

Oman: Friend of all, enemy of none

Written by Rio Praaning Prawira Adiningrat on 3 August 2017



Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said

Due to the turmoil in the Middle East and in the Gulf, regard should be given to Oman as the only peaceful and internationally active actor, writes Rio Praaning Prawira Adiningrat.

Oman has played a crucial role in settling conflicts in the Middle East. Muscat has welcomed warring parties from Iran, Iraq, Israel, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Yemen to find solutions - and is the only country in the region to have uncontested borders.

US, Chinese, British and French military visits receive a warm reception.

The strategic port of Duqm enjoys substantial Chinese investments, but is also used by the Americans and the British. The port of Antwerp is a partner in the development of the port of Duqm. Rotterdam is a partner of the port of Sohar, where some \$20bn have been invested in recent years.

Oman is the only Gulf State that was not 'designed' by oil companies. Thousands of years ago, the country developed its own route to the future that positioned Oman as a neutral state that is a friend

of all and an enemy of none.

Sultan Qaboos' leadership echoes this stable past, but in a modern form. International trade demands openness, tolerance and mutual respect. Those are the ingredients of Oman's foreign policy.

At the same time, Oman possesses - as guardian of the Gulf where 60 per cent of the world's energy travels through in oil and gas tankers - an optimally trained and armed army. Thus, Oman protects not only itself but also the interests of countries without their own energy sources.

With the signing of defence contracts between Saudi Arabia and US President Donald Trump, the traditional leaders of the Gulf States - despite rising domestic demands for liberalisation - seem to have ensured their survival.

By consequence the war against Yemen will be perpetuated, Iran is being put under pressure and strong diplomatic measures have been taken against Qatar.

Earlier this month a large delegation from Qatar visited Oman. Once again Oman can play a role in bringing about a compromise that will protect people's lives.

Ever since taking up his post in 1970, the Sultan has maintained consistent policies that all foreign major powers have appreciated, and that - domestically - have led to an astonishing level of popularity.

An ultramodern road network, high speed internet, low barriers for the establishment and development of smaller companies and an open economy in an area of economic growth: these are the achievements of one of the world's longest reigning monarchs.

On 23 July Oman celebrated the 47th anniversary of its Renaissance Day. On that day Sultan Qaboos marched up to his father at the helm of the Omani people after freeing himself from imprisonment in one of his father's forts.

This bloodless revolution brought one of the world's longest periods of uninterrupted peace, safety, societal development and economic growth. Can Oman therefore be considered the Switzerland of the Gulf or the Singapore of the Middle East? Perhaps it can.

About the author

Rio Praaning Prawira Adiningrat is a senior expert on international diplomacy and advisor to the government of the Sultanate of Oman

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[Foreign Affairs](#) [2]

Categories

[Defence and Security](#) [3]

[International Relations](#) [4]



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- [Editorial Calendar](#)
- [Policy Events](#)
- [Event Coverage](#)
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[4] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/international-relations>