of identity within international relations raises multiple definitions of identity. It is for this reason that critical observers such as Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, and McDermott (2006) termed the resultant situation a state of “definitional anarchy.” One explanation for this anarchical state is typological. Within the related research, different forms of “identity” are found, which include “self,” “collective,” “national,” “role,” “social,” “relational,” “corporate,” and “personal identity.” This introduced many diverse descriptions of identity, such as a rational addition or prolonging of the self to incorporate the well-being of others (collective identity), identifying one-self along state dispositions (national identity), and social identity – the self-concept emanating from the knowledge that a participant may have with regard to members within a social group (Gries, 2005; Mattern, 2001; and Koslowski & Kratochwil, 1994). Definitions additionally vary based on the specific aspects that researchers choose to focus on. For instance, Abdelal et al. (2006) note that collective identity varies along two primary dimensions namely contestation and content for purposes of operationalizing the principle to conduct comparative evaluation across members of a group. Others such as Zehfuss & Maja (2002) perceive identity as an outcome of the human desire to comprehend the world.

Other scholars such as Checkel (2001) and Callahan (2006) have not provided an explicit definition of identity and have rather favored to treat it as a self-explanatory concept.

Against this backdrop, it is important to begin by looking at identity in a simple form by adopting the definition provided by Jepperson et al. (1996). The authors define identity as the image of distinctiveness and individuality projected and held by an actor. According to the authors, identity is not just about the character or description of actors' characters. Wendt (1999) explains that such self-concepts are applicable in their plural form, for instance, when one says 'I am a Catholic, a Lawyer, or a Russian,' and they are in many cases, although not at all times formed and conceived through an actor's relationship and interaction with other individuals within the environment. In light of this, interactions and social experiences with other individuals are important elements for molding as well as remodeling identity, whereas ecological factors, which include institutional and cultural situations that provide appropriate platforms for the aforementioned interactions and experiences to occur have a possibility of being employed for developing identities (Wendt, 1999).

Given that the aforementioned accounts and definition of identity are derived from scholarly research in philosophy and psychology regarding a person's identity, it then follows that they should be translated within the context of a state. In this respect, state identities can be identified as a distinct identity category that denotes the image of distinctiveness and individuality projected and maintained by the states within specific international frameworks. In its simplistic form, state identity implies a notion of what a state represents (Alexandrov, 2003). Similar to individual identities, for instance, the concept of the Self-applied within the context of a state, is modified and developed over time through interactions and relations with other states, and in other instances, as a

result of interaction with other international actors that may include transnational and international firms. Meanwhile, institutional and cultural factors of states' external and internal environments additionally assist in developing the concept and philosophy of state identity. Similar to personal identity, state identity thus does not only represent an expressive personality of a state, but it is additionally a relational as well as the social concept that refers to the state in a manner that mirrors the identity or existence of others (Altorafi, 2012).

The Concept of State Identity and how it differs from National Identity

A clear difference between national identity and state identity is not easily made. Many scholars use the phrase state identity in respect to what is national identity and vice versa. Other scholars sub-divide identity into external and internal dimensions. The concepts of state and national identities, many times, if not at all times, overlay to a certain level. The common explanations of national identity that tie the "perceived community" together do additionally interrelate this community to other countries, while state identity, seen as common beliefs about the other and the self can become important factors in the role of maintaining togetherness of national society. The difference between state and national identities, thus, does not naturally or emanate from the basic distinctions between the aforementioned concepts (Bloom, 1993). To a certain level, this difference emanates from the divergent research priorities and theoretical concerns across the disciplinary areas of international relations and political science. Those academicians concerned with ethnic conflicts, nationalism, or domestic politics approach identity as "national" while those of the disciplines of international relations and foreign policy stress on the external perspective of identity (Altorafi, 2012).

Acknowledging the ongoing need for nation building in both the developed and

the developing states, scholars such as Bloom (1993) have argued that the substantial national identity dynamic, many times, affects a country's foreign policy, therefore going over and above the national context and spilling over to the IR domain. The impending signing of national identity problematic for IR theory is additionally a primary consequence of an argument fronted by Ruggie (1998) regarding equivalence between the principles of domestic order at play in the US's comprehension of its formation within the larger context of political community, and the vision of world order demanded by US leaders when instituting a new international system. Ruggie (1998) further argues that the identity factors of US played an important role in defining US interests on such areas as developing NATO and United Nations, and together with the superior capabilities of the US as hegemony had a significant effect on the international framework. This means that based on the principles and variables of IR theory, the national identity of great or hegemonic power in the world plays a critical role in the development of international systems.

Analyzing State Identity through Constructivist Approaches

Over and above the core of state identity, constructivist theorists stress on the margins that result from discussions that center on identity. They contend that identity is only present as a subject of discussion and that it is never secure or stable enough to become a descriptive factor in the analysis of foreign policy. Constructivists approach the "Self-Other" correlations in terms of opposition such that positive features are attributed to the self while any negative features are attributed to the "Other" (Altorai, 2012). In this perspective, Zehfuss and Maja (2002) contend that the "other" could additionally constitute the past "self" such as was the case with regard to West Germany in the postwar period when it defined its identity largely by opposing Nazi Germany and its associated ideas.

The most elaborate critical constructivist approach as regards state identity is presented by Campbell (1992); further extending the view presented previously by Bloom that foreign policy may also double up as an important element applied in the course of nation-building. The analysis by Campbell with regard to state identity and particularly that of the US in relation to foreign policy leads to the traditional view of foreign policy as the external alignment of pre-instituted countries with safe identities. Consequently, the author overturns the underlying relationship between foreign policy and state identity. The author provides an abstract understanding of foreign policy as a practice that produces boundaries, which are important to the construction and reconstruction of state identity in whose name it functions.

Campbell (1992) also recognizes state identity as the result of exclusion or elimination practices whereby elements that are resistant to securing identity from internally are correlated through a “dialogue of risk” with externally identified and located threats. Because the process of nation-building never ends, the identity and existence of a state cannot be safe and therefore has to be constantly maintained by the discourse of risk and danger. Constructivists argue that their identities form state interests and that owing to the process of interaction; the formed identities are susceptible to change. Constructivists thus argue that their methodologies can give better abstract accounts of change and evolution in IR as opposed to what rationalists provide (Alexandrov, 2003). Constructivists additionally advance the discourse that countries hold norms not just owing to their self-interest but also as a result of having internalized them within their identities, therefore widening the constrictive liberalist system for the scholarship of norms (Campbell, 1992).

Many scholars view state identity as being part of the larger culture (Berger, 1998). Constructivists define culture as socially shared or common beliefs and

practices. This definition of culture is narrower than and different from common sense or conservative meaning of the word. This difference is expected as constructivists are only concerned by those aspects that directly relate to IR. Therefore, for instance, the approach adopted by Berger (1998), in particular, makes reference to a country's local political-military cultural disposition, defined as “a subsection of the wider historical-political culture that includes dispositions associated with the use of force in international affairs, the military as an institution, security, and defense” (P. 62). There is, nevertheless inconsistency among scholars in matters that relate to whether state identity forms part of the international or local culture. Whereas a majority of constructivist researchers stress on a country's local culture as being a core source of state identity, some such as Wendt (1999) (Cited in Hudson, 2013) describes the culture of interstate society as a core factor of state identity.

CHAPTER 3: OMAN'S NATIONAL IDENTITY

This Chapter highlights the components of national identity that have a great impact on shaping the current approach of Oman's foreign policy. As argued earlier in Chapter 1, national identity has a great influence in determining the approach of foreign policy that a certain state will pursue. Despite the fact that there are numerous components of national identity, four of them are highly influential with respect to the Omani case. They include its unique geographical location, the country's historical dimension, its cultural and civilizational heritage and the religious aspect. The following is an analysis of these principles and how they fit in the country's foreign policy setup.

Historical Dimension

As it has been argued by scholars of statehood from different schools of thought, the conception of a state and the development of state identity is unavoidably associated to people's imagining or perception of their history and immemorial past. It has been argued that what gives nationalism its strength are ethnic heritage symbols, traditions, memories, and myths. Psychiatrists and social psychologists also accentuate the fact that a significant cognitive basis that is fundamental to the construction of social identity is shared knowledge regarding in-group history, in addition to the history of the inter-group points of contacts and conflict (Huang & Liu, 2018). As such, given that the collective elements of national identity include memories of national achievements, national experiences, national traditions and symbols, then it follows that a nation's history is equally important because all these collective elements are rooted in it (Huang & Liu, 2018).

With respect to Sultanate of Oman, it has had different historical experiences both in the distant and in the recent past. These past historical experiences are regarded

as one of the fundamental underpinnings of its foreign policy, for instance, the country's social interactions both externally and internally. As such, Oman commits a lot of resources to strengthen and consolidate its friendship with different people from multiple nations outside its national borders, who are of strategic significance to the country's security and economic interests (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). With Africa and Asia, the Sultanate of Oman seeks to support common interests and communicate while at the same time promoting cultural and civilizational exchange.

Oman's earliest settlements date from early 3 B.C. It was initially called the country of Majan. During this period, Oman's main activity was smelting copper and this was subsequently traded to Mesopotamia (Rippenburg, 1998). The Acadian and Sumerian inscriptions indicate that Oman, formerly called Majan had naval relations with Akkad and Sumer and this relationship comprised of an extensive trading network that stretched to Africa, Indus Valley, and Sumer (Hourani & Carswell, 1995). As people continued to look for areas to mine copper, a lot of agricultural lands was desiccated and coupled with changes in the climatic conditions; agriculture was officially replaced by camel nomadism. With time, the urbanized life vanished and copper trade came to a halt. A lot of time passed and it took nearly 1,000 years for agricultural settlements to reappear. This reappearance was largely attributed to the Persian expansion into the Arabian Peninsula and subsequent installation of agricultural systems as it was traditionally practiced by Persians (Rippenburg, 1998).

The earliest Arab migration into Oman is said to have taken place approximately 2,000 years ago. The Azd tribes were the first to land in Oman and they originated from Yemen, which was initially called Western Arabia (Akseki, 2010). Other subsequent migrations occurred all through the centuries while at the same time, the Persians were expanding their settlements in Oman. Some friction between these two groups

happened in the 6th century and from the resultant war, the Persians were defeated by Arabs and this effectively consolidated their position in the region. Having consolidated their position, it was only a matter of time before the introduction of Islam. This occurred in 630 AD (7th century Haas, 2013) after prophet Muhammad sent an envoy purposed to convince and convert the Omani tribes by preaching the Islamic faith. The Arabs accepted and as a result, more tension between the Omani tribes and the Persians developed given that the Persians refused to accept the Islamic religion (Ghubash, 2014). Official consolidation took place in 632 AD in the Ridda Wars. This led to a mass withdrawal of the Persians from Oman and they effectively migrated to Iran (Akseki, 2010).

The emergence of Oman as a significant maritime power at the crossroads of trade routes of Africa particularly East Africa, the Gulf, and India occasioned the rise of an expanding commercial society that necessitated an understanding leader who understood the unique needs of this emerging society. This newly-fangled social structure resulted in another classification in Oman's political and social life: the old policies and principles of the conservative imamate, reacting to the demands of this new commercial society with unique needs, and the resultant tension brought about by the new reality of an increasingly changing society that was inclined towards the secular rule. Oman was subjected to multiple invasions by foreign powers and dynasties (Al-Khalili, 2009). For instance, Oman was under the leadership of Qarmatians between the years 931 and 934. Oman was also placed under the rule of the Seljuk Empire between 1053 and 1154. Others included the Nabhani Dynasty (1154-1470; 1600-1624), the Portuguese (1515-1650), and the Ottomans (1550-1551; 1581-1588) (Akseki, 2010).

The Ya'aribah dynasty gained the reins of power in the year 1624 after Murshid

al-Ya'aribi was elected as the ruler. Murshid had contested for authority to rule Oman against the Portuguese for approximately 25 years and Saif al-Ya'aribi, his successor, had managed to drive away all the Portuguese from Oman and subsequently helped to complete the country's unification (Al-Rahma, 2015). It was under this dynasty that Oman was able to expand its power all through the Indian Ocean and the Gulf region towards the end of the 17th century, effectively becoming one of the major powers (Lefebvre, 2010). The Ya'aribah Dynasty was able to change a lot of things in Oman; key among them was the introduction of hereditary succession, which contravened the Ibadhi doctrine. The introduction of this rule generated another dividing line in Oman's political life and this resulted in a tribal war that lasted for approximately 20 years (Al-Khalili, 2009).

The country experienced political instabilities again after Sultan ibn Saif II left a power vacuum after his demise. His two sons fought a protracted war that lasted for many years. This aggression culminated into a full-blown civil war in 1723 after the Hinawi and Ghafiri groupings joined the conflict each in the opposing side (Al-Khalili, 2009). These instabilities in the social and political environment that originated from the struggle between the two warring sides: the struggle between Ulama and the tribes, which also included territorial conflicts and family rivalry, generated a convenient chance for external powers to take advantage of the situation and invade Oman. This was the case in 1738 when the Persians invaded Oman (Halliday, 1996). The Al Said Dynasty rose to power led by Ahmad bin Said in 1744. This ruling Dynasty continuous to rule the country to this day, whereby the current Sultan (Qaboos bin Said) is the ruler number 12 of the Al Said Dynasty (Kechichian,1995). This fact sets the Al Said Dynasty as one of the oldest in the world. So, Ahmad bin Said resistance to the Persian rule made him prominent and he garnered overwhelming support from the two warring

sides. He soon was able to drive the Persians away and expelled them completely from Oman. He, however, inherited a state that had been devastated by constant Persian invasion and civil war (Al-Rahma, 2015).

Ahmad bin Said was able to consolidate power and during his rule, Oman expanded its commercial and military influence in the Gulf, the Indian Ocean coastal region, and East Africa in late 18th and early 19th centuries (Akseki, 2010). It is through this consolidation that Oman was able to become a maritime power extending to Zanzibar in East Africa and the coast of modern-day Pakistan. Traders and entrepreneurs from Oman played a critical role in developing commercial routes all through these regions following the earlier established trade networks (Bhacker, 2002). His rule was characterized by concentrating on the restoration of the devastated overseas regions by investing in both the external and domestic fronts. Ahmad bin Said was able to suppress the tribal opposition within the country and he also rebuilt the collapsed irrigations systems, effectively transforming Oman to become one of the major foods producing states. Surplus food was used in trade and this helped to restore the Omani hegemony in the region and in the areas that it had been able to conquer (Akseki, 2010).

In the early stages of the 19th century (1806-1856), under the leadership of Said bin Sultan, Oman persistently consolidated its control and extended its influence in the East Africa region and the Gulf area. Said sent a governor to the East African island of Zanzibar and he also put pressure on Omani tribes in the Gulf, effectively challenging their power that culminated in losing some strategic areas. In 1830, Said had already conquered the Swahili coast and he took from Zanzibar as a capital of his great empire. It was during this time that the Omani empire had reached its peak (Kechichian, 1995). The following figures show two old maps of Oman that has been taken from the London

Geographical Institute and shown in the National Records and Archives Authority in Oman.



Figure 1: The map of Oman under the era of Said bin Sultan (The London Geographical Institute)

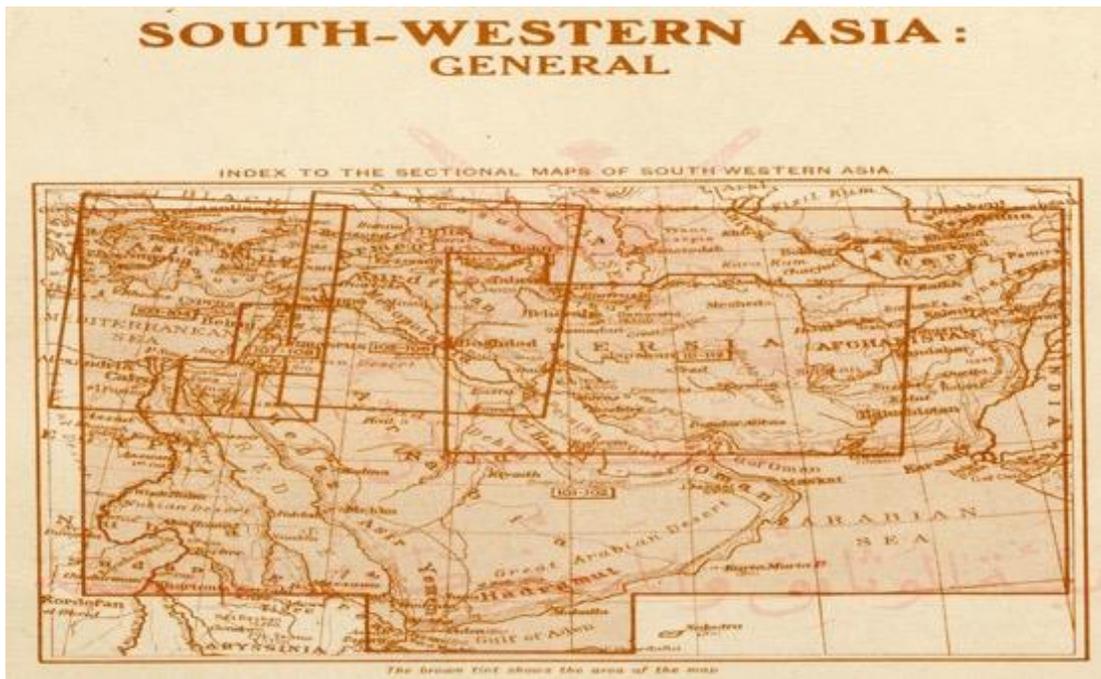


Figure 2: Another map of Oman shown in London Geographical Institute

It is worth mentioning that Oman's relation with the great powers had flourished during the rule of Said bin Sultan. He extended friendly relationships with these powers, particularly the US, UK, France, Germany and Iran. He exchanged friendly letters with these countries and most significantly, he appointed the first Arab ambassador to Washington namely "Ahmed bin Nuaman Al Kaabi (Kechichian, 1995). The letter shown in figure 3 is one of the letters he exchanged with the UK among other letters and documents shown in the Appendix page.

*From: El Wathig Billah Basa'eed
Ben Sultan.*

*To: Our highly esteemed friend
The Honourable President of the City
of Bremen.*

*May God preserve your goodself and prevail happy
times and luxury on all your Surroundings.*

*Now, the reason I am sending this correspondence
is to ask about your health and the conditions of your
dear people.*

*And if you ask about our conditions, we are,
praise be to Almighty God, in the best of conditions
and full independence.*

*Your esteemed letter has arrived in one of your
vessels which are visiting the waters of these regions,
and, God willing, they will only meet with all the
good will and welcome.*

*As for the correspondence which was exchanged
between you and the Romans, nobody could read it
in these lands at all. However, God Willing,
who ever comes from your end will only find good
reception and respect and we are willing to oblige all
your requests.*

*17 Gamadi I, 1243
(Arabic Calender).*

*Go
don't get lost
8642*

*God Willing
This letter of love and friendship
may reach our esteemed friend
The President of the City of Bremen -
Peace be on him.*

Figure 3: Friendship letter from Said bin Sultan to the President of Bremen city

Nevertheless, after Said's rule, there were internal instabilities and unrests, economic challenges and the ever increasing threat of foreign presence. British

interference had widened during the reign of Faisal ibn Turki to the point that angered the internal and conservative Ibadi tribes (Al-Khalili, 2009). Internal struggles had prompted him to seek the help of France and Britain to regain Muscat, which he had lost to the tribes. Given that Britain had already become a major trading partner with Oman, his decision to sign a pact with France granting them with coaling facilities for their fleet angered Britain, which required him to board a British naval vessel in Muscat Harbor, failure to which Muscat would be reduced to rubble (Kechichian, 1995). He boarded and soon rescinded his offer to France. Although his actions halted the aggression of the British, in the eyes of the Omani's, he was finished politically and his authority permanently damaged (Al-Rahma, 2015). It is worth noting that both France and Britain viewed Oman as a country that holds a strategic location where they could extend their influence in the region. Because of that, there was competition between France and UK to strengthening their ties with Oman. For instance, France issued a royal decree of appointing a Consul in Muscat in 1749 (Figure 4). Moreover, France exchanged some of the friendly letters with the Omani authority as shown in Figure 5. This competition continued until the late 19th century when they signed a declaration document on respect for the leverage of the Sultans of Oman (Figure 6).

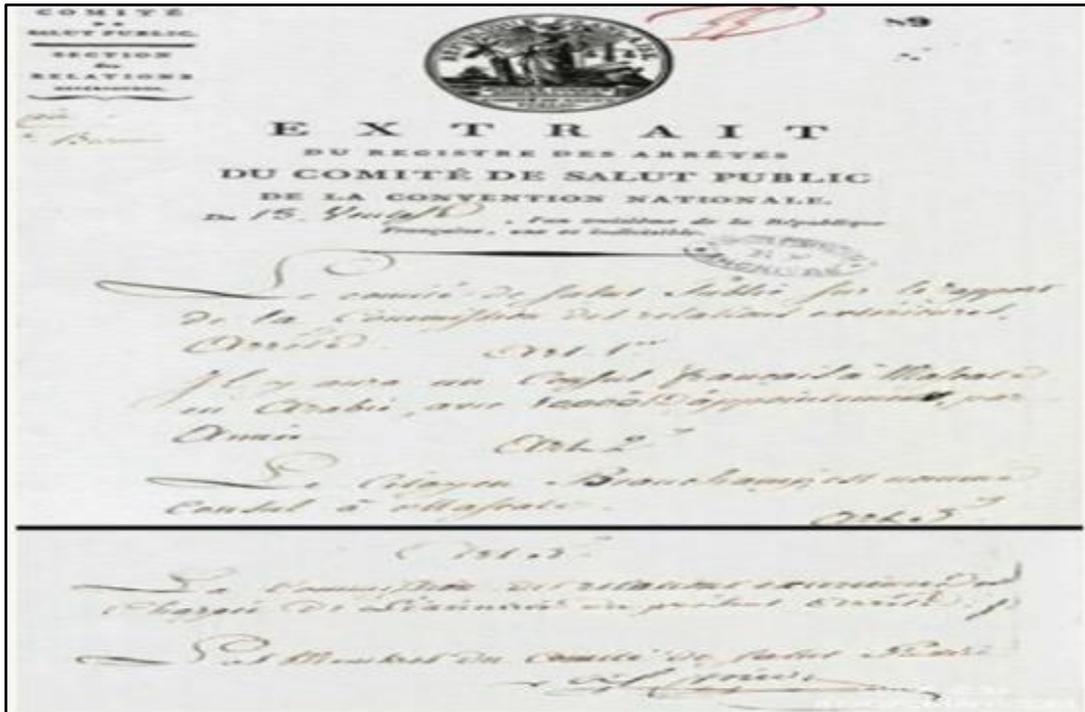


Figure 4: France decree of appointing a Consul to Muscat in 1749

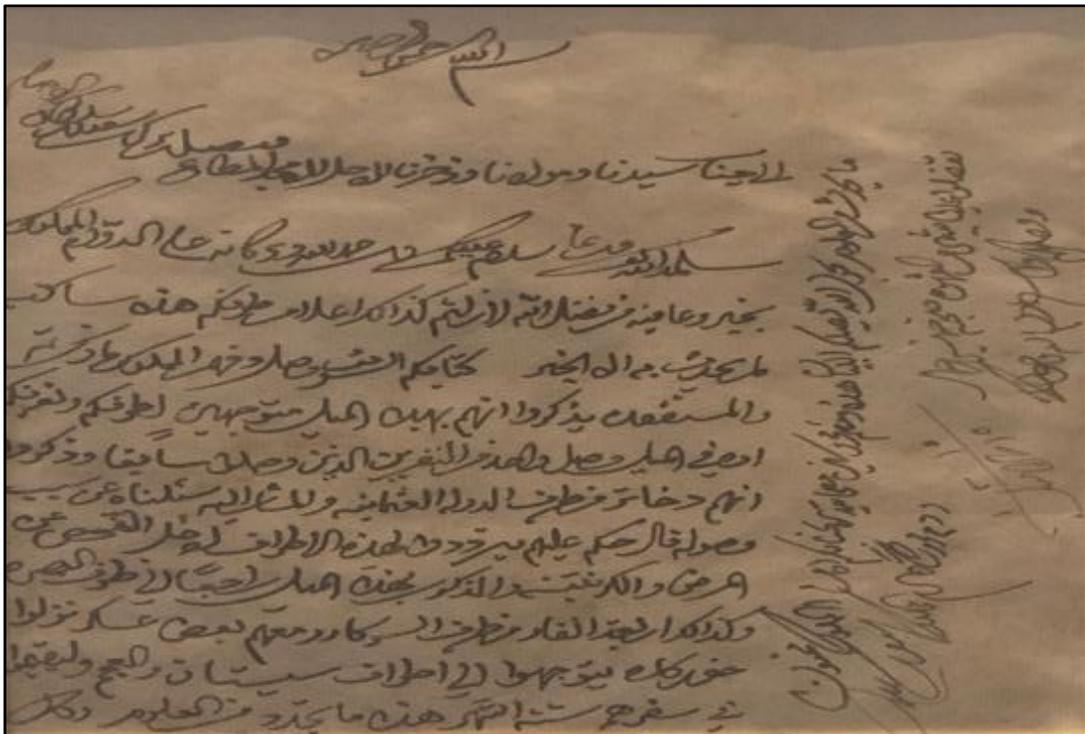


Figure 5: Letter in Arabic from Felix Francois Faure, President of France to Sultan Faisal bin Turki, informing the Sultan of his election as President in 1895.

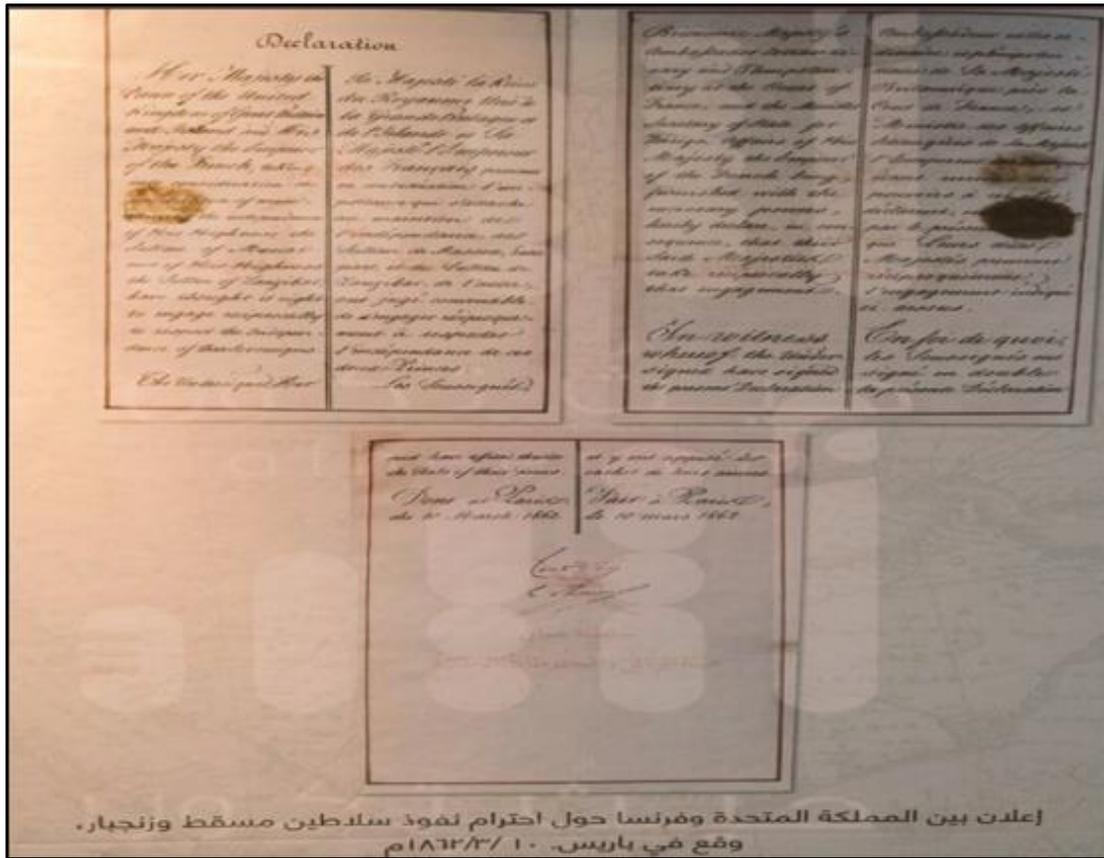


Figure 6: a Declaration between the United Kingdom and France on respect for the clout or leverage of the Sultans of Muscat and Zanzibar in 1863.

Nevertheless, even after this declaration, Britain intensified its relation with Oman in contrast to France. British involvement and interference with Oman's internal affairs resulted in increased unhappiness, which generated more internal unrest and revolts. Although Britain was providing some support to Oman's Sultan throne, it was not enough. As such, the internal political atmosphere was uncertain and quite unstable. The tribes were not happy with the increased British influence and the relationships of the British and the Sultan. This animosity brew for quite some time until 1913 when the Ghafiri and the Hinawi tribal groupings raised their arms against the sultan and his leadership as Imam (Gubash, 2014). This led to more British interference in a bid to

save the Sultan from being dethroned (Townsend, 1977). To do this, Britain sent troops to Muscat from India, which helped to avert the tribal forces from capturing Muscat. Britain would subsequently protect the central government in the Sultanate that had come under increased attacks from the tribes. The situation was untenable and unsustainable and as such, Britain organized for a peace deal between the chiefs and the central government, which culminated into the signing of the Treaty of Seeb in 1920 (Al-Rahma, 2015). The treaty granted the Ibadi tribes to govern the interior regions when the Al Said ruling family took over the coastline areas. It is by this treaty and conflict, the country was known as Sultanate of Muscat and Oman (Akseki, 2010).

Sultan Taimur's (1932-1970) reign entered the political scene and took over the management of the country's affairs with support from Britain. He depended on Britain for support during his encounter with Imam Ghalib in 1955 (Al-Khalili, 2009). He also assisted the RAF (Royal Air Force) in the course of WWII. Internal conflicts would also characterize his leadership and he tried to isolate Oman from the modern world. As such, he restricted some rights and freedoms such as the right to education and freedom of movement. During the 1950s, Sultan Taimur experienced the same internal strife that had characterized the history of Oman as a result of his despotic rule and external interference from Saudi Arabia given that it directly funded opposition groups to cause havoc within Oman (Akseki, 2010). A number of encounters between the office of Imam and the Sultan together with external players such as Britain and Iran-funded rebels all contributed to the situation of instability in Oman up until the 1970s (Lefebvre, 2009).

Geographical Location

One of the most important drivers of a country's foreign policy is its geographical location. Among other factors, a country's geographical location has been

singled out as one of the most important components that also impact on state identity. It has been argued that from the early times of human history, geography has played a critical role in the lives of individuals (Jafari, 2012). The lifestyle that people adopt is shaped by geography. Equally, human relationships, nutrition, economic activities, and the professions that they choose are all under the influence of geography. It therefore occurs that geography is also vital in molding the identities of not only individuals but states as well. As such, there is a direct correlation between the formation of identity and geography. People develop their personal, group, or state identities consistent with the climate and conditions of the region that they live in. The perception of life, values, norms, and expectations are all molded by their geographical placement. Equally, the formation of human settlements and communities, which plays a critical role in the development of social memory is also affected by geographical placement. Geography has therefore traditionally played a critical role particularly with regard to colonization (Lefebvre, 2009). Owing to their geographical placement, some countries are more prone to external attacks than others. This was the case with Oman as its location acted as an important factor in welcoming external aggression from the Persians, British, the Portuguese, as well as other foreign states (Kechichian, 2007).

Oman covers a total land area of about 309,000 km² and is located in the Southeastern part of the Arabian Peninsula . The land area in Oman comprises various topographic features, which include coastal plains at 3%, mountain ranges at 15%, and land mass, which accounts for 82% of the country (Jafari, 2012). Oman is flanked by the empty quarter of Saudi Arabia (Rub' al Khali), the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman, all of which contribute immensely to the country's geographical isolation (Wilkinson, 1964). All through history, Oman's contacts with other countries from different parts of the world were primarily by sea, which not only linked the coastal

towns but also provided access to foreign lands. Even with sophisticated desert transport, the Rub al Khali is a challenge to cross. It effectively formed a barrier between the Arabian interior and the Sultanate of Oman with another barrier being formed by the Al Hajar Mountains. These two major barriers have maintained the country's sovereignty by discouraging any external military encroachments (Jafari, 2012).

Oman holds a strategically significant position given it sits at the entry of the Persian Gulf (Lefebvre, 2009). It shares marine borders with Pakistan and Iran and shares land borders with Yemen to the southwest, Saudi Arabia to the west, and the northwest, United Arab Emirates. It is surrounded by two water bodies from both sides of its borders. To the south-east is the Indian Ocean and to the east is the Arabian Sea. To the northeast is the Oman Sea (AlRahma, 2015). Oman is separated from Iran, one of its long-time adversaries, by the Strait of Hormuz, which by extension means that the two countries share a maritime border (Rodrigue, 2004). The Strait has a great strategic and economic significance. As aforementioned, there are three countries that border Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Oman's geographical location is of great significance particularly with regards to connecting the Sultanate of Oman with other states that overlook the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea, which further impacts how the country approaches its foreign policy and how it relates with both the neighboring and non-neighboring countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). Of particular importance is how the country approaches matters of security given its geographical location for the freedom of transit and safety of navigation are of great importance, which if threatened could destabilize the region's and the country's internal security.

The Strait of Hormuz is an important path that connects the Persian Gulf with

the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. This path is significant because it is the main artery for the transport of products from and into the Middle East and because it is a geographic chokepoint (Rodrigue, 2004). Oman and Iran are the only two states nearest to the channel and as such, they share territorial rights over the region. Owing to its significance, Iran has on numerous occasions threatened to shut down the channel. For instance, during the 1980s in the course of the Iran-Iraq war, a disruption of the shipping by Iraq prompted Iran to threaten with the closure of the strait following the dispute (Lefebvre, 2010). Similarly, Iran and the US Navy had a protracted battle in the strait in 1988 during the Iran-Iraq war (Talmadge, 2008).

One of the primary and continuous factors in the Oman-Iran relationship is the geopolitics of the Strait of Hormuz. Oman and Iran are respectively located on the south and north coasts of the Strait of Hormuz. This geographical placement assists them to uphold good neighborly relations irrespective of what happens at the international or regional levels. Oman and Iran assume that there is a close correlation between their own security and the security at the Strait of Hormuz (Lefebvre, 2010). This factor reinforces their motivation to forge a friendly and close correlation. The two states are conscious to the fact that it is not easy to change geographical factors and that they have to be in contact for their interests. The two countries' geographical proximity through the Strait of Hormuz, the geostrategic and geopolitical significance of the Strait, and the relative remoteness of Oman with regards to its relationship with the rest of the Gulf countries have mandated that Oman and Iran maintain a strong and good neighborly relationship with each other. In light of this and in spite of the fact that Oman has maintained a close relationship with some western allies, owing to the geographical proximity that is aided by the Strait, the two countries, Oman and Iran, have maintained a close relationship over the years (Jafari, 2012).

Cultural and Civilizational Heritage

According to the information mentioned on the website of foreign affairs' ministry, the Sultanate of Oman is an active member of the GCC and is proud of its affiliation with the Arab Gulf region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). Consequently, it is also a member of the League of Arab States. As such, it participates in various cultural activities within the region in collaboration with its neighbors in the expression of its internal and regional strategic visions in different areas that pertain to matters that affect the Arab nation, particularly the contentious issue surrounding Israel and Palestine and the lack of peace in the Middle East countries such as Yemen and Syria. Oman has in the past advocated for the restoration of the full rights of the Palestine people and has constantly tried to create peaceful options to bring to an end the many years of in-fighting between Arabs and Jews in the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Furthermore, Oman prides itself on abiding by its unique Islamic identity that impacts heavily on its internal and foreign policy, which is founded on tolerance and moderation in its cultural and civilizational exchange (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). As such, Oman commits a lot of resources to promote peace and love among all people and nations within the region and has constantly and openly condemned acts of violence, terrorism, and extremism. (Baabood, 2017)

For a long time, Oman has promoted quiet diplomacy. A significant feature of Omani culture is the philosophy of politeness. In support of this ideology of politeness, scholars such as Frederick Barth have contended that in Oman, it is normal for an individual to model his or her behavior consistent with a code of honor and limit the expression of public opinion regarding an individual's worth, articulated in judgments of either admiration or denigration (Barth, 1983). It is based on this level of civility, combined with the standard diplomatic freedom of choice that supports the assertions

of Yusuf bin Alawi, Oman's Minister for Foreign Affairs, that the discourse of the part played by Oman in the period before the historic Geneva talks that calmed tensions between Iran and the US had been blown out of proportion. Going by the cultural norm of politeness, Oman's initial comment was always going to be watered down significantly (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013).

The culture of politeness can also be seen in the country's active cultural diplomacy be it mounting exhibitions or funding professorships both in the west and in the east (Echague, 2015). Such undertakings are, many times, said to be intended purposefully to promote cultural exchange, education, and scholarship. A number of features of the Omani foreign policy have remained consistent with this philosophy and culture of politeness. Over and above this principle, Oman works and accepts the fundamental geopolitical realism. This can be seen in the country's policy and attitudes towards Iran (Jones, 2014). The country also approaches matters practically particularly those regarding the geopolitics of the region. It is for this reason that Oman has maintained a close relationship with America.

There is also a culture of aversion to ideological or sectarian conflict. Oman is unique given that in the Arabian Peninsula, there are two main groups of Muslims: either belonging to Sunni or Shia sect. Nevertheless, a majority of people in Oman belong to the Ibadhi school of Islam, which originated in Basra, Iraq. Ibadhism, above all things, is characterized by non-sectarianism. Ibadhi Muslims can worship in any mosque and do welcome Muslims from the other groups to worship together (Ghubash, 2014) (The role of Ibadhism will be discussed in details in a separate section).

Within Oman, there is also a culture of tolerance. History indicates that when Oman was a great empire in the mid of 19th to which its influence extended to East African coast, maritime trade had flourished. For a long time, it engaged in trade

between the East African coast and India (Almezaini & Rickli, 2016). A critical look at the trade practices also indicates that the Omanis passed through many territories, as well as across the Straits of Hormuz to Persia and all the way to Indonesia, to Cape Town passing through the Malacca Strait devoid of losing sight of land. This expansion helped Omani traders to export goods and other materials to other parts of the world (Bontebal, 2015). The growth of trade and other commercial activities had coincided with the flow of people from numerous ethnic and tribal origins all the way to Oman. By the time, these people had taken from Oman as a place of residence and had lived there for generations which in turn, had created a sort of unprecedented shape of multiculturalism that is rarely found in its neighbors (Kechichian, 2007).

The visitor to Oman today can easily recognize this unique form of multiculturalism prevailed in society, which in turn, led to spreading the values of tolerance, acceptance others and peaceful coexistence among people. For instance, this is very obvious in Mutrah neighborhood in Muscat. In a study conducted by Peterson (2004), it has been found that due to Mutrah significance as a trade hub as well as its unique location, it had attracted a various types of outside population groups. During the 20th century, Peterson (2004) further estimates that along with the original population of Omani tribes, there was a homogeneous composition of various ethnic and cultural groups. These include Baluch and Jadjal tribes who are originally from Pakistan and Iran, people of sub-Saharan African descent, as well as wide varieties of Persian families known as Al Lawati and Al Baharinah. It has been found that around fourteen languages could be heard around Muscat in the early 20th century, making Oman the most diverse society in the Gulf (Potter, 2017). It is worth noting that currently, there are some commonly spoken languages in Muscat such as; Swahili, Zadjali, Baluchi, Lawati and of course Arabic (Bontebal, 2015).

Scholars have contended that given the available archaeological evidence, it is possible that since the age of civilization, Omanis have been engaged in this practice for many years (Peterson, 2004). As such, it can be deduced that Oman has engaged in the culture of tolerance be it in cultural, ethnicity, or religious matters, having interacted with people of different religions, cultures, and ethnicities without any aggression on their part. Although predominantly Muslim, Muscat has hosted a number of Christian churches and Jewish synagogues without having any religious conflict (Baabood, 2016). Thereby, and as stated in the website of the Ministry of Foreign affairs in Oman, it could be concluded that the principles of tolerance and peaceful coexistence pursued by current Oman's foreign policy is mainly driven and affected by the aforementioned cultural values practiced by the society throughout history (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). This argument is also agreed by some scholars such as those conducted by Peterson, (2016) and Al-Khalili, (2009).

Religious Aspect

In 630 AD, Prophet Mohammed sent emissaries to Oman to convert Omani tribes into Islam. He specifically sent Amr ibn al-Ass, who was welcomed by the chiefs of the tribes and the country subsequently became among the first to accept the new faith (Gubash, 2014). This occurred in the 8th century and the Omanis adopted the Ibadi doctrine of Islam. The category of Ibadhism that prevailed in Oman was fashioned by numerous religious personalities, which included Abd Allah ibn Ibadh from whom the sect's name was derived (Eickelman, 2002). One unique characteristic of Ibadhism is the process of selecting a leader or a ruler (Imam). Unlike in other regions, Ibadhis select their leaders through communal consent and consensus. There is no lineage or other factors such as familial affiliations that impact on the selection process. Provided an individual is qualified and worthy of the position, ancestry does not play any role in

the selection process (Kechichian, 2007).

Another significant feature of Ibadhism is the principle of consultative participation or Shura. Ibadhism stipulates that the Imam must at all times rule with the consent and advice of their people. Where the popularity of the imam has reduced significantly, he may be deposed or removed from office by a popular vote and his seat declared vacant (Kechichian, 2007). Where there is no suitable candidate to replace him, the office of Imam may remain vacant until such a time when a suitable candidate is found for replacement. Oman is the only Islamic country within the Gulf region that has most of its population adopting Ibadhi Islamic beliefs and practices. The first Imam was elected in Oman in 749 after the unification. During this time, the Imam was both a political and religious leader, who was elected by the Ulama through a lengthy and rigorous process of vetting and consultations (Ghubash, 2014). The only viable and valid political organization of the time, the Imamate, had retained its power up until the reign of Ya'aribah. It was during this period that the principle of hereditary succession was done away with, a feature which had stood for many years within the Imamate. This enabled many different leaders to ascent to power in subsequent years (Kechichian, 2007).

This unique experience of Ibadhi governance which was based on the principle of consultative had a profound impact on shaping Oman's national identity and the political system in particular. This impact has continued to the present day, whereby the current ruler (Qaboos bin Said) is one of the heirs of this Ibadi political experiment. Moreover, it could be argued that the political stability that Oman enjoys in the current time might be due to the long period of ruling and political experience of this Dynasty. Arguably, one of the explanations behind the current independent foreign policy of Oman is referred to one of the characteristics of Ibadhi school of thought which is the

rejection of being subordinated or influenced by the central Islamic state particularly during the era of Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman (Al-Khalili, 2009).

CHAPTER 4: OMAN'S FOREIGN POLICY, THE PRINCIPLES AND DECISION- MAKING SYSTEM

Numerous principles characterize Oman's foreign policy and this Chapter will highlight them extensively. In addition, the Chapter addresses the influence of the Sultan Qaboos in how these policies are formulated and applied. The Chapter also examines how decision-making process is being operated with regard to Oman's foreign policy.

The Main Principles that Characterize Oman's Foreign Policy

Since 1970, some of the main objectives of Oman's foreign policy have been to gain international and regional recognition, attracting international investments, establishing friendly relations with its neighbors and international partners, safeguarding of its territories from wars and foreign intervention, as well as protecting its sovereignty. In retrospect, it is clear that Sultan Qaboos has been able to achieve a majority of these objectives. Just after a short while of his rule, Oman has gained international recognition and has succeeded to be a unified state under the name "Sultanate of Oman" after for very long being known as "Sultanate Muscat and Oman" due to the division and conflict between the interior tribes and the Al Said authority (Lefebvre, 2010). In a bid to promote regional peace and safeguarding its sovereignty while avoiding wars and external aggression, Oman joined the Arab League in 1971, and towards the end of the same year became a member of the United Nations. Oman has also been able to make its national decisions and create its national foreign policy without undue influence from international or regional powers. It has also largely been able to safeguard not only its national borders but has also participated extensively in bringing peace to the Gulf region through various direct engagement peace initiatives (Miller, 1997). Although many different factors contribute and participate in Oman's

foreign policy practice, there are a number of basic underlying principles that typify their application. The following is an analysis of these principles as has been observed in the past few decades.

1. Neutrality

Oman has always maintained the principle of remaining neutral and keeping a distance from any form of polarization. Its neutrality is evident in the way it deals with different entities devoid of creating hostilities or enmity and maintaining these relationships on the basis of mutual respect. This policy of remaining neutral has seen Oman make friends with different countries that consider each other enemies, for instance, it has maintained a very good relationship with the United States and similarly its neighbor Iran, a longtime adversary of the United States (Al Mahrami, 2014). At the same time, Oman has been able to maintain a cordial relationship with Pakistan and India despite these two countries having a history of protracted border conflict that threatened to degenerate into a nuclear war. Similarly, Oman has maintained a good and effective role in its efforts to solving the Israeli-Palestinian issue, to an extent that on numerous occasions, it has spearheaded peace talks between these two warring sides, the last was in October 2018 when Sultan Qaboos received both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Mahmood Abbas in Muscat (Sanchez, 2018).

2. Balanced Relationships

Oman's foreign policy is grounded on the concept of mutual benefits between itself and other states. This principle has seen Oman create balanced relationships with other different countries, focusing on developing and enhancing common interests. In doing this, Oman has ensured that it safeguards its sovereignty and decisions irrespective of whether other countries are in support or not. Over the years, there has been a lot of activities that center on Oman's principle of maintaining balanced

relationships between itself and other entities. For example, it has had a good relationship with Iran and maintained a balanced relationship with the two countries sharing a maritime border at the Strait of Hormuz. Despite Iran being considered a hostile state by Oman's regional partners in the Gulf, Oman has not been deterred from maintaining a cordial and balanced relationship (Rieger, 2013).

3. Peaceful Coexistence

For the observer, it is not an exaggeration to find out that there is no other country in the Gulf region known for its policy of promoting peaceful coexistence and non-intervention in other states domestic affairs than Oman. Peace and solving conflicts through dialogue is one of the fundamental principles that characterize its foreign policy. This principle also distinguishes it from the other countries in the Arabian Gulf. Over the years, Oman has always advocated for peace through dialogue and non-aggression approach in solving regional and international issues (Valeri, 2009). At the forefront of advocating peace has been Sultan Qaboos championing peaceful coexistence between warring states. For example, in 1978, Sultan Qaboos spearheaded talks between Israel and Egypt and has always advocated and supported peace talks between Israel and Palestine.

Qaboos also supported and facilitated peace talks between Iran and the United States particularly on the contentious issue of the nuclear program while he has also participated extensively in organizing peaceful resolutions in Lebanon. Very recently, Oman has participated in peace talks to end the conflict in Yemen while with regard to Syria, Oman is still advocating for a peaceful resolution, calling on the two sides to resolve peacefully. It is clear that this forms the bedrock of the country's foreign policy.

4. Non-Interference

Consistent with the policy of remaining neutral, Oman has avoided interfering

with internal affairs of other countries. This has been one of its main principles that have supported its international relations policy. On numerous occasions, Oman has distanced itself from internal instabilities or issues of its neighbors and international partners, refusing to get drawn into unnecessary conflicts that may breed hostility. This was quite evident during the 2011 Arab Spring events. When other Gulf states were taking sides during the uprising in Egypt, Oman preferred to remain neutral, choosing to stay clear of any internal political activities that affected the internal security of its ally (Al Mahrami, 2014). This policy has also helped Oman to avoid making unnecessary enemies. It has always remained pragmatic when dealing with international partners.

5. Active Membership in International Conventions and Laws

Oman is a member of the United Nations and participates in most if not all state activities that are associated with the organization. The Sultanate of Oman gives priority to observing the rule of law both locally and internationally and respects international conventions and legal statutes. It additionally provides support to peaceful efforts promoted by the UN particularly those that deal with bringing peace to warring states. Oman also heavily supports dialogue and creates opportunities for different states to negotiate where conflict is widespread. For instance, although not officially stated, Oman played a critical role in bringing Iran and the US to the negotiation table which ended up into a historic peace deal between the two countries that led to the US lifting sanctions on Iran and subsequently, Iran halting its nuclear ambitions that would have destabilized peaceful coexistence of different states within the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). Oman believes that the safeguard of security and the realization of peace at both the international and regional level is an important aspect about preserving the peace both internally and regionally and as such, it commits a lot of

resources to achieve this peaceful coexistence between itself and the rest of the world.

The Personal Attributes of Sultan Qaboos in Drafting the Foreign Policy

After highlighting the aforementioned principles that characterize Oman's foreign policy, it is worth shedding light on the role of Oman's leader in drafting such principles. The success of Oman's foreign policy is largely attributed to the personal contribution of his Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Scholars argue that he has played a critical role in the formulation of the country's foreign policy and more so its success in promoting the country's domestic and regional interests. Qaboos's vision at the international and domestic level forms a key building block that promotes and one that has helped Oman to become the modern state it is today, particularly in the post-1970 renaissance. He constantly seeks new opportunities to establish diplomatic relationships with foreign countries in different parts of the world irrespective of race, color, religion, or cultural affiliation. Qaboos is said to have great leadership qualities, features that enable him to promote peace not only in Oman but also in the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). His open government policy has strengthened the country's internal institutions and governance, effectively making the citizens trust his leadership and participate fully in promoting and supporting local programs. His policies have also enjoyed the full support of the people in Oman and have earned him sufficient abilities to impact and attain impressive development results internally.

The Sultan has played a critical role in the development of the country's foreign policy. Scholars have noted that what is consistently evident in his strategy is the policy of pragmatism (Jones, 2014). He approaches the subject of international relations with a lot of caution ensuring that he has not overestimated or underestimated foreign countries' intentions towards Oman, as well as the country's capabilities. The Sultan has also made former enemies become friends and partners in both trade and security

matters, which further mirrors his approach to the subject of foreign policy. He has also indicated that he is not afraid to make unpopular decisions in promoting peace within the region and with regard to supporting the domestic interests of Oman (Al-Khalili, 2009).

Operating from the foreign policy perspective of adherence to nonaligned policy, respect for international law, and noninterference in other states' affairs, Qaboos has supported and promoted peaceful resolution and compromise, encouraging other states that are involved in the conflict to engage with peaceful dialogue and accept find commonalities. Since he took power from his predecessor, Qaboos has shown this characteristic. He is always keen on maintaining diplomatic relations between Oman and other states, attempting to maintain the best terms possible that would benefit all parties involved. Keeping in mind Oman's strategic Middle East location, economy, diverse population, geography and historical account, Qaboos seeks solutions to challenges facing the country in the larger arena by adopting long-term perspectives in the pursuit of the most appropriate solutions (Valeri, 2009).

When Sultan Qaboos assumed power in 1970, his predecessor who was also his father Sultan Said bin Taimur had traditionally depended on India and England for international support, effectively avoiding links to the country's Arab neighbors. Nevertheless, when he took the reins of power, Qaboos reversed this and his idea was for Oman to become a regional power, and he did this by first establishing direct diplomatic relations with the Arab neighbors and other countries within the region and in far off lands (Valeri, 2009). He additionally did this by lobbying to join the United Nations in 1971 and equally lobbying to be accepted into the Arab League within the same year. In so doing, he brought to a halt the country's long-term international isolation and effectively placing Oman strategically with the global map. This move

also helped to cement the country's sovereignty, effectively mitigating its over-dependence on India and Britain as its only two strongest allies. Britain, in particular, supported Qaboos in overcoming the bloodless coup that had been launched against his father (Echague, 2015).

In the same spirit, Qaboos made significant strides in reviving a cross-border relationship with the long-time hostile neighbor, Iran. The latter had first asserted its hegemonic powers in the region by annexing two islands that belonged to the UAE. During this time, Oman was recovering from the decades-long internal instabilities and therefore did not have sufficient resources to solve the regional challenges that had engulfed the region. Taking note of Shah's regional power, the new Omani leader Qaboos was able to obtain Iranian military support to help overcome the Dhofar Rebellion (Ladwig III, 2008). Iran provided this support so needed by Oman and this became the first step in reinstating diplomatic relations between the two countries. In addition, Qaboos was able to obtain an agreement between Iran and his country with regard to maintaining peace and freedom to use the Straits of Hormuz. Qaboos was also able to secure among other things the stature associated with being treated as a significant other by the most powerful state within the region, as well as an essential aid in the form of military intervention in the country, and a cross-border agreement that saw the two countries re-engage directly in trade and commerce. In return, Qaboos offered the Shah the needed support and cooperation, which the two countries have maintained up until today (Kéchichian, 2008).

The civil unrest that had characterized the Dhofar War in Oman prompted Qaboos to request assistance from the other neighboring states (Peterson, 2007). By requesting and being offered help, Oman was able to solidify the severed ties between these countries and in particular, the Gulf States. Most preferred to provide assistance

in the form of financial aid as opposed to direct military intervention. These relationships did not hinder Qaboos to practice his pragmatic policy of promoting peace when he independently garnered public support for Egypt and in particular, President Sadat who played a critical role in the US-sponsored peace talks at Camp David that were aimed at bringing peace in the Middle East and more specifically the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 1977. Most Arab countries did not support this move and Oman was the only state that stood by Egypt as the others broke off diplomatic relations with Egypt (Reinhart, 2011). In addition, while the other Gulf States were condemning Egypt in the Baghdad Rejectionist Summit in 1978, Oman chose to remain behind and this did not go down well with the Gulf States. But Oman's action, spearheaded by Qaboos was in keeping with the country's culture of being pragmatic.

Between 1981 and 1985, Iraq and Iran, two of the biggest regional countries were engaged in a protracted conflict. That conflict together with other tensions brought about by different factors in the area ultimately resulted in the culmination of efforts by Qaboos to assist form a regional organization, which gave rise to the Gulf Cooperation Council. Approximately six countries came together and formed the GCC, which effectively became an effective regional organization within the Arabian Peninsula (Haas, 2013). It became an important formation particularly with regard to the safety and security of the region as the countries were participating in joint military drills. Although taking part in all regional security undertakings having consented to the group's policies, Qaboos took no sides in the developing regional conflicts, for instance, between Israel and Palestine, Iraq and Iran and he supported neither Iraq nor Iran in the Iraq-Iran war. Consequently, Qaboos was able to maintain good regional relationships with the two powerhouses. Qaboos also participated directly in the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks and although this move was not popular among the GCC nations, it made a

lot of sense when viewed from the perspective of the long-term security situation in the region.

Foreign Policy Decision-Making and Government Apparatus in Oman

The underlying framework of how the Sultanate of Oman operates is anchored in the country's "Basic Law" which also serves as the Constitution of the country, and from which Sultan Qaboos derives his power. Realistically, and according to this law, the Sultan serves as Head of State and among other responsibilities, he is the final and supreme authority of Oman (AL Mahrami, 2014). Additionally, he holds other positions such as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Finance, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and also holds the position of the country's Prime Minister among other responsibilities. He is the only figurehead that has the authority to appoint Senior Judges, Ministers, Ministry Agents, and Deputy Prime Ministers (Lefebvre, 2010). As such, he plays a critical role in the country's foreign policy. Sultan Qaboos rules with the help of his appointed ministers. Since he rose to power, Qaboos has maintained an appropriate balance in the country in regard to ethnic, regional, and tribal interests in the formation of the country's national administration (Mechantaf, 2010).

The Council of Ministers, also operates as a cabinet, occupies the second degree of importance in the decision-making system in Oman. There are about 31 ministers with about 29 ministries, eight of them are members of the Al-Said ruling family while others from ordinary Omani people. The Cabinet, as stipulated in the Basic Law of the State, assists the Sultan in drafting and implementing the general policy of the State (Mechantaf, 2010). In addition to the Cabinet, there are several effective security and administrative councils in the making of public policies. These include the Council of Defense, National Security Council, Council of Finance and Energy Resources,

Supreme Judicial Council and Governors Council along with a group of high committees and subcommittees. In addition to several personalities in senior consultative positions, such as the position of adviser of the State, or the special adviser to the Sultan.

It is worth mentioning that Oman does not have political parties and the country does not have an independent legislature. The Council of Oman, also operates as a parliament, is composed of Consultative Council (elected lower chamber) and State Council (appointed higher chamber). The Sultan introduced a Consultative Council in the year 1991 and consists of 84 members. It assists the government in streamlining the decision-making process. Whereas the State Council was established in 1997 and the members are appointed by Sultan Qaboos, representing the prominent figures of the society, such as former government officials, academics, experts as well as tribal and commercial elites. The parliament can comment on and review proposed laws but they do not have any veto powers such that it is impossible to initiate or play any significant role in the country's leadership. The parliament, therefore, only serves the role of a consultative body (AL Mahrami, 2014).

Within this vast and complex network of institutions, bodies and councils, it is very difficult for the researcher to estimate how exactly the decision-making system is processed in the Sultanate. Although it is not easy to make out the exact system that is used to make decisions in the country, it is clear that the decision-making process is highly centralized and Sultan Qaboos is at the center of it all, making decisions on what policies are to be issued and what are to be dropped or adopted. His influence on how the country is run is evident and he plays a critical role in the country's foreign and domestic policy formulation and execution. Article 43 of the Basic Law gives him the mandate of assisting in the formulation of the general policies of the state, as well as

the implementation of the same policies by his appointed Cabinet and other related Councils (Al Shukaili, 2006). This also applies to the country's approach adopted with regard to how foreign affairs issues are handled.

It remains to be seen whether in the end, he will commit or allow the election or at least appointing someone as a prime minister who will take the responsibility for the country's foreign and domestic policy thus, developing a structural and institutional legitimacy that will effectively take over from him. It is not clear what the Sultan intends to do regarding this issue and this poses one of the many questions regarding the succession politics of the country. The succession challenges in Oman and the uncertainties in this aspect will be explained further in the coming Chapter.

CHAPTER 5: THE IMPACT OF NATIONAL IDENTITY COMPONENTS ON DETERMINING OMAN'S CONTEMPORARY FOREIGN POLICY

After examining the role of national identity in influencing Oman's foreign policy and addressing the components that shape the country's behavior in the regional and international arenas, this Chapter is devoted to highlight some of the major political incidents that took place in the region. In all of the examples provided, it is obvious that the components of national identity mentioned earlier play a major influence in determining Oman's political stance from these cases. Obviously, this is consistent with the argument of this thesis.

Examples of Oman's Position on some Regional and International Issues

1. Oman-Iran Relations

A majority of countries from the Gulf region particularly Saudi Arabia have, for a long time, had the worst diplomatic relations between themselves and Iran. States such as Bahrain, the UAE, and Kuwait, all belonging to the GCC have also adopted similar principles that Saudi Arabia has and their relations with Iran have not been the best to say the least (Rieger, 2013). The tension and geopolitical competition with Iran have been seen on numerous occasions particularly when the area has had to deal with regional conflicts, for instance, the recent local and regional conflicts in Yemen, Syria, as well as in Bahrain. While these countries have clearly regarded Iran as their adversary, Oman, on the other hand, has maintained very friendly relations and it is the only country that has done so in the region.

Common interests and geography have brought Iran and Oman together and although these two countries share a cordial relationship today, it has not always been a friendly affair. The relationship between these two countries took shape after Sultan Qaboos accented to power in 1970 and was given military support from Britain, Jordan, and Iran to deal with the rebellion in Dhofar region. Around 1976, the Sultan attempted

to organize regional talks between the Gulf nations, Iraq, and Iran in order to bring them together and remove the historical misunderstandings but he was unable to gain the desired outcome as hostilities once again took center stage (Gresh, n.d). In the 1970s, the Iranian Revolution occurred and while countries in the Gulf were taking sides, Oman maintained a good relation with Tehran. Even at the height of the Iraq-Iran War, Oman remained neutral while a majority of countries in the Gulf supported Iraq. It is the country's policy of pragmatism and remaining neutral while everyone else was taking sides among other factors that have enabled the two countries to maintain respect for each other (Said, 2014).

The relationship between Iran and Oman serves Omani interests in a number of ways. First, it boosts the Omani economy by creating new prospects for economic cooperation between the two countries. Second, it improves the level of trust between the two sides which enables Oman to act as a powerful mediator with the Iranians in solving many complicated issues and releasing western hostages held in Iran. Third, it enhances Oman's capacity and voice within the international arena and in the process of enhancing its image as a state that is strong politically not only within the Gulf region but also internationally. Fourth, it keeps the specter of military confrontation and war away from the Gulf region, particularly with regard to maintaining the stability of the Strait of Hormuz, in turn, serving the internal security and stability interests of Oman and the region (Neubauer, 2016).

The Oman-Iran relations go over and above the diplomatic and political affairs including economic and military cooperation. Just recently in 2013, both Oman and Iran signed a bilateral memorandum of understanding to improve the two countries' military corporation by jointly conducting military exercises along the Strait of Hormuz. In addition, Oman has made plans in the recent past of importing gas from the

oil and gas-rich Iran by developing a marine pipeline stretching from Iran to Oman (Ikerd, 2015). The two countries have also held talks of developing offshore gas fields. In a bid to maintain a cordial relationship between these two countries, Sultan Qaboos and other officials from Oman have made several diplomatic trips to Iran.

2. Oman's Position from the Syrian Crisis

When the crisis in Syria erupted in 2011, Oman took a firm stand by denouncing the military operations that were focused on removing President Bashar al-Assad from power. Oman insisted on dialogue between the different factions so as to safeguard the interests of all parties concerned. Oman further supported the option of exploring all other avenues that would resolve the conflict in a peaceful way, always advocating for diplomacy and discouraging external interventions, arguing that the crisis in Syria was internal and that it could only be solved if the players came to a negotiating table and agreed on the terms. This was in line with Oman's principles of peaceful resolution through dialogue and maintaining neutrality in its international relations policy. Nevertheless, this was a stand that was unpopular among the Gulf countries particularly with regard to the Syrian conflict (Cafiero & Karasik, 2016). To verify its neutrality, Oman maintained its embassy in Syria and kept it open. In addition, Sultan Qaboos instructed the Omani Foreign Minister to try and hold talks with his counterpart from Syria in a bid to promote peace and find an amicable solution to the internal challenges that the country was facing.

The distinction that Oman enjoys as a country known to be a rational broker, even-handed, and neutral in crisis management earned it the mediator role in solving the issues that had engulfed Syria. Oman was not perceived to be biased towards the Iranian-Russian axis that supported president Bashar on the one hand, and nor was it perceived as aligned to the American-Western position, which was opposing Bashar al-

Assad on the other hand. Despite Oman not being predisposed to geopolitical position alignment, it played a pivotal and critical role, particularly given that the two opposing sides, one that was supporting Assad and the other one that was against him, had so much in common in matters regarding military, economic, and political spheres (Echague, 2015).

3. Oman and the GCC Union Proposal

Oman refused to join the GCC Union right from the beginning and scholars note that observers from the Gulf were not surprised by this position but rather, they were shocked by the decisiveness of the country's stand. Oman was strongly opposed to joining the GCC Union and had even threatened to withdraw from the GCC during the Gulf Security Forum held in December 2013. The proposal to form the GCC Union had been made in 2011 during the GCC Summit. Oman declined to join the GCC Union for a number of reasons. First, Omani foreign policy can be described as cautious, non-interventionist, dialogue-based, and peaceful. This policy sharply contrasts from other countries in the Gulf such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, who intervened in Syria and in Egypt in their respective conflicts with the provision of arms, media, and monetary support to influence different parties to the conflicts. This interference and intervention was not agreed upon on the basis of cooperation between the different countries in the Gulf; each country was acting independently and unilaterally and was doing this basically to advance self-interests (Saeed, 2014). In light of this, Oman did not find any reasonable or justifiable cause in the proposed formation of the GCC Union as there existed a lot of contradictions.

Irrespective of other justifications, the most pressing and immediate reason for the proposal to form the GCC Union at that time was to confront Iran. This was specifically clear given that the formation of the GCC was, in particular, a reaction to

the threat of the Iranian Revolution spreading to other areas in the Gulf region. In addition, countries in the Gulf have, for a long time, perceived Iran as a direct threat to their sovereignty (Neubauer, 2016). This contradicted sharply with Oman's stance of neutrality and Oman believed that rather than breed hostilities with Iran, it would be economically, politically, and strategically more feasible to consider it as an ally and to discontinue all aggression. In light of this, Oman refused to take part in the formation of the GCC Union.

Like other countries from the Gulf, Oman was apprehensive of Saudi Arabia's sovereignty and influence in the region and this was one of the influencing factors that discouraged it from joining or supporting the proposal to join the GCC Union given that it wanted to protect its own independence. More specifically, Oman was concerned about the expansion of Saudi Arabia's influence and its possible effects on religious coexistence and tolerance in its state. There were also a number of underlying issues between the GCC states that would have complicated the formation of the Union. For instance, there was bad blood between Saudis and Qataris and there was an open conflict between these two countries, which would have forced member states of the GCC to take sides. In addition, in 2011, Oman reportedly discovered a spy network belonging to the United Arab Emirates, which further deepened the differences (Reuters, 2011). Furthermore, Oman argued that the GCC countries had tried to unify the region through a common currency initiative, a venture that failed terribly owing to competition and disagreements within the participating member states (Saeed, 2014). The current Gulf crisis came to put more salt on the wound and thus became obvious that the GCC had moved further away from the proposal of the Union project. This proves the correctness of Oman's position from the Union project mentioned above. Oman argued there were too many divisions among the participants, and as such, any

unification efforts would have been futile.

4. Oman's Position from Saudi-Led Coalition in Yemen

When dealing with the Yemeni crisis, Oman further showed its credentials as an even-handed, neutral, and responsible player. It shares more than 250km borderline with Yemen and the country run the risk of experiencing a spillover from the civil war that was developing in Yemen, which would have threatened the peace and stability of the whole region. Oman's refusal to declare war against Yemen and its decision to maintain diplomatic relations with the country further confirmed its foreign policy that is geared towards remaining neutral and resolving conflicts peacefully (Freeman, 2009). Despite many countries from the Gulf relocating their embassies from Sanaa to Aden, Oman refused to relocate its offices and this was in-line with its principle of non-alignment with any position or side irrespective of the cost.

Sultan Qaboos called for constructive dialogue between the conflicting parties. This was in line with its foreign policy principle of remaining neutral and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. Its neighbors, nevertheless, engaged fully in partisanship and failure to bring the two sides to an amicable solution resulted in a military offensive in Yemen, supported by GCC countries against Houthi rebels. Oman, on the other hand, called on all parties to end the conflict before it got out of hands. To support this, Oman agreed to host a number of roundtable talks and provided security for delegations from both the United Nations and the Houthi rebels in a bid to stop the aggression from spilling over into the region. Whereas it was committed to bring the challenges that Yemen faced to an end, it was accused by Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries of being sympathetic to the rebels (Peterson, 2016). In response, Oman's Foreign Minister noted that the media had a lot of misconceptions regarding the Houthi rebels and the situation in Oman, and although many countries believed that

the situation in Yemen could be managed by the government, it was quite contentious and the Gulf initiative was not sufficient to fully bring the situation to a close.

5. Oman's Position from the Current Gulf Crisis

In the midst of the ongoing diplomatic crisis in the Arabian Gulf where all countries belonging to the GCC have carried out a blockade against Qatar, Oman along with Kuwait have stayed put and avoided joining its neighbors in the diplomatic row (Cordesman, 2018). Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia issued statements to the effect that the countries were cutting diplomatic ties with Qatar. The statements were subsequently followed by sea, air, and land blockades. This situation has complicated the geopolitical outlook in the Gulf given that all the member states share with each other common strategies and interests. While Kuwait opted to mediate the issue, Oman decided to stay out of the issue and reverted to its traditional role of pragmatism and remaining neutral and sought later on to support the Kuwaiti initiative (O'Toole, 2017). Oman's political decision from this ongoing crisis can be understood from the interview made by DW German Channel with the Omani FM Yusuf bin Alawi. Bin Alawi assured that the Sultanate is supporting Kuwait's initiative to resolve the dispute (The World News, 2019). It is worth noting that research indicates that Oman has been aiding Qatar to go round the blockade and thus challenging the quartet's aim to isolate Qatar. While Oman opened its ports and airlines to the Qataris, its decision not to join the other countries in the blockade was interpreted as a sign of support for Qatar (O'Toole, 2017).

The countries issuing blockades on Qatar have accused it of maintaining cordial relations with Iran, a country seen as a direct enemy of Saudi Arabia, and supporting terrorism through direct funding of groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, and others affiliated to them, which have been declared as terrorist groups or

sympathizers. On the other hand, Qatar rejected the controversial list drawn by the Gulf countries as conditions, which constituted demands that had to be met before reinstating the diplomatic relations (Cordesman, 2018). Qatar accused these blockading countries of meddling with its sovereignty and refused to accept any of their demands, which led to further complicate the dilemma. Many people in Oman have refused to be drawn into the regional conflict. This refusal is in line with the country's long-held tradition of being a mediator and remaining nonpartisan in the region. As such, Oman opposes any sudden changes imposed on any country or on the region, hoping to maintain the geopolitical framework of the Gulf as it is (O'Toole, 2017). Muscat desires to maintain the regional peace and this is mirrored in the attitudes of its residents.

Challenges Facing Oman's Foreign Policy

The biggest internal risk affecting the country relates to the economy. Oman's state finances have been severely damaged by low oil prices, which further underscore the economic risks of over-relying on only one sector of the economy. Oman depends highly on the petroleum sector, which is said to comprise approximately 85% of the country's GDP (Fasano & Iqbal, 2003). Although the country is committed to creating other revenue streams in a bid to diversify its options, it lacks the enormous oil and gas supplies that other Arab countries have, which puts more pressure on the country's need to fast track this transition.

The Sultan has managed to bring together different people from the opposing divide. There are fears that once he is gone, groups such as the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and extremist groups (Page, Challita, & Harris, 2011) originating from Yemen will threaten Oman's security. These fears are based on the current trends whereby groups such as the Islamic State has managed to control huge areas in Iraq and in Syria, whereas others such as AQAP have gained

control over Yemen's Hadramawt region, including strategic key posts such as Mukalla, one of the main seaports, which is situated only a hundred miles from Salalah in Oman (Batati, 2015). At the moment, nonetheless, Oman is in a relatively good position with regards to safety given that it has installed strict border controls that monitor movement into and out of the country. In addition, the country does not have common attributes that are necessary to develop extremism and its national pillars of non-violence, dialogue, and tolerance have, over the years, determined what kind of relationship that Oman's diverse tribal and religious communities will have all through the reign of Sultan Qaboos.

In the wider geopolitical context of the country's position within the Gulf region, Oman plays a critical role in the balance of power in the Middle East and serves as a powerful diplomatic channel between its fellow GCC countries and their close allies from the west on the one side, and Iran on the other side. In the recent past, as a result of direct efforts by Sultan Qaboos, Oman has managed to strengthen and deepen cooperation between itself and Iran and these two countries have collaborated on different spheres such as security, energy, economy, and diplomacy. Although the relationship between Oman and Iran has not directly affected its position and standing within the GCC member states, it has been accused on several occasions for its independent foreign policy and how such a policy undermines the collective security of the GCC. In the recent past, besides the ongoing controversial issue regarding Iran, Oman was heavily criticized for its position on Qatar being the only member from the Gulf States to have maintained a good relationship when others were issuing sanctions left right and center (Cafiero & Karasik, 2016). The criticism will continue if the country carries on with its policies in the post-Qaboos era, and it is feared that continued finger-pointing and criticism might negatively affect future relations.

Oman is a close ally of both Britain and the US and more particularly these countries collaborate in the military and security front. However, there is immense pressure on Oman particularly emanating from the GCC region touching on the same issue of these military partnerships between Muscat, London, and Washington. Oman is keen on maintaining low visibility and its policy of non-partisanship, which has helped to maintain its security in the region, is greatly affected by these partnerships as there is the inherent risk of extremists looking at Oman as a tool of the two western countries. In spite of Oman being a close ally of the US, on numerous occasions, it has disagreed with it on a number of regional issues, which include but not limited to strategies of how to combat the Islamic State and its 2003 invasion of Iraq (Cordesman, 2018).

Therefore, in post-Sultan Qaboos era, there are fears that the next leader will be heavily weighed down by these geopolitical and international diplomatic issues and must strike the right balance going by the country's long-held traditions of pragmatism, nonpartisanship, independence, and politeness in how it approaches and manages its foreign policy. The next leader may inherit a huge responsibility of maintaining the right balance in a region that has a lot of geopolitical positions at play. He may face many challenges such as how to uphold and maintain the legacy of Sultan Qaboos, how to avoid unsettling new and old friends and managing the expectations of all players in the region (Valeri, 2015). Therefore, there is a risen concern that the new leader may have a huge burden to deal with and the uncertainty of what might transpire after Qaboos's exit is an issue that still needs to be addressed.

Another crucial challenge is that the civil society in the Sultanate is fairly absent from the decision-making system. A large segment of the society is discontented with not being involved in decision-making and not being consulted on some political issues.

For example, Oman's position from the sudden and unexpected rapprochement with Israel and the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Muscat in October 2018 drew widespread criticisms among Omanis, who expressed their dissatisfaction with this rapprochement. There are some voices demanding from the Omani government to, at least, involve their representatives in the Consultative Council with regard to some critical issues of foreign policy (Al Mahrami, 2014).

As mentioned earlier, Oman's foreign policy is highly dependent on the individual orientations of Sultan Qaboos and there is a lack of an institutional policy-making system that decision process is based on. Lefebvre (2010) argues that the decision-making in Oman has developed based on wisdom and not on an institutionally based system and also it is highly attributed to the person of Sultan Qaboos. The Omani Foreign Ministry does not have specialized political experts like in the US departments for instance. This matter raises skepticism and uncertainty about the continuity of Oman's political approach in the long term, especially after the reign of Sultan Qaboos.

Therefore, there is a growing concern about the country's political situation particularly in the near future given that there is no well-established framework for guiding the succession process. This atmosphere of uncertainty raises important questions regarding the country's ability to maintain a stable state of affairs in the post-sultan Qaboos era (Valeri, 2015). The following section will delve further to highlight the potential succession challenges that Oman may face in the future.

Succession Challenges

The succession process in Oman is, to some extent, problematic and there is uncertainty of whether Oman will maintain its foreign policy orientation after Qaboos's reign. However it is unlikely that it will change its foreign policy dramatically, especially with respect to some files such as its relation with Iran, as the components

of its national identity will continue to determine the action and behavior of any future leader in the Sultanate (Lefebvre, 2010). The geographical aspect and the maritime chokepoint they share will still function as an influential component and will prompt the two countries to keep communicating and maintaining their mutual relations.

Nevertheless, questions regarding how events will unfold after the vacancy of the leadership position of Sultan Qaboos have always been raised given the underlying challenges and complexities that surround the political outlook of the country. Unlike other countries in the GCC that have adopted hereditary monarchy systems with a Crown Prince already known, Oman's political succession is complicated by the fact that Sultan Qaboos is yet to produce a male heir (Henderson, 2017). As aforementioned, the country's Basic Law, which was ratified in 1995, many have believed that the country will transform into a constitutional monarchy (Lefebvre, 2010). Based on the experience in Oman, scholars contend that in the recent past, the monarchies have made great advancements than the republics of the Arabian Peninsula since they have implemented progressive economic and political reforms.

Given the Ibadi Muslim tradition, Oman's basic law provides for the selection and not for the political election of an individual who will succeed Sultan Qaboos. But given that the Sultan has not produced a son who would be the direct heir of the throne, it is unclear whether the political transition after the vacancy of Sultan's position would be problematic or not. However, political disputes always bring about tension and Oman has not been tested enough to provide a track record given that Sultan Qaboos has been in power since the 1970s (Valeri, 2015). What remains to be certain is the fact that his absence might create a political vacuum given that there is no direct successor to the throne.

Given the history of the Ibadi Muslims, one would expect that the political

transition in Oman that will take place in the future will be orderly and peaceful and will be characterized by minimum political instabilities if any. Ibadi Muslims stress on the “rule of the just” and try to avoid political violence and intolerance. Various indices rank Oman highly in terms of national stability. For instance, the Fund for Peace and Foreign Policy magazine noted that Oman falls in the category of the countries with the least risk potential for political upheaval (Baabood, 2016). Nevertheless, all this might change given the regional instabilities and lack of a suitable individual or structure to provide for the succession.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATION AND LIMITATIONS

Oman's national identity is affected by a number of factors. One of these factors is the country's history. Scholars have noted that what gives nationalism strength are its ethnic heritage, symbols, traditions, and memories (Yavuz, 1998). The collective elements of national identity comprise of national achievement, national experiences, traditions, and symbols, and all these are rooted in a country's history. Oman has a rich history that is centered on the Islamic religion (Wilkinson, 1964). The Sultanate has had multiple contacts with different people from different parts of the world, who have engaged the country either through trade or military contest or even migration such as was the case with the Persians. Oman's historical account is important because it explains how the country's identity has been formed and more in particular, how its identity has been shaped by historical events. Different groups have migrated into Oman all through history and they have also helped to enrich the country's multiculturalism. The Persians, together with Arabs, British, the Portuguese, and others were expanding their settlements in Oman during these early times, in turn, had led to developing Omani consciousness to resist any presence of foreign powers intervention (Rippenburg, 1998). The delegation sent by Prophet Muhammad also played a critical role in shaping the country's religious beliefs and practices and by extension, its identity as a country that abides by the teachings of the Islamic faith (Gubash, 2014).

Oman's geographical location has also played an important role in forming its foreign policy, and has, by extension, impacted heavily on its identity. Scholars have noted that the perception of life, values, norms, and expectations are influenced by geography. Oman's geographical placement is also strategic given that it shares a maritime border with Iran, which also has one of the most important maritime channels in the name of Strait of Hormuz (Rodrigue, 2004). This Strait is a maritime choke point

and this has also helped to shape the country's identity and foreign policy, particularly when considering its relation with Iran. Strait of Hormuz is important for the path connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, as well as the Arabian Sea. Oman and Iran are the only two countries that share a maritime border in the Strait of Hormuz and the threat of closure of this channel has forced the two countries to maintain a cordial relationship for their mutual benefits and generally, for the whole region's interest. The strategic location of Oman has also influenced its leader, Sultan Qaboos, to maintain good relations with all its neighbors and international partners as a strategy of safeguarding its sovereignty, which has in the past being constantly threatened by aggression from Yemen, Iran, Iraq, and other countries.

The dominant actor within the Oman state is Sultan Qaboos. The research has shown that he is the main figurehead who drives the foreign policy of the Sultanate of Oman (Al Mahrami, 2014). Qaboos has been markedly consistent during times of relative calm and in times when the country faces major regional disturbance. Most fundamental to this consistency is his policy of promoting peace and unity both regionally and domestically, as well as his policy of independence, non-interference, and pragmatism. Whereas these objectives are, in part, occasioned by having adopted a classic small-state security strategy, they do not expressly explain the approach and reasons behind the foreign policy. As such, although it has been addressed in this paper, it is of paramount importance to reiterate the country's political history and how it has influenced the country's approach towards state security and perceptions of the same.

The country's history indicates that it has been engulfed in a protracted internal dispute and instability and has been facing external aggression from some of its neighbors since the earliest time in history. Since the mid-18th century at the time Al Said Dynasty was at the helm, successive leaders have traditionally contacted with

foreign powers, mainly Britain and France, for both internal and external safety. Britain, in particular, has played a critical role over the years to protect against challenges posed by imamate to the Sultanate's authority. The historical theme of the Ibadhi doctrine has been based on the rejection of any external power influence, and when the time some of the Al Said rulers got overdependence on assistance from Britain, there was a growing dissatisfaction of interior tribes against this policy. Over the years, this resulted in entrenched domestic divisions, economic hardships, and has created a lot of vulnerability for the country.

Internal instabilities had weakened the country's ability to safeguard and protect its people and coupled with external interference from Persians and the Portuguese only made the country more susceptible to foreign occupation. In addition, the British policy in the country cemented and hardened divisions between the tribes and the Al Said authority. The main reasons behind the conflict between the Imamate and the Sultans were because of the rejection by the Imamate of the long-held practice of inheriting power as it was the custom by the Sultanate while the Ibadhi had a tradition of elected officials through consensus.

The emphasis put by Sultan Qaboos on unity and independence is visible in the foreign policy outcomes of the country. Oman participated fully, although behind the scenes, in the mediation talks between Iran and the US. Oman's position from this issue stemmed from the fact that being in contact with the Iranians enhances the region's security and interest than hostility. Sultan Qaboos has also secured economic benefits both for the region and for his country through his efforts of promoting commerce and trade between the party member states of the GCC, as well as international partners. Besides, to preserve political relationships, Sultan Qaboos regularly approaches contentious foreign policy issues with independence and always emphasizes on

maintaining good ties with all countries as a way of safeguarding and promoting harmony.

As regards the territorial disputes in the region, Sultan Qaboos has adopted the policy of maintaining a neutral stance and this illustrates that a country can gain much by adopting such a foreign policy approach. This strategy has worked and the country is technically safe from external aggression. When most of the Gulf countries have opted to sideline Iran because of its international policies with regard to supporting extremism, Oman has consistently declined to take that route of isolating the country from regional conflicts. Since 1979 when Iran experienced a revolution, Oman has always remained neutral even refusing to take sides during the decade-long Iran-Iraq war. At some point, Sultan Qaboos even attempted to form regional unity by requesting that the other countries incorporate Yemen, Iran, and Iraq to the GCC's security architecture during the time the discussions about the formation of the regional organization were taking place.

Oman's policy of remaining neutral and maintaining independence and pragmatism is even seen today. In the end, Oman's foreign policy can be interpreted in two ways. It mirrors its rather narrow capacities as a small country attempting to deal with the threats of insecurity. Yet it approaches these matters uniquely from how other smaller states approach them. It, therefore, rests upon us to look much deeper at the role that local state factors play in how the country manages the many perceptions of threat. It is easy to find that it is a national identity, an extension of its protracted political, social, and rich history that shapes its unique foreign policy.

Nevertheless, as the transformative leader continues to age, the country will ultimately require a new leader at some point. The country's next ruler, who is not known and is yet to be determined, will take over power from the overly successful

Sultan and his legacy, which is defined by his foreign policy and domestic governance, and one that has placed the country at the heart of international and regional security matters. Sultan Qaboos is not only popular within the local circles, but he is also hailed and revered as a transformative leader by citizens of the surrounding states (Valeri, 2009). Nevertheless, the incoming leader may encounter many international and local challenges that represent risks to the country's sovereignty and stability.

In sum, and to conclude this study, it could be argued that as humanitarian and political crises are experienced by many Arab countries, Oman remains a beacon of quietude and calmness in a region that is characterized by civil unrest and instability, stemming these features from its unique components of national identity. This identity has had a profound impact on the social and political structure of the country and thus, serves as an immune system that prevents society from being exposed to the threat of extremism, terrorism and sectarian conflicts, suffered by many nations. Such success did not come from a vacuum, rather it is a mixture of many components as discussed throughout the research. In addition, the country's unique stability and cohesion are primarily attributed to Sultan Qaboos and his legitimacy, bearing in mind that he enjoys an extraordinary legacy and he happens to be the second longest-serving ruler in the world after the Queen of Britain. He is also the only leader still in power from as early as the 1970s. Since he took over power from his father, Qaboos has been able to transform the Sultanate from a fractured state that was overly dependent on aid into one of the key players in the region with a strong military alliance with both Britain and the US, and on the other hand maintaining good relations with Iran.

This conclusion is consistent with the argument and the hypothesis of this research which states that Oman's contemporary foreign policy which is characterized by neutral and independent approach is driven largely by the impact of national identity

and its components. It is expected that this identity will continue to determine the action of any future leadership in Oman, especially with regard to some crucial and significant issues, such as the relationship with Iran and, on the other hand, maintain its international strategic allies, especially the United States and the United Kingdom. This conclusion should take into consideration the challenges the Sultanate might face in the future as discussed earlier.

Limitations and Recommendations

In conducting this study, some limitations and constraints have emerged. Given that a qualitative method of both primary and secondary resources have been used in analyzing this study, only a limited number of documents was collected from the aforementioned institutions in Oman. It was expected to collect wide varieties of documents and archives to further enrich the study. However, the process was not as easy as expected due to serious restrictions and complexities to reach some other important documents. The documents that address how the government has reacted in some crucial issues are strictly not accessible to academic works, particularly documents that reflect Oman's role in the Iranian nuclear deal. There are two reasons behind these constraints. Firstly, most of the Gulf monarchical governments are characterized by a very restrictive information policy in contrast to western governments. Secondly, the foreign policy of most of the Arabian Gulf monarchies has always been a pragmatic strategic balancing act. Therefore, the publication of documents that trace the foreign policy decision-making system of these countries may cause negative impacts to the regimes, both in the domestic and foreign aspects. Another limitation is related to the difficulty in finding enough literature that highlight foreign policy from an identity perspective. Although this could be perceived as an advantage point and added value to this study given that it would increase its

significance, rare literature in this area has created some challenges, as it required more time and effort.

One of the recommendations or suggestions for future research in the studied area is to use a mixed research method. A qualitative method could be combined with a quantitative method to further analyze the issue from a wider perspective. Conducting a questionnaire as well as interviewing some of the Omani officials in the political sphere along with other experts and academics may further enrich the study.

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Figure 1: Map of Oman under the era of Said bin Sultan (The London Geographical Institute).

Figure 3: Friendship letter from Said bin Sultan to the President of Bremen city.

Figure 4: France decree of appointing a Consul to Muscat in 1749.

Figure 5: Letter in Arabic from Felix Francois Faure, President of France to Sultan Faisal bin Turki, informing the Sultan of his election as President in 1895.

Figure 6: A Declaration between the United Kingdom and France on respect for the clout or leverage of the Sultans of Muscat and Zanzibar in 1863.

Appendix C: Documents shown in the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

Appendix D: Letters exchanged between Said bin Sultan to different Iranian figures (1855-1856).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: an Article published in the American Foreign Service Journal in 1934.

It is about an official visit of the American Minister Paul Knabenshue to Muscat for the purpose of celebrating a century of the treaty of trade and friendship signed between Oman and US in 1834.



**A
MISSION
TO
MUSCAT**

By DENIS KNAEBSHUE



HIS HIGHNESS SEYED SAID BIN TAIMUR, SULTAN OF MUSCAT AND OMAN

ARMY ENSEMBLE PRESENTED BY MINISTER KNAEBSHUE TO THE SULTAN OF MUSCAT

THE historical importance of Muscat is due mainly to its strategic position, which closely affects the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, and consequently the Indian Empire and the powers which struggled for it during the 16th, 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries. At the time of their colonial and commercial rivalry in the East, such European Powers as Portugal, Holland, and England continually endeavored to maintain control over the Muscat Government, either by treaty of friendship or by force of arms, because, apart from being an excellent trading-port serving the interior of Arabia with goods from India and the West, Muscat was also in a position effectively to control the pirates of the Guard Coast, whose activities were a constant nuisance to commercial enterprise in the East.

Oman, on such occasions, for instance, when

THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL



AMERICAN MINISTER KNAEBSHUE WITH OFFICIAL DELEGATION WELCOMING HIM TO MUSCAT

Left in right—Seyyed Said bin Taimur, Prince Said Mahmud, Prince Said Hamud and Prince Said Saïd.

would take. On the first signs of French defeat he elected, with rare political sagacity, to collaborate with the English. The British, in turn, made no attempt to trespass on the rights or interests of the Sultan, and from that time the Indian and Muscat Governments have pursued together a policy of common interest.

Up to 1860 the dominions of the ruler of Muscat included Zanzibar, but at that date Zanzibar was separated from Muscat, and was placed under the rule of another member of the reigning house. In the 19th Century Muscat acquired fresh interest in connection with the slave and gun-running trade, against which the British Government was at that time waging an energetic campaign. Meanwhile the town increased in importance as a trading port, but its time of greatest prosperity was from 1898 to 1902, when it was the centre of the arms trade. In 1912, however, the British efforts to check this traffic culminated in the establishment at Muscat of an Arms Warehouse, through which all traffic in arms and ammunition, whether for import or export, had to be conducted under direct government control. This measure did not destroy the trade completely, but it put an end to unregulated private enterprise which had brought such opulence to many inhabitants of Muscat. Consequently in 1912 Muscat entered an era of rapidly declining prosperity, as the comparative inactivity of her harbors today bears witness.

To return to the period of Muscat prosperity, it will be remembered that in about the 1830's American Clipper ships enjoyed a large share of the world's carrying trade. They were superior sailing craft, built in New England, of comparatively great speed and carrying capacity, and mainly owing to the enterprise of the New England merchants, they were to be seen in every port, among which Muscat ranked as one of the most important. Accordingly in 1833 the Government of the United States saw fit to sign a treaty of trade and friendship with the Muscat Government, which treaty has endured to this day. It was for the purpose of celebrating the centenary of this treaty, and of renewing the ties of friendship between the two Governments, that

an American Mission was sent on an official visit of courtesy to the Muscat Coast.

On March 1, 1934, the Mission, consisting of Mr. Paul Knabenshue, American Minister Resident at Zanzibar, Mr. James S. Moore, Jr., Secretary of Legation, and the Minister's son, left England by rail, arriving at Basra after a journey of twenty-four hours. The Mission spent two days in Basra at the American Evangelical Mission, and the opportunity was taken to inspect such American interests in the schools, and distribution centres and parking houses. The Mission then boarded a steamer for the Persian Gulf Ports and India, and a very pleasant and interesting journey was made down the Shatt al-Arab, towards the Gulf Waters.

The climatic and geographic conditions of the Shatt-al-Arab basin are peculiarly suited to the cultivation of date-palms. Thus the well-wooded banks of the broad river presented a beautiful sight as we progressed slowly downstream. Careless native sailing craft plied the waters, and their picturesque grace added considerably to the beauty of the natural scenery.

Numerous shallows made navigation in the river and gulf waters extremely difficult, and we were in addition very dependent on the tide. We were delayed for twelve hours at the

Appendix B: Another article published in an American journal in 1938.

It is about an official visit of Sultan Said bin Taimur to Washington, celebrating 105 years of the Omani-US treaty of friendship.

Sultan Greeted in Washington



**WASHINGTON GREETES
SULTAN FROM ARABIA**

Officials Dress Up and Receive Ruler of Muscat and Oman.

By the Associated Press.

WASHINGTON, March 3.—Government officials were bedecked in braid and medals and with the army band today gave a colorful welcome to the 27-year-old Sultan of Muscat and Oman.

A troop of cavalry was sent to the Union Station Plaza. Shiny automobiles stood near the doorway.

Secretary of State Hull donned striped morning trousers for the reception. Major-General Malin Craig, Chief of Staff, was resplendent in army finery. Admiral William D. Leahy was fit to launch a battleship. The President sent his secretary, Marvin McIntyre, in glistening top hat.

Luncheon with President Roosevelt was the first event on the three-day reception schedule.

Tonight the Sultan will be guest at a dinner given by Secretary Hull. However, it will not be anything like the dinner which the Sultan gave in 1934 for an American diplomatic mission which visited him. He served a whole roasted sheep, without knives or forks.

The Sultan, whose homeland is in Southeastern Arabia, made the trip to the United States to cement the friendship established 105 years ago between Muscat and Oman and the United States. His yearly salary of \$225,000 is thrice that of President Roosevelt.

—Associated Press Wirephoto.
SECRETARY OF STATE CORDELL HULL with the SULTAN OF MUSCAT AND OMAN.

Appendix C: Some of the documents shown in the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

The Museum is the second-largest art museum in the world. The documents shown are letters exchanged between Sultan Faisal bin Turki and some of the Russian figures (1884-1905).

Письмо от Кобайтича,
капитана российского судна «Корнилов»
Русского общества пароходства и торговли
Файсалу ибн Турки, султану Омана,
о желании капитана встретиться
с султаном и просьбе назначить время визита
4 октября 1884 г.

Letter from Kobaytich,
Captain of the Russian ship *Kornilov*
of the Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company,
to Faisal bin Turki, Sultan of Oman,
stating the captain's wish to meet him and enquiring
about the appointment date
4 October 1884

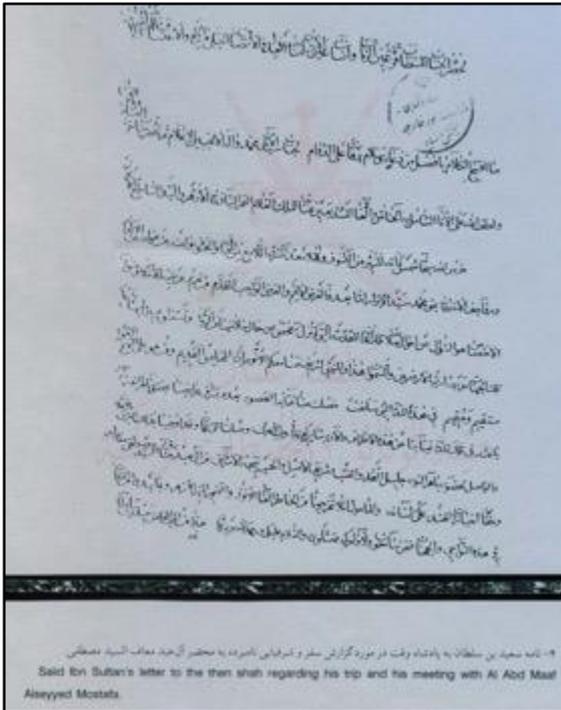
Письмо от Г. В. Овсеенко, российского
Генерального консула в Бушире
на побережье Персидского залива,
Файсалу ибн Турки, султану Омана,
в котором он прощается с ним в связи
с отъездом в Россию в отпуск
Июль 1903 г.

Letter from G. Ovseyenko,
Russian Consul-General residing in Bushehr
on the Persian Gulf,
to Faisal bin Turki, Sultan of Oman,
bidding farewell to the sultan due to his departure
to Russia for vacation
July 1903

Дружественное письмо от Н. П. Пассека,
российского Генерального консула в Бушире
на побережье Персидского залива,
Файсалу ибн Турки, султану Омана,
в котором он поздравляет его с праздником
и благодарит за приглашение российского
торгового судна в Маскат
4 февраля 1905 г.

Amicable letter from Nikolay Passek, Russian
Consul-General residing in Bushehr on the Persian Gulf,
to Faisal bin Turki, Sultan of Oman,
congratulating him on the holiday
and expressing gratitude for inviting
the Russian trading vessel to Muscat
4 February 1905

Appendix D: Letters exchanged between Said bin Sultan to some Iranian figures (1855-1856).



4- نامه سعید سلطان به شاهنشاهی ایران در مورد گزارش سفر و ترفیحات نامرد به محضر آید محمد معالی السید معظّم
 Said bin Sultan's letter to the shah regarding his trip and his meeting with Mirza Agha Khan, on 1272 AH
 Aseyyed Mostafa.



3- نامه سعید سلطان اسفهان به صدر اعظم ایران (میرزا آقاخان کرمانی) در مورد دوستی و تقاضای مقابل و معرفی یکی از
 معارف خود بنام عبدالله براسخ علی فریدونکیم در اول شهریور 1272 هـ ق
 The letter of Oman's Sultan, Said Sultan to Iran's Premier, Mirza Agha Khan, on 1272 AH



2- نامه سعید سلطان به ناصرالدین شاه که در آن ضمن دعا و آرزوی اجلال و اکرام از نامرد و وصول خویش را به زنگبار اعلام نموده و
 گفته است به محضر حاج عبدالحمید ملک تجار رسیدیم و از ایشان خواستیم فرودگاه گذرورت فراهم نمایند.
 Said Sultan's letter to Nasereddin Shah by which while honoring and praising the Shah, he
 informed His Majesty of his arrival. He also added that he met with Hajj Abdol- Mohammad Malek
 and requested him to take measures for removing discontentment.