



Oman's diplomacy strategy: Maneuvering tools to face regional challenges

Hani Albasoos^a, Musallam Maashani^b

^{a,b}Department of political Science, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman



ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 January 20

Received in revised form 15 Feb 20

Accepted 05 March 20

Keywords:

Oman, Diplomacy, Maneuvering
Tools, Challenges

JEL Classification:

Z18, K33

ABSTRACT

The role of Omani diplomacy is visible in promoting its foreign policy and fulfilling the Sultan's vision. Since 1970, Oman adopted a different foreign policy in both regional and international arenas characterized by independence, pragmatism, and moderation. This approach was reshaped after Sultan Qaboos bin Said seized rule. His first order of business was to accelerate the steps towards modernizing the Sultanate by adopting a nation-wide social, educational, and cultural reform often referred to as the Omani Renaissance. To translate the Sultan's vision to reality, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) has adopted a well-structured mechanism that will enhance diplomatic relations with various countries of the world. This research highlights Oman's diplomacy strategy post-1970. It focuses on Oman's foreign policy doctrine and examines the different categories of diplomacy that have been practiced in achieving Oman's foreign policy. The research includes the following types of diplomacy: official, mediation, tolerance and co-existence, economy, cultural, water, poet, aviation, and non-governmental diplomacy. This paper attempts to contribute to academia by providing a comprehensive outlook on Oman's diplomacy, focusing on this topic from a practical point of view. It presents Omani diplomacy through dialogue and negotiations. It assembles a clear direction for the reader based on information, including personal communication with Omani diplomats.

© 2020 by the authors. Licensee BSC International Publishing, Istanbul, Turkey. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Introduction

Diplomacy is the setup strategy of impacting the choices and behavior of foreign governments and people through an exchange, arrangement, and other measures short of war or peace. Historically, the relations between sovereign states are interpretations of diplomacy. However, as of the twentieth-century, diplomacy has expanded and broadened to cover more forms of activities such as summit meetings, conferences, parliamentary diplomacy, and non-official diplomacy by non-governmental bodies. Diplomacy is considered as a statement of official government policy, especially in foreign affairs and military strategy. The aim of diplomacy is to strengthen states' bilateral relations with other parties without damaging the state's images, and this is usually done by diplomats who are authorized to represent the state position. They are the practitioners of the state's diplomacy.

Oman's modern history is usually investigating the evolution of the Sultanate's foreign policy since the Renaissance in 1970. The leadership style and characteristics have determined the country's diplomatic tools with consideration to both internal and external determinants. Oman has played a significant role in resolving disputes in the Middle East and around the world, whether through facilitating talks or mediating negotiations between conflicted parties, highlighting the pillars of its foreign policy, which has become highly admired and respected by the international community. The Sultanate of Oman has adopted a unique foreign policy that has made it debatable for many decision makers and academic researchers in various parts of the world. From this standpoint, the idea of this paper came to try to understand the dynamics to present a detailed research on Omani diplomacy and to analyze the impact of Oman's diplomacy strategy as a maneuvering tool to face regional challenges. This paper is an original contribution to academia utilizing new forms of diplomacy such as "Water Diplomacy", "Poet Diplomacy", and "Aviation Diplomacy." This research

* Corresponding author. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2873-7325

employed documents analysis as a secondary research method and invested in semi-structured interviews, field observation, and previous discussions with officials.

Literature Review

Official Diplomacy

Sultan Qaboos paid a great attention to strengthening bilateral relations between the Sultanate and the rest of the world. As a result of that direction since 1970, diplomatic missions increased rapidly to fulfill the vision of the Sultan of being a peaceful state. In general, these missions range based on the official representation level, from an embassy headed by an ambassador to a permanent mission or consulate headed by a diplomat. The diplomatic mission has several functions, such as: (i) represent home country in the host state. (ii) serve the home state and its citizens' interests. (iii) monitor the host state conditions in different aspects: economic, scientific, cultural, political situation, and develop bilateral relations in these domains (MOFA, 2019).

With almost 51 embassies worldwide (see Table 1), Oman has spread its diplomatic missions in all the continents. For instance, since Oman have only 51 embassies worldwide, and to expand the diplomatic relations with all counties, they usually depend on the approach of assigning non-resident ambassador in which the embassy in a particular state will handle the foreign affairs to other neighboring countries. It should be noted that ambassadors mostly serve in a four years-long mission. In some cases, those ambassadors are chosen based on their long service in other governmental entities, which is called *honorary appointment*.

Table 1: Oman's diplomatic missions abroad

Continents	Number
Asia	28 Embassy + 1 Honorary Consulate + 2 Commercial Representative office + 1 in Ramallah in Palestine
Europe	11 Embassy + 2 Permanent mission + 10 Honorary consulates + 1 Diplomatic representative office
Africa	10 Embassies + 3 Honorary Consulates
Australia	1 Consulate
North America	1 Embassy + 1 Permanent mission + 1 Honorary consulate
South America	1 Embassy
Total	51 Embassies + 1 Consulate + 15 Honorary Consulate + 2 Commercial Representative Offices + 3 Permanent missions

Source: (MOFA, 2019)

The Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopts a systematic approach in selecting its diplomats. First, competency and experience are considered as the most crucial factor. Second, the level of relationship with the host state plays a vital role in the selection process in which the Sultan may interfere in selecting the ambassador in some missions as in the case of Oman's ambassador in the United Kingdom due to the strategic relationship between the two states. Third, an honorary appointment used as an approach to appoint some diplomats due to their long service in other governmental entities (Al-Katheeri, Personal communication, 2019).

In addition, Omani women are nominated in diplomatic missions reflects the Sultan's trust and belief in the importance of involving women in all fields to build the nation on equal opportunities and gender participation. This is based on the Sultan's vision in empowering Omani women. Meanwhile, MOFA maintains its commitment to applying that vision by appointing Omani women to hold diplomatic posts at various levels. Table 2 below reflects the first-ever Omani woman chosen as an ambassador in 1998 to run the Omani embassy in the Netherlands.

Table 2: Omani women ambassadors

Ambassadors	Year	State
Khadija Hassan Salman Al-Lawati	1998	Holland
Hunaina Sultan Ahmed Al-Mughairy	1999	US
Kifaya Khamis Al Raeesi	2014	Spain
Samira Mohammed Al-Moosa	2011	UN
Lyutha Sultan Ahmed Al-Mughairy	2017	Germany

Note: only current active diplomats listed other diplomatic levels was out of the scope of this study.

Sultan Qaboos took a step ahead in comparison to other Gulf neighbors by leading the way for *Khaleeji women* by appointing an Omani women diplomat in selected missions. The prime example began in 1998 when Khadija Al-Lawati was appointed the first Omani and Gulf woman as an ambassador. A year later, the Sultan appointed Hunaina Al Mughairy, the ambassador to the USA, in which it could be seen as an indication of the firm belief of the Sultan in the competency and capabilities of Omani women.

Building Capabilities of Omani Diplomats: Developing the skills of Omani diplomats is a vital issue for maintaining Omani diplomatic missions' ability to deliver and fulfill their duties. In that regard, the Diplomatic Institute was established in MOFA in

1991 to take a major role in building the Omani diplomats' capabilities. The Institute, currently, relies on studies and research rather than acting as an academic body. The courses provided by the Diplomatic Institute are categorized into different types: general courses, specialized courses, lectures, and seminars delivered by experts. Moreover, the Institute organizes foundation courses for new diplomats before enrolling in their abroad missions. Moreover, this is also applied to their families where the diplomatic protocol will be covered to enlighten them about the host state and their traditions, etc.

This also applies to newly employed diplomats in whom it is mandatory to learn foreign policy principles and its diplomatic strategy towards regional issues (MOFA, 2019). It also organizes a series of one or two days lectures covering various topics, as well as hosting seminars by foreign diplomats' in which both sides are able to discuss matters that fall within their common interest.

The Sultan Congratulations & Condolences Telegrams: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is tasked with following up on the affairs of other countries and sending letters of congratulations and condolences. This acts as a symbol of solidarity, which strengthens relationships in the long term. It is interesting to note that this mechanism has been long practiced in Oman's diplomacy since the time of Sultan Said bin Sultan - Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar - in which there was a letter preserved by the National Record and Archive Authority of Oman dated to 1832 to the Governor of the Bourbon Government on Bilateral Relations. Another example is congratulations letter to the American Consulate for the winning of US President Roosevelt in the elections in 1904 by the Sultan Faisal bin Turki (Al-Mahri, 2018).

As per the authors' observation, the Sultans of Oman used the same approach in domestic affairs as sending condolences letters to some Omani public figures.

Diplomatic Representation of other State's Interests: This approach is used to represent the interests of one state with another country in which the diplomatic relations between two have been suspended. For example, in 2012, Oman started to look after Iranian affairs in Canada as stated by of Marzieh Afkham the spokeswoman of Iran foreign ministry "Oman has been named the protector of Iran's interests in Canada, and Italy has been named the protector of Canada's interests in Tehran" (Reuters, 2012). Another prime example is when Oman played a major role during the diplomatic tension between UK and Iran, where both states downgraded their relations, which resulted in Oman representing Iran's interest in the UK during the period 2012-2014 (Schanzer, 2019). This approach became frequent, especially regarding Iran by Western countries since Oman is a trusted partner during such a crisis.

Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural Diplomacy is described as, "a course of action, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond. Cultural diplomacy can be practiced by the public sector, private sector, and civil society" (Ginting, 2015). The geographical location of Oman has placed it in the middle of the conflict zone between the regional powers. Therefore, to reshape its international image, the country has paid great attention to the cultural element as an essential pillar in its foreign policy. To implement this vision, Omani officials have undertaken many cultural initiatives different in their nature from culture, religion, and education. The Diwan of the Royal Court, the leading governing body, has sponsored cultural programs through the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science. The latter initiatives will be highlighted in serving overall Oman's cultural diplomacy.

Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science: Cultural Initiatives

As stated by Shidhani (Personal Communication, 2019), the center is working as a cultural bridge between Oman and the world to reflect the country's vision. For the sake of implementing this image, the center has adopted several cultural initiatives within Oman and abroad. The following sections will highlight the role of Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center in Washington D.C and other efforts:

The Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center in Washington D.C.: The Center was established in 2005 in Washington, D.C., the United States. The purpose of creating it was essentially a cultural corridor between Oman and the United States by advertising the Omani culture and heritage in the American Society. As stated by Shidhani (2019), this Center is considered one of the well-known initiatives of the annual symposium conducted in one of the American Ivy League universities with a different topic every year. Therefore, these symposia help to connect the American academic community with their Omanis counterparts. As argued by Shidhani, these events have a positive impact on the American, especially those who work in the political arena. As seen in Table 3, each year, an Omani minister is asked to attend these conferences as an honorary guest to deliver a keynote speech and to strengthen the bilateral relations with the United States.

In addition to the above, the Center runs evening classes for teaching Arabic for those who cannot travel abroad. Additionally, due to the increased demand for the Arabic language courses, the Center opens its doors to conduct extra classes on Saturday for kids (mostly for Arabic expatriates and immigrant community). The Center Sponsors American students to study the Arabic language in Oman and other research grants to conduct researches related to Oman. In addition to hosting cultural events that take place periodically to introduce the American people to the Omani culture jointly (Shidhani, Personal Communication, 2019).

Table 3: SQCC Annual Conferences and the Oman's Policymakers Participation

Conference	Keynote Speaker	Year	University
UHCL-SQCC Energy and Environmental Stewardship: Oman and the US	Dr Salim Al Oufi Deputy Minister of Oi,	2019	Houston-Clear Lake
Promote Economic Development	Dr Ali Al Sunaidy, Minister of Commerce and Industry	2018	Arizona State
The Importance of Tourism and Ports in Economic Development	Dr Ahmed Al Futaisi, Minister of Transport and Communication	2017	South Carolina

Besides, Shidhani (2019) stated that "Sabra" is another program initiated in 2009 for American citizens in which the candidates can use their summer break - six weeks - in Sultan Qaboos College for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers which located in Manah. However, before 2013 the program was delivered by World Learning Center in Muscat on a contract basis. Later it was hosted by the University of Nizwa and in one summer was offered by Dhofar University (SQCC, 2019).

Shidhani also said, the scholarship program is one of the most effective programs in which American researchers (holders of Master's degree and above) are granted 20,000 OMR to deliver research on Oman. As an instance, a current study is about Omani women. In contrast, in the last years, past studies were conducted on different topics such as (i) Developing Al Saleel National Park for tourist use in 2018. (ii) Physical activity of Omani School Students in 2017. (iii) Development of a Prototype Land Cover Monitoring System to Map Vegetation Change in the Dhofar Mountains of Oman in 2016.

Besides, the Center sponsors an annual trip after selected American academics and business people to visit Oman and discover the country and its touristic sites in which this visit could be considered as an influential positive tool when needed. As example, the last trip was headed by school and college teachers wherein return they were tasked to develop an action plan to introduce Oman to American students. On the other hand, from a strategic perspective, the Center often carries the cultural week in Washington D.C. on behalf of the Omani Embassy, where students and locals visit to get acquainted with the culture (Shidhani, Personal Communication, 2019).

Sultan Qaboos Scientific Chairs Initiative: During the celebration of the 10th National Day of Oman in 1980, Sultan Qaboos created a research fund, *Scientific Chairs*, in Ivy League universities started at George Town University focused on Islamic studies and Literature. This is in implementation of the Sultan's vision of tolerance and mutual understanding between different societies. This initiative helps as well to reshape the Western view of the Arab world (SQHCCS, 2019).

The aim of establishing these scientific chairs and fellowship is to achieve the following:

- i. *Introducing the cultural role of Oman in the development of human knowledge.*
- ii. *Promote peaceful coexistence and understanding among contemporary societies.*
- iii. *Support and encourage scientific studies and researches.*
- iv. *Strengthen Oman's role in bringing multi-cultures together.*
- v. *Promote Oman's renaissance message to the world through its continuous efforts in developing Arabic language studies, heritage, and culture.*

As stated by Shidhani (2019), the newest scientific chair funded was in 2014 at Cambridge University in the mathematics department under the name *The Sultan Qaboos Research Fellowship in Mathematics*. Also, he said that there are two chairs still under the process of funding, which makes total chairs almost 19 scientific chairs to date as seen in Table 4, where the purpose of each chair varies from the other while some are scientifically focused such as the one in Pakistan, the Netherlands, and other countries that more focused on social sciences such as the chairs in the US, the UK, and Australia (Shidhani, Personal Communication, 2019).

In the past, the supervision of these chairs were managed by various bodies: the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the office of the Sultan's Advisor for External Communications, the office of the Sultan's Advisor for Cultural Affairs, Sultan Qaboos University, and Iftaa' Office at the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs. Though, after the establishment of Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science, it has been tasked to supervise all the chairs.

Moreover, to strengthen the collaboration between the universities that hosted these chairs, the first symposium was held in Sultan Qaboos University in 2010 titled *The Sultan Qaboos Scientific Chairs and their contributions to the development of human knowledge*, and it was scheduled to be held every two years at other universities that host these chairs. The second symposium was held at Cambridge University titled *Pioneering contributions to Middle East studies* while the third one was held in Tokyo University titled *The Management of Water Resources for Sustainable Development*.

Also, to strengthen the relationship between universities, collaborative work is needed to serve Oman's interest by exchanging thoughts of researches and explore the best ways to maximizes interests.

Table 4: Sultan Qaboos Scientific Chairs (Manipulated by the authors)

Chair	Year	State	Supervised by
The Sultan Qaboos Research Fellowship in Mathematics, Corpus Christi College, University of Cambridge	2014	UK	SQHCCS
The Sultan Qaboos Chair for Middle East Studies, the College of William and Mary	2011	USA	SQHCCS
The Sultan Qaboos bin Said Professorship for Abrahamic Religions and Shared Values at the University of Cambridge	2011	UK	SQHCCS
The Sultan Qaboos bin Said Chair in Middle Eastern Studies, University of Tokyo	2010	Japan	SQHCCS
The Sultan of Oman Chair of Oriental Studies, Leiden University	2008	Netherlands	MOHE/ SQHCCS
The Sultan Qaboos Chair for Arabic Language Studies at Beijing University	2007	China	MOHE/ SQHCCS
The Sultan Qaboos Chair of Quantitative Water Management, at Roosevelt Academy in Utrecht University	2005	Netherlands	MOHE/ SQHCCS
The Sultan Qaboos bin Said Professorship of Modern Arabic Studies, University of Cambridge	2005	UK	H.M.A C.Affaris/ SQHCCS
The Sultan of Oman Fellowship for Islamic Studies, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Oxford University	2004	UK	MOFA/ SQHCCS
Sultan Qaboos Chair of Arab and Islamic Studies, The University of Melbourne	2003	Australia	MOHE/ SQHCCS
The Oman Information Technology Chair, NED University of Engineering and Technology,	2005	Pakistan	SQHCCS
Sultan Qaboos Chair for Information Technology, The University of Engineering & Technology	2004	Pakistan	H.M.A Ext Com/ SQHCCS
The Sultan of Oman Professorship in International Relations, Harvard University	1999	USA	MOFA/ SQHCCS
Sultan Qaboos Chair for the Unit of Omani Studies, Al Bait University	1997	Jordan	SQHCCS
Sultan Qaboos Chair for Desert Farming, Arabian Gulf University	1994	Bahrain	MOHE/ SQHCCS
Sultan of Oman Professorship in Arabic Language, Georgetown University	1993	USA	H.M.A Ext Com/ SQHCCS
Sultan Qaboos Chair for Arabic and Islamic Literature, Georgetown University	1980	USA	SQHCCS

Source: (SQCC, 2019)

Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature: Out of Sultan Qaboos interest on the importance of culture, arts, and literature, in 2011, an award was established to honor the contributors to these fields from Arab countries for a year. It was limited to Omanis in subsequent year (SQA, 2011). In words of Shidhani (2019), the impact of this award is undoubtedly significant, since it gives the impression of the Sultanate as a country aimed to spread the values of tolerance, cooperation, and harmony. However, this award interprets Sultan Qaboos intentions to support innovation and creativity in the Arab world.

Other Cultural Initiatives

UNESCO Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation: A speech delivered by Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1992 stated: "The conservation of the environment is the responsibility of all of us, a responsibility that knows no political boundaries." The words reflect the reason behind the Sultan's motivation behind launching this award. As in 1989, the mentioned prize was launched by UNESCO by means of a donation from which individuals and organizations can compete based on their outstanding contribution to preserving the environment (UNESCO, 2019). The award is dedicated to the following fields:

- i. Environmental and natural resources research.
- ii. Environmental education and training.
- iii. Creation of environmental awareness through the preparation of environmental information materials.
- iv. Establishment and management of protected areas, such as biosphere reserves and natural world heritage sites.

The launch of the award after 19 years of modern renaissance in Oman undoubtedly illustrates the approach taken to define the name of Oman as a positive contributor to world order by maintaining sustainable development and enhancement of world peace and prosperity. Table 5 below shows some institutes and individuals winners in the past five sessions.

Without doubt, this award has helped to flourish Oman's international image and increased its recognition by other countries as an active contributor to environmental conservation.

Table 5: The UNESCO Sultan Qaboos Prize for environmental preservation winners

Winner	Year	State
National Parks Board of Singapore	2017	Singapore
Fabio A. Kalesnik, Horacio Sirolli and Luciano Iribarren of the Wetlands Ecology Research Group of the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina	2015	Argentina
State Forests National Forest Holding of Poland and South Africa's Endangered Wildlife Trust	2013	Poland & South Africa
Institute for Forest Research of Nigeria	2011	Nigeria
Autonomous Authority for National Parks (OAPN)	2009	Spain

Jewel of Muscat (Singapore) Jewel of Muscat, a replicate sailing dhow from the 9th century, where the journey took roughly five months (February to July) from Sultan Qaboos Port in Muscat to Singapore port (Vaidya, 2010). A festival conducted under the honorary of Bader bin Hamad Al-Busiadi, secretary general of MOFA, upon the arrival of the ship in Singapore. The festival was held in the famous street "Muscat Street," which was named in 1909 after Muscat, Capital of Oman.

In recent times, the vessel is displayed at Sentosa's maritime experiential museum (Times of Oman, 2014). The purpose of this journey was to highlight the historical relations between Oman and Singapore, and it was upon the order of the Sultan of Oman. This was interpreting the Sultan's vision of strengthening the bilateral relations through culture with states that share a common history with Oman.

Preserving the Omani Empire Heritage in East Africa (House of Wonders): The House of Wonders in Zanzibar is one of the most famous historical and tourist landmarks on this African island, which was built by British engineers in 1883 during the reign of Sultan Barghash bin Said, the third Sultan of Zanzibar. It was called the House of Wonders because it consists of three floors, and then it was the first building to have electricity in Zanzibar and used stairs. In 2019, the Omani government represented by the Deputy Minister of Culture and Heritage signed a restoration contract valued 6 M USD (WafOman, 2019).

Preserving the ties with East African states, which were under the influence of Oman's empire, is crucial to keeping Oman's interest but this time by funding a related cultural initiative. This initiative indirectly strengthens relations between Oman and Tanzania and since it kept the relation alive by representing the common interest in the cultural domain.

The Royal Navy of Oman's Vessel (RNOV) Shabab Oman I & II: As argued by Al-Jabri in his book "The Role of Sea Power in Oman's Security & Economy" two vessels had been acted as Oman's maritime ambassadors since commissioned in 1979 and 2014, respectively. These vessels have served Oman's overall foreign policy, as for instance, Shabab Oman II conducted three deployments to GCC, India (2015) and Europe and Baltic Sea (2017) in which many Omani youths from all military and paramilitary services participated on these journeys (Al-Jabri, 2018). In addition, the last deployment to Europe just finished on 6 October 2019. In fact, these deployments were based on Sultan Qaboos' orders to strengthen Oman relations with all states around the world by opening its doors to local visitors in their destinations who are interested in Oman's ancient maritime heritage.

Royal Opera House Muscat: The Royal Opera House in Muscat is the iconic art and the leading cultural organization in Oman. It acts as a centre of excellence in the regional culture in which it provides a diversity of art and cultural programs to the audience. Also, it motivates the cultural exchange between societies by blending the cultures through concerts on its stage. In words of Dr. Nasser al Taei, the ROHM Board advisor, as commenting in his paper titled "The Renaissance of Arts and the Cultural diplomacy in His Majesty's Thought" in which he displayed the art as a diplomatic tool by Sultan Qaboos. Al Taei claimed that Sultan Qaboos ordered the establishment of different military bands in the 1970s and cultural centres as The Royal Orchestra Oman in 1985. The Omani Oud Amateurs association in 2006, and the journey ended up opening the Royal Opera House Muscat (Alroya, 2018). Additionally, in the words of Talal Al Zubair, in specific musical performances, some people just came for half day trip to attend these events in which it acts as an influencing tool in Oman's position as a key regional cultural and touristic hub.

Economic diplomacy

Economic diplomacy is defined as "the actions of both state and non-state actors aimed at promoting cross-border trade and investment flows" (Moons, 2017). The aim of economic diplomacy is to influence the decisions on cross-border through economic activities such as trade and investment. The following sections include examples of signed economic agreements between Oman and other states, which some of them are politically motivated. The agreements which are listed in the State General Reserve Fund:

Vietnam Oman Investment (VOI): Vietnam Oman Investment Company was established in 2005 as a joint venture between the Oman's General Reserve Fund and the Vietnam Sovereign Fund with an initial capital of \$75 M USA. A subsequent increase of \$125 M USA to invest in companies and projects with lucrative returns in Vietnam that contributes to the development and creation of

sustainable economic growth. As based on the disclosed information from Oman’s Sovereignty Fund - State General Reserve Fund - Oman signed separate bilateral investment agreements (SGRF, 2019).

Oman India Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF): Established in 2011, Oman's General Reserve Fund and the State Bank of India are investing in projects in various sectors in India. Following the successful investment and proper performance of the first \$100 M USA portfolio, the second portfolio is being established. The Fund has made seven investments, with a total acquisition value of about \$ 21.81 M USA (SGRF, 2019).

Uzbek Oman Investment Joint Venture (UOI): According to the decision of the Governments of Oman and the Republic of Uzbekistan, this joint fund between Oman's General Reserve Fund and the Uzbek Reconstruction and Development Fund was established in 2010 to invest in the Republic of Uzbekistan (SGRF, 2019).

Oman Brunei Investment Company”: The company's investment strategy is to invest capital in businesses with high growth opportunities through private ownership, in new ventures, or through investment in joint ventures. The company seeks to achieve an income rate through a diversified portfolio of services, industry, health, education, and tourism (SGRF, 2019).

Pakistan Oman Investment Company: This initiative was established in 2001 as a joint venture between the Government of Pakistan and the Sultanate of Oman. Pakistan Oman Investment Company (Pak Oman) entered a fiercely competitive market through a combination of enough teamwork, excellent human resource, smart market position, and a visionary Board of Directors. This investment evolved into a progressive and modern working environment with a solid reputation and a bright future (ADFIAP, 2007). In the words of Al Hinai (2019), this firm was initially founded by the Sultan's order to invest in Baluchistan province. Still, the Pakistani official resisted this motive and requested to broaden the scope to cover the other three provinces. Yet, the firm was established as a joint venture with a total \$50 M USA from each side, and currently, its investments are mainly in the banking sector.

Oman Libya Investment Company: This firm was established as a joint venture between Libya and Oman after the first visit by Sultan Qaboos to Libya. The company meant to invest in various economic projects. Oman's State General Reserve Fund represented Oman in the Oman-Libya Investment Holding Company (Khaleej-times, 2008). In recent times, after the military coup by the Libyan protests, nothing released in regard to this investment, but from a political point of view the family of the former Libyan president, Ghadaffi, was welcomed to be hosted in Oman. This could be interpreted as a result of strong diplomatic relations.

Oman Oil Company Investments: A governmental-owned firm established in 1996 focused its investments in the energy sector inside and outside Oman. The table 6 below reflects the investment abroad in 12 countries, which some of these investments with influential shares. Such practice, even though it will be profit-driven its most probably will have some political influence.

Table 6: Selected International Investments of Oman Oil

Investment	Country	OOC Share
OXEA	Germany	100%
Blackrock Metals Company	Canada	2.8%
MOL	Hungary	7%
Redes Energéticas Nacionais (REN)	Portugal	15%
Gulf Energy Maritime (GEM)	UAE	30.4%
Orient Power Company Limited (OPCL)	Pakistan	42.80%
Qingdao Lidong Chemical Ltd.	China	30%
GS Electric, Power & Services (GS EPS)	South Korea	30%
Qingdao Lixing Logistics	China	30%
Bharat Oman Refineries Limited (BORL)	India	26%
Compañia Logística de Hidrocarburos S.A (CLH)	Spain	10%
Oman Energy Limited (OEL)	Tanzania	Not mentioned

Source: (MOFA, 2019)

Free Trade Agreements: Some scholars consider the free trade agreements between Oman and other countries as an economic tool to enhance the relations between the states. In return, the agreements will lead to political ties between these countries. The sultanate of Oman has signed the following agreements in which some are bilateral and others are multi-literal agreements: (1) membership in the GCC: (2) USA-Oman FTA (2009), (3) Singapore- GCC (2013), (4) EU-GCC FTA (1990), (5) India-GCC FTA (2006).

Water diplomacy

During the Israeli Palestinian peace process, the Sultanate of Oman welcomed the proposal to establish the Middle East Desalination Research Centre (MEDRC) in 1996, which was endorsed by the UN negotiation group at its Beijing meeting. In which Israel will have full membership in line with other regional parties (Hefny, 2011). Moreover, the center is an international organization focused on conducting researches to solve the issue of fresh water scarcity by conducting all water-related research and training, etc. (MEDRC, 2019). However, these research fellowship programs are limited to Jordanians and Palestinians based on the official statement on the firm website.

Poet diplomacy

The emerging use of soft power tools in diplomacy, especially in the case of cultural exchanges, increased the potential presence of poetry as a tool. "Poetry seems to us the most profound kind of diplomacy, one that can help generate more enduring conversation and understanding in the world" (Abhay K, 2012). Poetry was chosen as a way of communication in political-related issues due to its ability to influence the public emotions and opinions. Diplomatic historians often revised international relations by exploring many official sources such as treaties, bilateral agreements, but in terms of the cultural ones, probably the novels and poems (Jensen & Corporaal, 2016).

However, referring to the third century of Oman's history, the poem was used during the Imamate period when the Socotra Zahra sent to Imam Salt ibn Malik al-Kharusi, invoking him to help after the Christians overturned the covenant that was between them and the Muslims. A treaty was signed between the followers of Islam and Christianity during the reign of Omani Imam Jalandi bin Masoud, who ruled Oman from 132 AH/749 CE to 134 AH/751 AD (Soqotra.org, 2009).

In present days, Hamoud Al Aisri, an example of a contemporary Omani poet who is best known for his national poems. He wrote some lyrics for GCC countries in their National Days celebrations, as for instance, his poem "Notary of Love" dedicated to Kuwait on its National Day and another is titled "Unity of Destiny" for UAE during the 43rd National Day. This method could be used effectively to practice influence on other states depend mostly on the poems and the events.

Aviation diplomacy

Aviation diplomacy, or sometimes is called air diplomacy defined as the use of air assets to support the state's foreign policy. McClory (2014) stated that aviation is an essential source of state's soft power in which national carriers can spread the world presence of the country where distance got closer between nations, people, and the exchanged culture. The national carrier, also called "the unofficial ambassador" plays a crucial role in enhancing and reshaping the global reputation of the home state.

For instance, UAE and Qatar airways are governments subsidized to expand their route map, which helped to boost states global recognition. The Turkish government is one of the most successful in using the national carrier as a tool of soft power. It is considered as one of the state's foreign policy pillars to enhance its global relation by 197 destinations in 104 countries (McClory, 2014). The Sultanate of Oman currently aligned its aviation strategy with its tourism strategy while still not mature enough to align it with our foreign affairs. However, in the meantime, Oman Air reaches 78 destinations in 37 states (Oman Air, 2019).

Non-governmental diplomacy

Wealthy Business Families: Most of Omani business families fall under this category. Their commercial relations with international partners served the state presence and influence on these nations indirectly. For example, Bahwan Group sustains its business relations with many countries, mainly with India & Japan. Therefore, this commercial relation will result in unofficial bilateral ties between the group and their counterparts in India and Japan. Another example is Mohammed Al-Barwani, a known businessman where his investments are worldwide. As declared by Al-Amri (2019), his new investments reached to Montenegro and Rwanda.

Al Jisr Foundation: The first non-profitable Omani organization to sign the UN global compact initiative was Al Jisr Foundation. It is an initiative aimed to motivate businesses worldwide to adopt policies to fulfill their obligation to social responsibilities. As mentioned in their website, the foundation donation programs focus both locally and abroad but mostly on a case basis, which ranges from providing scholarships to medical assistance and renovating homes in addition to food supplies. The founders are Fawziya, Amina, and Anisa, the daughters of well-known Businessman and charity donator Sheikh Saud Bahwan (Al Jisr Foundation, 2019).

Results and Discussion

Since 1970, the Sultanate has adopted a strategy, which avoids suspending diplomatic relations with other states, whatever the reason is (Lefebvre, 2009). Omani officials refused to cut-off diplomatic relations with Egypt after signing the peace agreement with Israel in 1978, where most Arab countries did. Also, during the Gulf war, the Sultanate sustained diplomatic relations with Iraq despite the Sultanate's opposition to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In addition, Oman has been neutral to the Yemen conflict and recent Qatar Crisis in 2017. The secret recipe behind this firm approach is based on the solid principle of non-intervention of sovereign decisions of any other state — moreover, the pragmatism of the policymaker in dealing with a crisis. The Sultanate continues to stress the need for a peaceful solution through the re-negotiation between the parties to the conflict. During the recent Syrian crisis, there were several visits of the Omani Minister responsible of Foreign Affairs to Damascus, which sent a message that the Sultanate is against the overthrow of the current Assad's regime. Oman's foreign policy is always committed to the none-interference in the internal affairs of other countries as a consistent principle over the past years. A prime example after the Shah of Iran was toppled down by the Iranian revolution in 1979 an Omani delegation visited Iran following the Sultan's order to support the agreements signed previously between the two countries and to ensure regional stability (Al-Zubair, 2017).

The Sultan's Advisors Role in Oman's Diplomacy: In political practice, advisors to the head of states play a crucial role in overseeing state diplomatic agenda, especially by utilizing their communications as official channels of diplomacy. These advisors often handle particular bilateral relations between Oman and other countries. During the early days of *Oman's Renaissance*, Britain seconded

officials to serve as advisors to the Sultan of Oman (Times News Service, 2019). For example, Sir James Timothy Whittington Landon “the White Sultan” worked as the Sultan’s external communications officer until his death in 2007. According to John Beasant, “Tim was a man who always had his eye to the main chance. This title Lawrence of Arabia was ridiculous as Time did through his advisory to the Qaboos in fashioning a modern state, which primarily meant establishing a modern navy, army and air force, meant that he was able to make huge amounts of money through the arms deals he brokered on behalf of the Sultan” (Popplewell, 2018).

In the same context, the Sultan appointed different advisors to carry low-profile communication abroad. The Sultan’s Advisor for external communications, Dr. Omar bin Abdul Menaam Al Zawawi, hold Oman’s bilateral relations with the USA, Egypt, and Pakistan. The advisors can serve the Sultanate’s foreign policies when requested to interfere. For instance, Dr. Oman Al-Zawawi was able to deliver the Sultan’s message to ex-Egyptian president Mohammed Hosni Mubarak without revealing the purpose of this visit (Al-Qabas, 2016).

This approach has resulted in very successful outcomes in various occasions. The Advisor for Cultural Affairs, Abdul Aziz Al-Rawas, oversees national cultural initiatives such as “Oman Across Ages Museum” that highlights Oman’s maritime history (Al watan, 2015). Talal Al-Zubair stated that “Mohammed Al-Zubair the Advisor for Economic Planning Affairs, playas a key role in Oman’s modern economy by adopting national initiatives and sponsoring the national project with the scope of their commercial activities” (Al-Zubair T., Personal communication, 2019).

Joining International Organizations and Treaties: As part of serving its foreign policy towards the global community, MOFA is obliged to contribute to the stability of international peace and security by joining regional and international organizations from the early days of the new renaissance. The government signed various treaties and agreements in different aspects: Telecommunications, Environment and Pollution (UNCLOS), Counterterrorism, International Organizations, Human rights, International Humanitarian Law and GCC, etc. MOFA has adopted a mechanism to join international and regional organizations. However, the Sultanate focused the efforts since 1970 to be recognized by the international community by joining these organizations, especially the United Nations and its related organizations.

In the same context, MOFA participated in joining regional cooperation organizations as example Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation. Oman was a founding member beside Mauritius, India, South Africa, Australia, Singapore, and Kenya. As declared on the official website, the intention was to create an economic grouping of the Indian Ocean states on the grounds of common historical characteristics and economic advantages (MOFA, 2013). In addition, the Sultanate recently joined the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) and Gulf-EU Dialogue.

Table 7: List of international & regional organizations

Organization	Year	Domain
Arab League	1971	Regional
International Monetary Fund	1971	International
United Nation	1971	International
UN Health Organization	1971	International
The Organization of Islamic Cooperation	1972	International
UNESCO	1972	International
Interpol	1972	International
UN Environmental Program	1973	International
FAO	1976	International
Arabsat	1976	Regional
The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological and Toxin Weapons	1976	International
Gulf Cooperation Council	1981	GCC
ITU	1983	International
International Fund for Agricultural Development	1983	International
WTO	2000	International
The International Labor Organization	1994	International
Source: (Al-Mahri, 2018)		

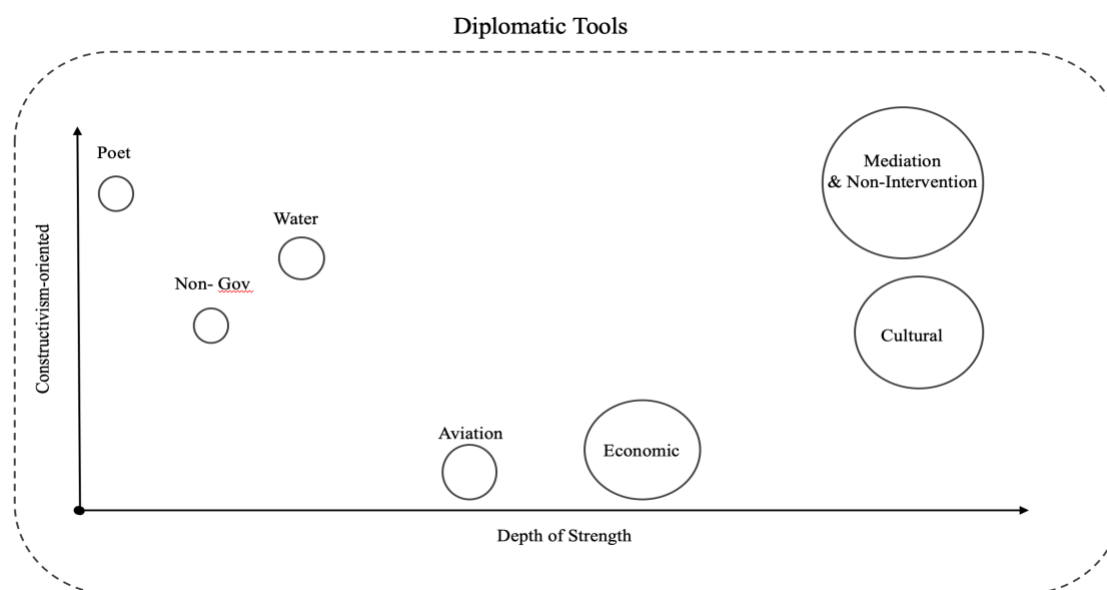


Fig. 1: Diplomatic tools

Mediation & Non-intervention diplomacy

United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation defined Mediation as “whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to grow mutually acceptable agreements” (UN Department of Political Affairs, 2017). The geographical proximity between Oman and the Republic of Iran is one of the factors of political rapprochement between the two countries to preserve the interests of each, whereas, to some extent, this also applied with its southern neighbor Yemen. Regarding Oman, as a mediator, has recently gained prominence as a trusted mediator after the announcement of a nuclear deal between Iran and P5+1. Recently, the US withdrew from the deal after President Trump took office and created a shift in the US policy (Vela, 2015). In addition, Oman facilitates peace negotiation processes between the parties in the Yemeni conflict and the same with the Libyan conflict. The government of Oman frequently uses its influence to release foreign hostages, especially in Yemenis and Iran through negotiations. In 2019, the Omani government was actively engaged in efforts to bring the Palestinians and Israelis to hold peace talks as Sultan Qaboos insisted on adopting a more pragmatic position to solve this enduring conflict.

Tolerance, Co-existence & charity diplomacy

The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs played a vital role in promoting tolerance and coexistence between sectors and other religious believers in Oman. Under these section three initiatives are discussed which is Al-Amama center, Oman’s Message of Islam exhibition and Oman Charity Organization.

Al Amama Center (Interfaith Dialogue): Al-Amama Center is one of the initiatives that is dedicated to strengthening the dialogues between religions. Historically, this center was created by Reformed Church since their mission in Muscat in 1893 to deliver medical and educational assistance. This center is based on 125 years of cooperation between the followers of Islam and Christian in Oman since its establishment as a hub for peace and moderation. However, in 1987, the center was recreated by the collaboration between the Church and the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs to deliver a cultural program covering many cultural domains such as Omani culture, Islam from Omani religious scholars' perspective, and other things interfaith activities (Anon, (2019).

Oman’s Message of Islam Exhibition: An initiative driven by the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs since 2010, these worldwide exhibitions aim to deliver Islam’s peaceful message and to introduce the tolerance of Islam to other religions (MOER, 2019). As of 2018, the exhibition has been convened 120 times in 35 countries in different public institutions (Time of Oman, 2018). This initiative is delivered under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through diplomatic missions abroad. In words of Said Al Ma’amri, a scientific advisor of MERA and the supervisor of this initiative, the visitors got a close vision on Islam in Oman and its practice of tolerance with other sectors and religions.

Oman Charitable Organizations: Oman Charity Organizations are the humanitarian donation arm of the government within the state territory and abroad to help the distribution of donations. The mechanism of its contribution abroad worked in two-phased; first, delivering urgent relief during the crisis and Secondly, reconstruction efforts depending on the damages and in light of the available resources. As an example of the relief program, the government sent urgent relief package to Sichuan Province in China due to the earthquake that hit, which caused losses in human and financial aspects. It was delivered in coordination with Oman’s ambassador to China. Also, another aid package was delivered to Bangladesh after the cyclone, where the Sultan ordered to assist the Bangladeshi

government. Such assistance was provided in different forms, such as food and logistics, to shelter the people in devastated areas. (OCO, 2019)

In regards to the reconstructions program, Sudan was one of the receivers of Oman's donations dedicated for Darfur. Moreover, as is the practice of many countries, Oman is donating to other countries, especially Yemen, even before the current conflict. Local hospitals, especially in Dhofar, continued to receive and treat Yemeni patients free of charge. Donations are also being made to improve infrastructure in Yemen's areas bordering the Omani South border. The Sultanate continued this approach even after the outbreak of the Yemeni war, which increased the contribution of Omani humanitarian support.

Table 8: Statistics for abroad donation programs

Cases	Year	Value (OMR)
5000	2008	302137.502
25000	2011	923.129.000

Source: (OCO, 2019)

Conclusions

Having examined Omani diplomacy as a maneuvering tools to face regional challenges, the research concludes that the Sultanate has exhibited an exceptional, and unique regional foreign policy consists of independence, pragmatism, and moderation. Oman is affirmed its international image as a peaceful state. Hence, while conducting this study, it is clear that it depends on the following diplomatic tools to serve its foreign policy agenda: cultural, mediation, and non-interference. Even though the economic tool is vital in contemporary politics, but the case of Oman did not show more effective in comparison with other regional states such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Hence, Oman's foreign policy adopted a more constructive approach, and the mediation efforts are the main driver in its policy towards regional crises. The rest of the diplomatic tools, despite their presence, their effectiveness still not obvious, and this is the main limitation of this work, which requires more structured interviews to figure out the unforeseen agenda.

References

- Abhay, K. (2012). *How diplomacy and poetry are linked*. <https://www.rediff.com/news/column/how-diplomacy-and-poetry-are-linked/20121030.htm> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2020].
- Adfiap.org, (2007). *Pak Oman Investment Company Profile*. <http://www.adfiap.org/members/pakoman/pakoman.htm> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2020].
- Al Hinai, H. A. (2019). Oman & Pakistan Relations. (Musallam, Interviewer)
- Al Jisr Foundation (2019). *Principles - Al Jisr Foundation*. Al Jisr Foundation. <http://www.aljisrfoundation.org/en/transparency/> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2020].
- Al Zubair, M. (2017). *Oman, Iran, and the United States: An Analysis of Omani Foreign Policy and Its Role as an Intermediary* (Master dissertation).
- Al-Jabri, K. (2018). *The Role of Sea Power in Oman's Security & Economy*. Cairo: Nabta.
- Al-Katheeri, A. (Personal communication, 2019, September). Oman Diplomacy. (Musallam, Interviewer)
- Al-Zubair, T. (Personal communication, 2019, October). Al Zubair Corporation. (Musallam, Interviewer)
- Anon, (2019). <http://alamanacentre.org/what-we-provide/> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2020].
- Drab, I. (2018). defence diplomacy – an important tool for the implementation of foreign policy and security of the state. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, pp. 57-71.
- Ginting, E. T. (2015). Italian Cultural Diplomacy: National Heritage and Economic Development. <https://etginting.wordpress.com/2015/04/13/italian-cultural-diplomacy-national-heritage-and-economic-development/>
- Hefny, D. M. (2011). *Water Diplomacy: A Tool for Enhancing Water Peace and Sustainability in the Arab Region*. Cairo: Second Arab Water Forum.
- Jensen, L., & Corporaal, M. (2016). Poetry as an Act of International Diplomacy: English translations of Willem van Haren's Political Poetry during the War of the Austrian Succession. *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39(3), 377-394.
- Khaleej Times. (2008). *Oman, Libya Sign \$500 Million JV Deal*. [<https://www.khaleejtimes.com/business/oman-libya-sign-500-million-jv-deal>] [Accessed 11 Feb. 2020].
- Lefebvre, J. A. (2009). *Oman's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century | Middle East Policy Council*. [online] Mepc.org. Available at: <https://www.mepc.org/omans-foreign-policy-twenty-first-century> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2020].
- McClory, J. (2014). [online] Aviationbenefits.org. Available at: https://aviationbenefits.org/media/13961/ATAG_AviationBenefits2014_ESSAY_Love-from-above.pdf [Accessed 11 Feb. 2020].
- Medrc.org. (2019). *MEDRC | About Us*. [online] Available at: <https://www.medrc.org/about-us/> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2020].
- MOER. (2019). *Oman's 'Message of Islam'*. [online] Available at: <http://www.islam-in-oman.com/en.html>
- MOFA. (2013). [online] Available at: <https://www.mofa.gov.om/?p=823&lang=en>
- MOFA. (2019). [online] Available at: https://www.mofa.gov.om/?page_id=1086

