Understanding Oman's Involvement in Mediation, 1980-2015

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Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

In the recent past, Oman has made independent foreign policy choices which differ from its allies in the Gulf. While most Arab Gulf states tend to take sides and pursue a confrontational approach during regional conflicts, Oman has chosen to act as a mediator. Applying Mark Bevir's interpretive framework that concentrates on explaining political actions by locating them against the background of traditions and as responses to dilemmas, this thesis seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of Oman's frequent involvement as a mediator. This is achieved by examining Oman's mediation role undertaken during the Iran-Iraq War, the Yemeni Civil War, and the Iranian nuclear deal. The study relies on primary and secondary material, including documentary analysis and elite's interviews.

This study argues that upon gaining power, Sultan Qaboos embarked on a socio-political programme consolidating Oman's national unity and national independence. In articulating his programme, he drew on a series of traditional ideas and historical references, which also came to frame understandings of Oman's foreign policy orientation during the 1970s. It shows that by 1980, the belief in Oman's cultural distinctiveness and vulnerability to external intervention had emerged as tantamount to 'traditions', playing a significant role in structuring Omani policy-makers' reading of regional security dilemmas, and the policies they adopt. In this context, Oman's desire to preserve its culturally distinct identity have constrained her pursuit of national independence, and shaped her response to foreign policy dilemmas, leading to the emergence of mediation as a policy practice. Oman's earlier adaptation of a 'balanced' approach, and later 'neutral' stance, followed by its active mediation role towards the end of the

Iran-Iraq War, were formed against the background of these traditions of thought. The study demonstrates that Omani policy-makers have been able to adjust their practice and policy as they have responded to each new policy dilemma posed by regional upheavals. In doing so, they developed mediation as a new tradition of policy practice.

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1 Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction:

Located in a region considered to be one of the world's most volatile and conflict-ridden situations, Oman's foreign and security policy and, in particular, its use of mediation as an instrument of peaceful conflict resolution, exhibits distinctive characteristics. Over the past several decades, Oman has consistently made independent foreign policy choices that are different to its similarly situated allies in the Gulf. While most other Arab Gulf states tend to take sides and pursue a confrontational approach during regional conflicts, Oman has positioned itself among the primary mediators in some of these conflicts. Indeed, Oman has played a central mediatory role in some of the most intractable conflicts in the Gulf and wider Middle East region, having played key mediatory roles in the Iran-Iraq war, Yemen's internal conflicts, and in the nuclear deal between Iran and the West. Moreover, Oman was instrumental in helping to release British soldiers held by Iran in 2007, and American hostages in 2011. Oman has also played a key role in resolving the sectarian crisis and confrontation between Ibadhist Amazigh and Arabs from the Maliki Islamic sect in Algeria. In addition, Oman has hosted meetings of the Libyan Constitution Drafting Assembly in Salalah, under the aegis of the United Nations. More recently, Oman has sought to organise talks connecting all the major actors in the Syrian conflict, demanding to organise direct meetings between Riyadh and Tehran, the two key regional supporters of the government of Syria and their opposition, respectively.

In fact, Oman has increasingly played an active regional role by repeatedly becoming involved in and committed to peaceful conflict resolution through its mediation efforts in regional conflicts. Within the context of the Gulf region, Qatar has also attempted to engage in mediation

activities between the small Arab Gulf States; however, there are several features that distinguish Oman's mediation practice from that of Qatar. First, compared to Oman, Qatar is a relative latecomer to the practice of international mediation, one that has only emerged since the mid-2000s.[1] In contrast, Oman has a long track record of mediation efforts that can be traced back to the mid-1980s. Secondly, and strongly linked to the first feature, is that Oman's mediation behaviour has been institutionalised and become deeply consolidated, as it demonstrates a sustained commitment to mediation over the years, which suggests that Oman uses mediation as tools within its broader strategy to secure national unity and national independence. By contrast, Qatar's mediation practice is personalised in its nature, normally being carried out by the Emir of Qatar himself.[2] Moreover, Qatari mediation is mainly motivated by the country's vast wealth, due to the rise of oil prices in the early 21st century, and its desire for international prestige.[3] As Kamrava has noted, "Qatar has invested heavily in all the countries in which it has played a mediating role."[4] Certainly, this suggests that Qatar's mediation practice is not based on a cohesive security strategy. As Lina Khatib indicates, "While Qatar is often praised for its mediation in conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere, its foreign policy does not appear to be based on a coherent political strategy but rather to be reactive, playing catch-up with political trends instead of setting them."[5] Unlike Qatar, Oman does not possess enormous financial resources, nor the military capabilities that allows it to bring conflicting parties into agreement. What makes Oman's mediation practice distinct from

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[1] M. Kamrava, 'Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy', *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 65, no.4, 2011, p. 539.
[2] S. Barakat, *Qatari mediation: between ambition and achievement*, Washington, Brookings Institution, 2014, p.2.
[3] M. Kamrava, 'Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy', p. 541.
[4] M. Kamrava, 'Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy', p.540.
[5] L. Khatib, 'Qatar's foreign policy: the limits of pragmatism', *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 2, March 2013, p.429.

other mediators in the region is that Oman's mediation is more discrete, avoiding large-scale publicity.[6] All mediation efforts are kept away from media coverage until the mediation process has been completed, and a final agreement achieved. For example, during its mediation efforts between Iran and the West, Oman took a discrete approach, hosting secret talks between the United States and Iran in Muscat in March 2013, which were only revealed when a six-month deal was rapidly agreed between Iran and the P5+1 in Geneva in November 2013.[7] Certainly, Oman is not identified with its satellite media network in the same way that Qatar is with Al Jazeera TV. Kamrava has noted that "Qatar's mediation efforts have taken place in the limelight and often before local and regional media outlets, with high ranking Qatari diplomats frequently granting media interviews as the process is still underway and reflecting on the country's role in positive, often glowing terms."[8]

As such, Oman's foreign policy and its use of mediation as an instrument of peaceful conflict resolution exhibits distinctive characteristics, which deserve further investigation. Why a small state like Oman becomes repeatedly involved in mediation activities within the multifaceted and interrelated conflicts of the Middle East is indeed a matter of curiosity. Despite having repeatedly been involved in mediation efforts in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East at large, Oman's mediation practice has not been authoritatively or comprehensively analysed either by Omani or international scholars. This study seeks to understand why Oman has engaged in this distinctive behavior of repeated involvement in mediation efforts.

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[6] J. Jones and N. Ridout, *Oman, culture and diplomacy*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012, p.252.
[7] H. Clinton, *Hard Choices*, London, Simon and Schuster, 2015, p.368-9.
[8] M. Kamrava, 'Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy', p.542.

While some variations exist in the literature defining third party mediation, the concept of international mediation generally refers to mediation activities conducted by various international actors with the aim of managing international conflicts, provided such activity is acceptable to the adversaries, and purports to abate, settle or resolve an international dispute without resorting to force or invoking authoritative rules.[9] As a rule, their aim is to prevent the escalation of conflict and achieve a peaceful solution.[10] In this sense, the primary aim of a mediator is to steer the conflicting parties from war to peace through curbing the potential violence of parties aiming to spoil the peace process. Thus, the power of a mediator is crucial to convince (or oblige) the conflicting parties to reach an agreement and a peaceful solution to their dispute. According to Sisk, a powerful mediator is more suitable for this task, since it is more effective in minimising the potential cost and increasing the potential benefits for the parties involved in the mediation process.[11] The mediator, therefore, should have the capabilities to undertake mediation activities. Furthermore, undertaking the role of mediator bears its own risk, because mediators, while attempting to influence the dynamics of a conflict, can become an actor in that conflict.[12] This in turn could lead to a serious investment of time and resources. As such, not many small states are bold enough to undertake this unpredictable form of behaviour,[13] which is another impetus to study Oman's role in mediation.

The study of international mediation tends to focus on studying the phenomenon itself rather than on the actors who make the decision to mediate in an ongoing conflict. In other words, the

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[9] J. Bercovitch, 'International Mediation', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 28, no.1,1991, p.3.
[10] J. Bercovitch, 'International Mediation'. p.3.
[11] T. Sisk, *International Mediation in Civil Wars: Bargaining with Bullets*, New York, Routledge, 2009, p.188.
[12] K. Beardsley, *The Mediation Dilemma*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2011, p.45.
[13] J. Bercovitch and J. Rubin, (eds.), *Mediation in international relations: Multiple approaches to conflict management*, London, Macmillan Press,1994, p.229.

focus has been on the nature of the conflict, the parties to the conflict, and the mediation process. As a result, most scholarly works have focused on when mediation occurs, under which condition conflicts are likely to experience third party intervention, who can mediate and what strategies mediators use; however, the question of why a mediator decides to mediate in a certain conflict has received scant scholarly attention. Early researchers on international mediation "assumed a simplistic approach regarding the role of a mediator as a neutral and impartial outside actor that was deprived of any self-interest or leverage in the process of managing the dispute."[14] In recent years, some scholarly works have considered the motives of involved mediators, but have dealt with the subject as a way to uncover when and where mediation is most likely to take place.[15] Those few studies that have dealt with the question of why mediators have decided to undertake the role of mediation have argued that self/national interest is the primary driver for states to intervene in a conflict. William Zartman, for example, points out that when states use mediation as foreign policy tools, they seek a reduction of conflict, because it is in their interests.[16] Similarly, Fisher argues that regardless of its size and strength, a state may be driven to initiate or accept to undertake a mediation role in an international conflict if that conflict affects its national interests.[17] In fact, self-interest lies at the heart of most current explanations for why states mediate in international conflict. However, the literature does not really examine in depth how mediating states conceive of their interests. As a result, the

[14] S. Vukovic, 'International mediation as a distinct form of conflict management', *International Journal of Conflict Management*, vol. 25, no.1, 2014, p.62.

[15] A. Duursma, 'A current literature review of international mediation', *International Journal of Conflict Management*, vol. 25, no.1, 2014, p.83.

[16] W. Zartman, "Mediation roles for large small countries.", in D. Carment and E. Hoffman, (eds.) *International Mediation in a Fragile World*, Routledge, 2018, p.10.

[17] J. Bercovitch, and S. Gartner, (eds.), *International conflict mediation: new approaches and findings*, London, Routledge, 2008, p.50.

questions concerning how individual mediators decide on and conceive of their interests have not been fully addressed.

Interests may have different aspects and vary in intensity. They can range from interests emerging from humanitarian concerns to strategic and security concerns to economic advantages, or even have some normative angle involved.[18] Moreover, national interests never exist in a vacuum. They are normally embedded in a broader web of strategic interests that each actor pursues on the international stage. In this sense, the decision to become engaged in conflict mediation is never an isolated incident; instead, it should be seen as an element of a more complex network of strategic choices developed by each actor in an international arena. As such, in order to gain a better understanding of a mediator's motives or decision to act as a mediator, it will be necessary to seek to understand how key policy and decision makers conceive of their national interests. This, in turn, entails understanding their perceptions, intentions and desires. In doing so, this study focuses strictly on those actors who make the decision to mediate in an ongoing conflict.

In trying to understand Oman's reasons for repeatedly engaging in regional conflict mediation, it seems relevant to consider the various aspects of Omani politics, culture and history which distinguish it from its regional rivals. An understanding of Oman's mediation practice would not be complete without an understanding the role of its distinctive form of Islam, Ibadhism, which is practiced by the majority of the population. According to the *World Population Review* about three-quarters of Oman's population follow the Ibadhi school of Islam, while Sunni and

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[18] S. Vukovic, "International mediation", p.66.

Shias constitute the rest of the population.[19] In this respect, two main factors are of importance regarding Ibadhism. First, its cultural identity represents Oman's status as a non-Sunni monarchy, which makes it distinct from other Arab states in the Gulf Cooperation Council GCC, and affords it more leeway in terms of its mediation efforts, as the Omani leadership, and a sizable portion of Oman's population, are neither Sunni nor Shi'a, but Ibadhi. Secondly, there is the influence of these Ibadhi traditions in shaping the conduct of the Omani people and Omani state, as some scholars, such as John Wilkinson, states that Ibadhi traditions have served as the guiding principle of the country over centuries.[20] Similarly, Thomas Bierschenk argues that "Ibadism has been the essential factor shaping the political structure of Oman."[21] Religious traditions play a significant role in shaping political practice. As John Gray observes , "Modern politics is a chapter in the history of religion."[22] This is particularly applicable to the political context of the Middle Eastern region, where religion plays a crucial role in conflict across the region. It is not necessarily the case that political actors are themselves religious, but in many aspects religious traditions have become so culturally entrenched as they are passed from generation to generation that they have simply acquired the status of shared understanding. In this context, political actors use ideology to legitimise their actions, irrespective of their real motivations. For example, when a political actor uses minorities' rights to justify a policy, we

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[19] World Population Review, *Oman Population 2021*, https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/oman-population , (accessed 4 July 2021)

[20] J. Wilkinson, *The imamate tradition of Oman*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 50.

[21] T. Bierschenk, 'Religion and Political Structure: Remarks on Ibadism in Oman and the Mzab (Algeria)', *Studia Islamica*, No. 681, 988, p.127. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1595760.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Abe3c3019e7ff4af66b4ae0cc01dec9b3 ,(accessed 26 May 2021)

[22] J. Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, London, Penguin Books, 2011, p.1.

cannot fully understand that justification and its value, irrespective of its truth, unless we grasp the content and role of ideas about minority rights in the relevant society.

Another distinctive feature of Oman is its political history, as it is the only Arab Gulf state to have undergone a civil war in its modern history. When Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970, the country was divided politically and socially. There was a communist insurgency in the southern region of the country, starting in 1964, posing a serious threat to the existence of the ruling family and national unity. The civil war led to the interference of external powers in Oman's internal affairs, so that the rebellion received substantial military and training support from the Marxist-oriented People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), China and the former Soviet Union. The turbulent experience of civil war in the southern region of Oman from the late sixties until the mid-seventies made a lasting impact upon its foreign policy calculations. This historical experience made the country well aware that it was not immune from the influence of foreign interference, ultimately playing an important role in shaping the perceptions of the Omani leadership regarding national and regional security. As Diana Alghoul points out, compared to its GCC counterparts, Oman does not view security through its ability to deter threats militarily; it prefers to maintain some balance by keeping external threats at bay.[23] As such, the Omani leadership has always perceived regional instability as a threatening factor to the country's internal stability, which could lead to the interference of external actors in Oman's internal affairs

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[23] D. Alghoul, 'Why is Oman's defence policy unique within the GCC?', *Middle East Monitor*, October 27, 2016. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20161027-why-is-omans-defence-policy-unique-within-the-gcc/ , (accessed 27 May 2017).

The preceding discussion suggests that Oman's reaction to the impact of regional conflict appears to be different from that of other states in the region, which in turn suggests that in order to fully understand Oman's involvement in mediation, one needs to understand how the Omani leadership and key policy makers perceive and understand these regional conflicts, and how they have considered the options available in responding to them. The working assumption which guides the structure of this study is that Oman's mediation efforts cannot be understood as a generic or automatic response to structural imperatives from a small state, because other small and similarly located Gulf states have not responded to the same situation in the same manner that Oman chose to act. This signifies that Omani policy-makers hold different beliefs, norms, perceptions and desires, because their experiences of the situation may be informed by different prior theories. In this sense, Oman's mediation efforts are significantly underpinned by a wider set of beliefs and desires held by the Omani leadership and key policy-makers; therefore, in order to fully understand why Omani policy-makers decided to act as mediators in response to the Iran-Iraq War, for example, we must interpret their actions as part of their web of beliefs.

Based on these factors, the study adopts the interpretive framework introduces by Mark Bevir in his famous work *The Logic of the History of Ideas*.[24] Scholars of political science have already established the utility of this interpretive theoretical framework in the study of domestic governance and policy, British foreign policy, as well as in the study of international security. Bevir provides an interpretive analysis method centered around two key explanatory concepts for understanding a political actor's beliefs and practices: traditions and dilemmas. I would

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[24] M. Bevir, *Mark, The Logic of the History of Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

argue that Bevir's interpretive theoretical framework of tradition and dilemma is of particular value in understanding Oman's reasons for acting as a mediator during regional conflicts, for several reasons. First, as this study seeks to understand policy practice and actions, the concepts of tradition and dilemma provide useful analytical lenses for understanding the nature of the meanings that inform actions and practices, by focusing on the study of 'situated agents' as foreign policy decision makers responding to policy dilemmas by drawing on – and sometimes adapting – foreign policy traditions in response to dilemmas.[25] The basic presumption here is that policy makers have to be treated as situated agents. The concept of situated agent implies that political actors are not autonomous, so that their agency is always situated against a particular historical background that influences them.[26] In this sense, while humans are agents who act according to their own beliefs and desires, their beliefs and actions are formed against the background of an inherited tradition. Thus, to grasp the motivation for the way in which someone acts is not just to understand their action, but also to give a proper explanation of their action, by recovering the beliefs that motivated them.[27] In this context, the focus will be on how Omani policy-makers' beliefs and preferences inform their choice to act as mediators in response to regional conflicts.

Secondly, the interpretive theoretical framework adopted here is of particular significance for studying the context of Omani mediation, since this interpretive approach does not follow any predetermined assumptions about the nature of security concerns in the external or internal

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[25] M. Bevir and O. Daddow, 'Interpreting foreign policy: National, comparative and regional studies.', *International Relations*, vol. 29, no.3, 2015, p.275.

[26] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, 'Interpretation and its Others.', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 40, no.2, 2005, p.7.

[27] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, 'Interpretation and its Others.', p.174.

spheres. It is therefore well suited for exploring the manner whereby Oman's perceptions of regional security concerns were localised within its national context, and the interrelationship between its regional and domestic security concerns. This interpretive framework is outlined in more detail in the methodological chapter.

Therefore, this study explores the way in which Oman's foreign and security policy practice developed and were shaped by the beliefs and traditions of thought developed by Sultan Qaboos upon his ascent to power, which in turn fed into and drove Omani policy makers' reading of Oman's main security dilemmas. The study argues that Oman's mediation practice has evolved and was set against the background of these beliefs and traditions of thought, and as Omani policy-makers' response to a perceived policy dilemma was created by regional upheavals. Oman's initial policy of a 'balanced approach', followed by adopting a 'neutral' stance, and the later clear shift towards adopting mediation as a policy response to the dilemma posed by Iran-Iraq war, all emerged out of the particular self-understanding of Oman's distinctive cultural identity within its regional context, one perceived as being vulnerable to external to external interference. The experience of the Iran-Iraq War influenced Omani policy-makers' sense of mediation as a viable policy option, and therefore, when the Yemeni Civil War erupted a decade later, the dilemma posed by the Yemeni conflict was met by acting as a mediator from the first instance. As such, the idea of Oman as a mediator has become consolidated as a traditional understanding informing Omani foreign and security practice. This suggests that as Omani policy makers have responded to a series of policy dilemmas posed by regional upheavals, this process has led them to develop a new tradition policy of foreign and security practice, thereby paving the way for the emergence of their role as mediators. As such, by 1995, Oman was very

much on its own in occupying this type of mediation role. Oman's sustained commitment in dealing with the technicalities of mediation played a greater role in securing Oman's credibility as a mediator, to such an extent that Oman got called on by other parties to play this role, even when she was not facing an acute foreign and security policy dilemma of her own. This was clearly demonstrated by the instrumental role that Oman played in facilitating the initial secret meetings between the U.S. and Iran that led to a nuclear agreement that came to be known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) on July 14th, 2015.[28]

1.2 **Research Questions**

This study seeks to understand Oman's reasons for becoming repeatedly involved in conflict mediation in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East region from 1980 to 2015. However, in order to fully understand why Oman repeatedly became involved in conflict mediation in the period 1980-2015, it's necessary to examine the traditions of thought out of which this policy choice emerged, and that by the mid-1990s had led to the emergence of Oman's new tradition as a mediator. From the early 1980s, Oman had begun to actively participate in finding a peaceful solution to regional conflicts as a mediator in the region. Its long track record of mediation efforts suggests that, over time, Oman has developed a distinctive approach to manage the unstable security environment of the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East region. Therefore, the main research question that this study will seek to answer is; Why did Oman repeatedly become involved in mediation efforts during regional conflicts?

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[28] R. Schmierer, 'The Sultanate of Oman and the Iran nuclear deal', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 22, no.4, 2015, p. 113.

In order to answer the stated question and gain a better understanding of Oman's mediation efforts, the study will first attempt to identify the core ideas and beliefs that informed Sultan Qaboos' thinking when he was crafting the first Omani foreign and security policy during the 1970s. It will then further investigate how these ideas and beliefs informed Oman's initial foreign and security policy practices, and how these policy practices evolved as a shared understanding within Omani foreign policy thinking, thereby acquiring the status of traditions in Oman's foreign and security policy by 1980. The subject will be further investigated in Chapter Five and Six (the two empirical case studies) with regard to how these traditions of thought helped to frame the types of dilemma presented by the first Iran-Iraq war and the 1994 Yemeni Civil War, and to shape how policy makers responded to them. Given these traditions of thoughts, the study will explore how Omani policy-makers came to perceive the new circumstances that were introduced by the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War at the end of 1980, how they constituted a challenge to the existing traditions of policy practice, and thereby posed a policy dilemma for them. As discussed above, most of the literature on international mediation argues that self / national interest is the underlying motive for the mediation efforts of third parties.[29] However, even if Oman's mediation is self-interested, self-interest can take many different forms, and therefore it will be necessary to understand how Omani leaders and policy makers conceive of their country's self/national interests. The study will then further investigate how Omani policy-makers modify and adjust their existing traditions in order to accommodate these new circumstances. In doing so, the study will seek to uncover why Omani policy makers

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[29] See; M. Maund et al., *Getting in: Mediators' Entry into the Settlement of African Conflicts*', United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington, DC, 2006. And, K. Beardsley, '*The Mediation Dilemma*', Cornell University Press, New York, NY, 2012. See also, W. Zartman and S. Touval, 'International mediation in the post-Cold War era', in C. Crocker, F. Hampson and P. Aall, (eds.) *Turbulent Peace*, *Washington: United States Institute of Peace*, 2001.

believed that acting as a mediator during regional crises/conflicts was the best choice to achieve and secure Oman's national interests. In addition, this will enable us to explore their understanding of the range of options open to them, and how they evaluated those options.

To provide a thorough examination of the interactions between beliefs, traditions and dilemma, this thesis adopts an intensive interpretive case study strategy to grant an in-depth analysis of the situation in its entirety. According to Yin, the case study deals with the "how" and "why" questions being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the researcher has little control.[30] Based on my research question, this study explores the evolution of Oman's use of mediation, by examining two early cases of Omani mediation. These are the Iran-Iraq War (1980- 1988), and the Yemen Civil War of 1994-1995. These are both critical cases as key early examples of Oman's mediation efforts through which the practice of mediation emerged and became consolidated as a tradition.

The first case study is the Iraq-Iran War, where Oman played an instrumental role in ending the war, and encouraged attempts to bridge the gap between Iraq and Iran during the conflict. The Sultanate utilised its relationship with both sides to broker a ceasefire agreement and host secret talks between the two parties. This case is the first major conflict during which Oman played a key role in the mediation process to end the conflict. In this context, it could be assumed that, based on the extent of their involvement in mediation efforts during this conflict, Omani policy-makers' sense of mediation as a viable policy option was strengthened, and therefore the wish to maintain and secure these investments through repeated engagement seems to be a strong motive for Oman to adopt the same policy when responding to regional conflict. This is critical

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[30] R. Yin, *Case study research: Design and methods*, London: Sage, 1994, p.23.

because it provides an example of Oman's mediation between the Sunni-led Iraqi regime and the Shia- Iranian regime, which will allow me to investigate how the aspect of Ibadhi ideology is related to Oman's mediation efforts, and how that made Oman uniquely suited to play the role of mediator in the region. Moreover, this case also provides an example of Oman becoming involved in mediation between major regional powers.

The second case is the Yemeni Civil War (1994-1995). When a civil war broke out between the southern and northern parts of Yemen in May 1994, unlike the other Arab Gulf States who decided to support the South, Oman choose to act as a mediator. In fact, the emerging conflict was dealt with from the first instance by actively acting as a mediator. This time Oman showed a more sustained and multifaceted commitment to mediation as a means to prevent the escalation of the conflict and to end the fighting. The sultanate initiated talks between the two sides in Salalah (the southern city of Oman) and extended asylum to the South Yemeni leader at the end of the conflict. There are two main reasons justifying the selection of the case of the Yemeni civil war of 1994; first, the selection of Yemen is based on the historical trajectory, where the Iran-Iraq War was the first major case, and Yemen was the next major case, by which time mediation was already becoming consolidated as a policy option. Secondly, in contrast to the case of the Iran-Iraq War, this case is an example of the intrastate type of conflict that took place at the outset of the post-Cold War era, where the nature and causes of the conflict had different underlying causes.

The study will also develop a new strand of analysis by briefly examining in conclusion the negotiations leading up to the signing of the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and Oman's role in facilitating them, thereby demonstrating the depth of Oman's continued commitment to playing the role of mediator.

In order to facilitate answering the research questions, this study has relied on textual analysis of primary and secondary material, and to build on the interpretive approach, interviews were conducted with key policy makers, practitioners, and experts in the Omani Government.

1.3 Significance of the study

The study is significant in that it seeks to make an original contribution to the literature on a number of fields. First, the study contributes significantly to the study of Oman's foreign and security policy, and in particular its mediation practice. By addressing Oman's mediation efforts in terms of regional conflicts, this study is important for a number of reasons. One reason is the notable absence of literature on Oman as a mediator, and the relatively limited body of literature on Oman's foreign policy in general, and its role in the region. Much of the literature focuses on the country's history and modern development, or the foundation of the state. The studies by Joseph Kechichian and Majid Al-Khalili can be considered as the main sources devoted exclusively to Oman's foreign policy[31]. However, these studies examine Oman's foreign policy in general terms. Oman's approach to international and regional issues, and its role as a mediator

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[31] J. Kechichian, '*Oman and the world: The emergence of an independent foreign policy*', Rand Corporation, 1995. and M. Al-Khalili, '*Oman's foreign policy: Foundations and practice*', ABC-CLIO, 2009.

in particular, deserve more detailed analysis. Despite having been repeatedly involved in mediation efforts in the Arab Gulf and the Middle East, Oman's role as a mediator has not been comprehensively studied. This study will provide an in-depth analysis of Oman's mediation role in conflict prevention and conflict management, to provide a better understanding of Oman's mediatory role at both regional and international levels.

Secondly, the study contributes to a methodological framework of tradition and dilemma developed by Mark Bevir, by applying it to a Middle Eastern context (i.e. a non-western context), as this interpretive approach developed primarily from the study of history and British governance, and has recently been applied to some other western contexts.[32] This study is the first systematic study to apply Bevir's interpretive framework of traditions and dilemma to the study of international mediation. It examines how the ideas and beliefs of key policy makers have been significant in the development of mediation as foreign and security policy practice. By doing so, it introduces the interpretive framework firmly to the field of international relations and foreign policy analysis, to bring an innovative dimension to the literature.

Thirdly, the study also makes a contribution to the study of international mediation by focusing specifically on actors' reasons for acting as a mediator. In doing so, the study will contribute to the existing literature on international mediation, with a particular focus on the aspect of why a state decides to act as a mediator, as this has received scant scholarly attention. As indicated earlier, most of the literature on international mediation focuses on when and how states are

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[32] See, M. Bevir, O. Daddow and I. Hall, *Interpreting global security*, London, Routledge, 2013.

likely to intervene, tending to focus on the characteristics and nature of the conflict and disputing parties, rather than studying the mediator and understanding their perspective. Furthermore, one consequence of the fact that the literature focuses on self-interest as a primary motive for mediation efforts is that there is a need to understand how different mediators and policy makers conceive of their national/self-interest when deciding to intervene in an ongoing conflict. Therefore, by focusing on the mediator as an actor, this study will contribute towards filling that gap in the literature on international mediation.

Finally, this study builds on findings and conclusions from the literature which imply that mediation should be considered as part of foreign policy. In doing so, the study explores mediators' motivations and commitment to mediation as functions of the mediator's perceptions of their regional and international security environment, their internal security needs and foreign and security policy objectives and strategies, which the study argues are influential in determining a policy maker's decision to act as a mediator in regional and international conflicts. This brings theories of conflict management in accordance with more general theories of foreign and security policy decision making.

1.4   Research scope

It is important to note at this point that this study is limited to understanding policy makers' decisions and actions with regard to why Oman decided to act as a mediator in regional and international conflicts. It does so by situating Omani policy makers within a wider web of beliefs, understood here as 'traditions' against which they construct their worldviews, including

their views of their own interests, and by examining how they respond to policy 'dilemmas' that conflict with these inherited traditions, forcing them to alter or adjust their traditional ways of thinking. The concepts of 'traditions' and 'dilemmas' are used as an analytical lens to understand the action political actors perform and to uncover their motives for acting as a mediator. As such, the findings from this research project present the opportunity to understand mediators' motives. However, the study does not aim to conduct a comprehensive analysis of Oman's mediation process in terms of the kinds of disputes it seeks to mediate and the strategies it employs or to investigate how successful were the outcomes of its mediation efforts.

1.5 Structure of the Study

Following this introduction, this study is organised in six chapters. Each chapter is organised in terms of sequential and relevant topics and sub-headings. Below is a brief description of each chapter's contents:

1.5.1 Chapter Two: Literature Review

The second chapter is the literature review chapter, which critically examines the existing literature in order to situate the research topic within the existing body of literature and identify gaps in previous research. It covers the most relevant literature on three main areas. These are; the literature on Oman mediation, the literature on Omani foreign policy more broadly, and the theoretical literature on why states become involved in mediation. To begin, this chapter examines the relevant existing literature on Omani mediation, to determine the breadth and depth of existing material and to identify its shortcomings. From reviewing the existing literature, it was notable that there is an absence of substantive studies on Omani mediation,

which can inform one why Oman chose to act as a mediator during regional crises and conflicts. In light of this absence, specifically on Oman's mediation efforts, it was necessary to review the existing body of literature on Omani foreign policy in general. The final section of this chapter reviews the theoretical literature on why states get involved in international mediation in order to examine the motives of such choices, and identify factors that states and policymakers consider when assessing whether to engage in mediation activity. Specifically, the focus here is to examine the extent to which the existing body of literature provides a basis for understanding Oman's drives behind its repeated involvement in regional conflict mediation.

1.5.2   Chapter Three: Methodology

The third chapter discusses alternative methodological approaches, and lays out the justification for adopting an interpretive approach. The chapter also introduces Bevir's theoretical framework that is employed for this study. It explains the two key explanatory concepts central to Bevir's interpretive approach: traditions and dilemmas. Following that, the selection of cases is justified. The research methods and procedures in data collection and data analysis approach are also discussed.

1.5.3   Chapter Four: Traditions of Thought in Omani Foreign and Security Policy

The fourth chapter identifies the core traditions of thought that had informed the first foreign and security policy practice crafted by Sultan Qaboos that was in place by 1980. By focusing on the manner in which Sultan Qaboos' core ideas and beliefs informed the Sultan's formulation of the first Omani foreign and security policy as a modern independent nation, the chapter

argues that in the process, Sultan Qaboos sought to put together a multifaceted programme for the new Omani state based on a series of 'old' Omani traditions intertwined with a set of 'new' ideas extracted from the Sultan's reading of the situation he found Oman facing in the late 1960s, and his perception of the threats and the challenges facing the country's sovereignty. The chapter will further argue that by 1980, anyone working on Omani foreign and security policy had been socialised into thinking of Oman as possessing a distinctive cultural identity in her region, and as remaining existentially vulnerable to external interference in virtue of her geopolitical position. Therefore, by 1980, these two sets of ideas formed the basis of a by now traditional 'web of beliefs', shared among Omani policy makers, which would inform any new foreign policy initiatives. Consequently, these two broad set of ideas gave rise to a cautiously crafted, balanced foreign and security policy that was in place by 1980.

1.5.4   **Chapter Five: The First Case Study (Iran-Iraq War 1980-88)**

Applying Bevir's interpretive approach of tradition and dilemma, this chapter covers the first case study of the Iran-Iraq war (1980- 1988). The chapter demonstrates how Omani policy-makers, when confronted by a policy dilemma created by regional conflicts, drew on the traditions of thought identified in chapter four, regarding Oman as a distinctive cultural identity in its regional context and as remaining existentially vulnerable to external interference. It shows that the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War had created a new regional security environment, challenging the existing 'balanced' approach, and leading Omani policy makers to adjust their exiting policy practice by adopting a policy of 'neutrality'. The chapter further demonstrates that, as the war turned into a protracted conflict threatening to destabilise the entire Gulf region,

Omani policy shifted towards a more active engagement with the conflicting parties, leading to the emergence of mediation as a new policy practice in Omani policy makers' thinking.

1.5.5 Chapter Six: The Second Case Study (The 1994 Yemen Civil War)

This chapter examines the second case study of Oman's mediation role, which is the Yemeni Civil War of 1994. It is designed to provide another insight of Oman's mediation in intrastate conflict and to illustrate how mediation had evolved as a viable policy option in the security thinking of Omani policy makers. Significantly, the chapter compares mediation practices in the two cases in order to further understand the dynamics between evolving traditions and new dilemmas and how this paved the way for the emergence of mediation as a preferred policy option in Oman's foreign and security policy.

1.5.6 Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The concluding chapter recapitulates the argument concerning the evolution of mediation as a new tradition in Oman's foreign and security policy practices. The chapter both summarises the main arguments presented in the thesis and reflects upon them in light of the more recent mediation practice played by Oman, especially her role in the nuclear deal agreement the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and the P5+1 countries in 2015. The aim is to provide a comprehensive, analytical account of the nature of the mediation practice in Oman's foreign and security policy. It shows the differences between Oman's earlier practice of mediation which was initiated in response to a real foreign and security policy dilemma that

was facing Omani policy makers, and its later efforts in mediation that were initiated by a request from the conflicting parties to assist them to resolve their dispute by peaceful means. In doing so, the chapter demonstrates how mediation came to be consolidated as a traditional policy practice. Oman's use of mediation as a tool for resolving foreign policy dilemmas has led to the development of their reputation as a mediator, so that Oman is asked to mediate even when she is not facing an acute foreign policy dilemma of her own.

1.6   **Summary**

This chapter aimed to clarify the main issues which this thesis is trying to resolve, and presented its objectives, main research question and sub-questions. It also highlighted the rationale of this study, and outlined the structure of the thesis. The next chapter will critically review the literature in three main domains in order to locate the subject matter of this thesis within the existing literature. These are: the literature on Oman's mediation, the literature on Oman's foreign policy and the theoretical literature on why states get involved in international mediation.

2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to critically review and examine the existing work relevant to the subject of Oman's mediation role, in order to locate the subject matter of this thesis within the existing literature, and to relate it to the research questions which have been posed. This study aims to contribute to the literature on mediation and on Omani foreign policy by trying to uncover why Oman repeatedly became involved in mediation efforts during regional conflicts. In order to achieve this aim, this chapter will critically examine the existing body of literature in three main areas. First, it will examine the relevant existing literature on Oman's mediation role, and identify its shortcomings. It is notable that there is an absence of substantive studies on Omani mediation, which could inform us on why Oman chose to act as a mediator during regional crises and conflicts, as the available literature is limited to small sections embedded in books about Oman, and some journal articles. While these discuss Omani mediation in general terms, acknowledging its importance as a stabilising factor in the Middle East region, the literature does not provide genuine analysis examining how and why Oman acts as a mediator.

In light of this absence, specifically on Oman's mediation efforts, it was necessary to review the existing body of literature on Omani foreign policy in general. This helped to identify factors that the existing literature suggests are important in Oman's foreign policy, which should be considered in a detailed study of Oman's mediation efforts. Such an understanding is critical for an analysis of Oman's mediation efforts, and for understanding its motives in becoming repeatedly involved in regional conflict mediation.

The final section of this chapter will review the literature on international mediation in order to examine the drivers of such choices, and identify factors that states and policymakers consider when assessing whether to engage in mediation activity. The focus here is to examine the extent to which the existing body of literature provides a basis for understanding Oman's drives behind its repeated involvement in regional conflict mediation.

2.2   Literature on Oman's mediation efforts

This section aims to examine the literature on Omani mediation in order to locate this research within the context of existing literature. The most notable observation in this regard is the almost total absence of literature on Omani mediation efforts. Despite the fact that Oman has a track record of mediation efforts which have contributed positively to the stability of the Gulf region and the Middle East, this has received little if any academic attention. In fact, there is no sustained or detailed study focusing on Oman's role in conflict mediation. The available works on Omani mediation efforts are limited to several articles and journalistic columns. While these works acknowledge the significance of Oman's mediation efforts as a stabilising factor in the Gulf and wider Middle East region, they tend to discuss the issue in general terms. They neither offer in-depth analysis of Oman's role and its impact on resolving conflicts, nor evaluate such forms of diplomacy instruments as employed in Oman's foreign policy. Therefore, I believe that this study is the first of its kind.

Some scholars have argued that the security perception of the Omani leadership plays a key role in influencing their decision to become involved in conflict mediation. Marc Valeri, for

example, in his article *Oman's mediation efforts in regional crises*, pointed out that Omani policy makers have always perceived political instability in the Gulf and West Asia as a factor threatening Oman's internal stability.[33] Therefore, this record of accomplishment in Oman's mediatory efforts in regional crises was intended to promote negotiated solutions to regional crises, and to prevent any foreign actor in the region from interfering in Oman's internal affairs.[34] Valeri provides a descriptive discussion of Oman's mediation efforts, but does not offer an adequate analysis of the motivations for Oman's mediation efforts. First, he does not provide any empirical explanation for why Oman's security perception differs from those of other Arab Gulf states, when they face a similar security environment. Second, while most states have a desire to influence their regional or international security environment and prevent external actors from intervening in their internal affairs, they do not pursue mediation efforts.

Other scholars have highlighted the role of Oman's distinctive culture and history in its mediation behaviour. Funsch Pappas, for example, in her work *Oman Reborn: Balancing Tradition and Modernization* devoted one section entitled 'The Quiet mediation in international conflicts' to Omani foreign policy, providing general descriptions of Oman's regional and international role in conflict mediation.[35] Funsch contends that Oman's commitment to peace, through its quiet mediation and patient dialogue between political adversaries, reflects the country's distinctive culture and unique history, and, in particular, the traditions of the Ibadhi sect, which call for resolving conflicts and disputes through peaceful means.[36] Similarly,

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[33] M. Valeri, 'Oman's mediatory efforts in regional crises', *The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre* , March 2014, p.1, https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10871/14682 , (accessed 16 April 2017).
[34] M. Valeri, 'Oman's mediatory efforts', p.2.
[35] L. Funsch, '*Oman Reborn: Balancing Tradition and Modernization*', New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
[36] L. Funsch, '*Oman Reborn*', p.6.

Richard Schmierer, who served as U.S. ambassador to Oman during the period from 2009 – 2012 and was a member of the US negotiation team with Iran during the initial phase, wrote an article entitled 'The Sultanate of Oman and The Iran nuclear deal'. Schmierer argues that Oman's history of being a maritime empire that included outposts around much of the Indian Ocean littoral, from South Asia to East Africa, including the port of Bandar Abbas in present-day Iran, has led Omanis to have an outward worldview and a predisposition to engage with and understand the perspectives of others.[37] Although the work falls short of offering a critical analysis of Oman's repeated mediation efforts, it does highlight the role of history and 'Ibadhi' traditions, which suggest further investigation to examine how these factors influence the decisions of the Omani leadership and policy makers to act as mediators during regional crises/conflicts.

Baabood, on the other hand, provides a broad explanation of the factors that make Oman a suitable third party player. He contends that the continued efforts of Omani mediation demonstrate that they have become an integral part of Omani foreign policy. Baabood observes that there is no crisis in the region that has not seen Oman act as a mediator, or offering their assistance to do so.[38] Baabood identifies several factors which have contributed to Oman's prominence as a mediator in international disputes. These are: first, Oman's strategic position on the Straits of Hormuz entails that it is in the interests of regional powers to maintain peaceful relations with the Sultanate. Second, Muscat's unique ability to maintain respectable relations

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[37] R. Schmierer, 'The Sultanate of Oman and The Iran nuclear deal', *Middle east Policy*, Vol. XXii, No. 4, Winter 2015, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/mepo.12162?saml_referrer , (accessed 20 March 2012).

[38] A. Baabood, 'Omani-Yemeni Relations; past, present and future', paper presented at "Yemen and the GCC: Future Relations" workshop, the 7th Annual Gulf Research Meeting, 16/08/2016- 19/08/2016, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK.

with both its neighbours and with the external powers that hold interests in the region has earned it a reputation as a trustworthy ally. Third, Oman's status as a non-Sunni monarchy makes it distinct from the other states of the GCC, and affords it more leeway in terms of its mediation efforts. While Baabood does give a broad explanation of the factors which qualify Oman to play the role of mediator, he does not address the issue of what motivated Oman to play this role. Additionally, Baabood does not explain what gives Muscat its unique ability to maintain this position, which is respected in its relations with its neighbours and external powers. This ability needs to be further explored.

As illustrated in the works discussed above, they do not offer an in-depth analysis of Oman's mediation practice, and in particular the reasons behind its repeated role and its impact on resolving conflicts, nor do they evaluate such forms of diplomacy instruments as employed in Oman's foreign policy. The available literature on Oman's mediation role discusses Omani mediation efforts in general terms, while acknowledging their significance for regional stability. Most of the works focus mainly on the country's distinctive foreign policy behaviour, which has made the country trusted by various parties, and supports its role as a mediator between the conflicting parties. However, the literature did highlight some important factors, such as the leadership's security perceptions and 'Ibadhi' traditions, which might provide some basis to understand Oman's focus on mediation. This suggests further study to examine these factors in order to ascertain their role and explore them in a more detailed study.

In light of the absence of detailed literature on Omani mediation efforts, it is necessary to look more broadly to find a useful theoretical approach to serve as a conceptual map to comprehend Oman's mediation efforts. Therefore, the next section will examine the literature on Oman's

foreign policy in order to identify and explore different characteristics and factors which have impacted and shaped Oman's foreign policy behaviour in general, and its pursuit of mediation.

2.3   General Literature Review on Oman's Foreign Policy

The number of studies relating to the foreign polices of Oman are limited, and normally embedded within studies of the Gulf states' foreign and security policies, which tend to focus on Oman in very general terms, providing general descriptions of the development of the country's foreign policy and its characteristics. In addition, most of these studies are written from Western perspectives, which tend to treat these states as one unit, and place more emphasis on the role of the global powers and their strategic interests in the region.[39] Moreover, studies that explicitly analyse the foreign policy of Arab Gulf states tend to focus mainly on Saudi Arabia, with less attention devoted to the other, smaller Gulf states . However, in the context of the security environment of the Gulf region and the greater Middle East, there are similarities between these small Arab Gulf states in terms of the security threats and challenges they face, of seeking to maintain regional security, and mounting a credible defence against significant regional and internal threats. Yet, in many cases, Oman has acted differently from its Arab Gulf state neighbours in dealing with these challenges.

Generally, within the field of foreign policy studies, three main theoretical streams have been applied in order to explain or understand a state's foreign policy behaviour and practices. The

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[39] See, M. Kamrava, (ed.), *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, New York, Syracuse University Press, 2011. Also, G. Nonneman, 'The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War: pattern shifts and continuities' , In L. Potter, G. Sick (eds.) , *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*, 2004, pp.167-192.

first is the macro-level, sometimes referred to as '*Aussenpolitik*'. The proponents of this stream favour external determinants and systemic-level explanations. Therefore, they place more emphasis on the impact of external factors in shaping a state's foreign policy behaviour. This stream is grounded in realist theories of international politics, which assume that international politics is a struggle for power in an anarchic international system, and that states are rational actors motivated by the desire to achieve their survival and security by maximising their relative advantages. According to this view, domestic factors have no impact on a state's foreign policy, because pressures from the international system are assumed to be strong and obvious enough to make states behave in a certain way, regardless of their internal characteristics.[40]

The second stream is the unit-level, sometimes referred to as the '*Innenpolitik*' stream. This stream of thought privileges domestic factors. According to this approach, "internal factors such as political and economic ideology, national character, partisan politics, or socioeconomic structure determine how countries behave toward the world beyond their borders".[41] Within innenpolitik theories there are many variants, each favouring a different specific domestic independent factor. The most prominent theoretical strand is that which advocates the importance of the state-level strand and pluralist strand. The state level strand emphasises the characteristics of states and their influence on foreign policy choices and practice. Internal characteristics such as history and traditions, political system, leadership, and ideology are viewed as the prominent factors in a state's foreign policy. The pluralist strand, on the other hand, privileges different internal factors that have a greater role in shaping a state's foreign

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[40] G. Rose, 'Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy', *World politics*, vol. 51, no.1, 1998, p.148
[41] G. Rose, 'Neoclassical realism and theories; p.149.

policy choices. According to pluralist theories, a state is not a unitary actor; instead, it is composed of different actors, such as individual bureaucracies, interest groups and individuals, that attempt to influence the making of foreign policy.

The third theoretical stream attempts to occupy a middle ground between these two theoretical approaches. This approach is grounded in the neoclassical realists' theories of international politics, which argue that in order to understand the manner in which states interpret and respond to their external environment, one must analyse how systemic pressures are translated through unit level intervening variables such as state institutions, decision makers, and social actors within society.[42]

The literature on Oman's foreign policy shows that most of the work falls within the state level strand, which emphasises the characteristics of states and their influence on foreign policy choices and practice. In fact, most scholars have paid a great deal of attention to the role of domestic factors in determining Oman's foreign policy behaviour. They argue that different factors such as history, traditions, ideology, and leadership have had a significant influence in shaping the country's foreign policy. Therefore, in order to examine the literature on Oman's foreign policy, this study is going to discuss the dominant domestic factors that are reflected in the literature as playing a key role in influencing and shaping Oman's foreign policy choices. These are the following main domestic components: history, Ibadhi traditions and social culture, and the leadership and political system.

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[42] G. Rose, 'Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy', p.46.

2.3.1 The Historical Determents

Several scholars have emphasised the influence of Oman's rich history on her foreign policy, arguing that factors such as the country's long-standing history of statehood and civilisation, its experience of being an overseas empire, and its experience of civil war are essential in understanding Oman's foreign policy. For them, the pre-1970 experience exercised a significant influence on Oman's post-1970 foreign policy. Much of the literature argues that these factors have played a key role in shaping Omani leadership's visions and their understanding of Oman's position in its region and beyond, and in turn influenced her foreign policy behaviour in the post-1970 era. Among those who argue for definite continuities of the past in the present are Calvin Allen and Lynn Rigsbee, who argue that Oman's historical legacy as one of the oldest Arabian communities, and a distinct ethnic and political entity for two thousand years have played an important role in shaping the country's distinctive foreign policies and actions.[43] They argue that, unlike its neighbors, Oman has had long standing history, the current ruling family the 'Al Said' dates back to the 1740s. During the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, Oman became the superpower on the coastal regions of the Indian Ocean, with an active and independent foreign policy that included relations with the United Kingdom and regional powers in the Middle East and Indian Ocean. For them the nature and uniqueness of Oman's current foreign policy comes from this sense of historical greatness and its perceived role in world affairs. They argue that this experience of independence is maintained in the fact that Omani leaders have a greater sense of self-confidence and maturity when making critical

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[43] C. Allen and L. Rigsbee, *Oman under Qaboos: From coup to constitution, 1970-1996*', London, Routledge, 2014, p.181.

decision.[44] Majid Al-Khalili, on the other hand, argues that an accurate understanding of Oman's consistent emphasis on the need for security, regional stability and balance of power remain incomplete without a return to the very foundations and experiences that characterise the process of state-building which gave rise to modern Oman.[45] Al-Khalili emphasises the role of history in shaping Oman's contemporary foreign policy, and in particular the history of Oman's political division before Sultan Qaboos came to power. Al-Khalili argues that the historical roots that underline Oman's position in the world cannot be taken as beginning in the 1970s, with the rise of the current Sultan.[46] For him, the internal and external crisis that engulfed Oman from the 1930s to the 1970s had major formative consequences for the post-1970 government.[47] He argues that Oman's historical experiences, such as the attempt of the Imamate to gain international recognition as an independent state separate from Muscat's authority, and the insurgency of the1950's, followed by the intervention of regional and international powers and the Dhofari rebellion, were instrumental in formulating Oman's understanding of itself within the region and the international arena as a whole.[48]

René Rieger highlights the role of the Omani historical experience of civil war in Dhofar in determining Oman's foreign policy orientation. Rieger provides a comparative study of the foreign policies of the Arab Gulf monarchies during the period 1971 to 1990. Examining the foreign policies of the six Gulf states through two case studies, (1) the Arab Gulf monarchies'

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[44] C. Allen and L. Rigsbee, *Oman under Qaboos*, p.182.
[45] M. Al-Khalili, *Oman's foreign policy: Foundations and practice*, London, Praeger Security International, 2005, p.125.
[46] M. Al-Khalili, *Oman's foreign policy*, p.128.
[47] M. Al-Khalili, *Oman's foreign policy*, p.128.
[48] M. Al-Khalili, *Oman's foreign policy*, p.269.

relations with Iran and Iraq and (2) the six states' positions in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Rieger identifies the Arab Gulf monarchies as unitary state and regime entities with broadly similar interests and challenges. He argues that the similarity of both their objectives and constraints motivated and even required them to cooperate and coordinate in the foreign policy arena. Nevertheless, he concluded that in both case studies he examined, Omani foreign policy displayed significant differences in comparison to other Arab Gulf states. Rieger argues that Oman advocated a more conciliatory approach in its foreign policy and rejects the notion that the policies of individual Arab states have to be subordinated to larger Arab interests.[49] He argues that the historical experience of civil war in Dhofar was instrumental in shaping Oman's foreign policy orientations.[50] As such, Oman has maintained cordial relations with Iran who supported Sultan Qaboos during the conflict, while Oman's relations with Iraq and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) was strained due to their support for the rebels.[51]

Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout examined the relationship between diplomacy and cultural history and the shaping of modern Omani foreign policy practice. They contend that the most consistent characteristics of modern Omani diplomacy are a function of Oman's long history of cosmopolitan interaction with the outside world.[52] The country's historical legacy of being an empire during the eighteenth century, stretching from Zanzibar and Mombasa on Africa's East coast to parts of the Indian subcontinent, resulted in Omani society long having a presence of

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[49] R. Rieger, *The Foreign Policy of the Arab Gulf Monarchies from 1971 to 1990*, Ph.D. diss., University of Exeter, 2013, p.369.
https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/13709/RiegerR.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y,
(accessed 30 December 2019)
[50] R. Rieger, *The Foreign Policy of the Arab Gulf Monarchies*, p.359.
[51] R. Rieger, *The Foreign Policy of the Arab Gulf Monarchies*, p.359.
[52] J. Jones and N. Ridout, *Oman, culture and diplomacy*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012, p.34.

multi-cultural and diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Omani nationals of Baluchi, Zanzibari and Indian descent.[53] This factor, as they argue, has promoted a high degree of tolerance and an outward-looking mind-set in the behaviour of the Omani peoples.[54] Jones and Ridout further argue that the traditional social behaviour of Oman's culture has shaped the development of toddy's distinctive foreign policy.[55] One aspect of Omani culture which they identified as playing a significant role in Oman's political development, and of great relevance to the topic of this study, is the tradition of 'Shura' - 'Consultation'. The 'Shura' tradition is a mechanism used at all levels of Omani society to resolve disputes and to sustain a sense of neighbourhood solidarity in the local community, through achieving outcomes with which everyone is content.[56] These cultural traditions have been embedded into semi-formal governmental structures and are manifested in contemporary Omani foreign policy practice. Jones and Ridout, identify four key characteristics of Oman's foreign policy: (i) a tendency to focus on enduring geopolitical considerations; (ii) abstaining from ideological or sectarian conflicts; (iii) working towards achieving consensus and; (iv) emphasising tolerance for the customs and practices of foreigners.[57] Jones and Ridout discussed these aspects of cultural history in the context of a social adhesive or mechanism used to resolve disputes within Omani society, but did not provide any analysis on how Omani policy makers draw on these cultural traditions when confronted by regional conflict, which calls for further investigation to understand Oman's mediation efforts.

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[53] J. Jones and N. Ridout, *Oman, culture and diplomacy*, p.30
[54] J. Jones and N. Ridout, *Oman, culture and diplomacy*, p.41
[55] J. Jones and N. Ridout, *Oman, culture and diplomacy*, p.145.
[56] J. Jones and N. Ridout, *Oman, culture and diplomacy*, p. 62.
[57] J. Jones and N. Ridout, *Oman, culture and diplomacy*, p.3.

2.3.2 **The Influence of the Ibadhi Traditions**

The second factor widely reflected in the literature as determining Oman's foreign policy is their Ibadhi traditions. John Wilkinson, for example, argues that Omani foreign policy is influenced by these traditions, characterised by promotion of moderation, openness, tolerance, and rationality.[58] Ibadhism calls for dealing with others in an amicable and equal way, based on the mutual interests of all parties. Similarly, Bader Al Hinai, examining Oman's negotiation behavior, argues that an understanding of Oman's foreign policy and political behaviour would not be complete without an understanding of its unique form of Islam derived from the Ibadhi ideology.[59] The Ibadhi Islamic tradition has been used to explain the rationality of Oman's choice in using peaceful means to end disputes with its neighbours. As Bader Al Hinai indicates, Ibadhi traditions have had a significant impact on many aspects of Omani society, and offer guiding principles for the Omani elites to give meaning to domestic and external events.[60] Al Hinai further argues that peaceful means, such as negotiation, based on Ibadhi traditions and principles, have been the preferred choice for Omani decision makers to settle conflicts, rather than the use of force. From the Omani leadership's point of view, by relying on peaceful means to resolve their disputes, the parties can all benefit from maintaining friendly relations, and cooperate in all fields to strengthen peace and stability in the region.[61] Uzi Rabi examined Oman's policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1970.[62] He founds that, by adopting a

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[58] J. Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, p. 141.

[59] B. Al Hinai, *Oman's negotiation behavior: A strategy for border conflict resolution (United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Yemen)*, Ph.D., diss., George Mason University, 2003, p.80.

[60] B. Al Hinai, *Oman's negotiation behavior*, p.80.

[61] B. Al Hinai, *Oman's negotiation behavior*, p.84.

[62] U. Rabi, 'Oman and the Arab–Israeli conflict: The reflection of a pragmatic foreign policy', *Israel Affairs*, vol.11, no.3, 2005, p.535.

reconciliation policy towards Israel, Omani foreign policy has differed markedly from that of other Arab Gulf countries, and Arab states in general. Rabi argues that Oman's unusual position within the Arab world has been partly explained by an Ibadhi tolerance toward people of different religions that predates Qaboos.[63]

Another aspect of the influence of Ibadhi ideology and traditions in shaping Oman's foreign policy is what Fredrik Barth has called an ideology of politeness.[64] Barth argues that in Oman it is customary to model the behaviour of individuals according to a code of honour, inhibiting the articulation of public views regarding the worth of a person, expressed through different judgements rather than criticism or praise.[65] This norm of politeness is evident in certain consistent features of Omani foreign policy, and in particular, its practice of quiet diplomacy, avoiding large-scale publicity as the price for genuinely engaging with some of the region's most complicated disputes. Jeremy Jones also argues that Omani social and cultural life make a significant contribution to the way in which Omanis think, and conduct foreign policy and practice diplomacy.[66] This is similar to Jeffrey Lefebvre, who also contends that Ibadhi political thought has its bearing on Oman's foreign policy. He observes that over the past several decades Oman's has conducted a unique regional foreign policy characterised by independence, pragmatism, and moderation.[67] He argues that Oman's foreign policy orientation is shaped in part by the Ibadhi culture of conservatism and tolerance and its emphasis on the 'rule of the

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[63] U. Rabi, 'Oman and the Arab–Israeli conflict, p. 550.
[64] F. Barth, *Sohar, culture and society in an Omani town*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, p.106.
[65] F. Barth, *Sohar, culture and society in an Omani town*, p.107.
[66] J. Jones, 'Oman's Quiet Diplomacy', *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, 2014, [file:///C:/Users/ndc/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Download s/Jeremy%20Jones.pdf](file:///C:/Users/ndc/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Download), (accessed 15 April 2018).
[67] J. Lefebvre, 'Oman's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century', *Middle East policy*, Vol.17, no.1, Spring 2010, p.99.

just', and aversion to political violence.[68] Lefebvre concluded that, agreeable disagreement with friends and peaceful compromise with enemies would appear to be consistent with the Ibadhi thought on the conduct of foreign policy.[69]

Jean-Marc Rickli and Khalid Almezaini examined both the foreign and security policy outcomes and processes of the small Gulf States, with particular focus on Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. They found that while all three small Gulf states have developed active foreign policy approaches which aimed at influencing regional security dynamics, Oman has had a different policy approach. Rickli and Almezaini argue that while Qatar and the UAE have pursued very active and visible foreign and security policies, Oman, in contrast, has been an active but invisible player in the Middle East.[70] They further point out that, Qatar and the UAE have utilised their enormous financial resources to conduct an influential foreign policy and reach out further through the use of international foreign aids and the control of media influence, while the traditional social behaviour of Omani cultural values have played a significant role in influencing the thinking of Omani leaders and shaping Oman's foreign policy behaviour, making it unique and distinct from other small states in the Gulf.

Another key aspect of Ibadhi culture identified in the literature is its contribution to the making of Oman's unique identity. Steven Wright argues that a unique sectarian character exists in Oman with the majority of the population being composed of the Ibadhi sect, has had its bearing on Oman's foreign relations. Wright explains that the desire to protect their Ibadhi identity from

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[68] J. Lefebvre, 'Oman's Foreign Policy', p.100.
[69] J. Lefebvre, 'Oman's Foreign Policy', p.110.
[70] J. Rickli, 'Theories of Small States Foreign and Security Policies and the Gulf States', in k. Almezaini and J. Rickli, (Eds.), *The Small Gulf States: Foreign and Security Policies Before and After the Arab Spring*, New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 08-30.

either Sunni or Shi'ite domination has inspired Oman's policy of isolation in the past, and continues to have a bearing on Oman's contemporary policy choices.[71]

Another distinctive feature of Ibadism is the practice of 'Shura'(consultation), which is a traditional method for political consultation. The tradition of Shura is applied in Omani society for all matters from as early as the eight century, and as such it has long been applied by communities and tribes' leaders to solve internal disputes between individuals, tribes as well as to manage domestic grievances. This experience had served to create a culture in which a great deal of thought and care are devoted to managing social relations through dialogue and avoidance of violence. Several scholarly works on Oman's political development has tended to emphasise that 'Shura' does play a significant role both in Oman's domestic politics and in its ways of conducting foreign relations. For example, Hussein Ghubash argues that, over a number of centuries, Omanis maintained and developed this consultative approach to worldly matters which saw them establish a systematic governing framework, and as such it is engrained in their attitudes and behaviours.[72] Similarly, Jeremy Jones argues that 'Shura' principle is an essential element of Omani distinctive culture and social life that have significantly contributed to shaping Oman's culture diplomacy and inform the ways in which Omani diplomats tend to approach problems in the sphere of international relations.[73]
However, these works did not examine how this cultural practice had influenced the

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[71] S. Wright, 'Foreign Policy in the GCC States', in, M. Kamrava, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, New York, Syracuse University Press, 2011, p.85.
[72] H. Ghubash, *Oman-The Islamic Democratic Tradition*, London, Routledge, 2014, p.6.
[73] J. Jones and N. Ridout, *Oman, culture and diplomacy*, p.65.

evolvement of Oman's mediatory role and her preference for mediation during regional conflict.

2.3.3 Leadership and political structure

Some other scholars emphasise the role of leadership and structure of decision-making in shaping Oman's foreign and security practice. Abdullah Baabood, for example, argues that foreign and security policy in Oman is highly personalised, and often carried out through quiet and sometimes secret diplomacy, which as he argues, has made the task harder for political analysts to explain and understand.[74] He further argues that the perceptions of Sultan Qaboos have contributed to the unique nature of Oman's foreign and security policy, and significantly influenced its response towards most of the developments that have occurred within its neighborhood and the wider region.[75] He highlighted the role of the internal conflict and in particular the war in Dhofar in shaping the Sultan's security perception and his desire to consolidate Oman's internal security and stability. Similarly, Nikolas Gardner examines the role of Sultan Qaboos in the development of Oman's foreign and defense policy from 1970 to 1977. He demonstrates that Qaboos played an active role in the development of Omani foreign and defense policy, arguing that Sultan Qaboos actively pursued his own interests, working to

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[74] A. Baabood, 'Oman's Independent Foreign Policy', in k. Almezaini and J. Rickli, (Eds.), *The Small Gulf States: Foreign and Security Policies Before and After the Arab Spring*, New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 107.
[75] A. Baabood, 'Oman's Independent Foreign Policy', p.121.

consolidate control over Omani foreign and defense policy from the beginning of his reign, in order to eliminate the influence of external powers on his policy choices.[76]

Joseph Kechichian, in his book titled *Oman and the world: The emergence of an independent foreign policy*, concluded that Oman has since 1970 diligently pursued a distinctive and independent foreign policy that stood in stark contrast to the region.[77] He argues that while other countries in the Middle East have been driven by ideology and short-term gains, Oman has pursued its own course, holding to the belief that peaceful negotiation is essential to the overall, long-term goals of Omani security and prosperity. Kechichian attributed Oman's independent foreign policy approach to Sultan Qaboos' characteristic traits and his leadership style, arguing that in order to understand Oman's present foreign policies, one must consider how the skilled diplomacy led by Sultan Qaboos works, how to balance interests, different tolerance levels, and a determined search for shared benefits which can play a vital role in opening international doors, and ensure keeping those doors open, even in times of conflict.[78] Similar to Kechichian, Qasim Al Salehi observes that due to the very nature of the Omani political system, Sultan Qaboos is a dominant actor in the Omani policy-making process, particularly for those policies that involve strategic choices.[79] Al Salehi identifies two types of decision making. The first type is those decisions that are highly sensitive and strategic in nature, involving strategic national interests. These kinds of decision are exclusive to the Sultan himself, and he exercises complete

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[76] N. Gardner, 'The limits of the Sand Hurst connection: The evolution of Oman's foreign and defense policy, 1970–1977.', *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, vol. 6., no.1, 2015, p. 58.

[77] J. Kechichian, *Oman and the world: The emergence of an independent foreign policy*, Santa Monica, Rand Corporation,1995. p.250.

[78] J. Kechichian, *Oman and the world,* p.59.

[79] Q. Al- Salehi, "*Oman's Diplomacy and the Challenges of Globalizations*", Muscat, Muscat Press Publishing and Distribution, 2004, p.146.

control over them. The second type of decision includes those that are tactical in nature. In these types of decision, the Sultan involves the actors concerned and grants them a higher degree of authority in formulating and implementing them, provided that they remain within the general guidance and principles that are laid out by the Sultan.[80] While Al Salehi contends that Oman's foreign policy orientation is to a great extent influenced by the Sultan's view of the world and his reading of the events that have occurred within its neighbourhood and the wider region, he does not provide any further explanation for how this has shaped Omani foreign policy.

These arguments indicate that Omani foreign policy is highly personalised, due to the direct involvement of Sultan Qaboos in the decision-making process. This indicates the importance of the Sultan's ideas, which have been significant to the development of Oman's modern foreign and security policy since he came to power in 1970, and hence in order to properly understand Oman's policy practice, it is necessary to explore his beliefs, preferences and intentions.

Drawing on the preceding discussion, most of the literature places an emphasis on the role of these domestic factors as the main shaper and determinant factor in the formation of Oman's foreign and security policy choices. These factors include: (I) the historical legacy and experience of the civil war, which has played a key role in shaping Oman's distinctive security perceptions. (ii) The tradition of the Ibadhi sect, which places more emphasis on pragmatism, tolerance, justice, egalitarianism, reconciliation, dialogue and mutual benefit, and also places Oman uniquely in the entire Middle East region as the sole state to have officially adopted Ibadhism (iii) Finally, the role of the Sultan in making foreign policy choices. Since he is the dominant actor within the Omani state, the practice of Oman's foreign and security policy since

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[80] Q. Al- Salehi, "*Oman's Diplomacy and the Challenges of Globalizations",* p.150.

1970 is essentially that of Sultan Qaboos' ideas for Oman, and his interpretation of the country's national interests.

In summary, the existing literature on Oman's foreign policy shows an almost total absence of analysis concerning Oman's motives for acting as a mediator. However, the literature on Omani foreign policy has identified that Oman, over the past few decades, has developed a distinctive foreign policy behaviour. Unlike its fellow small Arab Gulf States, Oman consistently makes independent foreign policy choices that are not only divergent from, but at times contradict its similarly structured allies in the Gulf. Oman's positions on critical regional issues such as the Camp David Peace Agreement, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and Oman's role in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are often described in the literature as being uniquely independent. The literature has also shown that Oman has mediated in most disputes and conflicts that have arisen in the Gulf and the Middle East, but has not provided sufficient explanation as to why Oman is willing to engage in mediation in regional conflicts.

As such, these factors fall short of providing an adequate explanation to Oman's motivations for becoming involved in mediation; nevertheless, understanding these domestic factors is essential in order to analyse Oman's mediation efforts in the Gulf and the greater Middle East region. Despite the fact that Oman's foreign policy has been discussed to a considerable extent in the literature, there is still a significant gap with respect to its mediation practice, particularly in terms of why Oman became repeatedly involved in mediating regional conflicts. The next section examines the literature on international mediation in order to draw a theoretical connection on why states get involved in mediation regional and international conflicts.

2.4 Theoretical literature on why states get involved in mediation

As illustrated in the previous section, the literature on Oman's mediation and foreign policy provides some theoretical explanations of the factors that have played a significant role in influencing the country's decision and foreign policy making, in turn shaping the country's external behaviour. However, it does not offer any account for why Oman chose to act as a mediator during regional upheavals and conflicts. This section will examine the literature on international mediation, with the focus on why a particular state decides to engage in mediation efforts during an ongoing conflict. It will identify the key factors and motives that influence a state's leadership and decision makers when considering whether to engage in mediation. Understanding of these factors will help us find a more useful theoretical approach to serve as a conceptual map that can help us make sense of Oman's mediation practices. In order to do this, first one must understand what international mediation is, who can serve as a mediator, what strategies they adopt, and why states engage in mediation.

2.4.1 Understanding International Mediation

International mediation is generally understood as a method of settling or resolving international conflicts on interstate and intrastate levels. However, there is a significant disagreement among scholars in defining international mediation. A wide range of terms are used in the literature, stressing different aspects of international mediation process. For Raymond and Kegley, international mediation can be understood as a method of conflict management and conflict resolution which bring about the use of third parties to help disputants in reaching a voluntary

agreement.[81] Moore stresses the non-coerciveness of mediation by stating that mediation is "the intervention in a negotiation or a conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power, who assists the involved parties to voluntarily reach a mutually acceptable settlement of the issues in dispute."[82] A similar definition is suggested by Wall, Stark and Standifer, who define mediation as "assistance to two or more interacting parties by third parties who usually have no authority to impose an outcome."[83] Mitchell looks more broadly at the objectives of the mediation process, asserting that a key feature of mediation as an intermediary activity is in its purpose of achieving some compromise settlement of issues at stake between conflicting parties, or at least ending disruptive conflict behavior.[84] William Zartman on the other hand, defines mediation as a "catalyze negotiation in which third party enables the conflicting parties to conduct the negotiations that they were unable to do by themselves."[85]

Since there is no agreed definitions or clear distinction existing in the literature between various processes dealing with managing international conflict, this study will follow the conception of the prominent scholar of international conflict, Jacob Bercovitch, who provides a comprehensive definition of the process. Bercovitch views international mediation as an "approach to conflict management in which impartial third parties help disputants resolve conflict through a process of information and social influence, without using violence or

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[81] G. Raymond and C. Kegley, 'Third party mediation and international norms: a test of two models', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1985, p.34.

[82] C. Moore, *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003, p.15.

[83] J. Wall, J. Stark and R. Standifer, 'Mediation: A current review and theory development.', *Journal of conflict resolution,* vol.45, no.3, 2001, p. 370.

[84] C. Mitchell, *The structure of international conflict*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1989, p. 275

[85] W. Zartman, 'Mediation roles for large Small Countries', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, vol.19, no.1, 2013, p.14.

invoking the authority of legal system."[86] Conflict management here will be used as an overarching concept to refer to any form of involvement by a third party in an ongoing conflict which aims to prevent conflict escalation and promote a peaceful settlement to the dispute. In this sense, it encompasses both strategies and approaches of containment, as well as strategies and approaches to resolving conflict. The purpose of conflict management is to affect the entire structure of a conflict situation, so as to contain the destructive components in the conflict process and help parties pursuing incompatible goals to find some solution to their conflict.

So, how does mediation fit into the overall framework of conflict management? Bercovitch and Gartner identify four different methods of conflict management.[87] These are: (1) the use of force and coercive measures; (2) judicial and legal process; (3) formal and informal bilateral methods; and (4) various forms of non-coercive third party interventions (those may be undertaken by a host of actors). At the most basic level, mediation is the most common form of peaceful third party intervention in international conflict management. It aims to supplement conflict management, not to supplant the parties' own efforts.[88] In fact, mediation can take place during different stages of the conflict, whether before, during or after the outbreak of the conflict.

A distinct feature of mediation as an intermediary action lies within its nature as a voluntary and non-coercive or non-violent tactic, being particularly practical within the intricate dynamics of international relations, dominated by the principles of preservation of actors' independence

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[86] J. Bercovitch (ed.), *Resolving international conflicts: The theory and practice of mediation*, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996, p.13. See Also, J. Bercovitch, 'Mediation in International Conflict: An Overview of Theory, A Review of Practice', in I. Zartman and J. Rasmussen (eds.), '*Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques*', Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997, p. 130.
[87] J. Bercovitch and S. Gartner (eds.), *International conflict mediation,* p.4.
[88] J. Bercovitch and S. Gartner (eds.), *International conflict mediation*, p.5.

and autonomy.[89] The objective of mediation is to achieve some compromised settlement of a dispute between conflicting parties. The conflicting parties are expected to accept the mediator, when they reach a situation where they feel they are trapped in a conflict, and their fear of continuing war becomes greater than the fear of peace. On the other hand, an acceptable, impartial and neutral mediator, holding no authoritative power, allows the conflicting parties to interact and reach a mutually acceptable agreement. As such, the mediation process highlights the crucial role played by a third party in the process of bringing about peace and facilitating agreement between conflicting parties.

Mediators can use different strategies in order to induce the parties to move toward a mutually acceptable solution. The functions of mediation are multiple, and involve a wide range of activities. In this sense, the mediator is playing an essential role in formulating potential solutions to end hostilities or crises, or suggesting options for resolving a dispute. Although mediation is always undertaken based on the conflicting parties' agreement, mediators are not merely eyewitnesses; rather, they actively take part in the conflict resolution process. Accordingly, mediation can take different forms, referred to in the literature as the mediator's behaviour or strategies.[90] The mediation literature has focused on three main strategies of mediation. These are: (1) communication-facilitation strategies, (2) formulation/procedural

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[89] J. Bercovitch, 'Mediation in the most resistant cases', in C. Crocker, F. Hampson and P. Aall (ed.), *Grasping the nettle: Analyzing cases of intractable conflict*, Washington, DC, US Institute of Peace Press, 2005. p.106. see also, S. Vukovic, 'International mediation as a distinct form of conflict management', *International Journal of Conflict Management*, vol.25, no.1, 2014, p.6.
[90] J. Bercovitch and J. Rubin, *Mediation in international relations: Multiple approaches to conflict management*, London, Macmillan Press, 1992, p.16.

strategies and (3) manipulation or directive strategies.[91] Mediators can utilise one of these three accompanying techniques at some point to manage an intractable dispute.

The role of 'facilitator', or as some literature refers to it, the 'communicator', is where the mediator serves primarily as a channel of communication between both parties. Facilitator activities include helping the disputing parties by providing relative information, building trust, organising logistics, setting the agenda, or delivering messages between parties in a situation where face-to-face negotiation is undesirable.[92] Although the mediator is not directly involved in the process, the capability of the mediator in providing relevant information to the conflicting parties can reduce uncertainty and build trust between them, which is crucial in leading to mutual understanding and preventing or resolving violent conflict. The intercession of Norway in achieving the Oslo Accords in 1993 is a relevant case where people's referral by correspondence helped systems to work. Oman's role in Iran's nuclear deal agreement is another example; Oman played an important role in facilitating the initial secret meetings between the U.S. and Iran to reach a nuclear agreement. In fact, the key role Oman played in this case helped the two adversaries build trust between them. Then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in her memoir entitled *Hard Choices*, highlighted the extent of trust that both side held in Sultan Qaboos, describing him as " one of the few leaders seen by all sides as an honest broker"[93] The strong trust in Omani leadership was also echoed in a speech by the Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in June 2015, acknowledging that;

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[91] J. Bercovitch and S. Gartner (eds.), *International conflict mediation,* p.27.
[92] J. Bercovitch and S. Gartner (eds.), *International conflict mediation*, p.28.
[93] H. Clinton, *Hard choices*, London, Simon and Schuster, 2014, p.348.

"…. Through that intermediary [Qaboos], he asked us to negotiate with them and to resolve the matter. I said to that honourable intermediary that we do not trust the Americans and their statements. He said, "try it once more" and we said, "very well, we will try it this time as well." This was how negotiations with the Americans began."[94]

In the literature on international mediation, it is widely recognised that trust is a significant determining factor in the outcome of the mediation process. Scholars such as Jacob Bercovitch and Su-Mi Lee have asserted that " in mediation, it is obviously important for mediators to attain the disputing parties' trust."[95] Similarly, Maundi (et al) acknowledged that confidence by the conflicting parties that a particular mediator can help them reach their desired outcome, as well as the need for an excuse to make undesired compromises, are recognised as motives of conflicting parties to accept or request mediation.[96] The literature further identifies that trust in the mediation process has two dimensions. First, the mediator himself should gain the trust of both conflicting parties. Without personal trust in the fairness and goodwill of the mediator, the parties of the dispute would be less likely to share information, move from positional to problem-solving thinking, respond positively to cooperative messages, or engage honestly in

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[94] Cited in S. Almajdoub, 'Discrete Diplomacy: Oman and the Iran Nuclear Deal', p.2, http://www.eir.info/2016/04/25/discrete-diplomacy-oman-and-the-iran-nuclear-deal/ (accessed 20 September 2018).

[95] J. Bercovitch and L. Su-Mi, 'Mediating international conflicts: examining the effectiveness of directive strategies.', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, vol.8, no.1, 2003, p.6.

[96] M. Maundi, et al., *Getting in: Mediators' entry into the settlement of African conflicts*, US Institute of Peace Press, 2006, p.74.

these forms of parallel activities.[97] Secondly, of equal importance is that the mediator must assist the conflicting parties to establish a minimal level of trust between them, because when the two parties accept to come together for mediation, it is normally after some sort of dispute, disagreement or dissatisfaction has damaged their relationship.[98] In this sense, the mediator's credibility is a crucial factor for increasing the probability of a partial or complete settlement.[99] Walter identifies three conditions in order to be a reliable credible mediator: first, a mediator must have a specific self-interest in upholding a promise; secondly, the mediator must be willing to use force if necessary; and thirdly, they have to be able to signal determination.[100]

The second type of role mediators play is their role as formulator, sometimes referred to as 'procedural' techniques.[101] Here, the mediator becomes more engaged, and exercises a greater degree of control over the mediation process. A formulator mediator can practice authority over timing, planning issues, meeting game plans, media exposure, the dispersion of data, and the convention or adaptability of meetings. A good illustration of the viable utilisation of procedural techniques is the US mediation role in the Camp David peace accords between Egypt and Israel in 1978. US President Carter assumed full control over all parts of the negotiation, the physical setting of the agenda, and proposed solutions to solve the dispute.[102]

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[97] C. Sandu, 'Mediation. Measuring the success of mediation', *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, Issue 2, January 2013.p. 37.

[98] C. Sandu, 'Mediation. Measuring the success of mediation', 2013.p. 37.

[99] Z. Maoz and L. Terris, 'Credibility and strategy in international mediation', in J. Bercovitch and S. Gartner (eds.), *International Conflict Management: New Approaches and Findings*, Routledge, London, 2009, p.88.

[100] B. Walter, 'The critical barrier to Civil War settlement', *International Organization*, Vol. 51 No. 3,1997, p.340.

[101] J. Bercovitch and S. Gartner (eds.), *International conflict mediation*, p.189.

[102] S. Telhami, 'The Camp David Accords: A case of international bargaining', *Institute for the Study of Diplomacy*, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service.1992, p.12. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/6847/doc_6849_290_en.pdf , (accessed 13 August 2018).

A third strategy the mediator can adopt is a 'manipulation' strategy, sometimes termed directive strategies.[103] Here, the mediator can use a more forceful approach to end the conflict, where the mediator uses their position and advantage to influence the conflict mediation process. Manipulative mediators can influence the bargaining process and make conflicting parties aware of the cost of non-agreement by employing carrot and stick mechanisms. Offering carrots can include direct compensation, economic and military assistance, or other diplomatic concessions. Mediators can also use sticks, which might include economic or diplomatic sanctions, as well as threats of direct military intervention. [104] Manipulation mediation may also include monitoring the post-conflict situation, and securing the commitment of both side to signed agreement. The best example illustrating a manipulative mediation strategy is during the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, when the UN was able to enforce a ceasefire through manipulative intervention strategies by the U.S, which imposed a military embargo on both sides, encouraging them to sit at the negotiation table.[105] Subsequently, both sides - in particular Pakistan - became more willing to negotiate the dispute peacefully, as they were highly dependent on the US for their arms supply.

The mediation strategies explained above and the activities they involve dictate the type and nature of the mediator required. Mediation conducted through manipulation strategy requires the type of mediator who has the capacity to enforce solutions. A small state like Oman may be an attractive and useful mediator, which can be trusted to be capable in providing relative

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[103] J. Bercovitch and S. Gartner (eds.), *International conflict mediation*, p.228.
[104] K. Beardsley, et al, 'Mediation style and crisis outcomes', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol.50, issue. 1, 2006. p.64.
[105] T. Böhmelt, '*International mediation interaction: Synergy, conflict, effectiveness*', Heidelberg, Springer Fachmedien, 2011, p.89.

information and make helpful suggestions, putting it in a good position to act as a facilitator or formulator. However, given its limited economic and military capability, it is unlikely to practice a manipulative type of mediation strategy, which may involve a threat to use economic sanctions or military intervention.

2.4.2 The state as a mediator

Given the different types of actor in the international arena, the range of mediators available is diverse. The literature on the theory of mediation distinguishes between three types of mediators: (1) Individuals (e.g., practitioners or scholars, former presidents). (2) International/ Regional Organisations (e.g., the United Nations, the Arab League) (3) States. As state mediation is the prime concern of this study, the other types of mediator are not discussed.

States represent the most common type of political actor willing to act as a mediator in international conflict resolution, and as Frazier and Dixon point out, states as central actors in international politics play the most important role in conflict management.[106] Sovereign states are thought to be the most capable mediators, because of their ability to credibly commit resources to a conflict management effort that manipulates the payoffs for both disputing parties, in ways that induce a peaceful settlement. The literature generally distinguishes between two categories of state mediation: small state mediation and large state mediation.[107] However, the studies on international relations have tended to privilege large states in world affairs, their

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[106] D. Frazier and W. Dixon, 'Third-party intermediaries and negotiated settlements, 1994-2000', *International interactions*, vol. 32, no. 4,2006, p.392.

[107] J. Bercovitch, R. Jackson and W. Jackson, *Conflict resolution in the twenty-first century: principles, methods, and approaches*, Michigan, University of Michigan Press,2009, p.39.

materialistic power capabilities and strategies, and consequently, their geopolitical interests.[108]

Small states are regarded as lees important actors, incapable of exerting any real influence on international affairs.[109] This perception is also applicable to the field of international mediation. Large states are often perceived as being more capable to engage in a wider range of conflicts, because of their capabilities and wide sphere of interests, so they can create opportunities to undertake the role of mediator and utilise mediation to protect or advance their own national interests.[110] Thus, state-led mediation is often viewed as the domain of major or large states. Therefore, more attention has been devoted to the study of large state mediation, because they are perceived to be more capable of undertaking the role of mediator.[111] In this vein, Oman's repeated mediation efforts represent a distinctive feature in the context of small state mediation. Oman does not have enough financial resources like the other Gulf States to use these as a reward, or to facilitate settlements between the conflicting parties, nor does it possess coercive military power to induce a particular settlement. Yet Oman has been repeatedly involved in mediation efforts. This requires further investigation to understand why Oman undertakes mediation activities. In order to understand why states in general, and small states like Oman in particular, attempt to mediate in regional and international disputes, the following section will survey the literature on international mediation to identify the key factors underlying mediation efforts.

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[108] I. Neumann, *Lilliputians in Gulliver's World? small states in international relations*, Centre for Small State Studies Institute for International Affairs, University of Iceland, Oddi, Sturlugata, 2004, p.7, https://rafhladan.is/bitstream/handle/10802/5122/Lilliputians%20Endanlegt%202004.pdf?sequence=1 (accessed 23 May 2019).

[109] B. Thorhallsson, p,136.

[110] J. Bercovitch, R. Jackson and W. Jackson, *Conflict resolution in the twenty-first century*: 2009, p.39.

[111] C. Ingebritsen, I. Neumann and S. Gstöhl (eds.), *Small States in International Relations*, Seattle, University of Washington, 2012, p.9.

2.4.3 Why do states get involved in Mediation?

While the literature on conflict mediation has established that states are the most common actors willing to act as mediators, it recognises that not all states volunteer to undertake the role of mediator. Saadia Touval argues that international conflict mediation activities should be considered as an aspect of foreign policy objectives.[112] In this sense, "mediation is seen here as deriving from the mediator's perceptions of the international system, from its domestic needs, and from its foreign policy objectives and strategies."[113] Similar to Touval, Melin argues, "states carefully consider when and where they mediate, and often consider the strategic benefits when deciding whether to take on the mediator role".[114] Maundi *et al*, provided an in-depth study examining both the motives of prospective mediators and the motives of the conflicting parties for consenting to mediation and accepting particular mediators. The study examined six African case studies: Rwanda from 1990 to 1992; Burundi from 1993 to 1998; Congo (Brazzaville) from 1991 to 1999; Sudan from 1983 to 1993; Liberia from 1989 to 1996; and Ethiopia-Eritrea from 1998 to 1999. The study asserted that, regardless of its size or strength, a state may be motivated to initiate an intermediary role if that conflict affects its national interests.[115] In agreement with Maundi *et al*, Peter Carnevale and Sharon Arad assert that mediators have interests and incentives that motivate them to undertake the role of mediator.[116] Similarly, Zartman and

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[112] S. Touval, 'Mediation and Foreign Policy', *International Studies Review*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2003, p. 91.
[113] S. Touval, 'Mediation and Foreign Policy', p.92.
[114] M. Melin, 'When states mediate.', *Journal of Law & International Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2013, p.80, https://elibrary.law.psu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=jlia, (accessed 18 September 2018).
[115] M. Maundi et al., *Getting in,* p.16.
[116] P. Carnevale, S. Arad, 'Bias and impartiality in international mediation.', in J. Bercovitch, *Resolving international conflicts: The theory and practice of mediation*, Lynne Rienner Publishers,1996, p. 39.

Touval contend that, in view of the considerable investment of political, moral and material resources that mediation requires, mediators decide to engage in conflict mediation based on their desire to make peace, and their own self-interest.[117] In examining the post-World War II mediation record, Greig and Diehl asserted that there is a clear sign that states' national interests play a key role in influencing a state's decision on where to mediate.[118] Therefore, national or self-interest is seen as the primary motivation for states to act as mediators. In this context, states are more likely to undertake the mediation role if their national interests are at stake. However, the literature provides different indications of the concept of self-interest that might prompt a state to undertake the role of mediator, and what this entails.

Some scholars such as Lemke and Regan, Findley and Toe, and Beardsley argue that mediators' decisions to intervene are likely to be related to their strategic and political interests.[119] They contend that when deciding to intervene, mediators consider the conditions of conflicting parties, such as their alliances, geographical proximity, historical relationships, and ideology. Within this mainstream view tying mediation initiatives to the national/self-interest of the mediator, some have argued that states may decide to undertake the role of mediator for strategic interests, including geopolitical relationships or regional security concerns, based on promoting or protecting national or allied interests in an area of conflict.[120] In this regard, states may seek

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[117] I. Zartman, S. Touval, 'International mediation in the post-cold war era', in C. Crocker (ed.), *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, Hampson, F. & Aall, P., Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2001, p.428.

[118] M. Greig and P. Diehl, *International mediation,* Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012, p.85.

[119] See M. Findley and T. Teo. 'Rethinking Third-Party Interventions into Civil Wars: An Actor-Centric Approach.', *The Journal of Politics,* vol. 68, no.4, 2006, pp.828-837. And K. Beardsley, *The Mediation Dilemma*, Cornell University Press, New York, NY, 2011.

[120] C. Crocker, F. Hampson, and P. Aall, *Taming intractable conflicts: Mediation in the hardest cases*, Washington DC, US Institute of Peace Press, 2004, p.29.

to assume a greater regional or global role. A good point of illustration is the ongoing Middle East conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours and the Palestinians. US strategic interests in the region have played a key role in prompting the US to lead the Middle East peace initiative, in order to shape the regional security environment in a way that will be favourable to the advancement of their interests, and the US' allies in the region.[121] Similarly, states, and in particular major powers, may mediate conflicts in order to prevent other external powers from expanding their influence into their sphere of influence, or to earn the favour of other nations.[122] For instance, during the Cold War, the U.S. was quick to mediate international conflicts in order to extend their influence and block the expansion of Soviet influence. The US saw the presence of the USSR's military forces in Egypt in 1970 as a threat to its interests, and took several steps to expel them, including acting as a mediator to end the "War of Attrition" between Egypt and Israel.[123] Similarly, the former Soviet Union adopted mediation as an instrument to contain the expansion of China's influence in Southern Asia. For example, the Soviets decided to act as mediator between India and Pakistan during the conflict of 1965, because of their concerns over the intervention of China on the side of Pakistan. The Soviets believed that if that happened, this would provide China with an opportunity to strengthen its relations with Pakistan, and consequently expand its sphere of influence in the region, and establish its presence at the Soviet Southern borders.[124]

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[121] C. Crocker, F. Hampson, and P. Aall, *Taming intractable conflicts*, 2004, p.30.
[122] J. Bercovitch and J. Rubin, *Mediation in international relations: Multiple approaches to conflict management*, London, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1994, p.238.
[123] J. Bercovitch and J. Rubin, *Mediation in international relations,* 1994, p.238.
[124] J. Bercovitch and J. Rubin, *Mediation in international relations*, 1994, p.238.

States may also choose to mediate in interstate conflicts as a strategy to avoid choosing sides in a dispute from which they cannot remain wholly detached. Avoiding choosing one side of the conflicting parties has the advantage of maintaining a good relationship with both sides. It is widely recognised that, for instance, the United States attempted to mediate between the United Kingdom and Argentina during the Falklands Crisis, since both parties were key Cold War allies, and the US sensed that a protracted conflict would impair its position regarding the Soviet Union.[125]

The geographical proximity of the conflict provides another strategic interest accounting for mediation efforts. Greig and Regan find that a state is nearly 14 times more likely to mediate in its neighboring country than an average state 1,265 miles away.[126] Similarly, Beardsley believes that an internal conflict in a neighbouring country may very well motivate a state to initiate an intermediary role, in order to prevent a spillover effect that could directly affect its national interests, such as disruption of trade and refugee flows when armed conflict occurs in a neighbouring country.[127] In their analysis of post-World War II mediation records, Michael Greig and Paul F. Diehl observe that " about 30% of all state mediation efforts are directed towards conflicts involving neighbouring states."[128] This suggests that states pay more attention to those conflicts that are likely to have a direct impact on their security and national interests. For example, the fear of spilling over and the push of large numbers of refugees into their

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[125] M. Kleiboer, *The multiple realities of international mediation*, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers,1998, p.138.

[126] M. Greig and M. Regan, 'When do they say yes? An analysis of the willingness to offer and accept mediation in civil wars', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2008, p. 773.

[127] K. Beardsley, 'Pain, pressure and political cover: Explaining mediation incidence', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 47, no.4, 2010, p. 398.

[128] M. Greig and P. Diehl, *International mediation*, 2012, p.85.

territories prompted both of the neighbouring countries of Guinea Bissau and Gambia to mediate during the 1990 Casamance conflict in Senegal.[129] In this context, small states are regarded as being more likely to mediate. Taking into account the high sensitivity and vulnerability that small states experience as part of their existence, violent conflict situations can increase their likelihood of falling victim to the consequences of escalation of an international or regional conflict, which in turn will disrupt their regional stability, and could spill over to undermine domestic or internal security and stability. As Zartman and Touval argue, the need to forestall adverse conditions and take action before events reach an unmanageable point are crucial determinants in small state mediation.[130] Small states may make efforts in intermediation, since they lack other foreign strategic tools, and as a means of circumventing becoming lured into the conflict as actors.

Moreover, states, and in particular small states, may adopt mediation as a foreign policy instrument in order to establish reputation or increase their influence on the world's stage. As Maundi *et al* indicate, potential motives might also include establishing a reputation as a peacemaker, and enhancing the state's influence on the international arena.[131] Norway, for example, gained a highly recognised reputation because of its key role in the negotiation of the Oslo Accord. The Norwegians have been called upon by a number of conflicting parties to help reach negotiated resolutions, for example in Mozambique, Sri Lanka, and between the Israelis and Palestinians. [132] Moreover, the end of the Cold War, which resulted in a changing

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[129] M. Greig and P. Diehl, *International mediation*, 2012, p.82.
[130] I. Zartman and S. Touval, 'International mediation in the post-Cold War era.', in C. Crocker, F. Hampson and P. Aall (eds.), *Turbulent Peace*, Washington, United States Institute of Peace, 2001, p.431.
[131] M. Maundi, et al., *Getting in*, p.23.
[132] J. Eriksson, *Swedish mediation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: a study of the utility of small-state mediation and Track II diplomacy*, Ph. D, diss., London, University of London, 2011, p.20.

international system with the advent of the multi-polarity system, expanded the opportunities for smaller states to take on new roles within the field of international conflict mediation. Similarly, states with previous experience of engagement in mediation are more likely to undertake the role of mediator.[133] Previous mediation experiences establish a rapport and signal a commitment to peaceful means of conflict resolution. As mentioned earlier, mediation efforts are not isolated events. Indeed, "Each instance creates a mediation history of the state's experience as a mediator."[134] In this context, previous mediation encourages future efforts to undertake a mediation role.

Furthermore, other scholars provide a broad understanding of the concept, arguing that mediators can also be motivated by value-driven interests that are humanitarian in nature. Zartman, Finnemore, Western and Regan for example, argue that third-party intervention is an important tool to relieve or prevent humanitarian catastrophe.[135] In a situation where there is a humanitarian disaster, large-scale human suffering can generate strong public pressure centered around ethical imperatives, and influence a state's decision to become engaged in a mediation role. The objective of the mediator here is to create a favourable environment for the negotiation process that can lead to ending of the conflict and human suffering. Examining the post-World War II record, Greig and Diehl found that more than half of states' mediation was directed

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[133] M. Melin, 'When states mediate.' Penn State, *Journal of Law & International Affairs,* vol. 2, no. 1, 2013, p. 88, https://elibrary.law.psu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=jlia, (accessed 18 September 2018).

[134] M. Melin, 'When states mediate.', p.88.

[135] See, Zartman, I. William, *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa*, Oxford University Press, 1989, and M. Finnemore, *The purpose of Intervention*, Cornell University Press,2003. and Regan, Patrick M., 'Third Party Interventions and the Duration of Intrastate Conflict', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 46, no.1, 2002, pp. 55-73.

toward those conflicts that produced a large number of refugees, because of the negative impact on regional security and stability.[136] The study also shows that states in general have less of a tendency towards humanitarian mediation than NGOs; nevertheless, small states are seen as having more motives to undertake an intermediary role during conflicts associated with human disaster.[137] However, although conventional wisdom asserts that there are no direct interests for the mediator involved in mediation of a humanitarian nature, the principal mediator can have indirect interests. The mediator can, for instance, establish relations with one or more parties in the dispute that will ensure gains for the mediator in future, or by gaining an international reputation as a 'peace-making nation', which is able to stand above realpolitik calculations to bring peace to a conflict-torn region.

Since many of the existing scholarly works on international conflict mediation recognise that the concept of self-interest also might entail value-driven interests, one can query the added value of this broad understanding of the concept. Questions such as how a certain state or particular mediator conceives its self or national interest, how policy-makers conceive the policy options open to them and how they arrived at mediation as the best policy response need to be addressed. For example, Oman's involvement in mediating regional conflicts such as the Iran-Iraq War and the Yemeni 1994 Civil War could be understood by the proximity of the conflicts and immediate impact on the region, as well as the threat posed to Oman's national interests. However, two key factors arise from this. First, even if Oman's mediation is self-interested, self-interest can take many different forms, as discussed above, and therefore it will be necessary to

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[136] J. Greig and P. Diehl, *International Mediation*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012, p.85.
[137] J. Greig and P. Diehl, *International Mediation*, p.84.

seek to understand how Omani leaders conceive of Oman's interests. Second, the geographical proximity of the conflict in itself is not always sufficient to motivate a neighbouring state to act as a mediator, since neighbouring states have an option of supporting either side of the conflict, according to how they perceive the nature of the conflict in relation to their own national interests.[138] In this case, a relevant question becomes understanding how Omani policy makers conceive of their national or self-interest, what policy options were available for these policy-makers, and uncovering how they came to believe that acting as a mediator was the best policy option to secure their country's national interests. It's worth noting here that much of the existing scholarly work on international conflict mediation tends to adopt a 'phenomenon centric' approach i.e. the focus of the works is on the conflict as a phenomenon, not on the political actors who make the decision to intervene by taking a mediatory role. As such, they limit their perspective to the study of techniques and strategies used by the mediator for influencing conflict dynamics, and how to achieve successful mediation outcomes. However, if we take the view of international mediation as a foreign policy instrument that "the mediating state is no longer perceived as focusing its efforts on ending the conflict, but rather as pursuing a broadly conceived foreign policy"[139], then study of international mediation needs to pay more attention to the broader framework of strategic action within the international and domestic political structures. In this sense, instead of limiting our investigation to how the mediator influences the relationship between the parties in the conflict, we shift our focus to examine the broader perspective of how objectives and strategies of policy-makers lead them to mediate in a conflict, and to understand the domestic factors that influenced the mediating actor's behaviour. In this

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[138] J. Greig and P. Diehl, International Mediation, p.84
[139] S. Touval, 'Mediation and foreign policy.', p.92.

context, we assume that Oman's mediation in regional conflicts for example, are driven by its perceptions of its regional security environment, its domestic security needs, and from its broader foreign policy objectives and strategies.

Furthermore, the 'self-interest' explanation offered in the literature suggests that scholars of international mediation have generally treated mediators as rational actors, which conforms to the realist theory that actors in the international arena should and do base their acts on self-interest. As Touval argues, actors weigh costs and benefits of alternative policies and prefer those they believe to be the best policy option in terms of cost and efficiency.[140] In this sense, states follow a logic of consequences, and calculate ends and means to maximise or optimise their given materials and power-based interests. Nevertheless, it is obvious that in reality, mediation often represents complex social phenomena, in which equally complex decision-making processes take place. As Mark Ross indicates, the manner in which conflict is defined, perceived, responded to and managed is culturally embedded.[141] Therefore, cultural norms, ideas and values are integral aspects not only in regard to how mediation is carried out, but also to the desirability of mediation as a method of conflict intervention. This suggests that analysis of international conflict mediation requires to take actions into account, which do not reflect material characteristics. If, for example, we limit our explanations of motivation for conflict mediation to their material and structural elements, we then ignore the influence that discourses and perceptions may have in shaping the understanding of self-interest on which the decision to get involved in mediation rests. The social relationships in which actors find themselves

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[140] S. Touval, 'Mediation and foreign policy, p 92.
[141] M. Ross, *The Culture of Conflict: Interpretations and Interests in Comparative Perspective*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993, p.10.

determine how they interpret events and others' actions, define their interests, and how they pursue their goals.[142]

Generally, the existing scholarly works on international mediation have paid scant focus to the issue of the mediator's underlying reasons for becoming involved in mediation efforts. To the extent that this is discussed, the literature just points to the importance of self-interest, which has only provided the first step in understanding why and how states decide to mediate in international conflict. The self-interest explanation is not enough of an explanation in the absence of a clearer understanding of how states conceive of their interests and what policy options are open to them in response to the conflict. Thus, the questions concerning how particular mediators decide on and conceive of their interests have remained unaddressed. In this sense, if we are to fully understand why Oman became repeatedly involved in mediating regional conflict, then it will be necessary to understand key Omani policy makers' perceptions about regional conflict, how they conceive of Oman's interests, and what policy options were available to them in responding to a dilemma posed by regional conflict. In this context, this study argues that a state's decision to act as a mediator in response to a conflict could be better understood by focusing on the role of norms, values, ideas and beliefs that constructed their interests and influenced or shaped the policy-maker's decision.

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[142] E. Conteh-Morgan, 'Peacebuilding and human security: a constructivist perspective', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 2005, p.74.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has critically reviewed the existing body of literature on three main areas; literature on Omani mediation, literature on Oman's foreign policy, and theoretical literature on why states get involved in mediation activities. The literature on Oman's mediation efforts is notably absent, in so far as there is no detailed study conducted on Omani mediation. The only available resources are a section in a book on Oman's political development and a few articles, which do not really provide a clear basis for understanding Oman's mediation efforts, given its track record of mediation. Thus, I have examined the general literature on Oman's foreign policy in order to examine what it indicates about the features that drive and influence Oman's foreign policy behaviour, and which can offer helpful guidance for understanding the country's drivers behind its mediation activities.

Although the literature on Oman's foreign policy does not offer a compelling answer as to why Oman decides to engage in mediation efforts when responding to regional crisis or conflicts, there is a consensus about the significance of domestic/internal factors. Three factors were identified as being especially important: first, the country's historical experience of civil war played a key role in shaping the security perception of Omani policy makers and how they view the world; second, the Sultan's personal control over making the country's strategic choices; third, the role of Ibadhi ideology and principles in influencing the behaviour and conduct of the Omani people in general, and the Omani leadership in particular. All these domestic factors play key roles in shaping Omani foreign policy behaviour and its interaction with its regional and international environment. As such, it will be necessary to consider the impact of these domestic factors in order to understand why Oman has repeatedly become involved in mediation efforts.

I have further explored the literature on international mediation to examine the drivers of such choices and factors that states consider when assessing whether to undertake the role of mediator. Generally, most of the studies on international mediation generally tend to adopt a 'phenomenon centric' approach, one that places more emphasis on analysing mediation strategies and methods, and their success and failure as mechanisms of conflict management, with less attention paid to studying the actor's decision to undertake the role of mediator. This has led to limited work being done on why states get involved in mediation efforts in particular. More specifically, there is a shortcoming in the literature when addressing the issue of states' decisions and motivations to play a mediating role in international conflicts. As Young points out, when the mediator's motives and objectives are mentioned in the literature, these are often dealt with as background or marginal issues in the mediation process.[143] Scholars of international mediation have studied the motives of involved actors as a means to uncover when and where mediation is most likely to take place, or whether a particular conflict is more or less likely to receive a mediation initiative. Scholars such as Maundi, Greig and Regan, Beardsley, and Kelman, for example, have focused on the conditions that explain the occurrence of mediation.[144] Other scholars such as Savun, Svensson, Rauchhaus, Kydd, Sisk, Greig and Diehl, Kaufman, focus on the many different strategies that a third party mediator can adopt.[145]

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[143] O. Young, *The intermediaries: Third parties in international crises*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2015, p.26.

[144] See K. Beardsley, *The Mediation Dilemma*, New York, NY, Cornell University Press, 2011. and M. Greig and M. Regan, 'When do they say yes? An analysis of the willingness to offer and accept mediation in civil wars', International Studies Quarterly, vol. 52, no. 4, 2008, pp. 759-781.and M. Maundi, W. Zartman, G. Khadiagala and K. Nuamah, *Getting in: Mediators' Entry into the Settlement of African Conflicts*, Washington, DC United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006.

[145] See, B. Savun, 'Mediators types and the effectiveness of information-provision strategies in the resolution of international conflict', in J. Bercovitch and S. Gartner (eds.), *International Conflict Mediation: New Approaches and Findings*, New York, NY, Routledge,2009. And T. Sisk, *International Mediation in Civil Wars: Bargaining with Bullets*, New York, NY, Routledge, 2009.

The literature shows that self-interest is the prime driver for a state to engage in mediation. However, if that is the case, we need to consider how states conceive of their self-interest. Indeed, to understand Omani self-interest, we need to look at the perceptions and understandings of the key actors or policy makers. It is necessary to analyse mediation initiatives from the perspective of the mediators, in order to facilitate an understanding of why they present themselves, or accept invitations, to play the role of mediator. In other words, we need to consider how states conceive of their self-interest. This will imply understanding the perceptions, aims, and intentions of key political actors, which, in turn, points us in the direction of an interpretive methodology, which will be outlined in more detail in the next chapter.

3   Chapter Three: Methodology Chapter

3.1   Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed and critically engaged with the literature on Oman's foreign policy, and the literature on states' engagement in mediating international conflicts. Two main points arose from the literature review. First, the literature on Oman's mediation and foreign policy demonstrates a great deal of agreement amongst scholars who have studied Oman's foreign policy on the significant role played by domestic factors in influencing and shaping the country's external behaviour and its foreign policy approach, both in its regional environment, and in the world. Factors such as the country's longstanding history of statehood and interaction with the outside world, its experience of civil war, the role played by the Sultan and his ideas of Oman in formulating its foreign policy, as well as its distinct Ibadhi sect of Islam, were regarded as the primary sources of the country's distinctive foreign policy. It is therefore necessary to investigate the influence of these factors on Oman's foreign and security policy practice, and in particular, its decision to mediate in regional conflicts. As such, in order to fully understand why Oman became repeatedly involved in mediation efforts, we need to explore the social context in which policy makers think and act. In particular, we need to examine how these domestic factors have shaped the background to the beliefs policy makers adopt and the actions they perform.

The second factor identified in the literature on states' motives for undertaking mediation roles is that self/national interest is regarded as the prime motive for states to engage in mediation efforts. The literature does not, however, consider in any depth how perceptions of national interest emerge out of relevant background beliefs. Indeed, given that national interest lies at

the centre of most current explanations of the initiation of mediation, it is striking that little attention has been paid to what this concept actually entails. Questions concerning how policy makers decide on and conceive their national interests have remained unaddressed. Therefore, even if Oman's mediation efforts are based on her national interests, in order to properly understand Oman's mediatory role during regional conflict we need to take into account how Omani policy makers conceived of their country's national interest.

Based on the above finding, the working assumptions formulated to guide this study are twofold. First, that Oman's mediation efforts cannot, on the basis of the relevant theoretical literature, simply be understood as responding to structural imperatives. In other words, Oman's mediation behaviour does not derive primarily from material but ideational factors. This means that we also need to take into account the influence that domestic factors have had on Omani policy makers thinking. Additionally, the manner in which an agent perceives their self-interest depends upon their wider network of beliefs.[146] Oman's mediation efforts are significantly underpinned by a wider set of beliefs and desires of the Omani leadership and policy makers. Therefore, in order to adequately understand why Omani policy-makers decided to act as mediators in response to regional conflict, one must grasp the beliefs through which they construct their world, including the means by which they understand their position, their cultural norms, and their interests. According to Alan Bryman, interpretivism implies an ontological belief that reality is socially constructed, and also a corresponding epistemological belief that

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[146] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, 'Interpretive political science: Mapping the field.' In M. Bevir and R. Rhodes (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Interpretive Political Science*, New York, Routledge, 2015, p.14.

generating knowledge of social reality will require the researcher to grasp the meaning of social actions.[147]

This chapter continues from where the previous chapter ended and introduces the interpretive approach that guides the thesis. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section contrasts interpretive theory and positivism, to locate the interpretive approach within the broader discipline of political science. The second section will introduce the main features of the interpretive approach as proposed by Mark Bevir. It will discuss some of the theoretical concepts associated with the interpretive approach in political science, and demonstrate why this approach is appropriate for this study. The third section will explain the research design and practical approach, which will be used to complete the study. As highlighted above, the study will employ the interpretive case study as a research design. Finally, it will explain the various methods that will be utilised for data generating and analysis.

3.2   Interpretivism vs Positivism

The foundations on which political scholars' work is based are their ontological and epistemological stances. While ontology is related to the nature of political reality, epistemology is concerned with the question of how we know what we know about political phenomena. Accordingly, political science is concentrated around two opposing stances with regard to ontology and epistemology, which are reflected in different research traditions, positivism and

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[147] A. Bryman, *Social research methods*, 4th edn., Oxford, Oxford university press, 2015, p.30.

interpretivism. Both of these stances play a determining role in dictating the research approaches and methods.[148]

A positivist research approach in political science generally interweaves three main assumptions.[149] First, it advances the unity of science, and the belief that the social sciences can be built upon the same model as the natural sciences. For positivists, the study of the social world is based on the study of natural science. Accordingly, the positivist approach is based on the broad assumption that knowledge can be acquired through experience and observation. Therefore, political science seeks to uncover psychological or social laws rather than historical narratives, or understanding webs of meaning. Second, it equates the existence of an object with its observability, which makes it easier to study the natural than the social world. Third, it distinguishes between the inquirer on the one hand and the phenomena being studied on the other. The inquirer ideally remains detached and 'outside', instead of becoming a participant in the events being classified.

Under this methodological tradition, different schools of thought have evolved in the field of political science and foreign policy analysis that are embedded in the positivist approach, through embracing different forms of 'structure', which are held to mould national foreign

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[148] D. Marsh, S. Ercan and E. Furlong, 'A Skin Not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science' in D. Marsh, G. Stoker and V. Lowndes (eds.), *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, 4th edn., Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017, p.185.

[149] See, A. Finlayson et al., 'The interpretive approach in political science: a symposium', *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2004, pp.129-164. and M. Bevir and O. Daddow, 'Interpreting foreign policy: National, comparative and regional studies', *International Relations*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2015, pp. 273-287. and S. Schram, '*Political Science Research: From Theory to Practice*, *International Encyclopedia of Political Science*, http://www.u.arizona.edu/~jag/POL602/SchramPolSci.pdf , (accessed 13 August 2018).

policy choices. These may not entirely - but quite often do - remove the 'human' element from explanations of state behaviour in the international arena.[150] In this sense, states are seen as unitary actors seeking their security and survival through maximising their material-based capabilities in an anarchic international system. Because the international system is characterised by anarchy, states are locked in a 'self-help' system, looking out for their own interests, and engaged in a constant struggle to ensure their own survival. In this sense, "the survival motive is taken as the grounds for action in a world where the security of a state is not assured, rather than a realistic description of the impulse that lies behind every act of state."[151] In other words, foreign policy choices are the outcomes of rational behaviour that calculate the costs and advantages of alternative policy options in order to maximise the benefits.

While positivism has played an important role in the study of foreign policy and international relations, it has its limitations, in the way that it attempts to bypass the beliefs, ideas and desires of relevant actors. In other words, positivism treats beliefs, meanings, ideas, and norms as if they can be separated from actions, by reducing beliefs to intervening variables between actions and social facts.[152] Positivism's proponents argue that we "can understand or explain human behaviour by objective social facts about people rather than by references to their beliefs".[153] In this sense, positivists believe that the action of political actors can be explained by reference to their social positions, such as class, economic interests, or institutional positions. In doing so,

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[150] M. Bevir and O. Daddow, 'Interpreting foreign policy: National, comparative and regional studies', *International Relations*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2015, p 277.

[151] K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, London, McGraw-Hill, Waveland Press, 1979, p.92.

[152] M. Bevir, O. Daddow and I. Hall(eds.), *Interpreting global security*, Oxon, Routledge, 2014. p.3.

[153] M. Bevir, O. Daddow and I. Hall(eds.), *Interpreting global security*, p. 5.

they have marginalised other alternative perspectives to the study of social meanings that underpin political action.

The interpretive approach opposes positivism over the form of understanding and explanation appropriate to the study of social science and human actions. Beginning from the position that our knowledge of the real world is a social construct by human actors, therefore the basic assumption is that in order to understand and explain social life, we must account for the beliefs and preferences of the people we study. Its central characteristic is its focus on meaning that shapes actions and institutions, and the ways in which they do so.[154]

The interpretive approach rests on two main bases that justify its appropriateness to the study of political phenomena. The first is that individual human actors act, at least in part, on the basis of their own beliefs and preferences.[155] For example, the Omani leadership's decision to act as a mediator during the Yemeni Civil War of 1994 might be understood as being motivated by their fear of spill-over effects and the massive number of refugees that the conflict would produce; alternatively, they may have believed it was a morally preferable action to perform, or a combination of both. However, whatever logic we apply to our understanding of Oman's mediation efforts in that conflict, we must do so in reference to the beliefs and preferences of relevant Omani policy makers, because humans are agents who act according to their own beliefs and preferences.

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[154] D. Yanow, 'Interpretation in policy analysis: On methods and practice', *Critical policy Studies*, vol.1, Issue 1, 2007, p.110.
[155] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, 'Interpretive Theory', p.4
https://escholarship.org/content/qt0bk3k2nq/qt0bk3k2nq.pdf, (accessed 20 October 2020)

The second base of the interpretive approach is that the behaviour and practice of political actors cannot be explained by objective social facts about them, such as their institutional position.[156] Political actors in the same circumstances can view their situation differently, because their experience of that situation can be loaded with prior beliefs and theories, and therefore, they might act in a different manner from other political actors. In this sense, their institutional position or membership of a particular social class cannot in itself explain a political actor's beliefs, interests, and actions. Interpretive approaches commence from the perception that in order to understand actions, practices and institutions, it is essential to grasp the meanings, beliefs and preferences, of the people involved.[157] Therefore, in order to adequately understand and explain their actions and practice, we need to grasp the meanings, beliefs and preferences of the people involved. When we say that Oman has particular interests for which it has acted as a mediator, during the Iran-Iraq War for example, we rely on how Omani policy makers view their country's national interests and its regional role and position, which might differ significantly from our views and theories, since different political actor with a different set of beliefs might believe that their country is in a different regional position or that it has different interests.

In short, the fact that political actors act according to beliefs and desires that are their own, and since their ideas and thoughts are not reducible to their social position or other objective characteristics, means that social investigation should be primarily concerned with interpreting the actions of others. To fully interpret the foreign and security policy decisions of key political actors is to grasp the relevant beliefs and desires that are the basis for why they act in the way

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[156] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, 'Interpretive Theory', p.5.
[157] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, 'Interpretive Theory', p.5.

that they do. In the following section, I will delineate the interpretive theoretical framework that this study will draw on in more detail.

3.3 Mark Bevir's Interpretive Framework

The previous section demonstrated that the interpretive approach is an appropriate approach to understand why Oman became repeatedly involved in mediating regional conflicts. In this section, therefore, I explore the interpretive theoretical framework advanced by the British philosopher Mark Bevir in his work *The Logic of the History of Ideas*. Bevir's theoretical framework provides an analytical lens that researchers in political sciences can apply to explore and understand political actions and practices, by exploring the beliefs through which actors construct their world, including the ways in which they understand their position, the norms affecting them, and their interests.[158] It offers an in-depth account, particularly on the historical side, of a variety of contexts within which foreign policy and security practice take place. Bevir's theoretical framework revolves around the concepts of traditions and dilemmas, and centres on the study of actors as 'situated agents' who, when confronted with policy dilemmas, draw on inherited traditions to inform their foreign policy practices. The interpretive approach rejects the idea of autonomous human actors that is, the idea that the human actor is capable of

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[158] See, M. Bevir, 'Interpretive Theory'. In M. Bevir, (ed.), *SAGE Handbook of Governance*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011, pp. 51–64. And M. Bevir, O. Daddow and I. Hall, 'Introduction: Interpreting British Foreign Policy', *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2013, pp. 163–174. Also M. Bevir, O. Daddow and P. Schnapper, 'Introduction: Interpreting British European Policy'. JCMS: *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2015, pp. 1–17.

making choices outside of all social influences.[159] However, while interpretivists accept that agency is possible, they understand that it is always situated in a particular context. This context may be understood as the wider web of beliefs of the actor, where this wider web of beliefs reflects a historical tradition.[160] In this sense, political actors' reasoning and action occurs in the context of agents' existing webs of belief. This interpretive framework provides accounts of foreign policy actions and practices by firstly, identifying the meanings embedded in agents' practices, and secondly, explaining these meanings by locating them in the social, cultural, institutional and historical contexts within which foreign policy activities occur. I will now turn to explain the two key explanatory concepts central to an interpretive approach: traditions and dilemmas.

3.3.1 Tradition

The form of explanation of political action focuses on two distinct themes: social structure and agency.[161] Those scholars who believe that social context predominates try to demonstrate how structures, discourses or paradigms play a key role in determining the behaviour of social actors. Scholars who advocate for agency argue for the role of individual actors in bringing about social changes. However, according to the interpretive theoretical approach, understanding social contexts cannot work as a determinant of an actor's behaviour, because actors can inhabit the same social context, yet hold different perceptions of the world and, accordingly, act in different

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[159] M. Bevir, 'Situated agency: A post-foundational alternative to autonomy', in K. Cahill, M. Gustafsson and T. Wentzer, (eds.), *Finite But Unbounded: New Approaches in Philosophical Anthropology*, Berlin, De Gruyter 2017, p. 47.
[160] M. Bevir, 'Political science after Foucault', *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 24, no.4, 2011, p.89.
[161] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance*, New York, Routledge, 2004, p.32.

ways.[162] Thus, there must be a space in the social context where each individual actor decides what beliefs to hold and what actions to perform for their own reasons.[163] In the political context of the Persian Gulf region, for example, the Arab Gulf states are faced with the same security challenges and hostile environment that characterise international relations in the Persian Gulf, yet Omani policy-makers hold different perceptions of regional security from those of their GCC counterparts. Therefore, in many regional upheavals, Omani policy-makers acted in a different manner in dealing with these challenges, because their experiences of the situation were influenced by different prior theories. This means, even if international relations scholars found a correlation between a state's self-interest and willingness to undertake a mediatory role, we could not properly understand why Omani policy-makers decided to act as mediators in response to the conflict in Yemen, for instance, simply by reference to self-interest. In order to properly understand why Omani policy-makers acted as mediators in response to the Yemeni Civil War of 1994, one needs to unpack the other relevant beliefs that link self-interest to the act of mediation. As Bevir *et al* argue, "to explain people's action, we implicitly or explicitly invoke their beliefs and desires."[164]

According to Bevir, social context is best conceptualised as a tradition. A tradition here is understood as a "set of understandings someone acquires as an initial web of beliefs during a process of socialisation."[165] We can identify the beliefs that make up a tradition by reference to two key features. First, traditions must embody suitable conceptual connections. The beliefs and ideas that are passed on from one generation to another must form a fairly coherent set, with

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[162] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance*, p.32.
[163] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance*, p.32.
[164] M. Bevir, O. Daddow and I. Hall (eds.), *Interpreting Global Security*, p.3.
[165] M. Bevir, '*The Logic of the History of Ideas*', p.200.

some shared understandings, so providing the theoretical underpinning with which people construct their understanding of the world. Second, traditions must embody a suitable temporal connection. Traditions must be composed of beliefs and ideas that have been passed consciously or unconsciously from generation to generation, changing slightly each time, so that no single idea persists from start to finish.[166] Ultimately, traditions are not fixed entities which people happen to discover. Traditions are contingent and evolving entities that operate through socialisations as influences on individuals, where the individuals can extend and modify them in novel ways.[167] In this sense, these beliefs must have provided a starting point for each of their successive exponents.

Bevir argues that "all people at all times set out from an inherited set of shared understandings which they have acquired during a process of socialisation. We necessarily acquire a way of seeing the world along with the values, concerns, and assumptions others impart to us."[168] A tradition captures the historical inheritance against the background of which individuals act.[169] In this sense, tradition should be seen as an initial starting point, not as an end in itself. Political actors acquire their beliefs and perform their actions against the background of a tradition that influences those beliefs and actions, but they are simultaneously creative agents who have the capacity to reason and act innovatively, based on that tradition.[170] This means that traditions do not prescribe the choices available to the political actors who set out from within them. Political

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[166] M. Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, p.204.
[167] M. Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, p.213.
[168] M. Bevir, '*The Logic of the History of Ideas*', p. 201.
[169] M. Bevir, O. Daddow and I. Hall, 'Introduction: Interpreting British Foreign Policy', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, vol. 15 no.2, 2013, p.167.
[170] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, 'Interpretation and its Others', *Australian Journal of Political Science,* vol.40, no.2, 2005., p176.

actors are 'situated agents' within their webs of belief who then perform the actions that they carry out against the background of inherited traditions, but they are also agents who can extend, modify, or even reject the traditions that provided the background to their initial webs of belief.[171] Therefore, tradition is unavoidable as the starting point, but not the final destination, of the beliefs and actions the actors later perform. Researchers should conceive of tradition only as an initial influence on political actors. The content of the tradition will appear in their later performances only in so far as their agency has not led them to change it, where every aspect of it is, in principle, open to change.[172] The role of agency is central to tradition, because they play an active role in the learning process, since it is individuals as the carriers of tradition who make them meaningful. As Bevir and Rhodes argue, it is due to agency to "settle its content and variations by developing their beliefs and practices, adapting it to new circumstances, while passing it on to the next generations. We can only identify the beliefs that make up a tradition by looking at the shared understandings and historical connections that allow us to link its exponents with one another."[173] In this sense, we can understand particular actions, and the practices of a particular actor, by locating them in the context of a particular tradition. This suggests that researchers can identify traditions as the background of the beliefs and actions they wish to understand, by establishing their coherence and tracing relevant temporal and conceptual connections between the relevant webs of belief. It is important to note, however, that researchers should not be tempted to place political actors in a tradition by comparing their beliefs and action with a reified tradition, because "traditions are not fixed entities, we cannot

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[171] M. Bevir, O. Daddow and I. Hall (eds.), *Interpreting Global Security*, p.7.
[172] M. Bevir, O. Daddow and I. Hall (eds.), *Interpreting Global Security*, p.5.
[173] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance*, p.33.

situate people in one by comparing their beliefs and actions with its allegedly key features. Rather we must recognise that traditions are contingent products of the ways in which people develop specific beliefs, preferences and actions."[174] Bevir and Rhodes argue that researchers "construct traditions in ways appropriate to explaining the particular set of beliefs and actions in which they are interested. They move back from particular beliefs and actions to traditions made up of linked beliefs and actions handed down from generation to generation."[175]

In this context, the conception of Oman as a distinctive cultural identity in its region, but also as vulnerable to external interference, are identified as the key traditions of thought that were in place by the 1980s. There are beliefs that are passed on from one generation to another with some shared understandings and historical connections. It is important to note here, however, that given the autocratic nature of the Omani state in which the sultan retains the ultimate authority on all important foreign and domestic issues, other policy-makers had little option but to go along with at least the broad thrust of the Sultan's thinking. In this regard, this is slightly different from the kind of socialisation envisaged by Bevir in describing the tradition. Nevertheless, in the process of his project of nation-building, the Sultan made a very deliberate attempt to shape a new national narrative and did so in a very public way, so that policy became tied very explicitly to a conception of Oman as a distinctive cultural identity in its region, but also as vulnerable to external interference. Starting in 1971, Sultan Qaboos took pains to explain his domestic and foreign-policy principles and repeatedly explained his motives. Moreover, young Omanis were exposed to Qaboos' views in school as history classes. As such, most of

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[174] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance*, p.34.
[175] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance*, p.33.

those who were working with the Sultan by 1980, were socialised with his way thinking, and therefore acquiring the status of shared understanding.

It is important to note, however, that in describing the key traditions of thought in Oman's foreign and security policy that were in place by 1980, prior to the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, the study is also constructing that tradition. This is because, as noted earlier, traditions do not have a fixed essence. The study will draw on the wider context of the country's historical experience of internal civil war, Ibadhi principles and traditions and the country's sense of historical significance, as they form the social context through which policy-makers understand the world around them, and inform the Sultan and his close advisors' conception of their country's regional and international role, as well as the foreign and security policy practices that have evolved out of that role. These are beliefs that were handed down through decades from one generation to another with some shared understandings and historical connections. The researcher will examine the background against which Omani policy-makers came to hold their beliefs, tracing these historical connections to most effectively tease out the web of beliefs that influenced the formulation of Oman's foreign and security policy practices. This will help the researcher to properly understand the social context within which Omani policymakers perceived themselves operating, and had an influence on their web of beliefs and practice, thereby identifying the core ideas that are widely shared by key Omani policy-makers, and which have persisted through time.

Locating political actors in their relevant inherited traditions provides one means of understanding or explaining the beliefs and actions of political actors, since tradition provides an essential starting point for an explanation of why an individual actor holds a given web of

beliefs which form the background to the beliefs and actions we wish to understand.[176] As such, traditions do not explain why political actors progress to change these initial webs. In other words, traditions on their own are insufficient to explain why a political actor has changed or adjusted the beliefs they have inherited and acted in the way that they did. This is because political actors have the capacity for creativity, as they can change their beliefs and therefore also their actions. As Bevir argues, "the modification of inherited beliefs is an act of agency performed against the background of a tradition but not decided by it." [177] To properly understand the beliefs and actions that a political actors has arrived at and why they acted in the way they have done, it is also necessary to provide a diachronic account of how change takes place in the inherited tradition, and leads to changes in beliefs.

3.3.2 Dilemma

Dilemma is the second explanatory concept of Bevir's interpretive framework. According to Bevir, dilemma is best understood as a new belief that calls into question an individual's existing beliefs and traditions, and the practices that they inform.[178] A dilemma prompts a change to the beliefs that constitute the inherited traditions and, thus, provides an explanation of why a political actor has changed or modified their inherited traditions.[179] In this sense, researchers of foreign policy analysis can use the concept of dilemma to explain the modification of political foreign policy practice by reference to the reasons political actors may have had for extending,

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[176] M. Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, p.214.
[177] M. Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, p.214.
[178] M. Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, p.221.
[179] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, *Governance Stories*, London, Routledge, 2006, p.9.

modifying, or even rejecting the traditions that provided them with their initial inheritances.[180]

Bevir and Rhodes explain that a dilemma "arises for an individual or group when a new idea stands in opposition to existing beliefs or practices and so forces a reconsideration of the existing beliefs and associated tradition. Political scientists can explain change in traditions and practices, therefore, by referring to the relevant dilemmas."[181] Dilemmas might also take the form of foreign policy 'crises' that challenge preconceptions about the behaviour of another state or international actor.[182] The new beliefs will stand in contradiction to the existing foreign policy traditions or practice, thereby posing a 'dilemma' for political actors. In order to resolve this contradiction dilemma, political actors may accommodate these new beliefs within their existing web of beliefs, by modifying their existing foreign policy practice and associated traditions, or by changing their old beliefs with the new beliefs and practices.

It is important to bear in mind that researchers cannot straightforwardly equate 'dilemma' with 'objective pressures in the world'.[183] This is because a 'dilemma' can arise from theoretical and moral reflection, as well as experiences of worldly pressures.[184] Individuals adjust their beliefs and practice in response to any new idea that they consider to be true, irrespective of whether or not it reflects pressure that researchers believe to be real. Thus, in explaining the change or shift that occurs in the political actors' beliefs and practice, researchers cannot privilege their own understanding of the world. What should be taken into account is the subjective or inter-

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[180] M. Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, p.214.
[181] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, *Governance Stories*, p. 9
[182] M. Bevir and O. Daddow, 'Interpreting foreign policy: National, comparative and regional studies', *International Relations*, vol. 29, no.3, 2015, p. 277.
[183] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance,* p.36.
[184] M. Bevir, O. Daddow and I. Hall (eds.), *Interpreting Global Security*, p.8.

subjective understandings of political actors.[185] In this sense, researchers explain modifications in political actors' beliefs and actions by reference to ideas they actually hold, irrespective of their apparent truth-value. We can understand people's solutions to dilemmas by reference to the character of the dilemma – whether factual, theoretical or moral – and their existing beliefs. An important point to highlight here is that there is no singular or correct response to a 'dilemma'. When political actors confront a new event or new beliefs, they accommodate them within their existing beliefs in a creative manner.[186] This means that the inherited traditions do not provide political actors with rules on how to respond to the 'dilemma'. However, political actors will have to modify their existing beliefs in order to maintain a relative coherence between the beliefs that they hold. Researchers can understand the action which the political actor arrived at by examining the character of both the 'dilemma' and the political actor's existing beliefs. As Bevir and Rhodes indicate, "To hold onto a new idea, people must develop their existing beliefs to make room for it. The new idea will open some ways of adjusting and close down others. People have to hook it onto their existing beliefs, and their existing beliefs will present some opportunities and not others."[187] This entails that change involves a pushing and pulling of a dilemma and a tradition in order to bring them together and maintain a relative coherence between them. A focus on dilemmas and knowledge of actors' existing beliefs allows us to account for why they modify their beliefs and actions in the way that they do. By knowing an actor's existing beliefs, we can understand what problem a dilemma posed for them and the

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[185]M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, *Governance Stories*, p. 10.
[186]M. Bevir, O. Daddow and I. Hall (eds.), *Interpreting Global Security*, p.8.
[187]M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, *Governance Stories*, p. 11.

relevant actions they engaged in. By understanding the character of the dilemma we can explain why the political actor responded as they did.

The concept of dilemma is particularly important in order to understand why Oman engages in mediatory roles, given the complex and dynamic nature of the security environment in the Gulf region, as it lies at the intersection of regional conflicts and the competing interests of regional and global powers. This context of regional political upheavals continues to create fundamental dilemmas for policy-makers on how best to advance their country's national interests, and secure independence in their political decisions within this contested security environment. The start of the Iran-Iraq War in August 1980, for example, shows that Oman came under pressure from their GCC partners to come to the support of Iraq against Iran, which conflicted with their established policy tradition of a 'balanced approach' to regional affairs that was in place by 1980. In response to this policy dilemma, Omani policy-makers had to adjust their policy tradition and act as a mediator between the two sides, helping to bring the war to an end. This study will try to understand the following; how the Omani leadership came to perceive the Iran-Iraq War as a 'dilemma', and how that contradicted their existing beliefs and practice. Additionally, one must ask which foreign policy dilemmas Omani policy makers considered themselves to be confronting, which policy options were available to them, how they weighed these options, and finally how they arrived at mediation as the best policy response to resolve the dilemma.

The explanatory concepts of tradition and dilemma provide international relations scholars with a reliable analytical lens they can employ to explain a political actor's or state's foreign policy

actions. Tradition draws attention to the historical inheritance that affects existing beliefs. Dilemma highlights how actors modify their webs of belief, and thus their actions, in response to the introduction of a new belief that is in conflict with their previous beliefs. In this sense, political scholars can provide a suitable understanding of why a political actor acted in the manner they did by treating political actors as 'situated agents' who, when confronted with policy dilemmas, draw on inherited foreign policy traditions to inform their foreign policy practices.

3.4   The Case Studies Research Strategy

This study employs the case study as a research strategy to understand Oman's reasons for acting as a mediator during regional conflicts. Case studies are widely used as a research design in international relations and political science by proponents of interpretivism and positivism alike. George and Bennett define the case study as a "well-defined aspect of a historical episode that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than a historical event itself."[188] This means that case studies allow the researcher to examine the unique context in which mediation takes place, and allow for a holistic in-depth investigation of the historical event. What counts as a case can be as flexible as the researcher's definition of the subject; for the purpose of this thesis, a case means a single instance of Omani mediation efforts. According to Thomas, "Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry

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[188] A. George and A. Bennett, *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2005, p.18.

will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame—an object—within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates."[189] In this sense interpretive researchers treat a case study as part of a broader methodology that emphasises human meaning and reflexivity. Similarly, Stake asserts that the case study should not be seen as a method in and of itself. Rather, it is a design framework that may incorporate a number of methods.[190] As such, case studies are used in this study as a means of generating deeper context-dependent knowledge on a given issue.

Case studies may serve different research objectives. Jack Levy identifies four types of case study, based on the theoretical (or descriptive) purposes or research objectives of a case study. These are: (1) idiographic case studies. (2) hypothesis generating case studies; (3) hypothesis testing cases (4) plausibility probe case studies.[191]

Idiographic case studies attempt to describe, explain, interpret, and/or understand a single case as an end in itself, rather than as a vehicle for developing broader theoretical generalisations. They allow facts to speak for themselves, or bring out their significance by largely intuitive interpretation. Idiographic case studies can be either of the inductive type, which is highly descriptive and lacking in an explicit theoretical framework to guide empirical analysis, aiming to explain all aspects of a case and their interconnections. Theory-guided case studies, unlike

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[189] G. Thomas, 'A Typology for the Case Study in Social Science Following a Review of Definition, Discourse, and Structure', *Qualitative inquiry*, vol.17, no.6, 2011, p. 513.
[190] R. Stake, 'Qualitative case studies', In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research,* 3rd edn., Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2005, p.443.
[191] J. Levy, 'Case studies: Types, designs, and logics of inference', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2008, p.3.

inductive case studies, are explicitly structured by a well-developed conceptual framework that focuses attention on some theoretically specified aspects, and neglects others.[192]

The second type of case study is the hypothesis-generating case study, which aims to generalise beyond the data. They "examine one or more cases for the purpose of developing more general theoretical propositions, which can then be tested through other methods, including large-N methods".[193]

Third, hypothesis-testing case studies aim to strengthen or reduce support for a theory, focus or extend the scope conditions of a theory, or determine which from two or more theories best explains a case, type, or general phenomenon.[194]

The fourth type is the plausibility probe, which is comparable to a pilot study in experimental or survey research. It allows the researcher to sharpen a hypothesis or theory, to refine the operationalisation or measurement of key variables, or to explore the suitability of a particular case as a vehicle for testing a theory, before engaging in costly and time-consuming research efforts.

As this study adopts an interpretive stance, the idiographic case study is the most appropriate to employ in order to understand Oman's involvement in regional conflict mediation, since the aim is to understand Oman's mediation efforts in their own right, rather than to generalise from them. The information about each case of Oman's mediation initiatives are constructed through

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[192] J. Levy, 'Case studies:', p.4.
[193] J. Levy, 'Case studies:', p.5.
[194] J. Levy, 'Case studies:', p.6.

collecting data related to the episode from different resources, including speeches by the Sultan, official documents and elite interviews with key decision makers, practitioners and experts. From an interpretive perspective, knowledge is a construction in the minds of individuals, and the role of the researcher is to understand, reconstruct, analyse and critique participants' views in a manner that leads to the construction of meaningful findings/outcomes.[195] As such, the researcher took constructionism as an epistemological stance, which allowed him to engage with the views and beliefs of the participants, trying to understand and construct reality from their perspective on the phenomena under investigation. The researcher moved between important themes produced in the analysis from each case study, and explored them with individual narratives and other documentary resources, comparing and contrasting them in order to draw some inferences from these case studies about why Oman has repeatedly become involved in mediation efforts.

3.5   **Case Selection**

This study aims principally to understand why Oman has repeatedly become involved in mediation. As such, it seeks to explain the development and consolidation of mediation as a tradition in Oman's foreign and security policy. As discussed in the introduction chapter, Oman has a track record of mediatory efforts; however, based on my research question, this study explores the evolution of Oman's use of mediation, by examining in more details two early cases of Omani mediation. These are the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), and the Yemeni Civil War of

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[195] E. Guba and Y. Lincoln, *Fourth generation evaluation*, London, Sage Publications, 1989, p. 154.

1994-1995. Additionally, the study will also briefly consider in conclusion the Iran nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015 and Oman's role in facilitating them, thereby demonstrating the depth of Oman's continued commitment to playing the role of mediator.

In chapter (5) the study examines Oman's mediation in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), which is the first major example of Omani mediation playing a key role in the mediation process to end conflict. In this sense, it is the point where mediation emerged as a policy option to secure Oman's national interests in the thinking of Omani policy makers. In order to examine the evolution of mediation as a tradition in foreign and security policy practice, the study will draw on the traditions of thought that are identified in chapter (4) to understand why Omani policy makers chose to act as mediators in response to the dilemma posed by the Iran-Iraq War. The Iran-Iraq War case is also used as an example in that it offers an opportunity to analyse Oman's role as a mediator in an intrastate conflict. The longevity of the conflict and Oman's steady commitment to act as a mediator to bring the war to an end are reasons that makes this case vital to study. In this context, it could be assumed that depending on the extent of their involvement in mediation efforts during Iraq-Iran War in the 1980s, had influenced Omani policy-makers' sense of mediation as a viable policy option and, therefore, the wish to maintain and secure these investments through repeated engagement seems to be a strong motive for Oman to adopt the same policy when responding to regional conflict. Moreover, it is also a critical case because it provides an example of Oman's mediation between the Sunni-led Iraqi regime and the Shia-Iranian regime, which will allow me to investigate how the aspect of Ibadhi ideology is related to Oman's mediation efforts, and how that made Oman uniquely suited to play the role of

mediator in the region. Additionally, this case provides an example of Oman becoming involved in mediation between major regional powers.

In chapter 6 the study will examine Oman's mediation efforts in the 1994 Yemeni Civil War. Here, the study considers how the policy of mediation developed across the two cases under investigation, and became consolidated as foreign and security policy practice. The Yemeni Civil War of 1994 is both the next major example of Omani mediation and the case in which the practice of mediation was first used again. As such, it is the point at which it is plausible to say that mediation is already beginning to be formulated as the policy option of choice. Therefore, by discussing this case I will be able to illustrate how mediation has become a 'first choice' policy rather than a policy of 'last resort'.

In addition to the criteria outlined above, it must be noted that the Iran-Iraq War and the Yemen Civil War were very different types of conflict in which Oman became involved in as a mediator. The Iran-Iraq War was an intrastate conflict, whereas the Yemeni Civil War was an interstate conflict, and therefore provided the opportunity to examine different kinds of Oman's mediatory practice, as well as to consider how these mediation efforts might be consolidated as aspects of Oman's traditional foreign and security policy. Equally important is the fact that these cases encompass the different kinds of major conflict in which Oman became involved as a mediator; therefore, it is more likely to gain relevant and enriched evidence about the selected case studies. Finally, these cases are well within the limits of the time period, which will allow me to trace and illustrate the development of Oman's reasons for getting involved in mediation over time. This illustration is completed by the discussion of the Iran nuclear case in the conclusion chapter,

which will enable me to illustrate the manner in which mediation has become part of Oman's new foreign policy tradition. It will show how Oman's use of mediation as a tool for resolving foreign policy dilemmas has led to the development of its reputation as a mediator, so that Oman is asked to mediate even when she is not facing an acute foreign policy dilemma of her own.

3.6   Data Gathering

As Mark Bevir and R. Rhodes indicate, an interpretive approach does not necessarily favour particular sources; indeed, on the contrary, "proponents of an interpretive approach might construct their interpretations using data generated by various techniques. They can draw on participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, mass surveys, statistical analysis, and formal models as well as reading memoirs, newspapers, and official and unofficial documents."[196] In order to facilitate answering the research questions, this study has relied on textual analysis of primary and secondary material, and to build on the interpretive approach, elite interviews were conducted with key policy makers, practitioners, and experts in the Omani Government.

3.6.1   Documents

Text or document analysis is used in order to generate evidence and acquire a comprehensive understanding of Oman's mediation role. The data in this thesis is generated from various primary sources, including Sultan Qaboos' annual speeches, which are particularly important.[197] Since coming to power in July 1970, Sultan Qaboos created a written record through his delivery

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[196] M. Bevir, R. Rhodes, 'Interpretation and its Others', p.187.
[197] His Majesty's annual speeches are available in print in various languages. They are also readily accessible online at the Ministry of Information web page. See
http://www.omanet.om/english/hmsq/hmsq3.asp?cat=hmsq

of an annual speech. As Joseph A. Kéchichian indicates, "no Arab head of state before Qaboos had engaged in a systematic annual accounting to his subjects for his decisions and actions."[198] Indeed, in these speeches Qaboos covered domestic, regional and international issues. He defined his vision, articulating policies to the people as well as setting the course for internal and regional stability, and often anticipated events or identified regional security trends. I have examined these speeches to identify the core beliefs and traditions informing Omani foreign policy, in order to trace the historical links between them, and to show how they influenced and shaped Sultan Qaboos' formulations of Oman's foreign policy orientation. I have reviewed a total of the nine most important of Sultan Qaboos' annual speeches, covering the period from 1970 to 1988. These speeches were delivered in Muscat, the capital city, and sometimes other major Omani cities such as Salalah, Sohar, Nizwah, Sur and Ibri, where they were attended by large audiences from Omani society, transmitted via Omani TV channels, and published in other media outlets. The Sultan's speeches were also made available to the public in print form and, more recently, digitally on the Internet.

As a point of illustration, examining the first few speeches of Sultan Qaboos enabled me to identify the Sultan's core ideas of Oman and key objectives of his sociopolitical project of nation-building. In 1970, Qaboos delivered two formal speeches to the Omani people. In his first speech on the day of his accession on 23rd July 1970, Qaboos recognises that the country in the past had been celebrated and strong, and would revive that glorious past to maintain a respectable place in the world. He also highlighted his primary objective of building a modern

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[198] J. Kéchichian, 'A vision of Oman: State of the Sultanate Speeches by Qaboos Bin Said 1970-2006, *Middle East Policy*, vol.15, no.4,2008, p. 112.

Omani state and to restore her past glories. The second speech was on 31st July 1970, on the occasion of his first arrival in Muscat, after assuming the reins of power. In this speech he emphasised the sense of national unity in the face of major challenges that country was facing, calling for the Omani people to work on unity and cooperation and to share the burden to build their country with the speed required to free her from the backwardness she had endured for so long. The speech Sultan Qaboos delivered on 18th November 1974 is also significantly useful because, in this speech he illustrated major foreign policy interests and outlined the contours of Oman's foreign policy in the 1970s. He explained the basis of Oman's foreign relations with other nations, highlighting the role of the ongoing civil war in Dhofar in determining Oman's attitude towards other countries, and respect of Oman's sovereignty.

Another example of Sultan Qaboos' annual speech is his speech on 18 November 1980. This speech is particularly important, because of the critical regional issues raised by the Iran-Iraq War, which were preoccupying the Arab Gulf States rulers. In this speech Qaboos expressed his view on the war and its implications on Gulf states' internal security. This speech is also important because the Sultan would also express the Omani position on the war. Equally important is his speech of 1985, is very significant in the way it signaled a change in Oman's attitude towards the Iran-Iraq War. In this speech Sultan Qaboos, for the first time since the outbreak of the war, declared Oman's intention and interests to act as a mediator between both sides of the conflict in order to end the war by peaceful means.

These are crucial sources in helping me to reconstruct the attitudes, policies and intentions of Sultan Qaboos as he was key Omani decision maker, and therefore, it was essential to examine these speeches to search for clues of the Sultan's beliefs and intentions. In addition to these speeches, I have also drawn on several interviews that the Sultan and key Omani officials made with various domestic, regional and international media outlets, which have provided valuable insights into Oman's foreign policy approach. These interviews were accessible online, mainly from the official websites of the respective institutions or in newspapers that published them.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to gain access to official government documents, such as policy papers or meeting records of documents, that carried the Sultan's directives to his subordinates pertaining specifically to Oman's mediation activities, due to serious restrictions and complexities in accessing official documents, which are treated as top secret. Those documents that contain the decision making process or address how and why the government reacted in a certain manner in response to some political crisis or episode are strictly not accessible to academic researchers. However, I was able to obtain a large number of copies of official documents released by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office archive. I have accessed this collection of confidential soft copies documents, primarily via an online platform of the library of University of Michigan on the US official database website. This was referred to me by a friend of mine from Sultan Qaboos University who was doing his sabbatical year at the University of Michigan.[199] These documents covered the period from when Sultan Qaboos came to power in July 1970, up to 1982. The collection includes meeting records of high British

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[199] The documents can be accessed through the permalink, https://www.lib.umich.edu/database/link/42707

officials with the Sultan and other top Omani officials, and correspondence letters between the Omani and British governments that address the domestic policies, external political relationship which concerned the Sultan's perceptions and beliefs on a number of regional and international affairs, and which are very much related to this thesis's topic.

Among these official documents is a meeting record of the British ambassador in Muscat meeting with Sultan Qaboos in December 1971. The meeting discusses the first visit by the Sultan to Saudi Arabia to discuss the issue of Imamate leaders who were in exile in Saudi Arabia. This meeting record underlines the Sultan's impression of his meeting with King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, and highlighting his concerns regarding the relationship with Saudi Arabia and its support to the Imamate's leaderships and activists, and how this issue influenced Oman's policy approach towards Saudi Arabia. Another useful document was a record of conversation between the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Oman, from Friday 1 June 1979, discussing Oman's position on the Camp David Peace Accord. In addition, there are several documents that pertain to Oman's security concerns following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, such as a confidential latter from Sultan Qaboos to the British Prime Minister, on 19 June 1979, discussing Oman's security concerns, a meeting record of the Head of the Political Department at Oman Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the British Ambassador in Muscat on 19 December 1979, discussing Omani concerns regarding the security of the Straits of Hormuz, and a meeting record of the Omani Ambassador to the UK with the British Foreign and Commonwealth Minister on 07 December 1979, discussing Oman's proposal for Gulf security.

Furthermore, there are a number of documents of great importance relating to Oman's positions during the Iran-Iraq War. Among these documents was a telegram from the American Embassy in Muscat to the Omani Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, containing discussion of an alleged report that Oman under the pressure of the Arab countries had granted and approved for Iraq to use Omani military for an attack on Iran. Another document was a meeting record between the Head of Political Department at Oman Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the British Ambassador in Muscat, discussing security in the Straits of Hormuz following the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War. There are also documents concerning Oman's relations with South Yemen, such as an official statement issued by the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 25 August 1980, regarding Oman's relations with South Yemen.

In fact, I found these official documents very useful in gaining an insight into Sultan Qaboos' ideas for Oman and his view of regional security, highlighting Oman's position on some regional issues during that time. This enabled the researcher to construct knowledge about the beliefs and practice of Oman's foreign and security policy that were in place as of 1980. Moreover, secondary sources such as books, journal articles, newspaper articles and media reports were also used to help construct an interpretation of the manner in which Omani policy-makers adopted mediation as foreign policy practice.

3.6.2 Elites Interview

In order to supplement these textual and documentary sources and address the remaining interpretative gaps, data has also been gathered by conducting a number of semi-structured elite interviews with Omani officials. An elite interview is a common approach for generating data

in an interpretive case study research. Indeed, interpretive researchers emphasise the use of interviewing as a data collection method to explore ideas that cannot be observed. Elite interviews are defined as interviewing a group of individuals, who hold, or have held, a high-status or senior position in society and as such, are likely to have had more influence on political outcomes than general members of the public.[200] It is widely recognised within the literature of political science that elite interviews are an important instrument if one needs to establish what a set of people think, what their 'attitudes, values, and beliefs' are, or how they interpret an event or set of events.[201] It allows the researcher to understand the perceptions of key policy makers and what may, or may not, have led them to think or act the way they did.[202] For this research, it was important to use the elite interview approach to tap into key policy makers' prior experience to attempt to understand Oman's motives for acting as a mediator during regional conflict. Semi-structured elite interviews were conducted with a fairly open framework which allowed for focused, conversational, two-way communication. Unlike the questionnaire framework, where a rigid set of formal questions are formulating ahead of time, semi structured interviewing starts with more general questions or a broad number of themes.

Thus, to explore the key beliefs and traditions that informed Oman's foreign and security policy practice, and gain comprehensive understanding of Oman's motives behind its mediation efforts, I elected to interview as many as possible of these individuals who were involved in making foreign and security policy decisions in general. and decisions that related to mediation initiatives during the Iran-Iraq War and the 1994 Yemeni Civil War in particular. I was able to

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[200] D. Richards, 'Elite interviewing: Approaches and pitfalls', *Politics,* vol. 16, no.3, 1996, p.199.
[201] J. Aberbach and B. Rockman, 'Conducting and coding elite interviews', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol.35, no. 4, 2002, p.673.
[202] D. Richards, 'Elite interviewing', p.204.

conduct about 10 interviews with different high Omani officials occupying senior government positions. Of those I had the opportunity to interview, a senior advisor to the Sultan who worked within the inner circle of Sultan Qaboos since the early 1970s was a former minister of information, and had held several leading civil service roles since he joined the government in 1970. His interview provided me with valuable information regarding the Sultan's socio-political program and his idea for Oman when he came to power in 1970, which enabled me to understand the context for the formulation of Oman's first foreign and security policy in the post-1970 era, as well as helping to develop my chapter on the traditions of thought that shaped Oman's foreign policy behaviour. I also had the opportunity to interview the Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, who was Oman's ambassador to Lebanon from 1971 -1974, and the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from (1974-1997) and then the Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs from (1997 -2020). He provided me with a valuable insight into Oman's foreign policy orientation as it developed during the 1970s. In addition, I also interviewed the current Omani Foreign Minister who, was a Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when I interviewed him back January 2019, and had joined the Foreign Ministry as a diplomat in 1988. In 1989 he was appointed as the first secretary, and he established the Office of Political Analysis to provide systematic assessment and policy analysis of key international and regional issues. In 1990 promoted to councilor, and in 1996 he was promoted to ambassador. In 2000 he was promoted to undersecretary, and then became Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry in 2007. He was particularly helpful in deepening my understanding of the development of mediation as a policy option in Omani foreign policy. I also interviewed the head of the Arab Affairs Department during the 1980s, who was involved in Oman's mediation efforts during the Iran Iraq War.

In addition, I interviewed the former Omani Ambassador to Yemen (1990-1996), who gave me valuable insight into Oman's foreign policy towards Yemen and its mediation role in the 1994 Yemeni Civil War. I also interviewed a retired high ranking Omani security officer who was a member of the border negotiation committee between Oman and Yemen between 1990 and 1992. In addition, I had the opportunity to interview a high ranking Omani military officer who was Oman's representative in the committee designed to support the merger of the two former armies of south and north Yemen after unification in May1992, and who was involved in Oman's mediation efforts at the outset of the conflict in 1994. Finally, from the Royal Office I was able to interview the Advisor to His Majesty the Sultan, his envoy during the Iran nuclear agreement, and other three high ranking officers, who were invaluable for understanding Oman's mediation role in the Iran nuclear deal in 2015. For a full, anonymized list of interviewees, with dates, see the Appendix (A).

As outlined above, the interviewees were selected among key informants who were assumed to have first-hand information about the topic, according to their position and relevance to Oman's foreign policy making, as well as their experience pertinent to my research, and particularly their relevance to Oman's mediation efforts in the cases under investigation. I also used a snowballing technique to gain further access to individuals whose experience was pertinent to my research. For example, in the course of my interview with interviewee 2, he referred me to interviewee 5, who had relevant experience with regard to Oman's mediation efforts in the Iran-Iraq War and was a member of the Omani delegation that met with Saddam Hussain to discuss the Omani mediation initiative. All interviews were conducted in the later stage of my work, after having studied the related documents, identified the gaps and achieving a good level of

knowledge on the subject under investigation. This was particularly important as it helped me to gain command of the material.

Having identified my interviewees, I than sent an official letter to every one of them along with a covering letter from the head of my military organisation requesting their support and setting out clearly my status, explaining the nature and objectives of my research topic and assuring them that all information they provided would be handled with a high degree of confidentiality. It should be noted here that due to the sensitivity of the subject, most of the interviewees preferred to remain anonymous, and therefore, it was agreed with them that I would not directly attribute them in the thesis. In order to protect their privacy, they were identified using numbers to cite them in my analysis, chapters, and no actual names of people or institutions were used in the analysis so as to protect their anonymity. In addition, all interviewees were reminded that I would be very happy to send them a transcript of the interview to correct or amend where necessary. An information sheet and consent form is shown in appendix (B).

To conduct interviews, an aide memoire with a set of broad and open-ended questions is prepared, which I referred to as the interview developed. This had helped me to maintain control over the course of the interview, as well as to ensure that I had covered all the issues I wished to discuss. During the course of the interviews I remained open minded whilst exploring the interviewee's explanations. This open approach allowed for new ideas to emerge rather than emanating from a constructed questionnaire framework. For the full list of questions drawn on, see the Appendix (C).

In the course of the interviews, I was first interested in identifying the key traditions of thought that had shaped Omani foreign and security policy that were in place by 1980. As such,

interviewees were left free to explain things in their own words and encouraged to give descriptions of the core ideas and beliefs that informed Sultan Qaboos' thinking when he was crafting the first Omani foreign and security policy during the 1970s. Other discussed points including, the most influential factors that had shaped Omani foreign and security policy in the 1970s; the role of Oman's historical legacy plays in shaping the Sultan's way of thinking; the effects of the civil war in Dhofar on shaping Oman's foreign policy; the influence of the Ibadhi traditions on Oman's foreign policy orientations; the influence of the Sultan's personality on Oman's foreign and security policy; the main objectives of Oman's foreign and security policy during the 1970s; the main security concerns; how did key Omani policy makers perceive Oman's regional position; how did Omani policy makers (elites) conceive, Oman's national interest; how had Oman's national interests been secured; the key characteristic of Oman's foreign and security policy that were in place by 1980. This discussion helped me to understand the background against which Omani policy makers constructed their worldviews, including their place within it, and their interests and values.

Having discussed the key traditions of thought shaping Omani foreign and security policy that were in place by 1980, I was keen to understand how these traditions of thought were drawn upon and adjusted in the face of dilemmas, leading to the emergence of mediation as a policy option of choice in light of both the Iran-Iraq War and then the 1994 Yemeni Civil War. In order to do that interviewees were encouraged to offer explanations on how did the Iran-Iraq War/1994 Yemeni Civil War presented a dilemma or a challenge to existing Omani foreign and security policy. Other questions include: what were the most security concerns; what policy options were available to Omani policy makers to counter the dilemma, and how they

decided between different competing policy options; how did mediation emerged as policy option of choice in the face of the dilemma posed by the conflict; why did Oman choose to act as a mediator in response to the dilemma? Appendix (D) illustrates how I have used the traditions and dilemmas framework to analysis the interview material by presenting a sample of interview responses to the questions I asked about one of my cases, which is the Iran-Iraq War.

While the interviewees were given enough time to answer the question to ensure that the interview did not stray too far from the topic, I kept reacting to what the interviewee had said, and if necessary drew him very politely to the subject I was trying to understand. I always ensured to end my interview by asking the interviewee if there were any further issues that I had not touched on, upon which he would wish to comment.

Some of the interviewees agreed for the interview to be recorded, while other were not willing to be recorded. However, for those who refused to be recorded I took detailed notes and kept summarising their answers before moving on to the next point. The majority of the interviews were held in the interviewees' offices; one took place at the interviewee's home. The interviews were all conducted and transcribed in Arabic and then translated into English. In addition, each recording of an interview was transcribed immediately after the interview had been carried out, and the transcription given to the interviewee for his approval. This helped to improve my interviewing skills and enabled me to get a clearer idea as to what was needed in the next interview, thereby successively improving the quality of each interview.

As previously stated in the introduction chapter, the aim of this study is to understand why Oman repeatedly became engaged in mediating regional conflicts. In order to gain a better

understanding of Oman's mediation efforts, the data analysis was guided by applying the interpretive theoretical framework advanced by Mark Bevir, as discussed earlier in this chapter, that focuses on beliefs, traditions, and dilemmas, placing the methodological focus on 'situated agents' as foreign policy decision-makers, responding to policy dilemmas by drawing on – and sometimes adapting – foreign policy traditions in response to dilemmas. The analysis has been carried out in two steps. In the first empirical chapter, the aim was to identify the key traditions of thought shaping Omani foreign and security policy that were in place by 1980. This was achieved by identifying the core ideas that Sultan Qaboos was working with when initially crafting Oman's modern foreign policy, examining the background against which Sultan Qaboos came to hold his beliefs, and tracing the relevant historical connections between them through time. In the second step I examine how Omani policy makers draw upon and adjusted these traditions of thought in the face of dilemmas, leading to the emergence of mediation as a policy option of choice.

It is essential to recognise the possibility of some methodological concerns which may exist in applying this approach. One concern, is that the information that the interviewee is providing can be potentially of a subjective nature, as most of the interviewees were elites from various ministries and state institutions. As such, they are likely to say what their institutions want them to say. Bevir and Rhodes argue that researchers applying an interpretive approach can avoid subjectivity by comparing bundles of narratives to assess their success in relating facts to one another, highlighting similarities and differences, and exploring continuities and disjunctions. In order to avoid bias in my analysis to the greatest possible extent, I tried to crosscheck the data

provided by the interviewees, by comparing and contrasting it with that of other interviewees or other primary and secondary resources to the greatest possible extent. This information was also supplemented with the confidential documents released by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office highlighted above that gave additional information in their own right. Another strategy I used to cross check the sources was during the interview, when I would sometimes cite information from earlier interviewees or from my preliminary findings, which in some cases contradicted the interviewee's narrative, and ask him to comment upon them. This was particularly helpful to cross check the sources.

Another concern of the study, is that the number of interviewee selected is relatively small and it is likely that individuals interviewed were not willing to provide opinions that diverge from the dominant foreign policy practices in Oman. However, Sultan Qaboos was the dominant figure in formulating Omani foreign and security policy. So, even if they are just dutifully reporting the Sultan's views, that is not entirely a bad thing, as it is the Sultan's views that this study seeking to understand. Also, in an examination of the Omani political elite, we must assume that all ideas and new understandings that form the country policies or approach will usually have the support of the Sultan.

3.7 **Summary**

This chapter has outlined the study's methodological and practical approach and its justifications. The study's theoretical approach has followed an aspect of constructionism – interpretivism. The researcher has decided to undertake an interpretivist approach to achieve the

overall objectives of the study, as this approach is characterised by its ability to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation. An interpretivist case study method will be employed as it will enable the researcher to explore the drivers behind Oman's mediation efforts during regional conflicts. It is considered that this strategy will prove to be the most suitable method to allow the researcher to gain an in-depth insight by examining the phenomena under investigation from different angles, and by using multiple sources of evidence, including semi-structured interviews with key policy makers and practitioners, as well as document analysis. Finally, the chapter discusses the issues of validity, acknowledging that it is not the aim of this study to achieve generalisable inferences that will be applicable to other small states. However, it will attempt to achieve generalisable inferences that can inform us as to why Oman repeatedly becomes involved in conflict mediation, and about Omani foreign policy behaviour in general.

4 Chapter Four: Traditions of Thought in Omani Foreign and Security Policy

4.1 Introduction

As highlighted in the methodology chapter, from the standpoint of the interpretivist framework adopted here, policy makers as 'situated agents' develop policy in response to dilemmas by drawing on inherited traditions.[203] Therefore, in order to adequately understand the background to the emergence of mediation as a new policy option in Oman's foreign and security policy, there is a need to identify the relevant traditions of thought which formed background to their actions, in order to establish their coherence and trace their relevant historical connections. In this sense, an interpretive account of the motives that lies behind Oman's mediation efforts during regional upheavals should aim to identify the traditions of thought that shaped decision making and informed policy makers' understanding of external developments, trace how they came to view these upheavals as policy dilemmas, reveal what they took to be their available responses to these dilemmas, and thus explain how policy makers responded, as situated agents, to these dilemmas.

The primary aim of this chapter is to identify the traditions of thought informing Omani foreign and security policy that were in place by 1980. In order to achieve this, the chapter will focus primarily on identifying Sultan Qaboos' core ideas and beliefs that informed his formulation of the first Omani foreign and security policy as a modern independent nation. The chapter argues

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[203]M. Bevier, O. Daddow and I. Hall, 'Interpreting global security', p.5.

that in the process of constructing Oman's modern foreign and security policy, Sultan Qaboos sought to put together a multifaceted programme for Oman, based on a series of 'old' Omani traditions, intertwined with a set of 'new' ideas, drawn from the Sultan's reading of Oman's position and the situation he found Oman in the late 1960s, and his perception of the threats and the challenges that were facing the country's sovereignty. The core aims of this political programme were to consolidate national unity and national independence. The chapter further argues that in developing this programme and, especially, in articulating it to the Omani people, Sultan Qaboos drew on a series of traditional ideas and historical references. Accordingly, two broad distinct sets of key ideas and beliefs emerged as a potent force in framing the Sultan's political programme. The first was the idea of Oman as a distinctive cultural identity within its regional context; and second, the idea of Oman as being existentially vulnerable to external interference in virtue of her geopolitical position. These ideas on which the Sultan drew to frame his political programme also therefore came to frame understandings of Oman's foreign policy orientation as it developed during the 1970s.

The chapter will show how these ideas emerged out of the Sultan's political programme during the 1970s, giving rise to a cautiously crafted, balanced, foreign and security policy. The chapter will further argue that by 1980, anyone working on Omani foreign and security policy had been socialised into thinking of Oman as possessing a distinctive cultural identity in her region and as remaining existentially vulnerable to external interference. Therefore, by 1980, these two sets of ideas formed the basis of a by now traditional 'web of beliefs', shared among Omani policy makers, which would inform any new foreign policy initiatives.

The body of this chapter is divided into five parts. The first part will outline the historical context in which Sultan Qaboos found Oman when he came to power in July 1970. The second part will identify the core ideas and beliefs that informed the Sultan's formulation of the first foreign and security policy of the modern Omani state. In the third part I will discuss the structure of the Omani policy-making machinery, highlighting the dominance of the Sultan within it. The fourth section will outline how these two sets of ideas gave rise to a policy of balanced approach that was in place by the end of 1970s. The fifth and concluding part brings the key findings of the previous parts together, by arguing that by 1980, with the breakout of the Iran-Iraq War, we can regard the two key ideas of Oman as possessing a distinctive cultural identity in her region and as being historically vulnerable to external interference by virtue of her geopolitical position are deeply established traditional understandings, which subsequently formed the background against which Omani policy-makers reasoned and acted when encountering policy dilemmas.

4.2   Historical Setting

To unpack the core traditions of thought that Sultan Qaboos was working with, we must examine the historical background against which he came to hold his beliefs, and trace their historical links. The evolution of Oman's modern foreign and security policy began to take shape with Sultan Qaboos' ascension to power on 23 July 1970, when he took control of a country which was on the brink of collapse and fragmentation. Domestically, the country was in a state of major crisis, as it was facing severe internal problems of political division. The people of the interior retained a latent resentment toward the authority of the sultans of Muscat, due to the historical struggle between those tribes who supported the 'Imamate' as a religious system of

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governance and the monarchic ruling system.[204] This political struggle between supporters of the 'Imamate' and the Sultan had characterised Omani politics since 1913.[205] Since then, Omani history had been marked by ongoing internal conflicts between central authority and the interior region. The last conflict between the two sides broke out in the reign of Sultan Qaboos' father in 1954, and ended in 1959, when supporters of the Imamate were defeated by the Sultan's forces, with the assistance of the British military.[206] However, the leading figures of the 'Imamate' fled to Saudi Arabia where they were provided with shelter, political and financial support by the Saudi government, and continued to pioneer guerrilla warfare activities inside Oman until the early 1970s. This led to a shift in the character of the Imamate's opposition to the sultan's rule in Muscat, in a manner that pushed it to seek the help of a number of Arab countries, opening the door for further external interference in Oman's internal affairs. This division was further deepened by the breakout of the communist-oriented insurgency in the country's southern province of Dhofar, near the border of Yemen, in 1964. When Sultan Qaboos assumed power in July 1970, the country was in the midst of a separatist communist insurgency. The insurgents were receiving substantial financial and military support from the USSR, China, Iraq and South Yemen, and the country was turning into an arena for Cold War rivalry.[207] This situation in turn resulted in Oman being geopolitically vulnerable to external interference, economic hardship, underdevelopment, and entrenched internal disunity. As of July 1970, there could have been few countries less developed than Oman, as the country had no

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[204] R. Barrett, 'Oman: the present in the context of a fractured past'. No. JSOU-11-5. Joint Special Operations University Pres, 2011, p.27. https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a591975.pdf (accessed 14 April 2020)
[205] R. Barrett, 'Oman: the present in the context of a fractured past', p.27.
[206] R. Barrett, 'Oman: the present in the context of a fractured past', p.41.
[207] J. Jones and N. Ridout, *A History of Modern Oman*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 142.

communications, apart from two graded roads, only three primary schools, and one hospital.[208]

Reviewing the situation in Oman in early 1970, the British Consul General in Muscat indicates that "Omanis were dissatisfied under the previous regime, and more active elements among them had left the country seeking better opportunities for themselves."[209] Some of these challenges were also reflected in Sultan Qaboos' speech to his people, which he delivered from the radio house on August 16, 1970: "Many of our gifted sons and daughters fled (the country) in despair to make a life for themselves in other lands, and we were faced with a war waged against our people with utmost cruelty by the surrogates of those same evil forces which have reduced so many millions in this world to a life of misery and slavery."[210]

This lack of 'national unity' and political division was reflected implicitly in the official title of the country, "Sultanate of Muscat and Oman", where Muscat represented the territories under the control of the Sultan, which included the main ports and much of the coast, while Oman represented most of the interior part of the country, ruled by the 'Imam'.[211] Externally, Oman was isolated from both regional and international affairs, as it had no diplomatic or consular missions anywhere in the world, and the only foreign missions in Muscat were the British and Indian consulates.[212] Oman's foreign affairs in practical terms were being carried out through London. Until 1971, the country was not recognised by the United Nations as an independent

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[208] M. Al-Khalili, *Oman's Foreign Policy*, p.65.
[209] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, diplomatic reports no. 126/71, '*Sultanate of Oman: Annual Review for 1970*', 4 January 1971.
[210] Cited in A. Maamiry, *Whither Oman*, New Delhi: Lancers, 1981, p. vii.
[211] J. Wilkinson, 'The Oman question: The background to the political geography of South-East Arabia', *Geographical Journal,* 1971, p.365.
[212] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *British Policy Towards Oman*, Policy Paper, NBM 3/548/2, 18 May 1971.

state, because of this domestic political division and the dispute between the Sultan and the Imam. It was only in October 1971 that Oman was officially accepted as a member into the UN, which served to demonstrate the international community's recognition of Oman's as a sovereign state under the leadership of Sultan Qaboos. Therefore, once in power, Sultan Qaboos' main objective was to re-establish the modern nation state of Oman. In fact, he had to reconstruct a new Omani state, a state which would be politically united and a nation which would be socially unified. From this perspective, the manner in which the Sultan and his closest advisors sought to reposition Oman in its immediate region and the wider world during the 1970s tells us a great deal about how they had come to perceive its identity, its national interests and its role.

4.3 Key Ideas and Beliefs Underpinning Sultan Qaboos' Political Programme

In this section, I will identify the key ideas and beliefs that informed the political programme on which Sultan Qaboos embarked when he came to power in July 1970. It argues that this programme revolved around two central aims, each of which was rationalised by a series of traditional ideas about Oman, its history, and its geopolitical position: 'consolidating national unity', and 'consolidating national independence'.

4.3.1 Consolidating National Unity

As indicated above, Sultan Qaboos inherited a country which was divided politically and socially, and on the brink of collapse and fragmentation. As Marc Valeri put it, Sultan Qaboos

"inherited a territory without a state."[213] In this context, Sultan Qaboos' main task when he came to power was to establish his control and authority over unified Omani territories. Therefore, building a unified national identity lay at the heart of the Sultan's comprehensive political project of rebuilding the modern Omani nation and restoring its position in the region and the wider world. This process became to be known as the 'renaissance' or awakening (al-nahda) of Oman in Omani popular narratives, and is almost exclusively ascribed to the individual agency of Sultan Qaboos. With his inspiring speeches, Sultan Qaboos' terminology produced a psychological effect upon the Omani people by emphasising the importance of 'national unity' within his project of 'nation-building', heralding a 'renaissance' in stating, "if we [Omanis] work in unity and cooperation, we will regenerate that glorious past and we will take a respectable place in the world."[214] Qaboos had engaged in a systematic annual accounting to his people for his decisions and actions. His annual speeches form a road map to various aspects of the political, economic and social life of the Omani people. Making sure that Omani people shared these inspirations, the annual speeches were delivered on the occasion of the Omani 'National Days' at a stadium in Muscat, where a mass audience attend the occasions from all over the country. The speeches were transmitted on Oman's TV, broadcast through Omani Radio, and were also made available to Omani people in print form. Young Omanis were also exposed to Sultan Qaboos' views in their school classes.

As such, it was not surprising that from the outset the Sultan, took immediate and decisive steps to unify his country, by changing the country's name and flag to demonstrate his resolve to unite the country and create a unified Omani nation. He changed the country's name from the

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[213] M. Valeri, *Oman: Politics and society in the Qaboos state*, Hurst & Company, 2009. p.4.
[214] HM Sultans Qaboos Speech, July 1970.

'Sultanate of Muscat and Oman', which reflected the country's political division between the central authority and Imamate forces, to the 'Sultanate of Oman'. This was clearly manifested in his first speech to the Omani people shortly after his ascension to the throne. Sultan Qaboos announced on the radio that;

"*One of the matters that is of great importance is our decision to change the name of the country. From now on, our dear land will be known as the Sultanate of Oman. Our belief that this change is the beginning of an enlightened new era, and a symbol of our determination to have our people united in our march towards progress. There is no difference anymore between the coast and the interior, and between them and the southern province, all of whom are one people.*"[215]

Subsequently, articulating Oman's distinctive national character became an urgent necessity for creating a unified Omani nation state. In pursuing this objective of constructing the Omani nation state post 1970, Sultan Qaboos sought to reshape Omani national identity. Indeed, the concept of a uniform Omani identity did not exist prior to Sultan Qaboos' assumption of power.[216] In this respect, Oman's modern national identity has evolved around two key themes, which create a sense of Oman as a distinctive national cultural identity within its regional context. The first aspect of this idea places emphasis on Oman's historical image of itself as the oldest independent political entity in its regional context, with a longstanding history of being an empire. The second is the influence of the Ibadhi tradition on Omani society. Significantly,

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[215] HM Sultans Qaboos Speech, 23 July 1970.
[216] M. Elgazzar, C. Haynes and T. Mace, 'Building an Omani National Identity: Economic and Social Struggle in Transitions', George Washington University, IMES Capstone Paper Series, May 2020, https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/6/1613/files/2020/05/Final-Capstone-Project.pdf , (accessed 15 April 2021).

each of these two aspects plays a role in the construction of the modern Omani nation state as a 'distinctive' national cultural national identity within its regional context.

Anthony Smith states that countries may construct versions of history to suit particular political circumstances, but they usually do not do so in a vacuum, drawing on existing myths and stories, and cultural styles and themes.[217] From this perspective, the Sultan placed emphasis on the distinctiveness of Oman's historical and cultural legacies, which he regarded as being distinctive and worth elevating above regional geographical identities, thereby preserving them against external influences. In his first speech to the Omani nation in 1970, Sultan Qaboos articulated this sense of historical greatness to support his development goals, asserting, "Our country in the past was famous and strong. If we work in unity and co-operation, we will regenerate that glorious past and we will take a respectable place in the world."[218] When the Sultan referred to the country's glorious past in his address to the Omani people, he recalled a number of historical associations within Oman's collective memory. Indeed, Oman has a very long history of being an independent political entity. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was an empire that stretched from Gwadar on the coast of modern Pakistan to Zanzibar on the coast of East Africa, with an active and an independent foreign policy. As John E. Peterson points out, "among the six Arab Gulf states, Oman stands alone in enjoying an ancient feeling of nation. The national identity of the smaller states is in large part a creation of the last few decades while Saudi Arabia is a collection of disparate regional identities cobbled together over the course of less than a century. Oman, on the other hand, has existed as a recognized geographical and

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[217] A. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 1991, p.178.
[218] HM Sultans Qaboos Speech, July 1970.

cultural entity encompassing eastern Arabia for several millennia."[219] Recognising this, Sultan Qaboos sought to promote the political symbols of the past, in order to construct a positive image for the modern Omani state. The Omani education curriculums placed a strong emphasis on Oman's long-standing history as a maritime nation and the role of the Omani nation in trade and exchange. Moreover, references to the historical past of Oman as an empire and the role of Omanis in expelling the Portuguese from Oman and the Gulf region is also repeatedly reflected in the narratives of Omani officials and the government media. As Okawa Mayuko noted, the vocabulary of the 'Omani Empire' is generally used not only in school textbooks but also in histories of Zanzibar that both the government and individual Omanis have published.[220] Indeed, the Omani government has positively utilised government-designated textbooks in public education as a means of nation-building, to consolidate national identity and convey this glorious historical past as a public memory. The idea of the Omani Empire is emphasised as the golden age in Omani history and a model of Arab civilisation. This is also presented as a means to assert Oman's superiority in terms of longevity, when compared with its neighbouring Arab Gulf states such as the UAE, or even its largest Arab neighbour, Saudi Arabia. This in turn lent Oman a sense of distinctiveness in its national identity within its regional context. The sense of being a historical empire, also, means that Oman feels like an 'equal player' to other major powers in the region. For example, interviewee (1) argued that "the long standing history of

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[219] J. Peterson, 'Oman: A State Elaborating A Nation." Identity Seekers: Nationhood and Nationalism in Gulf Monarchies', *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, 16 May 2019, p.8, https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/commentary_peterson_16.05.2019_0.pdf (accessed 14 August 2019).

[220] M. OKAWA, 'The Empire of Oman in the Formation of Oman's National History: An Analysis of School Social Studies Textbooks and Teachers' Guidelines', *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies,* vol.31, no. 1, 2015, p. 109, https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/ajames/31/1/31_KJ00010032648/_pdf/-char/ja , (accessed 05 March 2019)

being an empire has given Oman confidence when dealing with other major players in the region, in particular Saudi Arabia and Iran."[221] Similarly, interviewee (3) supported this argument by saying that "our understanding and comprehending of Oman's history as a naval power with its historical roots that dealt with various international and regional powers gave Omanis a great ability to deal with the competing interests of major regional powers and the ability to be patient and study matters in depth".[222]

To consolidate this sense of distinctiveness, the Sultan also emphasised Oman's cultural legacy. As stressed by the Sultan himself, the key to his success in building the Omani nation state lay in "the adoption of the advantages of modern society while preserving the ancient Omani traditions and culture." [223] Hence, rather than rejecting national traditions, the Sultan incorporated Oman's cultural legacy into current circumstances and the construction of modern Oman's national identity. In this context, the sense of pride in Oman's heritage was said to support the process of building a unified national identity post-1970, and to reflect the Sultan's understanding of Oman's identity and its position within its regional context and the wider world. As noted by Marc Valeri, Oman, "traditionally on the fringe of the Arab world," has under Sultan Qaboos pursued two potentially conflicting objectives: "to find its place in that region, while underlining its originality."[224] Indeed, while working on ending Oman's isolation, in order to reintegrate it in regional and world affairs, the Sultan also sought to establish Oman's distinctive position within its regional context. Therefore, the Sultan placed much emphasis on

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[221] Interview with Interviewee (1), 25 April 2018.
[222] Interview with Interviewee (3), 15 May 2018.
[223] Sultan Qaboos, Interviewed by A. Joyce, *Middle East Policy*, vol. 3. no. 4, 1st January 1995. https://www.mepc.org/node/4882 (accessed 18 April 2019)
[224] M. Valeri, *Oman: Politics and society in the Qaboos state,* p.77.

the importance of internal cohesion and the need to follow Oman's national principles in conjunction with global developments, and the need to engage regionally and internationally. This was seen as essential in enabling Oman to promote its foreign policy, restore its glorious past, and its historical role. As noted by the Sultan, 'the key to Oman's recovery and to regain its active historical role in all domains lies in the country's national cohesion and the nation's domestic building.'[225] It was therefore suggested that both state policy and Oman's revival in particular should be based on these foundations for the consolidation of Omani society in what can be considered traditional values and Omani national culture. Reflecting these concerns, Sultan Qaboos issued a decree in 1977 creating the Ministry of National Heritage, with a mandate to safeguard national traditions.[226] In fact, since he came to power, the Sultan has actively pursued a policy of national integration and modernisation, smoothing over the region's political divisions through the practices of heritage.[227] In this manner, cultural heritage is used to pull together different ethno-religious groups' presence on Omani territory, while simultaneously establishing a distinctive national cultural identity that distinguishes Oman as a nation from its neighbours in the region.

The second element that is closely linked to Oman's distinctive cultural identity is the sense of Omani identity, as both shared with other Arab states, but also being distinctive in light of the influence of the Ibadhi tradition. Although Oman is an Arab state, Oman's majority Ibadhi population neither belongs to the Sunni sect nor the Shia sect, which makes it somewhat

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[225] Sultan Qaboos, Interviewed by the Egyptian Journal '*the Republic'*, 08 July 1972.
[226] Royal Decree no. 77/20, 1977.
[227] A. Sachedina, *Of Living Traces and Revived Legacies: Unfolding Futures in the Sultanate of Oman*, Ph. D, diss., Berkeley, University of California, 2013, p.1.
http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/Sachedina_berkeley_0028E_13852.pdf (accessed 12 April 2020).

distinctive within its regional context. There are two important aspects of 'Ibadhism' that have contributed greatly to the development of the tradition of thought around Oman's national identity. First, 'Ibadhism' gave Oman a distinctive identity and position as the only Muslim state in the region with a majority population of the 'Ibadhi' branch of Islam, locating it at a crossroads between the flaring tensions amongst Sunni Arab Gulf states and Shia Persia. The people of Oman adopted the 'Ibadhi' doctrine in the mid eighth century, and since then become independent from the central Islamic states (Umayyad and Abbasid and Ottoman caliphates). Since that time, "Ibadhism' has truly become the cement of the emergent Omani identity, strengthened by the building of a political and geographical entity identifiable from abroad, 'al-misr- al-umaniyya' (the Omani country)." [228] In this respect, it is important to note that throughout most of its history, Oman has been predominantly ruled by Ibadhi leaders. As such, Ibadhi doctrines have played an important role in shaping the modern political history and national identity of Oman. The fact that the majority of Omani people belong to the Ibadhi sect has provided Omanis with a strong sense of distinctive cultural identity. However, this does not suggest that the Sultan or his advisors are themselves necessarily religious, or consult Ibadhi theological text when confronted with a dilemma. Nevertheless, as Linda Funsch has established, "for more than thirteen centuries 'Ibadism' has served as a guiding principle for many people in this land [Oman] suggesting the appropriate dynamic between the ruler and his people, while also providing a model for social interaction, based on moderation and inclusivity."[229] This suggests that the intellectual implications of the Ibadhi doctrines have been

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[228] M. Valeri, 'Identity Politics and Nation Building under Sultan Qaboos', In L. G. Potter, *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf,* New York, Oxford University Press,2013, p 186.
[229] L.P, Funsch, *Oman Reborn: Balancing Tradition and Modernization*. Springer, 2015.p25.

injected into the political traditions unknowingly because they are culturally entrenched, as they are passed from generation to generation. This is often expressed indirectly in the narrative of the Omani political elites in reference to the uniqueness of the Omani community structure. As expressed by Sultan Qaboos, "our strength lies in the great traditions of our glorious Omani culture, and the teachings and laws of our holy religion."[230] Interviewee (1) affirms that "no doubt, the 'Ibadhi' thought contributed greatly to the formation of Omani personality and behaviour, which was reflected in the unique political approach of the state in dealing with the crises of the region." [231]

In his project for rebuilding a unified modern Omani nation state, Sultan Qaboos has preserved the country's distinctive identity and the stature of 'Ibadhism', which gave it a distinctive identity and differentiated it from other nation-states within its regional context. Through his policies, he combined Ibadhism with the emerging Omani identity, by creating a new religious leadership position within the state's hierarchy, entitled 'The Grand Mufti of Oman'. Shaykh Ibrahim Al- Abri a prominent Ibadhi scholar was appointed as the first Mufti of the Sultanate by Royal Degree in 1970 for the first time in Oman's history.[232] The position is occupied by an Ibadhi scholar, as are most of the leading religious' personalities and Imams of the state mosques. After the death of the first Mufti in 1975, Shaykh Ahmed Al- Khalili, another Ibadhi scholar, was designated as the 'Grand Mufti of the Sultanate' by a Royal Degree.[233] As noted by Marc Frank Mermier, "the Ibadhi heritage is both covered up and glorified. On the one hand

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[230] HM Sultan Qaboos speech on the fourth National Day, 18 November 1980.
[231] Interview with interviewee (1), 25 April 2018.
[232] K. Al-Azri, *Social and gender inequality in Oman: the power of religious and political tradition*, London, Routledge, 2012, p.103.
[233] K. Al-Azri, *Social and gender inequality in Oman*, p.103.

covered up to be merged into the consensual 'national Islam' that binds the Omani society together, but on the other hand at the forefront to support the legitimacy of the regime."[234] The Sultan himself maintains the appearance of being a devout Ibadhi Muslim. However, since Oman contains sizeable Sunni and Shia communities as well, the idea of passivism and tri-sectarian harmony among Ibadhi, Sunni, and Shia sects was central to the belief of the Sultan in constructing the Omani national identity. [235] Thus, in order to promote national unity and to avoid sectarianism given the sectarian nature of the Gulf region context, the Sultan sought to promote a consensual and generic Islam that is peculiar to Oman. Since 1970, the policies and narrative of the Sultan's government have emphasised the importance of religious tolerance for national unity. In this respect, Oman's Islamic studies curriculum, for example, aimed not to favour one tradition over another, but rather to focus upon the basic Islamic principles upon which all Islamic sects agree.[236] Moreover, the history of the Ibadhi Imamate is rarely narrated in the national history. Considering that Omani society consists of different sects, it would be unfair to place the history of the Ibadhi imamate at the centre of the national narrative from the point of view of national unity. Therefore, although Ibadhi Islam is a major element in differentiating Oman from neighbouring countries, it is not possible to extensively describe it in the national history or in social studies textbooks.[237]

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[234] Cited in, M. Valeri, '*Identity Politics and Nation Building under Sultan Qaboos'*, p.78.
[235] The government does not keep official statistics on religious affiliation, but most unofficial resources estimated that Ibadhi Muslims constitute 55-60 per cent, Sunni 30-35 per cent, and Shi'a around 5 per cent of Oman's citizen population.
[236] A. Al-Salimi, 'The transformation of religious learning in Oman: tradition and modernity', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21, no. 2, 2011, p. 150.
[237] M. Okawa, 'The Empire of Oman in the Formation of Oman's National History', p.100.

Given the concern for maintaining national unity, Omani policy makers are particularly sensitive to transnational sectarian disputes (Arab-Persian, Sunni-Shia). As such, the distinctive identity and stature of 'Ibadhism' is a factor in Oman's desire to safeguard its stability and national cohesion from the incursions of external actors. This underpins the Sultan's policy, since he came to power to transcend sectarian affiliation and to integrate Oman's religious minorities into the social, political and economic fabric of society. Respect for other religious culture is enshrined in Omani law which, "punish those who try to arouse hate, prejudice, criticism and violence against other religious, religious groups or cultures."[238] This has worked to insulate Oman from regional sectarian tensions between Shia and Sunni, and gives no incentive for external powers - in this case Saudi Arabia and Iran - to intervene or meddle in their domestic sphere.

In its modern history, Oman has been subject to recurring attempts by Saudi Wahhabis to promote their religious influence and extend their authority in Oman, which came to be known in Oman's historical narrative as the 'Wahhabi invasions'.[239] In fact, the Saudis' aspiration to spread their Wahhabi religion and influence in Oman, and Oman's resistance to them had shaped the relations between the two countries until the early 1970s. This understanding of Oman's historical experience of religious hostility was explicitly reflected in the Sultan's expression after his first visit to Saudi Arabia in December 1971. In response to the Saudis' reluctance to establish close relations, Sultan Qaboos noted that he "would continue patiently to improve relations with Saudi Arabia but in general felt that King Faisal could not forget that he was

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[238] A. Al-Rabaani, 'Views of Omani post-basic education students about religious and cultural tolerance', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol. 48, no.1, 2018, p.89.
[239] A. Al-Ismaili, 'Ethnic, Linguistic, and Religious Pluralism in Oman: The Link with Political Stability', *AlMuntaqa,* vol. 1, no. 3, 2018, p 63.

Wahhabi where Oman was concerned."[240] Sultan Qaboos' references to Wahhabis reflect his understanding of Oman's historical experience with the Wahhabi incursion into Oman, which seems to have influenced the way in which Sultan Qaboos perceived and constructed Oman's national identity as being distinctive within its regional context. Therefore, it must be preserved and secured.

The second factor of 'Ibadhism' related to the distinctiveness of Omani national identity is the Ibadhi 'school of thought', and the manner in which it interprets the verses of the 'Holy Quran'. In this vein, the 'Ibadhi school of thought' places an emphasis on religious tolerance and a rejection of the use of violence as a means for resolving disputes. According to the famous 'Ibadhi' cleric Ali Muamar, 'Ibadhis' have eschewed violence except in the case of self defence throughout history.[241] This belief in 'Ibadhism' is both located in the principles of faith and as a regulatory function in social life, and many of these principles have long been applied to Oman's domestic affairs, becoming part of the culture and an aspect of the general education of the Omani people, a pattern in their life, behaviour and interactions with people of other nations. As mentioned above, Qaboos himself is an Ibadhi Muslim, who spent his childhood in Salalah, where he received his primary education. At the age of 16, his father sent him to a private school in Britain. In 1960, he was admitted to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst as an officer cadet. Upon graduation, he joined a British infantry battalion on operational duty in Germany for one year.[242] After his military service, Qaboos studied local government in England and went

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[240] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Political relations between Oman and Saudi Arabia', *meeting reports between HM Sultan Qaboos and British Ambassador in Muscat*, FCO: 353, 23 October 1971.
[241] A.Y. Muʿammar, '*al-Ibāḍīyya fī mawkib al-taʾrikh II: al-Ibāḍīyya fī Libya*, Cairo. 1964, p.135.
[242] A. Alhaj, 'The political elite and the introduction of political participation in Oman', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 7, no.3, 2000, p.97.

on a world tour before returning to Oman. Following his return from military training in the UK in 1964, he spent the following six years before his ascendancy to power studying the Islamic religion, Omani history and ancient civilisation, which provided him with deeper insights about Oman's history and culture. In one of his interviews, he claimed that his father's insistence on studying Islamic religion and the history and culture of Oman had a major impact on him, expanding his awareness about his responsibility towards his people and humanity in general.[243] Therefore, in the process of building the modern Omani nation state, Sultan Qaboos integrated the Ibadhi doctrine of tolerance and coexistence into the government and culture of the Omani state. Respect for other religious sects is enshrined in Omani law and the legal system. The government sponsors media events, conferences, seminars, symposia, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs regularly publishes magazines promoting tolerance and greater understanding at the national level. This process was constructed under a single Omani national culture captured by the 'national Omani traditional culture' slogan, promoted by the government since the early 1970s in an attempt to engender the type of unity fundamental for the stability and success of the state. This was further promoted by the expansion of education institutions across the country, which created a space for the dissemination of a narrative of uniform Omani identity. The principles of strengthening and consolidating values of belonging and national unity were incorporated into the first philosophy of education document, which was issued in 1978.[244] Consequently, this mode of conduct became a source of Omani national pride that held Oman's demographic makeup together. Moreover, these principles expressed in the 'Ibadhi'

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[243] Sultan Qaboos, interviewed by A. Joyce, *Middle East Policy*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1995, p. 1.
https://www.mepc.org/node/4882
[244] Ministry of Education, '*The Philosophy of Education*', Muscat, 1978.

doctrine have been embodied in the diplomatic role Oman plays in regional affairs, which made

Omani foreign policy unique in the region. In fact, the role of the 'Ibadhi' doctrine in shaping

Omani policy towards the region manifested itself in many ways. As Interviewee (2) asserted,

the conventional Ibadhi principle on dialogue is evident in Oman's strong preference for 'quiet

diplomacy and dialogue' to resolve disputes and conflicts.[245]

Another key feature of Ibadism that influenced Sultan Qaboos' idea for the new Omani state is

the tradition of 'Shura'. From the earliest days of his reign, Qaboos used the term "Shura". In

an interview in 1971 with Al-Ahram newspaper he said:

 "I will be the happiest person when the country's situation allows the formation of the Shura

Council... Our country, definitely, needs a Shura Council at the core of a "Shura-based

system"; and this Council - in my view, should include representatives of the people, and it

should be able to discuss all matters".[246]

Accordingly, Sultan Qaboos sought to preserve the Ibadi traditional principle of 'Shura' and

gradually institutionalized it within the structure of the new Omani state. Towards this end, he

embarks on his famous annual tours all over Oman meeting with the people, understanding

their needs and discuss his government policies, which represented a unique method of people

participation in formulating domestic policies. In 1976 Sultan Qaboos established the first

consultative council called the 'Special Consul for Agriculture and Fishery and Industry'

which was regarded as the first step towards public participation in decision making process.

A decade later, in 1981, the national Consultative Council was established by Royal Decree

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[245] Interview with interviewee (1), 25 April 2018.
[246] Interview with HM Sultan Qaboos, *Al-Ahram newspaper*, No. 134, July 8, 1971, p.3.

81/1981.[247] This was an advisory body which would give the government its views on economic and social development issues. The Council was formed of 45 members individually appointed by royal decree. They were drawn from the public sector, civil society, the private sector, and also included representatives of the separate regions. In this way both Ibadism and its traditional practice of shura formed core elements of Qaboos' idea of Oman's as a distinctive cultural identity within its region and inform us about the way in which Sultan Qaboos has positioned Oman in its region, and in turn has shaped his belief and practice.

I conclude this section by noting, therefore, that in the process of rebuilding the Omani nation state post-1970, Sultan Qaboos worked on 'consolidating national unity' by reshaping Oman's national identity. From this perspective, the idea of Oman as a distinctive cultural national identity within its regional context served two main purposes; first, it worked as a glue that bound together different regional identities on Oman's territory in order to consolidate national and domestic unification. Second, in articulating Oman's distinctiveness in its national identity, the idea was also used to differentiate the Omani nation from other neighbouring nations in the region, which in turn implied that it deserved to be preserved against any external influence. It is important to note that, in developing a new narrative of Omani cultural distinctiveness, designed to consolidate national unity, the Sultan drew heavily and sometimes consciously on a series of traditional ideas and historical references about Oman and the Omani people related

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[247] Royal Decrees No 81/1981, Muscat: Ministry of Legal Affairs.

to the historical legacy of the Omani empire, Ibadism, and external intervention of regional and global powers in Oman's domestic affairs.

4.3.2 Consolidating National Independence

The second key aim of the political programme Sultan Qaboos embarked on during the 1970s was to 'consolidate national independence'. In the process of formulating Oman's modern foreign and security policy, Sultan Qaboos sought to articulate and draw lessons from the situation in which Oman had found itself in the 1960s, particularly linked to fears of interference by external powers, and the perception that Oman's geostrategic location could make her vulnerable to foreign interference. In this respect, the Sultan drew lessons from Oman's historical experience, as well as from more contemporary developments, particularly linked to the country's geopolitical position and concerns about their vulnerability, related to the geopolitics of the Straits of Hormuz.

Oman's geostrategic location at a key maritime trade route linking Asia with Africa and Europe made it geo-strategically vulnerable to external powers. As noted by Linda Funsch, "throughout its history, Oman has suffered the oppression of foreign aggression, felt the sanctity of its sovereignty challenged, and stood firm to reap the benefit of alliances among equals."[248] Indeed, in 1552 CE, the Portuguese captured Oman in order to use such ports for their own colonial ambitions. The Portuguese saw Oman as an important base in their strategy to keep the maritime

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[248] L. Funsch, *Oman Reborn,* p.157.

route to India safe, and made Hormuz their main base of operations.[249] The Portuguese invasion

lasted for nearly a century, coming to an end in 1650. During the 18th century, Oman became a

major maritime power, which stretched throughout the Gulf and the Indian Ocean down the east

coast of Africa. However, rivalry over the succession of the 'Imam' in 1719 prompted a civil

war in Oman, which resulted in virtual anarchy, leading to Persian interference in Oman's

domestic affairs in 1738 and occupation of the coastal area, until they were expelled by Ahmad

ibn Said in 1774.[250] By the early 1900s, Oman's strategic positioning between Iran, which held

oil owned by British Petroleum, and India 'the Crown Jewel of Britain' resulted in an influx of

British interference that would last until the 1970s.[251] From 1954 to 1959, Oman witnessed a

series of conflicts between residents of the interior of Oman, who were supported by Saudi

Arabia and Egypt, and the Sultan, who was aided by the British. Between 1964 and 1975, Oman

was the scene of Cold War proxy warfare involving multiple external actors in her southern

province of 'Dhofar' that mobilised Omanis for more than a decade. The most relevant aspect

of this for Sultan Qaboos' political programme in the 1970s was the interference of global and

regional powers in Oman's domestic conflict. The rebels, inspired by Marxist ideology, were

supported by the USSR, China, and Iraq, who provided them with military and financial support,

using Oman's Southern neighbour, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, as a base for

their action. Each of these experiences has been etched into the collective memory of Oman,

forming the mould from which its foreign and security policy has been cast since Sultan Qaboos

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[249] W. Floor, and F. Hakimzadeh, *The Hispano-Portuguese Empire and Its Contacts with Safavid Persia, the Kingdom of Hormuz and Yarubid Oman from 1489 to 1720*: A Bibliography of Printed Publications, 1508-2007, Peters Publishers, vol. 45, 2007, p. xvi.
[250] J. Black, *War in the Eighteenth-century World,* London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p.174.
[251] J. Jones and N. Ridout, *A history of modern Oman*, p.64.

came to power. Internal insecurity made Oman particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of its regional and international environment.

The historical lesson that Sultan Qaboos drew from all this is that foreign interference amplified the country's internal divisions, which is why it must be avoided. This concept has manifested itself in many different ways. Throughout the 1970s, the Sultan stressed his concerns about regional vulnerability that could lead to the interference of external powers in the domestic affairs of the Gulf States. In his speech in May 1976, Sultan Qaboos highlighted Oman's geostrategic exposure, emphasising that "The Sultanate of Oman is aware of the fact that it is the region's first line of defence because of its strategic location, and that it is the main enforcer of that defence."[252] Clearly, the historical experience of foreign powers' interference in Oman's domestic affairs played a key role in shaping Sultan Qaboos' perception of threat and insecurity, by introducing a strong sense of vulnerability vis-a-vis the region, and the possibility of intervention by extra-regional powers. In this context, Oman has had more experience of a communist threat than most countries in the Gulf region. Throughout the 1970s, until its disintegration in the late 1980s, Oman viewed the Soviet Union as the main threat to its national security, and that of the entire Gulf region. A close reading of Sultan Qaboos' speeches during this period suggests that he constantly placed an emphasis on the threat posed by the Soviet Union. In 1972, Sultan Qaboos warned the Arab Gulf States of Soviet activities in South Yemen, highlighting that "there is no doubt that the Arab States are aware of the real conditions in Aden and that active international communism is working there to achieve its ambition in the Arab

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[252] HM Sultan Qaboos speech at the 4th Session of the Arab Gulf States' Foreign Ministers' Conference in Muscat, 25 November 1976.

Peninsula to transform it into a huge Communist camp."[253] Still in 1979, three years after declaring victory over the insurgency in Dhofar and the war having been brought to an end, Sultan Qaboos identified Soviet expansionism as a genuine threat. In his annual speech delivered on 18th November 1979, Qaboos stressed that; "The unbridled pursuit by the Soviet Union of policies of expansionism - policies reminiscent of the worst periods of colonialism in the past - continues to pose a most serious threat to world peace, and particularly to the peace of this region."[254] In an interview with the Far Eastern Economic Review Journal in May 1980 - during the heightening tensions between Iran and Iraq and in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan- the Sultan expressed his perception of the Soviet threat to the Gulf region, arguing: "I am sure it is an old ambition of the Soviet to get to the warm waters. From Afghanistan, they are only 300 miles from the Gulf. They are within reach from the oilfields of the Gulf."[255] The Sultan pointedly referred to the historical experience of the Dhofar War and the Russian support for the insurgency, emphasising that "we certainly have stopped one Communist plot against us, the Dhofar rebellion in southern Oman, we are like the bridge for the rest of the Gulf and in view of the new situation we are, of course, alert. We are equipping ourselves, and will do so with all the equipment we need and with the help of our friends."[256] This fear of foreign interference also helps us to understand why Sultan Qaboos remained resistant to a more robust American military presence in Oman. Following Great Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf, and its abandonment of its last base in Masirah in late 1977, Sultan

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[253] HM Sultan Qaboos speech on the fourth National Day, 18 November 1972.
[254] HM Sultan Qaboos speech on the fourth National Day, 18 November 1979.
[255] HM Sultan Qaboos. Interview with the Far Eastern Economic Review, cited in The Sun (1837-1992); May 22, 1980; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun. P A25.
[256] HM Sultan Qaboos. Interview with the Far Eastern Economic Review, cited in The Baltimore Sun (1837-1992); ProQuest Historical Newspapers: May 22, 1980, p, A25.

Qaboos expressed his opposition to American takeover of the former British bases, because of a perennially unstable domestic political situation. The Sultan had just defeated the communist inspired insurgencies in the southern part of his country, and feared that allowing a foreign military presence in his country would fuel additional domestic resentment against his rule. In an interview the Sultan stated, "I have always said we are well disposed towards our friends and if a friend asks for an aircraft to land in a normal circumstance, we would have no objection. But a base - out of the question!"[257] Following the Iranian revolution and the overthrow of the Shah, Sultan Qaboos reiterated the same fear about pushback he might receive from a robust relationship with the U.S military. He did not want a dynamic similar to that of Iran's playing out in Oman. He therefore remained uneasy about the possibility of Marxist led rebels using an American military presence to spark another rebellion against him, and remained reluctant about supporting a robust agreement on bases with the U.S.

Alongside these historical lessons from foreign interference, the Sultan also drew a lesson from more contemporary developments, particularly linked to the country's geopolitical position, and concerns about their vulnerability related to the geopolitics of the Straits of Hormuz. Since the discovery of oil under the sands of the Arabian Peninsula in the 1930s, the waterway of Hormuz had gained a significant strategic importance in international relations. Navigation through the Straits of Hormuz gained considerable attention at both a regional and international level in the 1970s, and they are of particular interest to the Omanis as part of the Straits lie in Omani

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[257] Cited in, R. Burgos, *Gulf security and the US military: Regime survival and the politics of basing. Parameters*, 45(3), Autumn 2015, pp. 129-130. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/1760266368?accountid=13460

territorial waters. Consequently, Omani policy makers have feared that the vulnerability of the Straits, and especially of the oil tankers and other shipping which pass through them, could lead to interference from external powers in Oman's internal affairs.

These concerns over the security of the Straits of Hormuz had preoccupied the thinking of Omani policy makers throughout the 1970s. As early as 1974, Sultan Qaboos recognised the geostrategic importance of the Straits of Hormuz for international shipping and for the maintenance of stability and security of Oman and the entire Gulf region. Therefore, the first border agreement which Oman signed was the Omani-Iranian border agreement on the Straits of Hormuz. In March 1974, Sultan Qaboos paid a state visit to Iran during which the two countries signed an agreement according to which both sides agreed on full cooperation to protect the free passage of ships and freedom of movement through the Straits of Hormuz.[258] During the discussion with the Shah of Iran, Sultan Qaboos clearly stated his concerns about the possibility of interference by external powers in this area, which he considered inconsistent with the national interests of his country.[259] This sense of geo-strategic vulnerability was further intensified when in 1979 a group of terrorist organisations called 'The Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine' issued a warning that they would launch operations in the Straits of Hormuz to disrupt shipping.[260] This was further complicated by press reports implying that the US was considering major military deployment in the region to safeguard their oil supply.[261]

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[258] Foreign and Commonwealth, Political relations between Oman and Iran, British Embassy in Muscat, TELNO.107: *Sultan's visit to Iran,* FCO, 8/2219: NBL 3/324/1, 18 March, 1974.
[259] Foreign and Commonwealth, Political relations between Oman and Iran, British Embassy in Muscat, TELNO.107: Sultan's visit to Iran, FCO, 8/2219: NBL 3/324/1, 18/03/74.
[260] Elias. A, 'Who should defend the Hormuz Strait', *The Jerusalem Post* (1950-1988), Dec 4, 1979, p.5.
[261] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Oman: The Straits of Hormuz and Gulf Security*, Brief No2 on Gulf Security/Iran, FCO: 8/3335: File No: NBL 051/1, December 1979.

This situation increased concern among some regional states such as Iraq, which described the situation as an attempt by western powers to return to the region.[262] These new developments triggered the Omani government's concerns over the vulnerability of the Straits to sabotage and the possibility of intervention by external powers.[263] In his speech of November 1979, Sultan Qaboos tackled the sensitivity of the vulnerability of the Straits of Hormuz;

"*No doubt you have heard a lot about the Straits of Hormuz, which as you know is part of our national waters and one of the most important sea lanes of the world, through which passes a huge proportion of the world's oil supplies. Should the present instability in the Middle East result in an interruption of this flow, the results would be disastrous; not only would immense hardship be caused to millions of people, but the economies of many countries.*" [264]

Fearing the interference of external powers, Sultan Qaboos proposed what he called a 'Technical Support Plan', by which the Sultan made a proposal to Gulf oil exporters and Western consumers who relied on traffic through the Straits, to finance minesweeping and naval patrol forces to enable Oman to guard and guarantee navigation in the Straits. However, the Sultan made it very clear that "Oman does not call for the intervention of foreign forces for this purpose; given the means, the Sultanate is fully capable of undertaking necessary measures; but the means must be provided."[265] This clearly indicates concerns about vulnerability related to

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[262] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, report from Middle East Department to Mr. Hurd on the Omani proposal for the Strait of Hormuz, 14 November 1979.
[263] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Meeting record of the Omani Ambassador to the UK with Mr. Hurd*, FCO: 8/3335: File No: NBL 051/1: TEL No 324,07 December 1979.
[264] HM Sultan Qaboos speech on the fourth National Day, 18 November 1979.
[265] HMS Sultan Qaboos Speech, 18 November 1979.

the geopolitics of the Straits of Hormuz, and the possibility of the interference of external powers in the minds of Omani policy makers. Consequently, Oman did not entertain the presence of foreign powers in the region, and regarded the security of the Gulf as the responsibility of the Gulf states. As such, Oman used this incident as a springboard for talks on regional cooperation rather than as the basis of a simple request for technical support. In my interview with Interviewee (1), he asserted, "we thought that the littoral states of the Gulf should come together to man, fund this force, and share the responsibility of regional security."[266] These thoughts about geostrategic vulnerability related to the Straits of Hormuz underpinned Sultan Qaboos' initiative at the end of 1979 to create 'joint mine sweeping and naval patrol forces' to guard and guarantee navigation in the Straits.[267]

In short, the historical experience of external interference by regional and global powers, as well as contemporary concerns about vulnerability related to the geopolitics of the Straits of Hormuz had both played a key role in shaping Omani policy makers' understanding of Oman's geostrategic position involving the risk of foreign interference. This close connection was drawn in the thinking of Omani policy makers between Oman's geostrategic position and their experience of foreign interference, leading Sultan Qaboos to the belief that Omani national independence was potentially threatened by external interference from regional and global powers. Omani foreign policy was therefore oriented towards preserving national independence by preventing any interference by external powers in Oman's internal affairs.

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[266] Interview with interviewee (1), 25 April 2018.
[267] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Meeting record of the Omani Ambassador to the UK with Mr. Hurd*, FCO TEL No 324, 07 December 1979.

4.4 Structure of the Omani policy-making machinery

The policy-making structure is extremely important in interpreting and understanding a state's foreign and security policy practice. Within Oman's political context, Sultan Qaboos positioned himself at the centre of his political project for Oman, as he retained the most influential official positions. He was both the head of state and the head of government, while also assuming the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Defense and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. He also held the reins of the economy as Finance Minister and head of the board of governors of the central bank. As Richard Common observes, the Sultan had an enormous degree of discretionary power over both state and society, as he was capable of appointing deputy prime ministers, ministers and those of similar rank, removing senior judges from their posts, declaring a state of emergency, public mobilisation, war, conciliation, issuing laws, ratifying international treaties and agreements, and issuing the state's general budget.[268] The Council of Ministers, which is directly appointed by the sultan, functions as his cabinet, and assists the Sultan in drafting and implementing the general domestic policy of the State.[269]

It is worth noting 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, and is composed of a Consultative Council (elected lower chamber) and State Council (appointed higher

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[268] R. Common, 'Leadership in The Sultanate of Oman', in B. Metcalfe, F. Immune, (eds.), *Leadership development in the Middle East*, Northampton, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011, p.154.
[269] T. Aldhabi, *The Impact of Identity on Oman's Foreign Policy*, Amman, Dar Weal for Publishing and Distribution, 2019, p.133.

chamber), which was only established in the mid-nineties.[270] The parliament can comment on and review proposed laws and public policies; however, they do not have any veto powers, so it is impossible for them to initiate or play any significant role in the country's foreign and security policy. The parliament, therefore, only serves the role of a consultative body.

In the end, however, all major policy decisions are made outside these formal apparatuses. Decision making on foreign and security matters was coordinated and practiced through the Royal Office, which was established as early as 1972. The Royal Office is regarded as one of the most senior and therefore powerful governmental organisations within the Omani state apparatus, one which controls internal and external security. It is a government body that has most influence in national security and intelligence issues, the minister in charge having been the de facto national security advisor to the Sultan. The Royal Office also acts as a foreign liaison focus on all international intelligence and security matters. There are two key bodies within the Royal Office; the Defence Council is an extra-parliamentary body tasked with coordinating the actions of the country's various security and armed forces in safeguarding and defending the Sultanate from external threats. The National Security Council is tasked with handling all issues related to the country's internal national security. Both councils are headed by the Sultan himself. Within this structure a small nucleus of senior Omani officials, such as the Minister of the Royal Office, Head of the Communications and Coordination Authority of the Royal Office, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and Minister Responsible for Defense Affairs were essential in implementing the regional agenda of Sultan Qaboos. This decision-

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[270] Royal Decree NO. (101/96) Promulgating the Basic Statute of the State, https://www.mjla.gov.om/eng/basicstatute.aspx (accessed 20 April 2021)

making structure clearly illustrates that the decision-making process is highly centralised with Sultan Qaboos at the centre of it all, making decisions on which policies are to be issued or adopted.

It is important to emphasise here, that given the autocratic nature of the Omani state, in which the Sultan is the dominant figure in formulating the country's foreign and security policy, the process of socialisation in this regard is slightly different from the kind of socialisation envisaged by Bevir in describing the concept of tradition. Even though Oman is an autocracy, in the process of his project of nation-building, the Sultan made a very deliberate attempt to shape a new national narrative, and he did so in a very public way, so that policy became tied explicitly to a conception of Oman as a distinctive cultural identity in its region, but also as vulnerable to external interference. One of the interesting methods that the Sultan initiated as part of his political programme was his customary policy of meeting his people, which became to be known in the Omani narrative as the 'Royal Tours', where the Sultan would be accompanied by ministers of his cabinet and his team of advisor to visit Omani cities, towns, and villages in a month-long tour. During this tour he gives speeches explaining his government policies and highlighting his vision for Oman's future. He also interacted directly and freely with Omani people, even having one-on-one meetings with members of the community in an open democratic environment. In addition to shaping a new national narrative about Oman, this policy, over the years, worked as a process through which ministers and senior governmental officials working on policy making became socialised to the Sultan's way of thinking. As Abdullah Alhaj observes, that Omani political elites are strongly connected to traditional ideas about Oman, including its distinctive cultural heritage and its historical struggle against the

interference of external powers for the preservation of Oman's independence.[271] As such, it is justifiable to argue that the Sultan's ideas of Oman had by 1980 become deeply rooted and - perhaps in some cases, unquestioned - shared understandings by policy makers who were working within the Sultan's inner circle.

4.5   **The birth of a cautiously crafted, balanced foreign and security policy**

Having identified the principal ideas that informed Omani policy makers thinking in the 1970s, this section will now lay out the parameters of the policy of a balanced approach. In doing so it will show that it was strongly shaped by the idea of Oman as a distinctive cultural identity in her region, but as being vulnerable to external interference.

As discussed earlier, when Sultan Qaboos bin Said came to power in 1970, he inherited a country that was politically and socially divided. This domestic division was further amplified by a history of foreign interference. Thus, Sultan Qaboos had to work on consolidating Omani national identity and consolidating its national independence, which were integral to the country internal security and stability. Outlining guidelines of his policy in the early 1970s, Sultan Qaboos asserted that;

"*We affirm that we are ready to extend the hand of friendship to all who will grasp that hand in a similar spirit of friendship and goodwill. We have made it abundantly clear that we shall stand*

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[271] A. Alhaj, 'The political elite and the introduction of political participation in Oman.', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 7, no..3, 2000, p.100.

resolutely by the side of all countries who are determined to preserve their freedom and who oppose interference in the affairs of others, and by close co-operation with the countries of our region. These are our policies which we have followed and which we shall maintain."[272]

In the above reference to "determine to preserve their freedom' and 'oppose interference in the affairs of others' Sultan Qaboos was probably referring to the Dhofar War and the interference of regional and global powers, and in particular the communist bloc, but by being vague he may have also wished to reference Wahhabi expansion from Saudi Arabia, Persian, or even British influence, all of whom were deeply involved in Oman internal affairs and potentially undermining his legitimacy and independency. As such, Sultan Qaboos' key foreign policy goals in the early 1970s were to consolidate Oman's 'national unity' and to consolidate its 'national independence'. Within this framework, Sultan Qaboos' priorities were: first, to end the communist insurgencies in the southern province of Dhofar and to cease Saudi Arabia's assistance to the 'Imamate' supporters who were still occasionally launching some sabotage operations in the northern part of the country, and secondly, to end the isolation policy of his father and reintegrate Oman into regional and international affairs.

From this perspective, maintaining close relations with the Arab Gulf states came to be seen as key to Oman's internal security and stability, and for its integration into the regional and international fold. Among its Gulf Arab neighbours, Oman's top priority was relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with whom Oman shares land borders. When Sultan Qaboos came

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[272] HM Sultan Qaboos speech, 18 November, 1973.

to power, Saudi Arabia was still backing the Imamate rebels by providing shelter and financial assistance to the former Imam and his supporters to exert their influence in Oman. At this stage, the Imamate issue was a major obstacle to Oman joining the Arab League, as most Arab countries looked to Sultan Qaboos to reach an agreement with Ghalib - the former Imam - and thereby resolve the situation created by earlier Arab recognition of the Imamate.[273] Moreover, a border dispute over the Buraimi area on the border between Oman, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia still existed. In the meantime, improving relations with Iraq was also important in stopping Iraq's financial and political support to the insurgents in the south. As such, establishing cordial relations with the Arab states was perceived as vital by Sultan Qaboos. This was reflected in the Sultan's early decision to form an Omani goodwill mission in February 1971 to visit the Arab capitals.[274]

Equally important were relations with Iran. Oman's distinctive cultural identity and her geopolitical vulnerability both played a key role in shaping Oman's policy towards Iran. Although Oman is an Arab country, it is nonetheless different from other Arab states in light of the influence of Ibadhi culture and ideas, Oman's cultural difference in the predominantly Sunni neighbourhood being considered a conducive factor in its success in rapprochement towards Iran. The desire to safeguard this characteristic of distinctive national identity being forefront, Oman was reluctant to align too strongly with any one side, and tried to maintain good relations with both the Arab/Sunnis and the Persian/Shiites. As asserted by Sultan Qaboos, "we are

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[273] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Political relations between Oman and Saudi Arabia, The Saudis and the fall of the Ibadi Imamate in Oman, *diplomatic report*, No. 296/72: NBM 3/372/1, 29 April 1972.
[274] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, The Saudis and the fall of the Ibadi Imamate in Oman, 29 April 1972.

constantly striving to establish a good neighbourly relationship with everyone without exception. We are against alliances and blocs of any kind."[275] Meanwhile, both Oman and Iran held the key to the Gulf through their strategic location on either side of the Straits of Hormuz. The geostrategic importance of the Straits of Hormuz to both countries and the need to safeguard the freedom and security of international shipping through them necessitated the maintenance of good relations between these two countries. As articulated by Sultan Qaboos himself, "the distance between Tehran and Muscat is not great, but nearer to that are our shores which are at a distance of not more than 25 miles in the Straits of Hormuz, an area which we both desire to keep peaceful for the international navigation." [276] Sultan Qaboos also feared Iranian interference in its territories, and the possibility that hostilities with Iran could destabilise his country. Following the signing of the 1975 Algiers treaty between Iran and Iraq to settle their border disputes and conflicts, Sultan Qaboos pointedly referred to the fear of interference by both countries in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries. He asserted that, "the signing of this agreement [the 1975 Algiers treaty] will have a positive impact on regional security and stability, especially if the two countries adhere to the agreed non-interference in the affairs of the countries of the region and not to create any unrest and do not support any opposition movements against the existing regimes in the Gulf States."[277] Therefore, it was believed that it was in Oman's interests to maintain good relations with Iran, even though this would almost inevitably create concern and even criticism from its Arab Gulf state neighbours, who viewed

[275] Interview with HM Sultan Qaboos, Oman Daily newspaper, 26 Jan, 1974. No.63, pp.1&4.
[276] HM Sultan Qaboos speech on the occasion of the Shah of Iran visits to Oman, December 1977. Found in FCO, British Embassy, Muscat: 8/2947, File No NBL: 020/324/1: Confidential: Political relations between Oman and Iran. 1977.
[277] Interview with HM Sultan Qaboos, AL Hayat newspaper, No.134, 07 Jun 1975, p.1.

Iran with grave suspicion over its intentions in the region, and Iran's longstanding claim to Bahrain and the small islands in the Gulf.

Therefore, in its relations within the Persian Gulf region, the Omani government developed an explicit policy of good neighbourly relations with all countries in the region from the early 1970s, by adopting a balanced regional policy that could accommodate both sides of the Gulf. In 1971, when the Shah of Iran decided to seize the small Islands of Abu Moussa and Tunb, which were claimed by the Trucial States of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, and caused serious antagonism within the Arab world, Sultan Qaboos sought to prevent the issue from arising in his bilateral relations with either side of the Gulf states. Consequently, Oman avoided taking sides in the dispute, by not cooperating when 14 Arab countries led by Iraq signed a rejection letter to the Security Council declaring that the Islands were Arab and constituted an integral part of the United Arab Emirates and of the Arab homeland.[278] However, Oman encouraged and approved when the formation of the Union of Arab Emirates as an independent state was officially declared in December 1971, and was opposed by Iran on the background of the disputed islands issue.[279]

Moving towards this balanced regional position and demonstrating his goodwill in order to consolidate Oman's 'national unity' and its 'national independence', the Sultan sought to solve his country's inherited border disputes with its neighbours through bilateral negotiation. As

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[278] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Claims by Iran to the disputed Islands in the Persian Gulf, FCO 8/1812, UK Mission in UN: TELNO 921, 19 July 1972.

[279] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Claims of Iran to the disputed Islands in Persian Gulf, British Embassy in Tehran secret report: Gulf Islands and the Union of the Arab Emirates, FCO 8/1592, 08 Mar 1971.

early as 1974, Oman concluded an agreement with Iran by which they delineated maritime

borders between the two countries.[280] In addition, in the same year the Sultan solved the border

dispute with Saudi Arabia and UAE over the Al- Buraimi Oases through negotiation. The Sultan

then adopted the same approach to mark their borderlines with the UAE. By mid-1975, Oman

had concluded separate agreements with the six federation members whose territories touched

Oman.[281] As Gwenn Okruhlik and Patrick Conge explain, in a region where border disputes are

not only about territorial integrity, but also concern the wealth of oil and natural gas resources

that are present between the countries of the region, and where many border disputes have been

pursued violently, Oman had managed to resolve all of its border disputes successfully and

peacefully.[282] The means of resolution sought by Oman in its boundary disputes had been

bilateral negotiations, without any need for third party mediation. This is in stark contrast with,

for example, Saudi Arabia, who during the mid-1970s used aggressive tactics, including the

threat of military intervention, forcing a newly formed federation state (the UAE) to abandon

its claim to the Zararah oilfield on their shared border, and surrender the only piece of land that

linked it to Qatar.[283] The UAE publicly revived the boundary dispute in 2004, claiming some

lost territory from Saudi Arabia, including most of the Shaybah Oil Field.[284] The border dispute

has remained a thorn in the side of UAE-Saudi relations since, as it remains unresolved to this

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[280] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Political relation between Oman and Iran, Brattish Embassy in Muscat confidential report, Oman/Iran Seabed Boundaries, FCO 8/2219, File No: NBL:3/324/1, 4 August 1974.

[281] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Boundaries between Oman and Saudi Arabia, British Embassy in Muscat confidential report: Oman/Saudi/UAE boundaries, FCO: 8/2223: file No: NBL 4/2,17 October 1974.

[282] G. Okruhlik, and P. Conge, 'The Politics of Border Disputes: On the Arabian Peninsula', *International Journal*, vol. 54, no.2, 1999, p.244.

[283] R. Miller and H. Verhoeven, 'Overcoming smallness: Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and strategic realignment in the Gulf', *International Politics,* 2019, p.2.

[284] S. Henderson, 'Map Wars: The UAE Reclaims Lost Territory from Saudi Arabia', *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, January 19, 2006, https://archive.fo/20070707000419/http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/print.php?template=C05&CID=2431#selection-221.0-231.16 (accessed 23 August 2020)

day. Oman's strategy and their associated foreign and security conduct to resolve border disputes with its neighbours through bilateral negotiations were partially informed by the Ibadhi principle that placed an emphasis on dialogue to solve disputes.

Adopting a balanced regional policy that can accommodate both sides of the Gulf proved to be very successful, and served well in achieving Oman's internal security and stability, as well as repositioning the country in terms of its status and role in the region. In the course of the first half of the 1970s, Sultan Qaboos managed to develop a cordial relationship with Oman's neighbours on both sides of the Gulf. Consequently, Oman received considerable financial and military equipment support from the Arab Gulf states, which enabled her to pursue a domestic social development project and to sustain the military campaign against the rebels in the southern province.[285] On the other hand, the Sultan had developed a close relationship with the Shah of Iran. Iran provided considerable military assistance to Oman, which was instrumental in defeating the communist insurgencies and in ending the war.[286] Expressing his gratitude, the Sultan told the Shah during his visit in the aftermath of the end of the civil war in Dhofar "We, in Oman appreciate and value your [the Shah] efforts and good neighbourly relations between two countries and what brings us close is our common desire for strengthening the security of the region to which we belong."[287] By 1975, Sultan Qaboos succeeded in putting an end to both the 'Imamate' issue in the northern part of the country, and the communist insurgencies in the

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[285] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Oman annual review for 1976, diplomatic report No. 14/77, 1 January 1977.
[286] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Oman annual review for 1976, diplomatic report No. 14/77, 1 January 1977.
[287] HM Sultan Qaboos speech on the occasion of the Shah of Iran visits to Oman, December 1977. Found in FCO, British Embassy, Muscat: 8/2947, File No NBL: 020/324/1: Confidential: *Political relations between Oman and Iran.* 1977.

southern provinces, thereby consolidating his authority over a unified Omani state. On 11th December 1975, the Sultan, at a victory celebration in Muscat, officially declared victory over the communist insurgents, marking an end to civil war, which had lasted for more than a decade.[288]

Having achieved national unity, Oman moved towards consolidating its national independence and assuming its regional role. Sultan Qaboos made considerable efforts to mitigate Oman's dependence on global or regional powers and to prevent exterior powers from exerting any form of influence on his policies. Consequently, Sultan Qaboos sought to promote security and cooperation in the Persian Gulf region. Omani policy makers have considered Persian Gulf stability as necessary for their own security and development. The experience of civil war in the southern part of the country and the interference of external powers meant that Sultan Qaboos was very conscious of the geopolitical vulnerability of the Gulf region. As noted by Sultan Qaboos:

"Our region seriously needs to establish firm, solid foundations that all the parties concerned will accept as a basis for co-operation in every sphere in the interests of stability, so that we can ensure maximum development for the sake of our people's prosperity."[289]

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[288] HM Sultan Qaboos speech, 18 November,1975.
[289] His Majesty Sultan Qaboos speech at the 4th Session of the Arab Gulf States' Foreign Ministers' Conference, Muscat, 25 November 1976.

Thus, by the mid-1970s, Omani policy makers had elevated the security of the entire Persian Gulf region to fall within Omani national security policy. The belief in an urgent need to achieve collective regional security without external interference was translated into foreign and security policy practice. However, recognising that tensions in relations existed between the largest regional powers, namely Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, who were competing for regional hegemony, Qaboos sought to bridge the gap between the two shores of the Gulf and to promote the importance of close cooperation between the countries of the region. Consequently, in the course of 1976, the Omani Minister for Foreign Affairs toured the Gulf States, including Iraq and Iran, in an attempt to create mutual understanding among the countries of the region to stress the importance of creating a form of collective security arrangement, proposing a conference at the level of the ministers for foreign affairs.[290] The conference was eventually held in Muscat on 25th of December under the chairmanship of Sultan Qaboos, who addressed the conference, highlighting the importance of establishing "the best possible means of further developing the already close relations and co-operation between the governments and peoples of the region in order to safeguard the security of our region."[291]

It was hoped this policy approach that placed emphasis on close cooperation within the region would create a more favourable regional security environment for Oman, enable it to continue on the path of socio-economic development, promote its national unity and independence, and facilitate its role in the region and on the international stage. According to Interviewee (1),

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[290] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Gulf Foreign Ministers Conference*, FCO Tel No. 249, 19 Aug 1976.
[291] Sultan Qaboos speech at the 4th Session of the Gulf States' Foreign Ministers' Conference, Muscat, 25 November 1976.

Sultan Qaboos' initiative to form a regional collective security framework that included all countries in the Persian Gulf was intended to serve several political objectives. Firstly, to bridge the gap between the two shores of the Gulf, which in turn would prevent or minimise the interference of external powers in regional affairs, which would undermine the stability of the Gulf region as a whole. Second, it was believed that this approach would draw the most rivalrous major regional actors, namely Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, together into rational discourse through a mutual defence and security agreement.[292] Interviewee (2) further explains that Oman's motive behind this initiative was to balance the conflicting interests of its neighbours against one another without making enemies.[293] Although little progress was made in Sultan Qaboos' initiative for a collective security effort, Oman managed to maintain cordial and fruitful relations with seemingly all parties in the region. Even Iraq, which had been deeply immersed in Oman's internal affairs by providing financial and military support for the Dhofar insurgents, acknowledged Oman's independence by establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries in January 1976, thereby ending its support to the Dhofar insurgents. Meanwhile Oman's relations with Iran remained cordial.

By the end of the 1970s, this approach of carefully crafted 'balanced' foreign and security policy was clearly manifesting itself in the Sultan's policy towards the Gulf and the wider Middle East region. Oman's position toward the Arab/Israeli conflict is an illustration of adopting such an approach to foreign and security policy. In 1978, Oman participated in the Arab ranks in boycotting Israel and condemning her for its annexation of Jerusalem and declaration of a united

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[292] Interview with Interviewee (1), 25 April 2018.
[293] Interview with Interviewee (2), 8 May 2018.

Jerusalem as capital of Israel. In the meeting of the Committee on Jerusalem, the Omani spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a statement condemning the decision of the Israeli Knesset to make Jerusalem Israel's capital, describing it as an affront to the international community and a wounding blow to the Muslim peoples.[294] However, Oman, contrary to most Arab countries, publicly supported the Egyptian President Sadat's peace efforts with Israel and the signing of the Camp David peace agreement. Despite strong pressure from the anti-Sadat Arabs Camp, Oman courageously stuck to her moderate line, opposed Arab sanctions against Egypt, and refused to break diplomatic relations with Cairo. Interestingly, Sultan Qaboos' decision to support the Camp David Accord was underpinned by the fear of external interference, and Qaboos' ideas and desire for consolidating national independence. As Qais Al Zawawi, the Omani Minister for Foreign Affairs argued at the time, other countries in the region had got their priorities wrong, and the most urgent problem was the presence of a Marxist regime in the PDRY, arguing that Oman's policy of support for Camp David had been a carefully considered decision, one not taken by the Sultan alone.[295] Omani policy makers held the belief that the Russians did not wish to see a solution in the Middle East, and that they were busy exploiting the situation in an attempt to expand their influence in the area.[296] Therefore, although Omanis felt strongly about the Palestinians, they viewed the Camp David agreement

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[294] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Foreign Relations of Oman: Statement issued by the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, British Embassy in Muscat: 8/ 3537: NBL: 021/1, 25 August 1980.
[295] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Record of conversation between the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Oman*, FCO 8/3334: NBL:026/1, 1 June 1979.
[296] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Record of conversation between the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Oman*, FCO 8/3334: NBL:026/1, 1 June 1979.

as the best solution so far offered, and in the absence of any practical alternative, it should be given a chance.[297] As stated by Sultan Qaboos;

 "*We have supported the peace initiative with Israel for the very simple reason that in our eyes it is a step in the right direction. We consider it imperative that those who try to achieve their aims through peaceful negotiation should receive the support of their friends and brothers. We in this country have had to fight in recent years in order to preserve our independence from the ever-growing ambitions of the Soviet Union. It is these ambitions which we believe to be the overriding threat to security in our region*"[298]

However, Omani policy makers were very careful not to stray too far out of line with their allies in the Arab world, as they also made it clear that they regarded the treaty as "only a first step towards a just and lasting peace, and that a final solution must include the return of East Jerusalem to Arab sovereignty and full self–determination for the Palestinians."[299] Furthermore, Sultan Qaboos stated that if the treaty did not produce further results, Omani support would be withdrawn.[300]

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[297] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Record of conversation between the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Oman*, FCO 8/3334: NBL:026/1, 1 June 1979.

[298] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, confidential: *Sultan Qaboos latter to the British Prime Minister,* NBL 026/1, Annex A, 19 June 1979.

[299] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Middle East Department: NBL 026/1, Annex A: confidential: Sultan Qaboos latter to the British Prime Minister, 19 June 1979.

[300] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Middle East Department: 8/3334: NBL:026/1: confidential: *Record of conversation between the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Oman*, Friday 1 June 1979 at 1200 noon.

In 1979, in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution that deposed the Shah with whom Sultan Qaboos had enjoyed close relations, Oman kept the established Omani-Iranian ties in place. Oman's most feared consequences regarding the new political situation in Iran following the revolution were; first, its worst fear about the dangers of Soviet encroachment in the region, by taking advantage of the new situation in Iran by backing the Tudeh Party in Iran.[301] Second, the fear that Marxist-inspired insurgent groups would began to revive in Dhofar province. Shortly after the overthrow of the Shah, intelligence resources reported that the Dhofar insurgents had begun to regroup and to reorganise their forces.[302] Third, concerns over the security of the Straits of Hormuz. Fourth, there were also some concerns related to the influence of the Islamic Revolution on Oman's Shi'a minority.[303] Omani security agencies arrested a Shia Imam of Iraqi origin who was receiving literature critical of the Sultan in the post, and distributing it among the Shia population in Muscat.[304] Consequently, Sultan Qaboos concluded that Oman's security concerns could only be mitigated by keeping open diplomatic channels with Tehran, regardless of the type of regime in place. Therefore, despite the Khomeini regime's revolutionary rhetoric directed against the monarchical regimes in the region, the Omanis, unlike their Arab neighbours, were keen to preserve their relationship with the Iranian people. Following the Iranian Revolution, Oman's ambassador in Tehran had called on the Iranian Prime Minister to

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[301] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, NBL 026/1, annex A: Confidential: Sultan Qaboos latter to the British Prime Minister, 19 June 1979.

[302] B. Debusmann, 'New Oman Uprising Reported Brewing: Diplomats Cite Guerrilla', *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 18, 1979, p.6.

[303] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Middle East Department 8/3541: confidential: *Record of conversation between the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth and the Omani Minister of States for Foreign Affairs at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office* at 1130 am on 27 May, 1980.

[304] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO, 227/2. 4: Confidential: *Internal Political Affairs in Oman, Oman Deporting of Shia Iman*, British Embassy in Muscat, March 1980.

express Oman's desire to continue good relations.[305] This was shortly followed by a visit by high ranking Omani envoys, headed by the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, to meet with Khomeini. At the end of the visit, Iran pledged to honour all previous agreements signed by the Shah's regime, and engage in close cooperation to ensure the Gulf's security and the safety of international navigation through the Straits of Hormuz. To highlight Oman's interest in maintaining good relations with Tehran, the Omani Information Minister, who was part of the delegation, stated that "Iran is our neighbour, we have close historical, religious and geographic links with her and we are eagerly looking forward to expanding pure relations with her in all fields in order to make the region a safer place to live in."[306] On the other hand, while keeping on good terms with the new regime in Tehran, Oman also sought to promote its ties with the Arab Gulf states, and to increase cooperation in various fields between them. Following the Iranian Revolution, Oman had increasingly participated in various meetings and visits, indicating a closing of ranks among the Arab Gulf States at both bilateral and multilateral levels. In late 1979, an Omani delegation visited the UAE and discussed the possibility of conducting a joint military exercise by the armed forces of both countries.[307] In November 1979, Oman attended the Taif meeting of Foreign Minsters held in Saudi Arabia that discussed the general question of cooperation among the Arab Gulf states.[308] In March 1980, Muscat hosted the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Conference of Agricultural Ministers attended by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain,

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[305] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO8/3334: *Record of conversation between the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth and the Omani Minister of States for Foreign Affairs at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, 01 June, 1979.

[306] Cited in J. Kechichian, *Oman and the world,* p.101.

[307] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Embassy, Abu Dhabi, Telegram No 47: Confidential: *Gulf Cooperation*, February 1980.

[308] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Embassy Muscat, 440/1, *Political Situation in the Gulf, Gulf Cooperation*, 12 November 1979.

Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Iraq, and North Yemen (YAR).[309] When Saddam Hussein, in February 1980 forwarded his proposal for a pan-Arab pact in order to stem the religious and revolutionary fervour of Iran, one that was approved by every Gulf state, Oman abstained from supporting the Iraqi proposal.[310] However, they did not oppose it publicly and decided to keep a low profile on the this subject, with an absence of comments or obfuscation.[311] Commenting on the issue, a top Omani official described the other Arab Gulf states' attitude towards Iraq as ambivalent natural Arab sympathy, combined with marked comprehension of the possibility of Saddam becoming Nasser of the 80s.[312] Oman's position contrasted sharply with their neighbouring Arab Gulf states, who seemed more willing to enter full relations with Iraq. Clearly, their stance was influenced by Sultan Qaboos' ideas of Oman as possessing a distinctive national identity within its regional context, but also as being particularly vulnerable to external interference.

In this manner, the rise of a 'balanced' foreign policy in the 1970s was designed to secure Omani national independence, and thereby also to secure her national unity. This approach was underpinned by the Sultan's idea of Oman as a distinctive national identity within its regional context and his perception of her continued vulnerability to external intervention, ideas which lay at the heart of his political project for the modern Omani nation state. It was due to this understanding that Omani policy makers adopted a carefully balanced policy approach in the 1970s that could reach accommodation with both sides of the Gulf, the Arabs and the Iranians.

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[309] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3449, File No: NB 029/9, *Gulf Cooperation*, British Embassy in Muscat letter, Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Conference of Agricultural Ministers, 2 April 1980.
[310] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Embassy in Muscat, Muscat TL 415, 021/17, *Oman External Relations*, 15 April 1980.
[311] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, NBL 021/1, *Foreign relations of Oman*, *Oman/Iraq*, 25 Feb 1980.
[312] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 026/18, '*John Moberly's Visit', British Embassy*, Muscat, 19 October 1980.

This policy approach aimed to avoid creating implacable enemies or entangling Oman in regional alliances, and would prevent any regional power from exerting their influence on Oman. Indeed, by keeping on the best terms possible with regional and global actors, Sultan Qaboos had situated Oman to take advantage of opportunities that could further his country's long-term interests, as well as promoting Oman's national independence.

4.6   Summary

This chapter sought to identify the traditions of thought informing Omani foreign and security policies that were in place by 1980. This was accomplished by tracing the core ideas that informed the Sultan's formulation of the first Omani foreign and security policy as a modern independent nation state when he came to power in July 1970. The chapter has outlined the 'political programme' on which Sultan Qaboos embarked when he came to power and its core aims of consolidating Oman's 'national unity' and its 'national independence'. The chapter argues that in developing this programme and, especially, in articulating it to the Omani people, Sultan Qaboos drew on a series of traditional ideas and historical references about Oman and Omani people. In doing so, two broad sets of ideas have emerged as a potent force in framing the understanding of Oman's foreign policy orientation as it developed during the 1970s. These are; the ideas of Oman as possessing a distinctive cultural identity in her region, and as being vulnerable to external interference in virtue of her geopolitical position.

These two broad sets of ideas collectively played a role in the development of a cautiously crafted, balanced foreign and security policy throughout the 1970s. As noted above, Sultan

Qaboos inherited a country that was politically and socially divided, which was further amplified by the external interference of regional and global actors. Therefore, in constructing the modern Omani nation state, the idea of Oman as a 'distinctive' national identity that deserved to be protected from foreign interference lay at the heart of Sultan Qaboos' political project for Oman. Accordingly, his desire to protect Oman's distinctive national identity and consolidate its national independence fashioned a foreign and security policy that sought to balance the conflicting interests of both regional and global actors against one another without making enemies. It was assumed that this this policy would create a more favourable regional security environment for Oman, enable it to deal with its domestic problems in order to subsequently continue on the path of socio-economic development; protect its sovereignty, and facilitate its role in the region and on the international stage.

Oman's balanced foreign and security policy was evident in its position and policy actions in various regional upheavals, most clearly illustrated by the Omani position during the dispute between Iran and the UAE over an island in the Persian Gulf in 1974. Oman saw itself having to balance its relationships with the Arab Gulf countries on one side, and Iran on the other, without becoming embroiled in the dispute, and without taking sides. Oman's policy approach towards the Camp David Peace Accord between Egypt and Israel in 1978 is another example of its balanced policy towards conflicting parties. While Arab countries decided to boycott Egypt and cut their diplomatic relations with the country, with the head office of the Arab league being moved from Cairo to Tunisia, Oman took a path that was distinct from the other Arab Gulf monarchies. Hence, while the smaller Gulf States largely followed the Saudi lead with respect to the conflict and means towards its solution, Oman was the exception, deciding not to sever

diplomatic relations with Egypt, while asserting its support for the Palestinian people to exercise their national rights and to have their own independent state. In this sense, Oman acted independently in response to these events, and maintained a balanced approach towards both parties in the conflict. Oman's policy of a balanced approach is also evident in its relations with Iran and the Arab Gulf states following the Iranian Revolution and collapse of the Shah's regime in 1979, that profoundly altered the nature of regional relations. Despite some tension between Oman and Iran over the Straits of Hormuz, Oman, unlike the other Arab Gulf states, did not accept the premise that the revolution would spill over into the Gulf, and urged other Gulf states not to isolate Iran, seeking to maintain good relations with revolutionary Iran. Moreover, Oman joined the Arab Gulf states to shore up their collective security by the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which was initially discussed in November 1980 and officially inaugurated in May 1981. However, it rejected the idea of transforming the organisation into any form of anti-Iranian military alliance. Thus, Oman managed to maintain a balanced and cordial relationship with Iran, despite tensions between its GCC counterparts and Iran. In pursuing this policy, Oman ensured that it safeguarded its sovereignty from any external interference, and preserved independence in its political choices and decisions without antagonising any side, irrespective of whether other countries were in support or not. Oman's tendency is to maintain an independent policy on regional issues, differing from those of the other Arab Gulf states, such as Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE and Bahrain, who generally tend to follow the Saudi lead in their regional policies. This independence is clearly informed by the idea of Oman as a distinctive national cultural identity, and its unique perspective on regional affairs.

As such, it justifiable to argue that these two broad sets of ideas – of Oman as possessing a distinctive cultural identity in her region, but as being especially vulnerable to external interference – had become so deeply rooted in Omani foreign policy thinking, that by 1980, when the Iran-Iraq War broke out, we can conceive of them as deeply established traditional understandings which formed the background against which Omani policy-makers would respond to new dilemmas. Applying the framework of traditions and dilemmas, the following chapters of this study will examine two cases of regional upheaval that created a policy dilemma for the Omani policy makers. These are the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 and the Civil War in Yemen of 1994. They will examine how Omani policy makers drew on these two broad sets of ideas to help them frame the dilemma, and to decide on the appropriate policy with which to face it.

5 Chapter Five: The Iran-Iraq War

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will begin to apply the interpretive analytical framework of traditions and dilemmas adopted by Mark Bevir in order to understand why Omani policy makers chose to act as mediators in response to the dilemma posed by the Iran-Iraq War. It is argued that the dramatic outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq in September 1980 presented Omani policy-makers with a major foreign and security policy dilemma. The outbreak of war undermined the relatively stable situation in the Persian Gulf region, and posed an existential threat to the monarchical regimes of the small Arab Gulf states. They feared that if they failed to provide necessary support for the Iraqi war effort, this would lead to the collapse of the Iraqi regime, which would in turn encourage Khomeini's regime to expand the Iranian Revolution to include the Gulf States. Consequently, the Arab Gulf states became active on the Iraqi side, providing it with substantial military and financial support. Sultan Qaboos came under considerable pressure from the Arab Gulf states and the wider Arab world, pushing him to join the Arab ranks against Iran, based on the principle that Oman as an Arab state should support Iraq.[313]

This regional upheaval indicates that Omani policy makers were faced with a policy dilemma, as the traditional existing foreign and security policy of a 'balanced approach' identified in the previous chapter was profoundly challenged by the new circumstances. Ultimately, this brought about a reassessment of this tradition in Oman's foreign and security policy practice and

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[313] Telegram from the American Embassy in Muscat to the Secretary of State, 'Discussion with Zawawi on Iraqi access to facilities for attack on Iran', October 01, 1980, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/208196 , (accessed 10 January 2019).

provoked a modification to their web of beliefs about how best to secure and advance Oman security interests in the emerging regional security environment. It is argued that Omani policy responses evolved through three overlapping stages, which demonstrate an evolution in their balanced approach, adapting it to new circumstances: in the early stages of the dilemma posed by the war this was met by the existing policy of a 'balanced approach', which was influenced by the belief that Iraq would achieve a quick victory over Iran. Once the war turned out to be longer than has been envisaged, Omani policy-makers recognised that the policy of a 'balanced approach' was no longer sustainable, leading them to revisit their tradition policy practice, and consequently adopt what they termed a 'positive neutrality' stance.

However, as the conflict develop bringing with it a more protracted threat of interference by international powers, Oman moved from its position of neutrality to act as a mediator to bring the war to an end. While the other Arab Gulf States decided to support Iraq, Oman refused to back Iraq against Iran, choosing to pursue a new policy and take a different approach to counter the dilemma posed by the war. Towards the end of 1984, Oman decided to undertake the role of mediator with the aim to end the conflict by peaceful means. Indeed, as the war continued to rage, Oman became actively engaged in mediation efforts, urging the conflicting parties to negotiate, hosting secret negotiations between the conflicting parties, concluding in a ceasefire agreement and ending the eight-year war.

This chapter will argue that Oman's decision to act as a mediator in response to the dilemma posed by the Iran-Iraq War was influenced by two sets of traditional ideas about Oman, as it has a distinctive cultural identity in the region, and the idea that Oman is distinctively vulnerable to external intervention, in view of her history and exposed geopolitical position. In fact, Omani

policy makers drew heavily on these ideas both in framing the kinds of threat presented by the Iran-Iraq War and in seeking to meet them with action. However, as the war continued, Omani policy makers as creative agents were able to act innovatively against the background of these traditional ideas. In this context, the neutral position that was adopted in the early days of the war, and the later decision to act as mediators of conflict between the conflicting parties by the end of 1984, were both influenced by these traditional ideas. In this sense, the foreign and security policies remained heavily dependent on the two traditions of thought constructed by Sultan Qaboos regarding Oman's place in the world identified in the previous chapter, but suggest that the practice that sustained this tradition of thought had undergone some subtle but noticeable and significant shifts over time.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will describe the key external developments to set out the context in which Omani political actors were operating, by providing a brief summary of the regional and international environment, how these created a policy dilemma for Omani policy makers, and provoked the shift in Omani foreign and security policy thinking which culminated in mediation. In doing so, it will explore how and why the existing foreign and security policy ideas came to be questioned in light of the new developments; it will also elucidate the nature of the policy options Omani policy makers faced, given their predominant worldview. The second section will examine how Omani policy makers drew on the traditions of thoughts outlined in the previous chapter to help frame the dilemma, and to choose appropriate policies to counter it. It will describe what Omani policy makers decided to do, and how they drew on and remoulded traditional ideas in the process of arriving at mediation

as the preferred policy choice for resolving the dilemma they faced. The third section of this chapter brings the key findings of the previous parts together.

5.2   Key external developments

To understand how and why the Iran-Iraq War constituted a dilemma for Omani policy makers, given their existing traditions of thought, it is necessary to first describe the key external developments which created the dilemma, and provoked the modification in Oman's foreign and security policy thinking which culminated in mediation.

The immediate dilemma for Omani policy makers was how to respond to the outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq, which had happened in a context strongly informed by three key external events. These were; the Iranian Revolution in January 1979, the seizure of the Grand Mosque (Al Haram al-Makki') in November 1979, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In my interviews with selected Omani political elites who were involved in the policy making process during that period, I was eager to explore how Omani policy-makers perceived the strategic context in which they were operating in the period that preceded the Iran-Iraq War. These three key historical episodes in the period leading to the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War had played a key role in shaping Omani policymakers' understanding of the geostrategic context in which they were operating, and eventually influenced their response to the war.[314]

The "Islamic Revolution" in Iran in January 1979 was based on a religious doctrine of Shi'a ideology which institutionalised the intention of the dissemination of the Islamic Revolution's

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[314] Interview with Interviewee (2), 8 May 2018.

principles across the region through the exploitation of Shi'a minorities in the Arab Gulf States. While this could potentially undermine the region, most importantly for Oman the Iranian revolution overthrew the Shah, with whom Sultan Qaboos had enjoyed a very close relationship during the 1970s. The leaders of the two countries had maintained full cooperation in maintaining the security and stability of the region and safety of navigation through the Straits of Hormuz. This close cooperation was exemplified by the signing of the agreement on a joint Iranian-Omani naval operation to patrol the Straits of Hormuz in March 1974. [315] The relationship between the two countries in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution had significantly deteriorated after the new regime in Tehran took somewhat hostile steps to extend its influence in the Straits. As described by the Iranian ambassador to the UN at the time, "in the early days the relations with Oman was not very good. We looked at Oman as a collaborator with the Shah. There was no cooperation of any sort"[316] Indeed, shortly after the overthrow of the Shah in January 1979, Iran terminated the joint Oman-Iran patrol in the Straits of Hormuz.[317] In September 1979, concerned by the vulnerability of the Straits to mining or sabotage after the fall of the Shah's regime, and the hostile attitude of the new regime in Tehran coinciding with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Omanis approached their Gulf neighbours proposing financial support to enable Oman to establish naval patrol forces, and to enhance their military capabilities with air reconnaissance helicopters and electronic monitoring equipment. [318] Outlining this initiative, Sultan Qaboos indicated that he did not want foreign troops to help him guard the Straits, arguing that "given the means, Oman is capable of taking the necessary

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[315] R. Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz*. Brill Archive, 1979, p.140.
[316] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: From Khomeini to Khatami*, Routledge, 2003. p.70.
[317] A. Borchagrave, 'Oman: In Dire Straits', *Newsweek*, 24 September 1979, p.6.
[318] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Omani Proposals on The Strait of Hormuz, Oman the Straits of Hormuz and Gulf Security*, File No. NBL 051/1, 9 November 1979.

measures."[319] Nevertheless, the Omani proposal received a negative response from the other Arab Gulf states. These developments forced the Omanis to shift their defence posture away from their traditional confrontation with the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (DRY), and north to the Gulf itself. In response to Iran's hostile initiatives, Oman reinforced its military units on the Musandam Peninsula, and Omani naval forces were placed on full alert to guard the strategically vital Straits of Hormuz.[320] The relation became particularly tenuous between the two countries following Iranian hostile activities in the Straits of Hormuz. In late September 1980 three Iranian frigates violated Omani territorial waters to check shipping on late September 1980.[321] On 7 October, three foreign cargo ships passing through the Straits of Hormuz were sunk by Iranian troops holding in the port city of Khorramshahr.[322] These developments highlighted Omani policy makers' geopolitical concerns with regard to Iran's policy, relating to freedom of navigation through the Straits of Hormuz and Iran's challenge to the political status quo in the region, through its use of subversive activities.[323] It is true that Oman might have regarded itself as insulated from pressures to which other Arab Gulf states such as Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE were exposed, as Oman was far less reliant on the Straits as an export route. The largest part of the Omani coastline and the major Omani ports are located outside the Gulf, offering the Sultanate alternative export routes. However, Oman regards itself as more vulnerable to regional instability. This sense of vulnerability on the part of Omani policy makers was underpinned by the idea that Oman is distinctively vulnerable to external interference, in

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[319] J. Bulloch, 'Oman Calls for Help to Guard Tankers', *Telegraph*, 20 November 1979, p.4.
[320] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Meeting record of the Head of Political Department at Oman Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the British Ambassador in Muscat*, Muscat TELNO 271, 19 December1980.
[321] 'Omani navy on alert: Flow of oil tankers slowed in vital strait', *The Globe and Mail*, 01 Oct 1980, p.10.
[322] H. Ellis, 'Could Iran close Hormuz? Most think not', *The Christian Science Monitor*, Oct 10, 1980, p.5.
[323] Interview with Interviewee (2), 8 May 2018.

view of her history and exposed geopolitical position, which play a key role in framing Omani perceptions of threat. This also explains Oman's continued warning to the Gulf states about the threat to Straits of Hormuz and its initiative regarding the security of the Straits of Hormuz, as outlined above.

The second incident was the seizure of the Grand Mosque (Al Haram al-Makki') in Mecca in November 1979, by an extremist Wahhabi religious group of 250 armed men led by Juhaiman Al Utaibi, who held the belief that the Saudi regime and the Arab world at large had diverged from the path of true Islam, and there must be a return to the 'original' Islam - if need be, by force. This incident exemplified the rise of 'Wahhabi' extremism and emergence of the so-called "Sahawa" movement (Awakening movement) in Saudi Arabia. The movement was regarded as Sunni fundamentalists as having its origins in a religious society that was inspired by Wahhabi ideology and aimed to spread this school of thought across the region. It was established in 'Madinah' in 1972 with the active support of a leading Saudi cleric Abdul Aziz bin Baz.[324] This incident had alarmed Omani policy-makers regarding their own domestic security concerns, highlighting Oman's fears over 'Wahhabi' expansionism through the Gulf region, and Oman's apprehension over how this would impact their social fabric. Expressing his view of events, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs asserted that he "did not read the events in Mecca as being directed against the Saudi regime or its policies but as representing a bid for leadership for Sunni Islam worldwide." [325] This belief was influenced by the Omani historical experience of 'Wahhabis' meddling in Oman's internal affairs. As such, the Omanis were concerned about

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[324]Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3419, Ref 12/81, 'The seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca', 21 August 1981.
[325] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3419, Muscat Tel 346, 'Islamic cross-currents', 28 November 1979.

serious consequences which could ensue for neighbouring countries, including Oman, whatever the motives behind this extremist movement.[326]

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of December 1979 had further intensified Omani policy makers' existing fear of Soviet expansion in the Gulf region. Sultan Qaboos has always been conscious of both a direct and indirect Soviet threat, and memories of the protracted civil war remained with the Sultan and his advisors. Although it was now some six years since the Omani forces had succeeded in crushing rebels in the southern part of the country, some feelings of discontent and anti-government sentiment still existed, and Oman feared the possibility that the Soviet-backed PDRY would like to exploit this situation. Their suspicions were that the insurgents were waiting for any sign of weakness in Oman to revive hostilities. Now, with Iran in revolutionary turmoil, South Yemen may have been in a better position to rekindle revolt. The Sultan therefore watched anxiously as Ethiopia swung leftward on the Horn of Africa, South Yemen moved close to the Soviets, and Afghanistan fell to a Marxist coup, while Iran experienced a destabilising revolution. As one of the Sultan's advisers at the time described the situation, "from Afghanistan to the Horn of Africa, the situation looks very bleak to us."[327] This perception was also clearly presented in the Sultan's words;

"*Certainly it is one of the rather difficult times with all the activities going around us. There is Afghanistan, the uncertain situation in Iran, and what is happening in South Yemen, getting*

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[326] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3419, Muscat Tel 346, 'Islamic cross-currents', 28 November 1979.

[327] D. Zagoria, 'Into the Breach: New Soviet Alliances in the Third World', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 57, no. 4 Spring, 1979, p. 739, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20040199. , (accessed 21 July 2018).

more and more in the Russian hands; ... Russian naval activities have increased not just in their

bases in South Yemen, but also, in the Gulf itself. Yes, we feel it is a time when one must think

seriously…. we are [Oman] like the bridge to the rest of the Gulf, and in view of the new

situation we are, of course, alert."[328]

Within these regional security dynamics, the dramatic outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq in

September 1980 occurred, and the combination of these key external developments heightened

existing beliefs about the fear of foreign interference and the potential threat to Omani internal

security and its national independence. This in turn had played a key role in shaping the policy

makers' security perceptions in the run up to the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, and influenced

the manner in which they interpreted the dilemma posed by the war. Obviously, Omani policy-

makers perceived regional stability as an important factor for Oman's domestic order; therefore,

when the war between Iran and Iraq broke out in September 1980, the emerging conflict was

framed very much within the same context.

5.3 How did the Iran-Iraq war present Omani policymakers with a dilemma?

As war broke out, the Arab Gulf states decided to effectively side with Iraq on the basis of the

principle of Arab solidarity. [329] The Arab Gulf states feared that if they failed to provide

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[328] 'Concern in Oman', *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 May 1980, p. A25. Available from ProQuest
[329] R. King, 'The Iran-Iraq War: The Political Implications: Introduction', *The Adelphi Papers 27*, no. 219, March 1987, p. 1–76.

necessary support for the Iraqi war effort, this would lead to the collapse of the Iraqi regime, which would in turn encourage Khomeini's regime to expand the Iranian Revolution to include the Gulf States.[330] As well as allowing Iraq access to their airfields in the early stages of the war, the Arab Gulf states, except Oman, provided Iraq with a $24 billion loan to support its war effort.[331] Consequently, Oman faced increased diplomatic pressure from hard-liner Arab neighbours. The Arab Gulf states, and in particular Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, tried to push Oman into joining ranks with Iraq and build an anti-Iranian block. As Interviewee (5) recalls, this pressure extended to some Arab countries warning Oman that "Saddam Hussain might send Iraqi troops to South Yemen and carry out military operation against Oman."[332] Iraq also applied pressure to Oman to support its fellow Arab state. Saddam Hussein claimed that the return by Iran to Arab sovereignty of the islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs was one of the early aims of the war.[333] As part of his proposed plan, in late September 1980, Saddam Hussein requested to use Omani airbases to mount an air operation against Iran, urging Oman as an Arab state to do its duty in supporting Iraq.[334] Omani policy makers even came under pressure from the wider Arab world, who preferred to close ranks against Persian Iran, and provide support to Arab Iraq, based on the principle of Arab solidarity. For instance, Sultan Qaboos came under pressure from King Hussain of Jordan, who had been asked by the Iraqis to intervene in support of an Iraqi request to Oman for refueling facilities to enable the Iraqi air force to mount an air operation

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[330] "Tilting Toward Baghdad: Gulf States' Aid to Iraq", a brief by the Central Intelligence Agency (US). https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP06T00412R000200020001-6.pdf
[331] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.71.
[332] Interview with Interviewee (5), 23 May 2018.
[333] G. Nonneman, 'The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War, p. 174.
[334] Telegram from the American Embassy in Muscat to the Secretary of State, 'Discussion with Zawawi on Iraqi access to facilities for attack on Iran", *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library*, 01 October 1980, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/20819.

against the Iranian naval base at Bandar Abbas from Omani territory.[335] The Iraqis had made a previous direct approach to Oman, but had been turned down. However, while the Omanis made further consideration of the request, ultimately they did not agree to cooperate with Iraq in this way, in order to avoid any inflammatory action that could antagonise Iran, due to their desire not to be drawn into taking sides in the conflict

On the other hand, Oman was concerned with to Iran's policy relating to freedom of navigation through the Straits of Hormuz, and challenge to the political status quo in the region through its use of subversive activities. In November 1980, Sultan Qaboos outlined their fear of Iranian retaliation, stressing that, "They [the Iranians] are going to cause problems because they are going to use subversive mechanisms in the area, and that is going to create some instability."[336] Following this line of thought, Omani policy makers felt that they were caught in the middle, and their country was susceptible to attacks from either side. Therefore, it was not wise to make enemies. As the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the time, explained;

"The war produced some negative reactions from our neighbours towards Iran. During the first years, it was not clear for Oman what direction the war would take. We did not want to be allied to either party. We were neutral; we had no interest in continuing this war. This was very much appreciated by Iran, but it made a number of neighbours very unhappy… We looked far ahead and saw that GCC had no strength against Iran and Iraq. Also, being Iran's neighbour, it was not wise making enemies."[337]

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[335] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3687, Fil No: 020/4, Iran/Iraq, British Embassy in Amman Tel No. 362, 27 September 1980.
[336] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interviewed by *Oman Daily*, Sunday, 08 November 1980, p1&3.
[337] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.91.

Clearly, the regional security dynamics that emerged post-1979, and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, had profoundly challenged Omani policy makers, facing them with a radical policy dilemma over the kind of foreign and security policy approach to follow in order to safeguard Oman's security. Indeed, after a three-year calm following civil war in the southern province of Dhofar, Oman was once again in a perilous position. The Omani policy makers' narrative depicted five most consistently feared consequences of the Iran-Iraq War. First, the most voiced concern was, as Qais Zawawi, the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs asserted, that "the war would usher in a new protracted period of revived Arab/Persian hostility which would not end with the fighting."[338] Second, and closely linked to this aspect, is that the war was also seen as carrying an ideological dimension. As described by the Omani ambassador to the UK at the time, the dispute embodied aspects of Sunni/Shi'a ideological conflict.[339] This concern was also apparent in my interview with Interviewee (5), who asserted that there was a "fear of having this war turn into a "Sunni-Shi'a" sectarian conflict, which would in turn cause a sectarian polarisation in the region, affecting the unity of the Omani society."[340] As the Director of the Oman Research Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time affirmed, concerns over the impact of the war on Omani domestic security were discussed at a higher level within the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He referred specifically to concerns about Shi'a/Sunni differences within Omani society, and the possibility of having religious dissidents

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[338] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3534, File No. NBL/020/1, Part (A), Anglo/Omani Relations, British Embassy in Muscat, 026/18, John Moberly's Visit' Record of meeting between the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Sir John Moberly the British diplomat, 19 October 1980.

[339] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3696, *Iran/Iraq conflict: Foreign Reaction of Views*, Record of conversation between the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman at the FCO, on 30 September, 1980.

[340] Interview with Interviewee (5), 23 May 2018

who could be stimulated into activity by the consequences of the war.[341] Third, there were also concerns regarding vulnerability related to the geopolitics of the Straits of Hormuz. Considering the situation in the aftermath of the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, Omani policy makers gave careful consideration to the possibility of Iranian retaliation and the blocking of the Straits of Hormuz. In fact, the Omani government feared that the Iranians might even try to occupy the tip of the Mussandam Peninsula, located in the northern part of Oman and overlooking the Straits of Hormuz.[342] As Interviewee (7) put it, "the consequences of Iran's closure of the Straits of Hormuz would be very serious for Oman's national security, which would put Oman in a difficult position leading to the intervention of international forces and then dragging Oman into becoming a party in the war."[343] Indeed, given Oman's geographical proximity and its location on the Persian Gulf, both factors made it susceptible to attacks from Iran. This prompted Omani policy makers to fear that siding with the other Gulf Arab states would lead to further escalation of the war, and confrontation with Iran. As such, Oman was sufficiently concerned about its potential vulnerability to resist pressure to align itself unambiguously with the Arab bloc. Fourth, Omani policy makers thinking were occupied by fear of the threat of Soviet expansion, which was further intensified by the eruption of the Iran-Iraq War. For instance, in the course of his interview, Interviewee (1) indicated that "one of the concerns that we have frequently voiced during the war is that the conflict would be bound to bring the Soviets to the region.[344]

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[341] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO/3539, '*The Iraq/Iran War: Oman's Position on the light of Iran/Iraq conflict'*, File No. 021/2, a meeting record between the Omani Ambassador to the UK and Sir John Moberly, 30 September, 1980.

[342] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO/3539, '*The Iraq/Iran War: Oman's Position on the light of Iran/Iraq conflict'*, File No. 021/2, a meeting record between the Omani Ambassador to the UK and Sir John Moberly, 30 September, 1980.

[343] Interview with Interviewee (7), 13 June 2018.

[344] Interview with interviewee (1), 25 April 2018.

A similar concern was also expressed by Interviewee (2) who noted that, "we considered that the expansion of the war's scope would lead to the intervention of international forces in the conflict, thus increasing foreign interferences in the internal affairs of regional states."[345] Finally, Omani policy makers voiced concerns about the economic damage incurred by having this region turn into a region of turmoil, as this would have an indirect impact on the Omani economy. As Interviewee (1) affirmed, the country was facing difficulties over securing adequate finance for social development, and one of the problems facing the government was that the more that was achieved, the higher the people's aspirations became.[346] Interviewee (5) recalls that there was great concern that the war would lead to an increase in the rate of defence expenditure, which was anticipated to reach over 70% of total revenue, and would severely disrupt the social development plan.[347] Indeed, by the end of 1980, the Omani government had reached a stage at which hard decisions would have to be taken on the competing priorities of development and defence.[348] As a result, one of the most feared consequences was that if the Omani government could not secure the resources required to keep the population content, protests and disturbances could occur, thereby seriously undermining and threatening the country's stability.

Not only did this reflect Omani policy makers' understanding of the security environment around them, but also highlighted the traditions of thought within which they reasoned and acted. The Iran-Iraq War was regarded as a challenge to Oman internal stability and its national

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[345] Interview with Interviewee (2), 8 May 2018.
[346] Interview with interviewee (1), 25 April 2018.
[347] Interview with Interviewee (5), 23 May 2018.
[348] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3531, *Internal Political Affairs in Oman*, British Embassy in Muscat, Tele letter, File Ref: 014/6, dated 2 December 1980.

independence. Omani policy makers feared that siding with the other Gulf Arab states would lead to further confrontation with Iran. As the then Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs put it, "the other Gulf countries were happy when Iraq started the war. Oman for geopolitical and historical reasons was not keen to see this conflict in the region." [349] Therefore, Omani policymakers' understanding of the threat posed by the Iran-Iraq War reflected their traditions of thinking about regional security, particularly linked to their sense of Oman as being peculiarly geo-strategically vulnerable, the close connection drawn between regional and domestic conflicts, and the tradition of thought on Omani society as being particularly sensitive to sectarian disputes (Arab-Persian, Sunni-Shia) in light of the influence of the Ibadhi traditions in shaping Oman's national identity.

Accordingly, Omani policy makers read Oman's position in the regional security arena in the aftermath of the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War as a major foreign and security policy dilemma. The dilemma was whether Oman should put its weight behind the Arab Gulf states in siding with Iraq, or distance itself from Iraq and the other Arab Gulf states in order to avoid complete alienation from Iran. Oman was sufficiently concerned about its potential vulnerability to resist pressure to align itself unambiguously with the Arab Gulf states in siding with Iraq. Indeed, Omani policy makers feared that joining the other Gulf Arab states in siding with Iraq would lead to further escalation in the war, confrontation with Iran, increasing, as well as the possibility of Iranian retaliation and counter attack across the Straits. The alternative - not joining the Arab Gulf States in supporting Iraq was not much better, as this would open Oman to charges of abandoning fellow Arab states. In addition, Oman needed to keep close ties with its follow Arab

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[349] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.92.

Gulf states for economic imperatives. Oman's economic outlook was not in a good condition, as their economic growth had begun to experience slowing down since 1976, and with the continuing drain on its resources for military expenditure, Oman was confronted with the added disadvantage of diminishing its oil income, as their production was decreasing by about 300,000 barrels a day. This was further complicated with the security developments that were taking place in the region, most notably the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian Revolution and Iran-Iraq War, which had prompted Sultan Qaboos to increase his defence expenditure to about 70% of total revenue.[350] As such, the Omani government was facing difficulties securing adequate finance for the socio-economic development projects which were deemed necessary to win the hearts and minds of the Omani people and to consolidate national unity.[351] This economic weakness increased Omani dependence on its richer Arab neighbours, particularly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE for financial assistance for military hardware and large development projects, and to sustain its security and stability. This economic situation had made the dilemma more acute for Omani policy-makers, as they felt that this would undermine their ability to pursue an independent foreign and security policy in the new context provided by the Iran-Iraq War. In light of this dramatic change in the security environment of the Gulf region, and in particular the changed attitudes of Iran towards states on the other side of the Gulf, this context made a 'balanced approach' much harder to implement and, significantly, made it much less clear that a balanced approach could secure Oman's national unity and national independence.

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[350] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3549, British Embassy- Muscat, Oman defence expenditure, 7 December 1980.
[351] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3549, British Embassy- Muscat, Oman defence expenditure, 7 December 1980.

5.4   Responding to the Dilemma of the Iran-Iraq War

As outlined above, the Iran-Iraq War presented Omani policymakers with a major foreign and security policy dilemma, and they clearly drew on the Sultan's ideas of Oman as possessing a distinctive cultural identity in her region and as being historically vulnerable to external interference, which by now had become a major belief adopted by the Sultan and his closest advisors, in order to help frame the problem and to choose appropriate policies to counter it. Within this given context, Oman's distinctive cultural identity as the only Muslim state in the region with a majority population of the 'Ibadhi' branch of Islam, located at a crossroads between the flaring tensions amongst Sunni Arab Gulf states and Shia Persia and its desire to prevent external actors from interfering in its internal affairs since Oman contains sizeable Sunni and Shia communities as well, has led Oman to not want to ally itself to other major powers in the region. In this specific circumstance, the conviction that Oman could act as a mediator between Persians/Shi'ites and Arabs/Sunnis, not just held the guarantee of a more stable Gulf region, yet additionally provided Oman with a chance to show its capacity to influence its immediate security environment and to act as an equal player to other major powers in the region.

As indicated above, the Omani response to the dilemma posed by the war progressed through three overlapping stages; applying the existing policy of a 'balanced approach', adopting a 'positive neutrality' position, and eventually acting as a mediator to help bring the war to an end. The challenge posed by the Iran-Iraq War was met in the first instance by the existing

policy tradition of a 'balanced approach'. Accordingly, Omani policy makers pursued a delicate balancing act between its Arab Gulf state neighbours and Iran. On one hand, Oman joined the Arab Gulf states to shore up their collective security by the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which was initially discussed in November 1980 and officially inaugurated in May 1981. It worth noting at this point that Iraq was excluded from being a potential partner in the organisation, which was significant for Oman, as there was an important difference between joining the GCC and joining an Arab alliance with Iraq. On the other hand, Oman refused the Arab Gulf states' call to cut diplomatic relations with Iran and to isolate the country. Despite mounting pressure from the other Arab states, Oman insisted on -and succeeded in - keeping good relations with Iran. As was expressed by the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs at the time, "Oman dealt with the war according to its point of view that we should not be drawn into the conflict because Oman will be there, Iran will be there, no matter what government, so the only solution is to keep talking them. At the same time, Oman did not isolate itself from the region; it was a part of the GCC."[352] Accordingly, in the early days of the war, Oman made great efforts to prevent any confrontation with Iran. On the 30th September 1980, the Omani government issued a statement declaring that it wanted to be on good terms with both sides in the conflict.[353] The statement came in response to an Iranian statement that they would take action against Iraqi naval vessels taking shelter in the ports of the Arab states. Interviewee (1) recalls that "Sultan Qaboos ordered the Omani Naval forces to keep away from any contact with the Iranian gunboats when they were chasing tankers in the Straits of Hormuz."[354] The reason

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[352] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.92.
[353] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO/3539, 'The Iraq/Iran War: Oman's Position on the light of Iran/Iraq conflict', File No. 021/2, meeting record between the Omani Ambassador to the UK and Sir John Moberly, 30 September, 1980.
[354] Interview with interviewee (1), 25 April 2018.

underlying Sultan Qaboos' decision to avoid being drawn into confrontation with Iran is the tradition of thought that regards Oman as being particularly geo-strategically vulnerable, in relation to the geopolitics of the Straits of Hormuz. Therefore, Oman's security interests would be better protected by taking a conciliatory policy towards Iran, rather than through complete solidarity with pro-Iraqi GCC states. The Omani policy makers feared that if the war did escalate, this would prompt the Iranians to attempt to occupy the tip of the Mussandum peninsula or close the Straits of Hormuz to shipping, which would inevitably attract interference from external powers. In this respect, during the early days of the war, Omani policy makers frequently voiced particular concerns about the possibility of Russian involvement in the region if the West (US) decided to implement a contingency plan to patrol the Straits of Hormuz.[355] This also reflected the way in which Omani policy makers constructed regional and global developments in the emerging security context as threats to Oman's national unity and its national independence. Not only did this reflect the belief that the Soviet Union was the core security challenge facing Oman, but also highlighted the role of Oman's recent historical experience of civil war in shaping Omani policy makers' understanding of their security environment, as Oman was the only Arab Gulf state which had fought communist inspired insurgencies. As such, Omani policy makers' main objective became to avoid any step which could exacerbate the situation and lead to the spread of military conflict outside the existing area of the conflict.

Although Oman was not siding with the Arab Gulf states in supporting Iraq, relations with Iran during this early stage of the war were still somewhat strained. At the beginning of the war,

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[355] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Embassy, Muscat, Tel No. 026/18, John Moberly's Visit, 19 October 1980.

Iranian behaviour towards the Arab Gulf States was shaped by revolutionary rhetoric and ideological zeal, and did not differentiate between Oman and those Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait who were actively supporting Iraq.[356] Iran also viewed Oman as a pro-Western country because of its close relations with the US and the UK, and because it had had a very cordial relationship with the Shah's regime. As was described by the Iranian ambassador to the UN at the time, "in the early days the relations with Oman were not very good. We looked at Oman as a collaborator with the Shah."[357] However, fearing getting drawn into the Iran-Iraq War, Oman sought accommodation with Iran rather than confrontation. Indeed, Sultan Qaboos sought to develop an explicit policy of good neighbourly relations with Iran. Borrowing from the Ibadhi principles of good neighbourliness and the importance of dialogue as a means to resolve disputes and achieve peaceful coexistence, Sultan Qaboos consistently warned the Arab Gulf States that isolating Iran would be counterproductive to the region's long-term security interests. As the Sultan put it in November 1980, "It is essential that the Gulf States do not cut off the thread with Iran and maintain the opportunity for dialogue because the Iran-Iraq War, whatever it is showing to us of its current ferocity, will eventually be an event of the past and the Arab and the Persian will remain in the same place forever. There is no substitute for good neighbourliness."[358]

Towards the end of 1980, the conflict reached a turning point. Iran was able to stop the Iraqi offensive and, regaining the initiative, started its counter attack against the Iraqi forces, forcing them to retreat and take defensive positions, transforming the conflict into a stalemate.[359] Once

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[356] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.70.
[357] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.70.
[358] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interview with *Oman Daily*, Monday, 12 November, 1980, p.1.
[359] G. Nonneman, 'The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War', p.175.

the conflict had clearly turned into a stalemate by the end of November 1980, the Arab Gulf states became increasingly alarmed. Fearing an Iranian victory over Iraq, with the view that Arab states must unite against Persian Iran, the Arab Gulf States and in particular Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, adopted a more emphatic pro-Iraqi stance.[360] During this phase of the war the Arab Gulf states increased their financial and material support to Iraq in order to prevent an Iranian victory. Saudi Arabia offered Iraq transshipment of military and civilian supplies, gave $6 billion in direct financial aid by April 1981, and a further $4 billion during the remainder of the year. Kuwait's first $2 billion loan was given in the autumn of 1980, followed by a further $2 billion in April 1981. The UAE is thought to have contributed between $1–3 billion, and Qatar some $1 billion.[361] For its part, Iran started to retaliate against the Arab Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, for their active support of Iraq. During the month of November, Iran mounted several air attacks against Kuwait. On 7th November 1980, Iran launched an air attack against Kuwaiti oil refineries, and on 16 November, Iranian fighter jets mounted several attacks inside Kuwait, including on the border post in the northern city of Abdali, and the road between Abdali and the city of Safwan in the southern part of Iraq.[362] The attacks were intended to disrupt the trans-shipment of logistical support from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to Iraq. By the end of 1980, it was clear that there would be no rapid Iraqi victory as had been envisaged, and the war would turn into a long protracted conflict.

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[360] "Tilting Toward Baghdad: Gulf States' Aid to Iraq", a brief by the Central Intelligence Agency (US). https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP06T00412R000200020001-6.pdf

[361] G. Nonneman, 'The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War:', p175.

[362] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Embassy in Kuwait, Tel No 722, Abdali Incident Report, 17 November 1980.

The changing fortunes of the war by the end of 1980 amounted to a policy dilemma. Omani policy-makers became more concerned about being dragged into a long protracted conflict with its implications of sectarian polarisation and the possible involvement of external powers becoming their primary concern. Interviewee (2) points out that;

"when Iran started to retaliate against Saudi Arabia and Kuwait by the end of 1980, it was a clear indication for us that the war will spread out of its actual zone , which raised our concerns that the consequences would be very serious, the war would escalate and go out of hand, by involving Kuwait that would drag the other Arab Gulf States into the conflict, and once this happened the involvement of the outside powers would surely be a strong possibility, so our prime concerns was to avoid a long-drawn out conflict and to see the war brought to a speedy end."[363]

As such, it was clear at this point that simply maintaining a balanced approach would be less likely to secure Oman's national unity and national independence, and therefore, a more active policy was required. The need to avoid a drawn-out conflict with its implication of sectarian polarisation and spillover led Sultan Qaboos to adjust his traditional policy practice, and this time seek to promote the principle of 'Positive Neutrality', one presented as the best policy option for guaranteeing both regional security and Oman's unique regional position, and to safeguard its national security interests, with the possibility to create opportunities for peaceful resolution of the conflict. As Sultan Qaboos asserted in early 1981, Gulf States' security can be achieved by avoiding exposing Gulf States to any extension of the conflict and adopting a policy

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[363] Interview with Interviewee (2), 8 May 2018.

of positive neutrality."[364] In the context of wartime, positive neutrality is a political position involving legal duties and responsibilities.[365] In this sense, positive neutrality is a more active policy that involves a more positive and constructive role for the neutral state as an honest broker capable of offering good offices and mediating between belligerents. This understanding was also apparent in my interviews with the Omani elites. According to Interviewee (2), 'Positive Neutrality' meant "not siding with any of the conflicting parties and keeping channels of communication and diplomatic relations open with both parties."[366] This represents a slight departure from a policy of a balanced approach. Indeed, such a policy need not necessary involve any committal policies. On the contrary, a balanced approach may entail a cautious alignment. On this line, Omani policy makers believed that Oman's national interests would be better served and protected by taking a neutral stance in the conflict rather than joining Arab ranks against Iran. As Sultan Qaboos stated, "the objective view of the Iran-Iraq War dictates to us a degree of impartiality of the vision and dictates that we keep the chances of dialogue with Tehran."[367] This was influenced by belief in the principle of peaceful coexistence between Arab and Persians as a key factor to ensure regional stability and to advance Omani national interests. Indeed, Sultan Qaboos stressed, "I think that the Persians have been in this place since time immemorial and will remain as Iraq was and just as we existed as countries and communities of the Gulf. This is the sure fact that should not prevented by the dark fog of the war that gathers over the Gulf."[368] Therefore Omanis believed that they would have to live with

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[364] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interview with *Oman Daily*, Monday, 12 November, 1980, p.1.

[365] G. Evans and J. Newnham, '*The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations*', London, Penguin Books, p.366.

[366] Interview with Interviewee (2), 8 May 2018.

[367] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interview with *Oman Daily*, Monday, 12 November, 1980, p.1.

[368] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interview with *Oman Daily*, Monday, 12 November, 1980, p.1.

the Iranians regardless of the type of regime in place, and that it would be unwise to make an enemy of them.

In the course of the first three years of the war Omani policy makers pursued what they termed a 'Positive Neutrality' policy; however, by mid-1984, the conflict shifted again with the start of the so-called 'Tanker War', leading to further escalation in Arab/Persian tensions. Overwhelmed by the Iranian offensive's massive ground attacks, Saddam Hussain sought to internationalise the conflict by targeting Iranian oil export terminals and tankers to provoke them to retaliate with extreme measures that would endanger the shipping lane in the Straits of Hormuz, thereby bringing direct intervention from external powers.[369] Iraq further declared that all inbound or outbound ships from Iranian ports in the northern zone of the Persian Gulf were subject to attack.[370] In response to the Iraqi attacks on its oil outlets, Iran started a series of attacks against all oil tankers that belonged to the Arab Gulf States supporting Iraq: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE.[371] On 14 May 1984, Iranian fighter jets attacked a Kuwaiti oil tanker carrying over 80,000 tons of crude oil to Britain, and three days later Iran attacked a Saudi oil tanker in Saudi territorial waters. These increased attacks on shipping further heightened the Arab/Persian antagonism and marked a major escalation in the war. In response to the increased attacks on shipping, the Arab Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, established an air defence patrol.[372] Moreover, the Arab Gulf states, and in particular Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, became more antagonised, leading to a direct confrontation with Iran on the 5th of June 1984, when Saudi Arabia shot down two Iranian fighter jets over the Persian Gulf using American-

[369] G. Nonneman, 'The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War:', p.178.
[370] K. Efraim, '*The Iran-Iraq War*', The Rosen Publishing Group, 2009, p.48.
[371] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.77.
[372] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.79.

made Stinger missiles.[373] Iran regarded the Saudis action as turning the war into an Arabian-Persian conflict. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait also pushed to turn the GCC into a military alliance by proposing an integrated military structure and formal alliance in order to build a bulwark against Iran.

Omani policy makers' understanding of the above developments incorporated two of their traditions of thought. Firstly, it revealed that the GCC was beginning to look like an Arab/Sunni alliance, risking Omani involvement in just the kind of sectarian conflict it was trying to avoid. This prompted Sultan Qaboos to modify his idea of establishing a collective regional security mechanism. As illustrated earlier in the chapter, during the 1970s, Sultan Qaboos had been known as a strong advocate of the idea of creating a collective security organisation in the Gulf region to maintain peace, with the focus on security and defence as prime objectives. However, by the end of 1984, Oman's position had changed. Omani policymakers came to believe that any attempt to establish a NATO type military alliance would be viewed by the Iranians as being directed against them, and therefore, would be counterproductive for regional security and stability. While assessing the GCC's proposal to form a security alliance, Sultan Qaboos warned the Arab Gulf states that; "to be perfectly frank, I say that here in Muscat we do not believe it to be in the interest of security in the Gulf that Iran feels we intend to establish an Arab military pact that will always be hostile to it, or that we are about to form a joint force, whose main task is to fight Iran."[374] Consequently, Oman opposed the Saudi and Kuwaiti initiative to turn the GCC into a military alliance in favour of strong independent defence forces, with close cooperation in training and exercises. Secondly, Omani policy makers took the Iraqi strategy of

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[373] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.78.
[374] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interview with *Al- Wattan AL – Arabi*, 02 May 1981, pp.1. Paris.

internationalising the conflict seriously, as it would be bound to bring the direct intervention of external powers, and they feared the more general regional instability that might presage. As Sultan Qaboos argued at the time, "The Iraqi-Iranian War, as it has become clear, is a real threat to the peoples of the region, especially if it continues and expands. We must be careful and work as much as we can to avoid any polarization or a conflict between the major powers in this region."[375] This highlighted Oman's traditional fear of the interference of external powers in the domestic affairs of the Gulf states , which would have undermined their domestic stability.

The dramatic shift in the war as it moved towards internationalisation, threatening the interference of external powers, stimulated a real break from Oman's traditional foreign and security policy practice. Omani policy makers came to recognise that their neutral stance in the war had proved insufficient to allay fears over escalation of the Iran-Iraq War, and therefore, now it had to be complemented with more active and intensive efforts at engagement with the conflicting parties. Recognising the need to avoid a long drawn-out conflict, with its implications of military spill-over and superpower involvement or turning the region into an arena of the Cold War by proxy, the main concern of the Omani policy makers therefore became to end the war. Expressing these concerns, Sultan Qaboos stated in an interview with Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Syassah in November 1984, "In any situation, there is the possibility of hostilities getting out of hand. That's why I believe every possible step –on the national, regional and international level – should be taken to stop the [Iran-Iraq] war."[376] Thus, by early 1985, Omani policy shifted towards a more active engagement with the conflicting parties, urging them to negotiate. Sultan Qaboos explicitly declared his intention to act as a mediator to bring the

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[375] HM Sultan Qaboos, interview with Ibrahim Nafe'ah, *Al-Ahram Daily*, Cairo, 21 Jan 1985, p.1.
[376] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interview with *Al- Syassah*, 03 November 1984, p.1&3.

conflict to an end, stressing that, "there does not seem to be any sign of a close end to this brutal war, yet we have only to try, and try everything possible to stop this war, at least so that we are not told we sat down watching while the fire ate the outskirts of our homes."[377] Therefore, in response to these developments, Oman continued to maintain its neutral position, but now sought to act as a mediator to reduce intra-regional conflict and bring the war to an end. Taking this policy shift clearly reflects that Omani policy-makers interpreted the dilemma posed by the Iran-Iraq War through the lens of their idea of Oman as a distinctive cultural identity, and as being vulnerable to external interference. As such, the dilemma was sufficient to cause them to shift their policy, which also informed their tradition of thought about Oman. Therefore, alongside the principle of neutrality, mediation became yet another central principle at the heart of Omani policy makers' web of beliefs.

In this context, the belief that Oman could act as a mediator between Persians/Shi'ites and Arabs/Sunnis, not only held the promise of a more stable Gulf region, but also provided Oman with an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to influence its immediate security environment. As the Sultan noted, "We here in this region should be realistic and do nothing that will have negative consequences for us in the future. Therefore, we must seek to stop this war and reconciliation between the two sides, and we must not stand by either side."[378] The influence of the Ibadhi principle of the use of nonviolent means to resolve disputes manifested itself both in the policy adopted in response to the Iran-Iraq War and in the Sultan's narrative. Recognising that the conflict was not yet ripe for mediation efforts, because neither side was willing to settle its disputes peacefully and there was a lack of trust, Qaboos noted in an extensive interview in

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[377] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interview with *Oman Daily*, 04 April 1985, p1-3.
[378] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interview with *Al- Ahram Daily*, 21 Jan, 1985, pp.1-3.

April 1985; "Our problem here in the Gulf region is that Iraq believes that the Arab duty dictates that we support it without reservations and regardless of the results, while the Iranian side believes that because of the Arab affiliation, we are not qualified for the mediation role."[379] The lack of trust in the Arab Gulf states was also apparent on the Iranian side. The former Iranian ambassador to the UN during the war affirmed that "none of the Persian Gulf States had an advantage from mediating, because generally we did not like it as we saw it as it pro-Saddam Hussein. Oman was cautious, because they did not want any negative answers from us."[380] Thus, in order to be in a good position to be an acceptable mediator, Sultan Qaboos had to adjust his policy towards Iran. When he was asked how the Arab States could help Iraq in this war, Sultan Qaboos asserted that, "We must help the Iraqi people get out of the crisis and reach to a satisfactory solution and at the same time we should seek to convince our neighbours in Iran that their right can be achieved through legitimate means and by peaceful means."[381]

As illustrated earlier, although Oman was not siding with the Arab Gulf states, it also didn't have close enough relations with Iran to be a credible mediator. Tehran did not have much faith in the Arab Gulf states' peace efforts, as it believed the Arab states were still aiding and biased in favour of Iraq, and thus could not be credible negotiators. As Interviewee (5) recalls, "during the early years of the war, Iran kept its distance from Oman. They were not sure because of the other Gulf states' support of Iraq, and the GCC Organization was explicitly criticising Iran during this period. So in 1985 we felt that a new approach was needed in order to pave the way to our mediation efforts and to bring an end to the war."[382] Therefore, in order to help to create

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[379] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interview with *Oman Daily*, 04 April 1985, pp1-3.
[380] C. Marschall, 2003, p.92.
[381] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interview with *Al- Ahram Daily*, 21 June, 1985, pp.1-3.
[382] Interview with Interviewee (5) 23 May 2018.

a suitable environment for peaceful resolution to the conflict, Oman attempted to normalise and improve its relations with Tehran. This was seen as a precondition for its attempts to play the role of mediator and be accepted as a mediator in Iran's eyes. To achieve these ends, Sultan Qaboos adopted a conciliatory tone towards Iran and pursued some energetic diplomatic activities. During this time, there were regular visits by Iranian officials to Muscat; for example, by the Director of Arab and Islamic Affairs at the Iranian Foreign Ministry in July 1985, the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Besharti in October 1985, and Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati in December 1985.[383] Meanwhile, Oman maintained its contact with the Iraqi regime. High level diplomatic visits were exchanged between the countries, the most prominent being visits by the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to Muscat, during which they were received by Sultan Qaboos, and held two days of talks with Omani officials.[384]

By the end of 1985 Oman was clearly establishing itself as a go-between for Iran on the one hand and the pro-Iraqi camp on the other. During the fifth GCC summit held in Muscat in late November 1985, Sultan Qaboos made great efforts to moderate the final communiqué towards Iran and to adopt a more even-handed approach. Indeed, the GCC summit, for the first time since the eruption of the war, abandoned its anti-Iranian statements that had tended to identify Iraq as the side who had not wanted the war. This time the final communiqué called for "the parties concerned to end this destructive war in a manner that safeguards the legitimate rights and interests of the two sides in order to bring about the establishment of normal relations among

[383] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.93.
[384] I. Rabinovich and H. Shaked, *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Volume Xi, 1987. Vol. 11. The Moshe Dayan Center, 1989.

the Gulf States."[385] This suggests that, Oman was able to influence its GCC counterparts, as they more generally had adopted a position that it was best to bring the war to an end without a comprehensive victory by either side. The statement was received positively by Iranian officials and regarded as a positive shift in the GCC's stance.[386] In addition, for the first time in his annual speech on 18 November 1985, the Sultan explicitly appealed for "the leaders of both countries to show flexibility that could pave the way for mediation efforts to end the war by peaceful means."[387] Following the fifth GCC summit in Muscat, Oman initiated its first attempt to act as a mediator between the belligerent parties. In late November, Sultan Qaboos sent a delegation led by the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs to Tehran to convince Iran to accept a ceasefire, and offered Oman's assistance in bringing about a ceasefire between the two sides.[388] However, Oman's first mediation efforts did not produce any compromise, as the Iranians were unwilling to negotiate a peaceful settlement. As Interviewee (2), who was the head of the delegation recalls, "the Iranians were difficult and making unconditional and unrealistic demands such as Saddam's immediate resignation and Iranian 'observer rights' over Najaf and Karbala, the two Shi'ite holy cities in Iraq."[389]

Nonetheless, this unsuccessful first attempt to facilitate a peaceful settlement did not prevent Oman from continuing its mediation efforts. In late October 1985, Sultan Qaboos gave a press conference to the Omani media, in which he appealed to the conflicting parties to put aside their ideological differences and come to the negotiation table to solve their disputes by peaceful

[385] The Closing Statement of the Sixth Session of the GCC Supreme Council, Sultanate of Oman – Muscat, 3-6 November 1985.
[386] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.81.
[387] HM Sultan Qaboos' speech, 18 November, 1985.
[388] Interview with Interviewee (2) 8 May 2018.
[389] Interview with Interviewee (2) 8 May 2018.

means, calling for concerted regional and international efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement to the Iran-Iraq War.[390] Clearly, this reflects the extent to which Oman had become committed to mediation in spite of the failure of its first attempt. Omani policymakers by then regarded acting as a mediator to be the best available policy option to avoid the consequences of spillover and restore regional stability, which were seen as essential to ensure Oman's security and national independence. As a neighbouring country, Iran was a state with which Oman would have to deal with in perpetuity, and therefore developing stronger relations with it was always a desirable objective. In this context, Oman mediation efforts were also regarded as an investment in the future.

The Iranian capture of the Faw peninsula in February 1986 brought the war's frontline even closer to the Arab Gulf states' territory. At the same time, the conflict was internationalising in the wake of the reflagging operation and increased presence of naval forces of external powers including the US, British, and the Soviet Union escorting oil tankers through the Gulf. This highlighted deep concerns for Omani policy makers regarding the interference of external powers. In fact, they became even more alarmed when there were reports of a Kuwaiti proposal that their oil tankers would be escorted by Soviet naval vessels.[391] The Omanis were worried that superpower involvement "will raise the risk of more aggressive Iranian behaviour."[392] This could only lead the Omani policymakers to intensify their mediation efforts. Indeed, from 1986 onward, Oman invested significant amounts of energy and diplomatic efforts in attempting to engage both Iran and Iraq to secure a negotiated settlement. As interviewee (3) recalls, "in 1986

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[390] HM Sultan Qaboos, Interview with *Oman Daily*, Muscat, 23 October, 1985.pp1-5.
[391] Interview with interviewee (3), 15 May 2018.
[392] J. Kifner, 'Superpower Protection Worries Gulf Nations', *New York Times*, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, 15 June 1987, p.A.9.

the exchange official visits with both sides increased steadily. There were always exchange visits at the level of Foreign Ministers."[393] High level contacts were maintained with the Iraqi side in the course of 1986. In October 1986 the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister visited Muscat, during which they were received by Sultan Qaboos, and held two days of talks with Omani officials.[394] In the meantime, there were several high-level contacts between Oman and Iran, including a visit by the Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Valayati to Muscat, during which Sultan Qaboos labelled Iran a source of pride for the region.[395] Furthermore, Oman continued its conciliatory policy towards Iran to mitigate the Arab/Persian tension through its diplomatic activities in regional and international organisations such as the GCC, the Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the UN, attempting to moderate anti-Iranian statements and put pressure on both sides to reduce the scope and intensity of the conflict. This conciliatory policy coalesced further with the visit of Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi, who visited Tehran in May of 1987 to reach "an agreement to develop jointly a gas field in the Straits of Hormuz and to establish a communication link."[396] When on 20 July 1987 the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 598, calling for a cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq War, Oman supported the implementation of the resolution and asserted its willingness to mediate between the conflicting parties by proposing to host a meeting between their leaders.[397] This set up the framework for Oman to expand its mediation efforts between the conflicting parties. Thus, in order to pave the way for her mediation efforts, Oman

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[393] Interview with interviewee (3), 15 May 2018.
[394] I. Rabinovich and H. Shaked, *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Volume X, 1986, Volume 10; Volume 1986, p.314.
[395] G. Nonneman, 'The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War:', p.183.
[396] "Iranian Intentions in the Persian Gulf", briefing by the Central Intelligence Agency, US, 2 June 1987, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90T00114R000700320001-6.pdf
[397] I. Rabinovich and H. Shaked, *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, p.379.

refrained from voting for the arms sale sanction proposed by the US against Iran in response to her actions against vessels from the U.S. and other countries in the Persian Gulf. In his speech to the UN General Assembly in September, the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Policy stressed that his country resented the proposed anti-Iranian sanction.[398] A similar attitude reportedly prevailed in Oman during the GCC summit held in late 1987. Oman maintained the pressure to influence the summit's decisions and try to persuade the other Arab Gulf states to keep diplomatic channels open with Iran in the hope of persuading it to accept UN resolution 598.[399] The mollifying approach towards Iran clearly indicated Omani policy makers' perception that building trust with Iran would allow it to be accepted as a mediator by Iran. These diplomatic activities were aimed at building trust with the Iranians, to appease their hostile stance and bring them to the negotiation table.[400]

Oman's diplomatic efforts appeared to bear fruit when in September 1987 success was achieved in facilitating the release of Iranian solders who had been captured by American forces in a military engagement in the Gulf.[401] Subsequently, towards the end of 1987, Iran seemed to engage more positively with the increasingly frequent mediation attempts initiated by Sultan Qaboos. In fact, Oman's neutral stance in the conflict and its conciliatory approach towards Iran played a considerable role in Iran's policy change towards Oman. In October 1987, the Iranian foreign minister Valayati visited Muscat to meet with Omani officials and discuss the implementation of UNSCR 598. Following the visit, the Iranians toned down their hostile rhetoric and declared that a visit from the UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar to Iran to

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[398] I. Rabinovich and H. Shaked, *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, p.380.
[399] I. Rabinovich and H. Shaked, *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, p.380.
[400] Interview with Interviewee (2), 8 May 2018.
[401] I. Rabinovich and H. Shaked, *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, p.379.

discuss the terms of the peace plan would be welcome, and the mediation efforts with Iraq would be accepted.[402]

Against the background of these new developments, and with requests from the UN and the US, Oman undertook a new diplomatic initiative to broker a settlement to this long-standing conflict. In May 1988, the Omani Foreign Minister Yousef Bin Alawi visited Tehran and Baghdad respectively to discuss the UN peace efforts, and find a peaceful solution to the war which would be acceptable to both sides. In Tehran, he met with the Iranian Leader Ayatollah Khomeini. As Interviewee (5) recalls, "during the meeting the Iranian leaders appeared to be more flexible than they were during the previous years of the war. They expressed their readiness to accept the UN Resolution 598 and to bring the war to an end."[403] Consequently, the Omani Minister of Foreign Affairs offered Oman's services to facilitate a ceasefire agreement, and the Iranian leader replied positively. In Baghdad, Bin Alawi met with the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussain. He felt they shared attitudes towards the war, and when Bin Alawi expressed Oman's interests in brokering a ceasefire agreement, Saddam replied that "normally we should not accept an Arab country to mediate in this dispute, but Oman has a special place with us."[404] Between May and July, several talks were held separately between the Omani Foreign Minister and his Iranian and Iraqi counterparts' with the assistance of the UN Secretary-General, aiming to draw up a plan to implement UNSCR 598.[405] Such a policy solidified into secret ceasefire discussions held in Salalah, the southern city of Oman. Following these intensive mediation efforts, both sides declared their formal acceptance of UNSCR 598 by the end of July 1988. Later in August, Oman

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[402] C. Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy*, p.94.
[403] Interview with Interviewee (5), 23 May 2018.
[404] Interview with Interviewee (5), 23 May 2018.
[405] Interview with Interviewee (5), 23 May 2018.

succeeded in bringing the opposing sides to the negotiation table when it hosted direct talks between the governments of Tehran and Baghdad under the auspices of the UN, culminating in a ceasefire and ending the eight-year war.

It is worth mentioning at this point that within the context of the Iran-Iraq war, Oman's choice to act as a mediator during Iran-Iraq war was not because it was influenced or under pressure by other great powers such as the US or the UK to do this. In fact, Oman's mediation role during the war had emerged out of her national security needs and as Omani policy makers trying to react to the perceived dilemma posed by the war, which in turn pushed Oman towards the preference of mediation as a policy option. As such, it is justifiable to argue that, Oman's adoption of a policy of mediation was not inevitable, but it was a natural outgrowth of Oman's distinct cultural identity and the desire to avoid external interference in its internal affairs.

5.5 **Summary**

To recap, using Bevir's interpretive framework of tradition and dilemmas to understand a political actor's policy response by locating them against the background of different traditions and dilemmas, this chapter sought to understand why Omani policy makers chose to play the role of mediator in response to the dilemma posed by the Iran-Iraq War. The dramatic outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq in September 1980 had profoundly challenged the tradition of Oman's foreign and security policy practice. As outlined in the previous chapter, by 1980 the ideas of Oman as a distinctive cultural identity and being distinctively vulnerable to external

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interference had evolved as a tradition of thought in Omani foreign and security policy thinking, giving rise to a policy of a 'balanced approach' to regional affairs. The main objective of this policy was to accommodate both sides of the Gulf, the Arabs and the Iranians, who were seen as key to Oman's internal security and ensuring its national unity and national independence. As war broke out between Iran and Iraq, the Arab Gulf was effectively on Iraq's side. Oman came under considerable pressure, not just from its Arab Gulf state counterparts but also from the wider Arab world, pushing the country to join the Arab ranks in supporting Iraq.

As such, Omani policy-makers viewed the Iran-Iraq War as a significant foreign policy dilemma. The problem Oman faced was how to manage its relationship with both sides of the Gulf states in the uncertain landscape that had been created by the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, threatening to undermine Oman's own security. Oman had to decide whether to position itself with the Arab Gulf states in siding with Iraq, or distance itself from Iraq and the other Arab Gulf states in order to avoid completely alienating Iran. A revolutionary Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini was proving to be a security threat for the Arab Gulf states who sided with Iraq. As such, Omani policy makers felt that they were caught in a crossfire and susceptible to attacks from either side.

This chapter demonstrates that Omani policy-makers repeatedly drew on Sultan Qaboos' ideas that regarded Oman as bearing a distinctive cultural identity within its regional context, and being distinctively vulnerable to external interference, both in framing the kinds of threat presented by the war and in seeking to meet them with action. Omani responses to the war evolved through three overlapping policy practices: the dilemma posed by the Iran-Iraq War was first met by the existing policy tradition of a 'balanced approach' which was influenced by

the belief that the war not last for long, as Iraq envisaged a quick victory over Iran; however, once it was clear that the war was going to last longer, Omani policy-makers adopted what they called a 'positive neutrality' stance, and eventually acted as a mediator by playing a key role in negotiation of the ceasefire agreement. Two major turning points occurred in the course of the war, thereby bringing a reassessment of Oman's foreign and security policy practice, provoking a modification to their web of beliefs about how best to secure and advance Oman's security interests, and subsequently stimulating an alteration to the existing foreign and security policy practice. By the end of 1980, the conflict had clearly turned into a stalemate, the Arab Gulf states becoming more active in supporting Iraq to prevent an Iranian victory. The need to avoid a long drawn-out conflict, with its implications for sectarian polarisation, became the primary concern of Omani policy makers, leading them to adjust their existing policy toward the war. Accordingly, Omani policy makers shifted from a policy of a 'balanced approach' to a 'positivity neutrality' position. However, as the war continued, with the possibility of becoming internationalised, risking the involvement of external powers and Omani involvement in precisely the kind of conflict they were trying to avoid, changes were prompted in Omani thought over the best course of action. This gave way to the view that acting as a mediator was a viable option to prevent further escalation in the conflict. In this context, the belief that Oman could act as a mediator between Iranians/Shi'ites and Iraqis/Sunnis not only held the promise of a more stable Gulf region, but also provided Omani policy makers with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to influence their immediate domestic security environment in attempting to uphold regional interests. Therefore, by the end of 1985, Oman was clearly establishing itself as a go-between for Iran and Iraq to bring the conflict to an end.

Therefore, it is justifiable to argue that Oman's reading of the conflict and the response it performed were a reflection of the traditions of thought that were at the heart of Omani policymakers' self-understanding of Oman's national identity and its role in the region. Their initial response, with the existing policy practice of a 'balanced approach', followed by taking a 'positive neutrality' stance, and the later clear shift towards adopting mediation as a policy response, all emerged out of this particular self-understanding of Oman's distinctive national identity within its regional context and as being distinctively vulnerable to external interference. In this sense, 'positive neutrality' is an evolution in the balanced approach, while Oman's mediation role was a genuine breakthrough from positive neutrality to mediation.

6   Chapter Six: The Yemeni Civil War of 1994

6.1   Introduction

This chapter deals with the second case study on Oman's mediation role during regional upheavals. In this chapter, I will continue to apply Mark Bevir's interpretive analytical framework of traditions and dilemmas in order to understand why Omani policy makers decided to act as mediators during the Yemeni Civil War of 1994. The previous chapter has shown how, in responding to the Iran-Iraq War, Omani policy makers drew on two core traditional ideas which were identified in chapter 5 as giving rise to a policy of mediation; namely, the notion of Oman as having a distinctive cultural identity, and as being distinctively vulnerable to external interference. This chapter now examines their next significant mediation activity, which was Oman's mediation role in the Yemen Civil War in 1994.

After being an ideological adversary for more than three decades, Oman began to enjoy steadily improving relations with the Republic of Yemen, as full diplomatic ties were established in 1987, and, with the advent of Yemeni unity in 1990, a border agreement was signed in 1992. These developments appeared to mark a turning point in their bilateral relations, bringing them closer together. They opened new horizons for bilateral cooperation, facilitating contacts and links between the two sides and, most importantly, eliminating the threat posed by Aden.

However important the agreement of the demarcation of the border line and improving relations between the two countries were, a civil war on a major scale that erupted between northern and southern Yemen in May 1994 threatened to destroy all that had been achieved in the bilateral

Oman-Yemen relations. The union between both parts of Yemen turned sour and, on 22 May 1994, South Yemen attempted to break away from the newly formed union, while the North acted to crush the secession by force, leading to the eruption of full scale war between them. The conflict between these two parts of Yemen extended to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as the organisation had drifted apart over how to respond to the inter-Yemeni conflict, with most Arab Gulf states favouring the breakaway, and therefore opting to support South Yemen.[406]

The Yemeni Civil War of 1994 presented Omani policy makers with a general policy dilemma which made them uneasy. A retired high ranking Omani security officer who was a member of the border negotiation committee described the outbreak of the Yemeni civil war of 1994 as "one of the most significant threats to peace and stability within Oman's neighbourhood, and thus to its internal security interests since the end of the Dhofar war in 1975."[407] Given the bitter experience that Oman had with the South Yemen during the Dhofar War, and the fact that Oman had established good relations with Ali Saleh since unification, Oman had an interest in maintaining its strategic relations with the unified state of Yemen, which Oman had already invested in. However, backing Ali Saleh would bring Oman into direct conflict with the remainder of the GCC and particularly Saudi Arabia, whereas siding with the South and the GCC is liable to create further instability on Oman's borders, including boosting Saudi influence in that region. As such, either situation would have made difficult for Oman to preserve her national independence and eliminate the risk of external interference. Within the above context, Omani policy makers had to find a way of mitigating the risk of instability and interference on

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[406] M. Al-Khalili, *Oman's Foreign Policy*, p. 226,
[407] Interview with Interviewee (8), 17 August 2018.

Oman's borders associated with the South winning without actively confronting the GCC by siding with the North.

The dilemma posed by the Yemeni internal conflict was met in the first instance by undertaking the role of mediation. The question at the heart of this chapter is why Omani policy makers perceived the Yemeni Civil War as a threat, how it constituted a policy dilemma for them, and why they chose the particular policy responses they did. This chapter argues that Omani policy makers viewed the Yemeni Civil War as one of the most significant policy dilemmas since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, and the policy response they chose to counter it was formed against the background of traditions of thought of Oman as a distinctive cultural identity, and as being distinctively vulnerable to external interference, both in terms of framing the kinds of dilemma presented by the Yemeni conflict, and in seeking to meet it with policy action. However, by this time Oman's experience of acting as a mediator in the Iran-Iraq War in 1989 had influenced Omani policy makers' sense of mediation as a viable policy option in dealing with regional conflict, which in turn had a profound consequence for how Oman came to address the dilemma posed by the conflict in Yemen. In this sense, the challenge posed by the Yemeni conflict was met in the first instance by acting as a mediator, to solve the dispute by peaceful means.

The body of this chapter is divided into five sections. The first section begins by highlighting the historical context in which Omani policy makers decided to act as mediators in the Yemeni Civil War of 1994. The second section describes the key external developments which created a policy dilemma for Omani policymakers. The third section explains how these external developments created a policy dilemma for Omani policy makers. The fourth section describes what Oman in fact chose to do. The fifth and final section offers some brief conclusions.

6.2   Historical Background

The main assessment of Omani policymakers regarding the Yemeni conflict must be seen in the context of relations between Oman and the southern People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), and the latter's role in the Dhofar Civil War in Oman. Thus, in order to understand why and how the outbreak of the civil war in Yemen became a dilemma for Omani policymakers, it is necessary to describe the historical context of relations between the two countries.

The relationship between Oman and Yemen in modern history is shaped mostly by the period associated with the war in Dhofar, between 1965 and 1975, marked by South Yemen's (PDRY) support for the communist insurgencies in the southern province of Oman against the Sultan. As identified in chapter four of this thesis, the Dhofar War was one of the key drivers of Sultan Qaboos' idea that Oman was vulnerable to external interference and that it must be a priority to consolidate Oman's national independence. The Dhofar insurgency was a separatist movement that adopted a communist ideology after a Marxist government gained power in neighbouring South Yemen (PDRY). The war left a lasting impact on the Omanis, as evidenced in a statement by a senior officer in the Omani army, when delegations from both countries were working to normalise bilateral relations in early 1987.

The then Under-Secretary of Defence said: "We don't trust South Yemen with the Soviet Union behind them."[408] He was speaking from experience. Throughout the period of the Dhofar War,

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[408] J. Robert, 'Oman's delicate position as `policeman' of the Gulf', *Minneapolis Star and Tribune; Minneapolis, Minn*, 25 March 1987, p.11A, file:///D:/documents/newspaper/1987/Oman's%20delicate%20position%20as%20%60policeman'%20of%20the .pdf, , (accessed 13 September 2020).

the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen played an important role in providing significant military logistical assistance, including bases and training camps just across the border, to the rebels.[409] Moreover, South Yemeni territory on the border region served as a transit area for supplies and military support coming from other communist countries, such as China and the Soviet Union.[410] Conflict and armed clashes along the frontier between Dhofar and the eastern frontier region of the PDRY continued intermittently throughout the period of the war.

In addition to military confrontations along the border and military support, South Yemen provided consistent political and diplomatic backup to the communist insurgency. The insurgency's leaders had an office in Aden which served as a centre for political and war propaganda directed at the outside world, and the guerrillas were given time on Aden radio for broadcasts to Omani people.[411] In fact, Aden was on a collision course with Oman, not only along the frontier, but also in the diplomatic arena. In 1971 when Oman sought entry to the Arab League and to the UN, South Yemen sought to organise opposition to its entry. In an attempt to prevent Oman from taking a place in the membership of the United Nations, the South Yemeni delegation at the UN distributed a comprehensive memorandum among the member states, objecting to Oman's admission to the UN.[412] Even after the decisive defeat of the communist insurgents by the Sultan's armed forces and the end of the Dhofar war in late 1975, the PDRY remained committed to their support for the Dhofar rebellion for a further six years. In an

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[409] F. Halliday, *Aspects of South Yemen's Foreign Policy*, Ph.D., diss., London, University of London, 1985, p.193, file:///C:/Users/ITS/Desktop/Halliday_Aspects%20of%20South%20Yemen's%20foreign%20policy.pdf , (accessed 20 September 2020)
[410] F. Halliday, *Aspects of South Yemen's Foreign Policy*, p.193.
[411] F. Halliday, *Aspects of South Yemen's Foreign Policy*, p.193.
[412] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/1674, '*Political Relations between Oman and the United Nations*', British Embassy in Muscat FCO Tel No 314, 14 August 1971.

interview with a Lebanese journal released on 31st of March 1981, PDRY President Abdel Fatah Ismael clearly stressed his continued support for the rebels in Dhofar stating that "in our view a people fighting for it legitimate rights, such as the rights for which the people of Oman are fighting, would certainly achieve victory in future no matter how far or close from realising their legitimates hopes and wishes, because the movement of history is decided by people not individuals."[413] This was also evident from the fact that a number of border incidents took place in the early 1980s involving PDRY troops and Dhofar Communist insurgents.

Yet, despite the fact that towards the end of the 1970s Sultan Qaboos had managed to re-establish domestic security and stability, and that objective conditions no longer existed in Dhofar region for the PDRY to stir up serious challenges there, Sultan Qaboos sought to reduce the tension in relations and modify his policy towards the PDRY. This was part of his policy of a 'balanced approach' that was adopted towards the end of the 1970s, as outlined in chapter four. As Kechichian points out, "steps to reduce tensions in relations between Muscat and Aden assumed a great deal of importance on the Omani political agenda from the end of the Dhofar war."[414]. This was in part influenced by their fear of the Soviet expansionist strategy and their increasing presence in the region, and triggered by a number of key developments. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late December 1979 was followed by the ramifications of the war between Iraq and Iran, which started in late September 1980, and Oman's fear that the Soviets would exploit the situation in order to advance their strategy for the region, creating a situation to be avoided. This fear was further augmented by the declaration of the establishment of the 'Tripartite Alliances' sponsored by the Soviets between the PDRY, Ethiopia, and Libya after a

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[413] British Embassy in Aden, FCO, 21/2, *PDRY Foreign Relations*, 9 April 1980.
[414] J. Kechichian, *Oman and the world*, p.92.

meeting held in Adan in August 1981. This agreement was regarded by Oman as throwing open the doors for Soviet expansionism. Bin Alawi, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs at the time, described the alliances as "the product of the Soviet machination and the spearhead of its military expansionism in the area."[415] Bin Alawi further stressed that "Oman would adopt whatever strategic measures were necessary to protect her security and territory from such threats."[416] These developments together increased Oman's concerns about its internal security, which were subject to a decade of civil war supported mainly by the PDRY and the Soviet Union. Together, the ongoing war between Iran and Iraq on its northern front and fear of Soviet penetration within its southern neighbour created an insecure regional environment for Oman, increasing their fear of interference by external powers in their internal affairs. In this context, pacifying Oman's southern flank was regarded as crucial to eliminate these threats and maintain their independent policy to handle their security concerns, particularly in dealing with the ramifications of the Iran-Iraq War. In this respect, Oman was also concerned by the Saudi dominance over GCC security decision-making and, in particular, its anti-Iranian policy, as Oman wished to maintain its independence from Saudi influence in its foreign and security decision making. More specifically, Oman was concerned about the expansion of Saudi Arabia's influence and possible effects of Saudi policy on religious coexistence and tolerance in Oman.[417] As identified in chapter four, Sultan Qaboos' traditions of thought about Oman as possessing a distinctive cultural identity in its regional context and as remaining vulnerable to external interference, entailed that the Sultan was unwilling to follow the leading regional

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[415] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 08/3959, "Oman's Officials Rejects USSR'S Gulf and African Policies", ME/6635/A/1, Muscat home service, 1300gmt, 27 January 1981.
[416] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 08/3959, "Oman's Officials Rejects USSR'S Gulf and African Policies", 27 January 1981.
[417] Interview with Interviewee (8), 17 August 2018.

power, Saudi Arabia as this would undermine Oman's national independence. As such, Oman sought to improve its relations with South Yemen during the 1980s, as this relationship could improve Oman's regional strategic position.

Therefore, within their broad regional 'balanced approach' policy practice, Omani policy makers adopted a conciliatory approach towards the PDRY. Hence, commencing from 1981, Sultan Qaboos would adopt what he referred to as a step-by-step rapprochement policy approach towards the PDRY. [418] This policy of rapprochement was clearly apparent in an official statement issued by the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs in December 1981 in response to a statement issued by the PDRY embassy in Beirut, accusing Oman of committing an act of aggression against it, and threatening to retaliate. The Omani statement confirmed that "while announcing its full determination to counter such moves and aggressions, the Sultanate still believes in the necessity of peaceful coexistence based on good neighbourliness between the countries of the area to ensure stability and security."[419] The statement further asserted that the Sultanate was "working for the creation of the suitable political circumstances so that the efforts made by the countries of the GCC to mediate may succeed and to put an end to the People's Democratic Government of Yemen's policy of aggression."[420]

Solving the border dispute was Sultan Qaboos' top priority in his conciliation strategy. In fact, border demarcation was part of Sultan Qaboos' project of 'nation building', and creating a unified Omani state to consolidate Omani national identity through redefining Omani territory

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[418] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3999, File No: NBN 021/1, Meeting Records between Bin Alai the Under Secretary in the Omani MFA and Mr. Lucas the British Ambassador in Muscat, 25 October, 1981.
[419] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3959, '*Oman foreign Relations*', Official statement by the Official spokesman of the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 02 December 1981.
[420] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/3959, Official statement by the Official spokesman of the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 02 December 1981.

and establishing the nation's boundaries was intended to strengthen the narrative of national identity and maintain Omanis' loyalty.[421] Indeed, in order to achieve this, the Sultan created border troops made up of people living in border lands, forming forces which were attributed power through serving as employees of the state, enabling the state to control them. Sultan Qaboos' objective to demarcate Oman's sea and land borders with all of its neighbours started with Iran in 1972, Saudi Arabia in 1992 and the UAE in 1993. Toward this end, Sultan Qaboos adopted a conciliatory policy in order to resolve border disputes with all neighbouring countries, including Yemen. In the course of his interview, interviewee (8) notes that Sultan Qaboos was concerned about the borderline, and thus, "Sultan Qaboos was keen and determined to solve the border dispute and to reach an agreement on demarcation of the border between the two countries in his life time."[422] This policy approach was framed by the tradition of thought that regarded Oman as a distinctive cultural identity, and Sultan Qaboos' desire not to get swamped by the GCC countries, prompting him to search for different ways to deal with his country's security interests. The rationale for Oman's accommodating stance toward Yemen on these territorial disputes, according to one Omani official at the time, was strategic in nature, stating that "it is in our best interests for our relationship with our nearest neighbors to have a strong sense of 'us-ness'."[423]

Consequently, Oman took several steps to reduce tensions and improve relations between the two countries, trying to convince the PDRY to change its policy of aggression. The political

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[421] E. BRUIJNE, *Demarcating the Omani Yemeni Border: A Border Perspective on Shifting State-Society Relations in the Sultanate of Oman,* PhD diss., Leiden University, 2020, p.43.
[422] Interview with Interviewee (8), 17 August 2018.
[423] Cited in, O. Gwenn and P. Conge, 'The politics of border disputes: On the Arabian Peninsula.' *International Journal,* 54.2 ,1999, p.245.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40203374.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Acc4eaae4f78a3c258917ec62e9959ebb ,
(Accessed 30 March 2021).

change that had taken place in the PDRY, with the collapse of the extremist regime of President Abdul Fattah Ismael, and the incoming moderate regime headed by President Ali Nasser Mohammed in April 1980, provided Sultan Qaboos with a good opportunity to engage with the PDRY, and proceed in his policy of moderation and rapprochement. In order to create suitable conditions that would help to first mitigate, then finally settle the border disputes with the PDRY, Sultan Qaboos sent a confidential letter to President Nasser signaling his good intentions, to pave the way for conciliatory efforts to normalise relations between the two sides.[424] In addition to its conciliatory approach, Oman also used the GCC as a platform to address the security threat implied by South Yemen to the region, in order to strengthen its position against South Yemen and exert pressure on it. During the first meeting of the GCC Supreme Council, held in Abu Dhabi in May 1981, Oman presented a working paper highlighting the security threat posed by South Yemen, not just to Oman but to the stability of the entire region.[425] Accordingly, the Supreme Council sent a military mission to Oman to evaluate the extent of this threat, and to suggest ways of reducing tension between the two countries.[426] Subsequently, the GCC initiated a mediation plan between the two countries, to be carried out by Kuwait and the UAE.[427] In July 1981, Kuwait led mediation efforts to eliminate the differences between Oman and South Yemen. After several months of mediation, Kuwait succeeded in organising the first bilateral public meeting of representatives from the two neighbouring countries, hosted on October 25, 1982 under the auspices of the GCC.[428] The two

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[424] B. Alhinai, *Oman's Negotiation Behavior: A Strategy for Border Conflict Resolution*, Ph.D. diss., George Mason University, 2004, p.141.
[425] B. Alhinai, *Oman's Negotiation Behavior,* p.141.
[426] J. Kechichian, *Oman and the world*,1995, p.92.
[427] B. Alhinai, *Oman's Negotiation Behavior*, p.141.
[428] 'Oman Opens Meeting with South Yemen', *New York Times*, 26 October 1982, p. A.14, file:///D:/documents/newspaper/1982/Oman_Opens_Meetings_With_South.pdf, (accessed 20 December 2020)

sides reached a preliminary agreement that called for the establishment of normal relations; non-interference in the internal affairs of the other; respect for sovereignty in discussing the border issue; a halt to media campaigns against each other; and an exchange of diplomatic representation.[429] The agreement was officially ratified on the 15th of November 1982, ending 15 years of hostility between the two countries.[430]

Against these rapidly changing circumstances, relations between the two sides were normalised, and the PDRY formally ceased its overt support for the communist insurgents, closing radio facilities in Aden used by the insurgents. Although this was a genuine step forward as it deprived the insurgents of their most important platform, the issue of border demarcation was at the top of the Omani agenda, and thus, Oman insisted on negotiating border disputes before the exchange of ambassadors between the two countries, while the PDRY favoured the exchange of ambassadors before proceeding to negotiate the border disputes. In November 1985 the Omani state minister for Foreign Affairs Yousef Bin Alawi made it clear that "Oman would not exchange ambassadors with the PDRY until border agreement was duly ratified."[431] This disagreement resulted in the delay of the ambassadors' exchange for another two years. Oman insistence on achieving formal agreement on the border dispute before proceeding on exchanging ambassadors clearly demonstrates that Oman's 'conciliation approach' was being used as an instrument within Oman's broad strategy to achieve long-term national security objectives, and therefore, when not directly connected to the achievement of Oman's long-term

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[429] F. Halliday, Aspects of South Yemen's Foreign Policy, 1985, p.203.
[430] 'Oman, South Yemen End 15 Years of Hostility', *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 November 1982, p.3, file:///D:/documents/newspaper/1982/Oman,_South_Yemen_end_15_years.pdf, (accessed 20 December 2020)
[431] J. Kechichian, *Oman and the world*, p.93.

national security objectives, in this case solving its border disputes, the conciliation approach was halted.

However, because Sultan Qaboos was also fully aware of the need for a more moderate stance at this stage, the exchange of ambassadors between the two sides was finally established in December 1987. Nevertheless, upon Oman's insistence, a technical committee was established, with the participation of the UAE and Kuwait, to review all documents relevant to the border issue, in order to reach a final solution.[432] The technical committee held several meetings to discuss the border issue; however, it failed to achieve any positive steps. As a result, relations remained tense until the late 1980s, in spite of the opening of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Some tensions continued on both sides: for instance, in 1987 there was a serious border incident in which several soldiers were reported killed.[433] The border negotiation rested there until 1990, when North Yemen and South Yemen merged into one state.

With the unification of the PDRY and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) of North Yemen to form the Republic of Yemen in 1990, a new chapter in Omani-Yemeni relations was opened. North and South Yemen united on May 22, 1990, with the northern leader, Ali Abdullah Saleh, becoming President and Ali Salim Al Beidh, from the south, becoming Vice President. North Yemen had maintained relations with Muscat ever since the emergence of Oman as a modern Arab state in 1971, and shared a common interest in containing the PDRY. Oman saw in the unification of North and South Yemen a vital opportunity to resolve its security concerns on its

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[432] B. Alhinai, *Oman's negotiation behaviour*, p.143.
[433] F. Halliday, 'Oman-Yemen: an historic re-encounter', *British-Yemeni Society Journal*, (8). lecture delivered to a joint meeting of the Anglo-Omani and British-Yemeni Societies on 28 October 1999, file:///C:/Users/ITS/Desktop/Oman%20and%20Yemen_%20an%20historic%20re-encounter%20_%20al-bab.com.html , (accessed 18 September 2020).

southern border and begin a new chapter in its bilateral relations with Yemen. Oman welcomed the unification of Yemen, appointing a military representative to be part of a Yemeni unification military committee designed to aid the merger of the two former armies.[434]

Sultan Qaboos recognised that changing political circumstances warranted bold initiatives to advance his policy of rapprochement and to strengthen bilateral relations with Yemen. Accordingly, on the 7th of January 1992, the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs visited Yemen, and held a meeting with the Yemeni President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to whom he delivered an official letter from the Sultan regarding the border issue.[435] This was followed by extensive discussions of the border disputes and an exchange of several letters of proposals and counter-proposals between the two governments to delineate the shape of the borderline.[436] Sultan Qaboos' policy of rapprochement and conciliation would bear fruit when, in 1992, the border agreement was signed between the two states, ending a 25-year border disagreement between them. Subsequently, in May 1993, a new border post at al-Mazyouna was opened.[437] In October 1993, just a few months before the outbreak of disputes between the northern and southern leaders of Yemen, Sultan Qaboos paid his first visit to Sana'a, to celebrate the first anniversary of the border agreement, and signed a $21 million loan toward the construction of the road linking the two states.[438] In fact, this represented a turning point in the history of bilateral relations between the two countries, acting as a strong impetus for more advanced relations. Oman had certainly made an important concession to Yemen, by which Oman

[434] C. Allen, and W. Rigsbee II, *Oman under Qaboos*, p.189.
[435] B. Alhinai, *Oman's negotiation behaviour*, p.155.
[436] Interview with Interviewee (9), 03 August 2018.
[437] J. Kechichian, *Oman and the world*, p.97.
[438] J. Kechichian, *Oman and the world*, p.98.

transferred about 5000 square km from its territory to Yemen.[439] This fact was recognised by the Yemeni Prime Minister, who declared that Yemen had actually gained territory from Oman and that "there would be no compensation to the Omani government or Omani citizens for areas whose ownership transferred to Yemen after the signing the border agreement."[440] This point was conceded by the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Yousef Bin Alawi; "True, we have theoretically conceded scores of kilometers, but in return we have gained much more than that. We have gained the love of the Yemeni people…… the new agreement between the two sides will put an end to all problems so that cordiality and cooperation will prevail in the Arabian Peninsula countries."[441] In order to win over the local tribal communities on the border, Yemeni Omani officials took pains to explain the agreement to them. Immediately after signing the border agreement with Yemen, the governor of Dhofar together with the Minister of Information, who was originally from Dhofar held a meeting with tribal leaders who lived along the border area to explain the details of the agreement and solicit their reactions.[442] It is notable that the Oman-Yemen border agreement stood in sharp contrast with what was happening between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as it was signed just a day after Saudi and Qatari military units clashed on the border post between the two countries.

 Ironically, Saudi Arabia also objected to the border agreement between Oman and Yemen, informing the UN and the Arab League of its dissatisfaction.[443] The Saudi government

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[439] B. Alhinai, M. *Oman's negotiation behaviour*, p.163.
[440] M. Al-Khalili, *Oman's Foreign Policy*, p.110.
[441] M. Al-Khalili, *Oman's Foreign Policy*, p.225.
[442] J. Kechichian, Oman and the world, p.95.
[443] M. Al-Khalili, *Oman's Foreign Policy*, p.225.

complained that the agreement posed a threat to its access to the Arabian Sea .[444] Since they sought a territorial corridor passing through the border area between Oman and Yemen to the sea, Saudi discontent must be understood in the context of their search for regional hegemony and influence. It is important to note here that although Oman wished to preserve her independence from Saudi Arabia in order to preserve her cultural distinctiveness, at times Oman also seemed to be engaging in more traditional power politics in order to maximise its regional influence. In this context, in addition to securing its border area, the signing of the border agreement gave Oman leverage in the balance of power in the turbulent Gulf region. As Yousef Bin Alawi, the Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs stressed, "the agreement was the fulfilment of the Omani leadership's aspirations to coordinate policies with its southern neighbour."[445] This objective was clearly manifested when Oman and Yemen, shortly after the ratification of the border agreement, established a joint committee at the foreign ministries' level to coordinate and consult on political issues of mutual concern.[446] Moreover, Sultan Qaboos called upon the GCC to consider admitting Yemen as a member of the organisation.[447] However, his proposal was rejected by the other GCC members. This is a clear illustration that Sultan Qaboos' approach towards Yemen went beyond the issue of the border dispute, revealing his desire to strengthen Oman's regional strategic position. As Oman sought to assert its autonomy in the face of Saudi Arabian hegemony within the organisation, reinforcing its relations with Yemen would give Oman leverage in the balance of power in the region, dominated by

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[444] O. Gwenn and P. Conge, *The politics of border disputes*, p.238.
[445] B. Alhinai, *Oman's negotiation behavior*, p.164.
[446] J. Kechichian, *Oman and the world*, p.97.
[447] M. Al-Khalili, *Oman's Foreign Policy,* p.228.

competition between regional powers for hegemony.[448] It was against this background that Oman's response to the Yemeni Civil War of 1994 must be considered.

6.3   **Key External developments**

Having outlined the historical relationship between Oman and Yemen, and set out the context in which Omani policy makers were operating, this section will now investigate more closely the external events that created challenges for policy makers' thinking about relations between Oman and Yemen. North Yemen (YAR) and South Yemen (PDRY) agreed a reunification deal on 22 May 1990 that merged their legal and constitutional systems. However, the Yemeni unification agreement of May 1990, while creating one government, failed to create a single and unified state. Although the merger between both parts of Yemen was initially amicable, efforts to integrate the North and South swiftly became contentious. Lack of success in the unification project is not hard to explain. In the first place, the southern Yemeni political leadership became subservient to that of the north in terms of authority and decision-making, as President Ali Abdallah Saleh served as head of state, retaining most of the key ministerial portfolios for his close allies.[449] Secondly, incompatible economic systems, separate standing armies, and disputes over oil concessions each contributed to a growing rift between President Saleh's Arab Nationalist General People's Congress Party (GPC) and the South's Yemeni Socialist Party

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[448] Interview with interviewee (3) 15 May 2018.

[449] G. Nonneman, 'The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond', In H. Jawad, *The Middle East in the New World Order,* London, Palgrave Macmillan Press Ltd, Second Edition,1997, p71.

(YSP).[450] Third, the ideological tensions between the conservative North and the Marxist-Leninist oriented South continued after unification. This resulted in a political rivalry over power sharing within the coalition. The former South felt politically and economically marginalised, and Vice President Ali Salim Al-Beidh (former president of the PRY) from the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) accused the President of seeking to seize ultimate power. In contrast, President Ali Abdallah Saleh and his political party argued that the YSP was unwilling to embrace unification. On account of these tensions, and following the repeated assassinations of YSP politicians, al-Beidh went on strike and left for Aden – the former capital of South Yemen – in August 1993, never to return to the Republic's capital Sana'a.[451] After the YSP Secretary General's home was attacked in early 1994, secessionist sentiments increased in the South.[452] On 5 May 1994, the crisis escalated, as Northern forces crossed the demarcation line and pushed towards Aden. Even though revoking the unification was not originally a demand of Al-Beidh and the YSP, South Yemen's former president and prime minister Haidar Abu Bakr al-Attas declared an independent Democratic Republic of Yemen (DRY) to succeed the former PDRY, and restored Aden as their capital on May 21, 1994. Consequently, the fighting quickly escalated into full-scale warfare between the armies of the North and South over the South's secession.

The crisis further extended to the GCC states, as it became polarised and drifted apart on dealing with the Yemeni conflict, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE strongly favouring the secession of South Yemen. In particular, Saudi Arabia strongly supported the DRY to reverse the rise of

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[450] G. Nonneman, 'The Yemen Republic', p.71.
[451] C. Schmitz, '*Civil war in Yemen: The price of unity*?', Oakland, Current History, vol. 94, Issue. 588, Jan 1995, p33.
[452] G. Nonneman, 'The Yemen Republic', p.71.

a unified Yemen. Historically, relations between the two countries were soured by a legacy of conflicts and wars dating back to their early formation, which resulted in chronic border problems. Accordingly, Riyadh had always preferred a weak and divided Yemen, in order to secure the upper hand and prevent its southern neighbour from becoming strong. The Saudi leadership had long funneled payments to Northern tribes supporting opposition to previous unification initiatives.[453] When North and South Yemen declared unification in May 1990, Saudi Arabia expressed reservations, and actively sought to undermine Yemeni unity. They were concerned about the potentially negative implications of establishing a larger and more populous country on Saudi Arabia's southern border.[454] In the period before the civil war, Saudi-Yemeni relations were experiencing a period of tension as a result of Yemen's position on the crisis and the Second Gulf War, which Saudi Arabia considered to be hostile to it and loyal to Iraq, producing repercussions that led to the exile of about a million Yemenis who were living in Saudi Arabia. Under these circumstances, Saudi Arabia was prepared and ready to play a role in any conflict in Yemen, with the aim of regaining the influence it had lost in the country since Yemeni unity in 1990. Qatar on the other hand supported the north. The Qatari position can be understood against the background of the tension in relations between Doha and Riyadh mentioned earlier, resulting from a border dispute that had led to armed clashes in 1992, and led Qatar to develop its relations with countries that were at odds with Saudi Arabia, such as Iran, Iraq and Yemen.

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[453] G. Nonneman, The Yemen Republic, p.62.

[454] A. Duke. 'Saudi Arabian-Yemeni Relations: Implications for US Policy.', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2000, p. 78. https://ncusar.org/publications/Publications/1999-07-01-Whither-Saudi-Yemeni-Relations.pdf

The unfolding circumstances created by the Yemeni internal conflict alarmed Omani policy makers, as they threatened to undo all of Sultan Qaboos' accomplishments in strengthening relations with his southern neighbour, and therefore posed a challenge to his policy of rapprochement towards Yemen. It was also threatening to affect Oman's relations with its GCC allies. How this development constituted a policy dilemma to Omani policy makers will be explained further in the following section.

6.4 Omani policymakers' dilemma

The conflicts within the Yemeni coalition, involving a civil war over leadership, made Omani policy makers uneasy, as they were faced with a general policy dilemma. Omani policy makers were concerned with the future political landscape of Yemen, which would inevitably impact Oman, whether positively or negatively. In this context, it appears that Omani policy makers were concerned that the conflict between North and South Yemen would strike a severe blow to improving Omani-Yemeni relations, to Sultan Qaboos' initiatives to strengthen bilateral relations established prior to May 1994, and in particular, the border agreement that had been ratified in December 1992.[455] One of the most feared consequences of the conflict shared by my interviewees was that the conflict might result in the breakaway of southern Yemen as a separate state, which could cause a revival of old hostilities and endanger the border agreement, as the conflict between north and south didn't just threaten to undo all that had been accomplished, but could possibly place the two countries in a confrontational situation again.[456] This concern

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[455] Interview with Interviewee (9), 03 August 2018.
[456] Interviewee (4), Interviewee (7), Interviewee (8) and Interviewee (10).

was informed by their bitter memories of the communist insurgencies of the 1960s and 1970s in the southern part of Oman, and South Yemen's sponsorship of the insurgency. As stated above, the ties between the Omani and Yemeni borderlands are shaped heavily by the history of the civil war in Dhofar, in which Marxist Yemenis from the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen assisted the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) in their battle against the Sultan. Although the Dhofar uprising was curbed by the Sultan, it was considered that the "history of Yemeni backing for Omani domestic revolt during Dhofar War continues to augment the Sultan's suspicion of the region's residents as potential insurgents."[457] In this sense, Oman had an interest in a unified and stable Yemen under the leadership of Ali Saleh, in order to maintain its strategic relations with the unified state of Yemen, which Oman had already invested in.[458]

However, the situation was further complicated by the position of GG states. Most of the GCC member states favored the breakaway of South Yemen, and therefore expressed their allegiance by providing political and military support for the separatist leaders in the South. As highlighted above, Saudi Arabia was unhappy with a unified democratic Yemen, which it saw as a threat to its dominance over the region, so "they (had) a preference for a divided Yemen where they would in effect become the patron of the new Southern state."[459] Therefore, when Ali Salem Al-Beidh, the leader of South Yemen declared his intention to break away from the newly formed union, the Saudis supported his move, if indeed they did not foment the breakaway. [460] Moreover, and against the background of Ali Saleh's support for Saddam Hussein during the

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[457] Interview with Interviewee (1), 25 April 2018.
[458] Interview with Interviewee (9), 03 August 2018.
[459] G. Nonneman, *The Yemen Republic*, p.81.
[460] 'Yemen Says Saudi Threat Bars a Truce', *New York Times*, Section A, Page 6, June 6, 1994. file:///C:/Users/ITS/Desktop/TimesMachine_%20June%206,%201994%20-%20NYTimes.com.html (accessed 26 November 2020).

Gulf War and invasion of Kuwait, the other members of the GCC also favoured the South, and joined the Saudis in backing southern Yemen's breakaway, criticising President Ali Abdallah Saleh's effort to unite the country by force.[461] The Yemeni government considered this position to be biased in favour of the separatists against the Yemeni state. In fact, some Yemeni media accused the Saudi and Gulf states position of working against the unity of Yemen. These accusations came to a head when the Yemeni Minister of Planning and Development, Abdul Karim Al-Eryani, accused Saudi Arabia of interference in Yemen's internal affairs.[462] Some in the Yemeni media went as far as to accuse the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates of providing political and financial support to the separatists.[463]

Consequently, Omani policymakers found themselves in a difficult position, as they came under pressure from their counterparts, notably the Saudis, to support the breakaway of the South. The Saudis had a strong preference for separation and initially promoted a vote in the GCC supporting South Yemen, putting Oman under pressure, and creating a rift between Oman and its GCC allies. This position of the Arab Gulf states was made clearer when they issued a communique on 5 June calling for an immediate ceasefire and a warning to any party who would not comply - a reference to the government in Sana'a- while depicting the secession as a reaction against the military offensive by northern forces.[464] This resulted in relations between Muscat and Riyadh becoming strained.[465]

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[461] A. Mohammad, Yemeni civil war in 1994, *The Arab Gulf*, vol. 43, Issue 1-2, 2015, p.83. https://www.iasj.net/iasj/download/8b0f952000548a94 , (accessed 22 October 2020).
[462] A. Mohammad, Yemeni civil war in 1994 p.90.
[463] A. Mohammad, Yemeni civil war in 1994, p.90.
[464] Press release Issued by the fifty-first session of the Ministerial Council, Riyadh, 4-5 June 1994. https://www.gccsg.org/enus/Statements/MinisterialCouncilData/PressReleasesforSessions/Pages/Pressreleaseissuedbythefiftyfi35.aspx, (accessed 17 December 2020).
[465] M. Valeri, '*Oman: Politics and society in the Qaboos state'*, Hurst & Company, 2009, p.79.

In itself, this situation created a policy dilemma for Oman. On the one hand, Oman's national security considerations seemed to require staying close to Saudi Arabia. To achieve his goal of creating security and prosperity for Omanis, Sultan Qaboos considered it necessary to maintain a degree of harmony and close cooperation with the GCC Arab states. On the other hand, Oman was also concerned about preserving its cultural distinctiveness, which prevents it from pursuing the easiest means of combatting threats to national independence, which would be to fall into line with Saudi Arabia as most of the other Arab Gulf states did. As such, the other aspect of the dilemma created by the Yemeni conflict was to make it difficult for Sultan Qaboos to maintain the correct distance from Saudi Arabia, while promoting the national independence of his country.

Clearly, the 1994 Yemen Civil War presented Omani policymakers with a major foreign policy dilemma, and it is obvious that both the framing of the dilemma and the approach they took to resolve it was set against the broad set of ideas that regards Oman as a distinctive cultural identity in its regional context, and as being distinctively vulnerable to external interference. The most consistently feared consequence of the Yemeni internal conflict was that "any attempt to separate the north from the south would regenerate calculations regarding the border demarcation agreement."[466] This interviewee (9) was also concerned that "the internal conflict in Yemen will be used by regional powers in their favor with their support of one party against another. This would undermine stability in the Arabian Peninsula and redraw the borders lines."[467] Not only did this reflect an understanding that the Yemeni internal conflict was seen as a threat to Oman's own national security, but it also highlighted the view that the conflict

[466] Interview with Interviewee (3), 15 May 2018.
[467] Interview with Interviewee (9), 03 August 2018.

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would also open the door for regional powers' interference in Oman's immediate neighbourhood, in this case the Saudis' pursuit of regional hegemonic policy in the form of its interference in Yemeni internal affairs by supporting the breakaway of the South. It also reflects Omani policy makers' fear that any regional destabilisation would undermine Sultan Qaboos' efforts to build national unity around a distinctive cultural identity by the fear of Oman being subsumed under a Saudi cultural hegemony.

In this context, Oman had an interest in maintaining strategic relations with a unified Yemeni State, and therefore, would prefer the breakaway to fail. However, backing Ali Saleh would bring Oman into direct conflict with the rest of the GCC, and particularly Saudi Arabia. As such, supporting the north was not seen as an appropriate policy choice. Joining the Saudis in supporting the breakaway of South Yemen was not seen as appropriate policy option either as it was liable to create further instability on Oman's borders, including boosting Saudi influence in that region, which would not serve Oman's long-term national security objectives, as this would place constrains on Oman's policy choices and make it harder to preserve Omani freedom of movement.[468]

It is worth noting here that, similar to its reading of the Iran-Iraq War, Oman took a very different view on the Yemeni conflict to that of the other Arab Gulf states. Omani policy makers' understanding of the conflict also clearly illustrates that the emerging conflict between North and South Yemen was viewed very much within the same frame as the Iran-Iraq War, despite the fact that the Yemeni conflict was an intrastate conflict. This distinctive view on regional affairs was shaped in great part by both Oman's own experience of civil war and the interference

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[468] Interview with Interviewee (9), 03 August 2018.

of external powers in Oman's internal affairs, and by the idea that regarded Oman as a distinctive cultural identity within its regional context, which had profoundly influenced the manner in which Omani policy-makers came to address the dilemma.

6.5 Oman's Policy Response

Within the context outlined above, in order to preserve Oman's national unity and national independence, Omani policy makers had to find a way of mitigating the risk of instability and interference on Oman's borders associated with the breakaway of the South without actively confronting the other GCC states by siding with Ali Abdullah Saleh. In this respect, acting as a mediator to defuse the crisis and end the conflict by peaceful means not only held the promise of a more stable regional environment, but also provided Oman with an opportunity to distance itself from Saudi influence over the Gulf states, and to demonstrate its independence in dealing with its national security concerns. As interviewee (8) recalls, "we viewed stability in Yemen as a crucial element of our national security outlook, thus we strived to foster dialogue and negotiate a peaceful solution to the conflict."[469]Accordingly, Oman carefully resisted pressure from its GCC fellow members to back the breakaway of southern Yemen, and actively played a role of mediation between the conflicting parties, in order to contain the escalation and assist them to resolve their dispute.

Remarkably enough, Omani policymakers' decision to act as a mediator in response to the Yemeni conflict was formed from the outset of the conflict, contrary to their reaction to the

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[469] Interview with Interviewee (8), 17 August 2018.

dilemma posed the Iran-Iraq War, where they initially attempted to remain neutral, and took some time to arrive at mediation as a solution to the dilemma they faced. This suggests that Oman's experience of acting as a mediator in helping to end the Iran-Iraq War in 1989 had influenced Omani policy makers' sense of mediation as a viable policy option in dealing with regional conflict, which in turn had a profound consequence for how Oman came to address the dilemma posed by the conflict in Yemen, by undertaking a mediation role from the outset of the conflict. As interviewee (2) noted, "The policy pursued by Sultan Qaboos during the Iran-Iraq War of maintaining balanced relations with the parties to the conflict and undertaking mediation efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict has proven its feasibility and effectiveness as a policy to spare Oman the repercussions of regional conflicts and to preserve the cohesion of national unity, as Oman kept a stable country in a region rife with conflicts."[470] Which earned it the satisfaction of the Omani society and its confidence in the performance of the government in addition to the respect of the international community."[471] This suggests that the success of this policy in previous experience led Omani policy-makers to believe that acting as a mediator was an ideal approach in dealing with regional conflicts. In this sense, the challenge posed by the Yemeni conflict was met in the first instance by acting as a mediator to solve the dispute by peaceful means.

Further evidence for the contention that the experience of the Iran-Iraq War had led to the development of mediation as a plausible policy to secure Oman's national interests and manage its regional security environment follows from the fact that Oman, once again in response to this dilemma, took an approach that differed significantly from the rest of the GCC countries.

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[470] Interview with Interviewee (2), 8 May 2018.
[471] Interview with Interviewee (4), 6 Jun 2018.

Indeed, in sharp contrast, Oman independently staked out the middle ground between the two parties, and actively sought to prevent the conflict from escalating by taking an active role in mediation between the conflicting parties. In a sense, this was also simply embodying a continuation of the policy Oman had adopted in response to the dilemma posed by the Iran-Iraq War a decade earlier.

Equally important is that Oman's response to the Yemeni Civil War of 1994 revealed a more sustained and multifaceted commitment to mediation as a means of securing national independence and regional stability than was the case during the Iran-Iraq War. Oman had tried both individually and through its close allies in the region and the international community to address the Yemeni crisis, to contain its escalation and push both parties in the conflict to find a suitable ground for dialogue, towards a political solution acceptable to all parties that guaranteed the stability of Yemen and the region. From the outset of the political dispute between the leaderships over the integration process, Sultan Qaboos initiated a mediation effort trying to avert the crisis.[472] As a result of Sultan Qaboos' initiative, more than 310 Yemeni political and tribal figures met in the Jordanian capital, Amman on February 21, 1994, to find a peaceful settlement to the dispute between President Saleh and his deputy, Ali Al-Beidh.[473] The meeting was attended by the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Yusuf Bin Alawi.[474] Consequently, the two Yemeni leaders signed the 'Document of Pledge and Accord' which included five points:[475]

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[472] Interview with Interviewee (9), 03 August 2018.
[473] Interview with Interviewee (9), 03 August 2018.
[474] Interview with Interviewee (9), 03 August 2018
[475] Interview with Interviewee (9), 03 August 2018.

1. The return of the northern and southern forces to their previous positions before clashes

2. Return all seized equipment

3. The release of military detainees in each side

4. Removing the new military checkpoints

5. Stopping the media campaigns and prohibiting any military action except by order of the joint committee

It was also agreed to form a committee of military observers to monitor so-called contact lines between the forces of both parties. The committee consisted of ten members, nine military officers from Oman and one officer from Jordan.[476] While they set a timetable and a mechanism for implementing the five points, tension continued to escalate between the two sides throughout the continuation of military preparations, along with their continuous exchange of statements and accusations.[477] Shortly after the signing of the 'Document of Pledge and Accord' in Amman, military clashes broke out over an oil field in 'Shabwa' province, as the southern forces attempted to capture the newly discovered oil field.[478] The Omani military leader, who was part of a Yemeni unification military committee designed to aid the merger of the two former armies at the time, endeavored to bring a stop to the conflict, but proved unable to.[479]

As Yemen's political crisis lurched toward full-scale war, Sultan Qaboos sought to contain the escalating conflict and, along with US Assistant Secretary of State Pelletrau, attempted to mediate between the conflicting parties.[480] However, these mediation efforts also proved unable

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[476] Interview with Interviewee (10), 10 August 2018.
[477] Interview with Interviewee (10), 10 August 2018.
[478] G. Nonneman, The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, In H. Jawad, *The Middle East in the New World Order* (pp. 53-69). Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1997, p.80.
[479] C. Allen, and W. Rigsbee II, Oman under Qaboos, p.189.
[480] G. Nonneman, 'The Yemen Republic:', p.80.

to turn the tide of increasing military clashes between the disputants. In late March 1994, Oman made another attempt to mediate between the two sides. This time Sultan Qaboos extended his invitation to President Saleh (leader of Northern Yemen) and vice president Ali Salim Al- Beidh (leader of South Yemen) to hold a truce meeting, bring their views closer, and reach appropriate solutions that could ensure Yemen's unity and stability within the framework of Omani mediation. The two parties met in the southern Omani city of Salalah, on April 3-4, under the personal auspices of Sultan Qaboos, who advised the two parties not to rush into civil war, and to adopt the confederation or federation system, due to the failure of the merger.[481] Saleh and Al-Beidh held a closed meeting to discuss the crisis and the Omani proposal. They agreed on the principle that they considered it necessary to prevent any military confrontation, and not to resort to military force, to avoid being drawn into civil war. However, they were not able to agree on a joint statement, as Al-Beidh insisted on the necessity of the northern and southern military units' withdrawal to locations on both sides of the border, where they had previously been stationed, while Saleh rejected this proposal, because he considered it a step back which threatened the unity of Yemen.[482] This meeting ended in failure, with the Yemeni Socialist Party blaming the failure of the talks on the General People's Congress (GPC), who refused to accept the fact that the merger was no longer feasible, and thought that other forms of federal unity should be explored.[483]

However, despite Sultan Qaboos' mediation efforts in hosting talks between Vice President Al-Beidh and President Saleh, Yemen's southern leaders announced their secession and, with the

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[481] A. Mohammad, 'Yemeni civil war in 1994', p.84.
[482] A. Mohammad, 'Yemeni civil war in 1994', p.84.
[483] A. Mohammad, 'Yemeni civil war in 1994', p.85.

declaration of the Democratic Republic of Yemen (DRY), the fighting quickly escalated into full-scale warfare between the armies of the North and South. On the 27th April, major fighting erupted between the northern and southern forces at Amran military base. The conflict moved to a new phase with an air bombardment launched against Sana'a and Aden by the conflicting parties. Against this deteriorating political and military situation, on May 24, the southern leader Salem Al-Beidh announced a decision to separate the southern and eastern governorates from the United Yemen State, and to establish what he called the Democratic Republic of Yemen. This was followed by the formation of a new government in Aden headed by Haydar Abu Bakr Al-Attas. In response to this new development, most GCC countries demonstrated their sympathy towards the secession by politically and militarily supporting the southern leaders[484]. This position was clearly articulated in the final declaration of the GCC ministerial meeting, held in Saudi Arabia on 4th June 1994, which stated that:

"*The Council welcomed the unity of Yemen when it was established with the consent of the two independent states, the Yemeni Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, in May 1990, and therefore its survival cannot continue without the consent of the two parties and in the face of the reality that one of the parties has announced his return to his previous situation and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Yemen, the two parties cannot deal in this context, except by peaceful means….. the council affirms that it is absolutely impossible to impose this unity by military means.*"[485]

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[484] The press release issued by the fifty-first session of the Ministerial Council , Riyadh, 4-5 June 1994 https://www.gcc-sg.org/en-us/Statements/MinisterialCouncilData/PressReleasesforSessions/Pages/Pressreleaseissuedbythefiftyfi35.aspx
[485] A. Mohammad, 'Yemeni civil war in 1994', p.88.

This statement emerged from the influential position that the Saudis held in the GCC organisation. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal, in the ministerial meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council, criticised Sana'a for what he called its attempt to impose unity by force.[486] In fact, Saudi Arabia actively supported the separation of South Yemen, including funding the MiG-29 deal for the Southern Army, and even made a plea to the UN to intervene.[487] This position was considered by President Ali Saleh as a tacit recognition of the separate state in southern Yemen, constituting support for the militants against a united Yemen.[488]

Unlike their GCC partners, Omani officials expressed their fears about the Yemeni Civil War, warning their GCC partners that it would lead to the spread of instability throughout the entire region. Bin Alawi, the Omani Minister of state for Foreign Affairs, stated that "the Yemen issue is a pivotal issue and a threat to the security and stability of the region, and the Gulf Cooperation Council states should make great diplomatic efforts in order to stop the war."[489] This position was not mere rhetoric. In the time that followed, Omani policy makers invested significant amounts of energy and political capital in attempting to engage with the conflicting parties in order to secure a negotiated settlement of the Yemeni conflict.

Despite the failure of its previous attempts, Oman remained committed to playing an active role in mediating between the parties in the conflict, with the hope of finding a peaceful solution to the Yemeni conflict. Reflecting the extent to which Omani policy makers' sense of mediation as a viable policy option had by now become consolidated, Oman led a new diplomatic initiative

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[486] A. Mohammad, 'Yemeni civil war in 1994', p.84.
[487] M. Katz, 'External Powers and the Yemeni Civil War', In J. Al-Suwaidi, and M. Hudson, (eds.), *The Yemeni War of 1994: causes and consequences*. Saqi Books.,1994, p. 81.
[488] A. Mohammad, 'Yemeni civil war in 1994', p.84.
[489] Oman daily, Issue 4757, 05 June 1994, p.3.

through its representative at the UN. At the time of the conflict, Oman held a non-permanent seat in the Security Council. Therefore, when the Security Council convened on the 1ST of June to discuss the situation in the Republic of Yemen, Oman sought to obtain a balanced resolution between both parties in the conflict by pushing them to sit at the negotiating table, creating an appropriate environment for dialogue to reach an acceptable solution that guaranteed the stability of Yemen and the region. Speaking before the Security Council members in his capacity as the representative of Oman, the Omani representative stated that his country "hoped that the two parties could resolve their differences through dialogue and peaceful negotiations. Oman deeply regretted the continuation of the war, which had brought dangerous and negative consequences, not only for Yemen, but for the region as a whole."[490]

Consequently, the UN Security Council meeting culminated in the adoption of resolution 924 (1994), calling for an immediate ceasefire and requesting the parties to go back to the negotiating table as the most appropriate means of resolving their differences.[491] The Security Council also agreed to send a fact finding mission to the area as soon as practicable to assess prospects for a renewed dialogue between all those concerned, and for further efforts to resolve their differences. This was in addition to the formation of a ceasefire mechanism involving the participation of representatives from Oman and Jordan, as well as the military attachés of France and the United States in Sana'a, with a mandate to supervise the ceasefire.[492] The resolution also urged an immediate cessation of the supply of arms and other material which might contribute

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[490] UNSC, Chapter VIII, Consideration of questions under the responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security, *The situation in the Republic of Yemen*, p.1022. https://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/93-95/Chapter%208/MIDDLE%20EAST/93-95_8-26-YEMEN.pdf (accessed 05 July 2020).
[491] UNSC, 'The situation in the Republic of Yemen', p.1019.
[492] UNSC, 'The situation in the Republic of Yemen', p.1020.

to continuation of the conflict. The Security Council resolution was balanced in holding both parties responsible for all their actions, and its demand for the immediate cessation of the supply of arms by external powers, reflecting the Omanis' concern over the interference of regional powers in the internal Yemeni conflict, which they believed would damage the situation in Yemen and pose a serious threat to the security and stability of the entire region. Speaking after the vote on the resolution, the Omani representative clearly articulated this view, stating that "Oman believed that the resolution was very balanced in its demands and that, if it had been implemented fully by the parties, it could have helped the parties to settle their differences."[493]

In parallel with these diplomatic efforts in the UN Security Council, Oman also attempted to entice its GCC fellow members to take a balanced position in the Yemeni conflict. On June 27, the Omani Foreign Minister Youssef bin Alawi visited the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to discuss the Yemeni crisis to work to stop the war.[494] Bin Alawi stressed that "the Yemeni crisis is a pivotal issue for us {Omani} and we are undertaking different diplomatic efforts to stop the war."[495] Meanwhile, in a brief lull, Sultan Qaboos made a final attempt to persuade the two parties to resolve their dispute peacefully, when on June 27th he received a high ranking official representative from President Ali Saleh to discuss the crisis as well as means to reach a peaceful solution.[496]

However, despite all mediation efforts, fighting intensified between the two sides. The conflict witnessed a dramatic shift, with the northern forces swiftly succeeded in taking the battle to the

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[493] UNSC, 'The situation in the Republic of Yemen', p.1022.
[494] 'Concluded two visits to Abu Dhabi and Riyadh: Bin Alawi, the Cooperation Council supports the stability of Yemen', *Oman daily newspaper*, no 4779, 27 June 1994, p.1.
[495] Oman daily newspaper, no 4779, 27 June 1994, p.1.
[496] 'Received a Yemeni official: His Majesty the Sultan expresses his keenness to stop the fighting in Yemen', *Oman daily Newspaper*, No 4778, 26 June 1994, p.1.

south, and northern leaders proclaiming their willingness to cooperate with the mediation efforts, without seriously slowing their advance towards Aden. On 28 June the northern forces blockaded Aden, combined with intensified bombardment of the city.[497] The southern forces were unable to counter the northern offensive, with the result that, on 6th July, the northern forces captured Aden. As the city fell into their hands, the southern leaders fled the country.[498] Oman's commitment to act as a mediator in response to the Yemeni conflict continued even after the war ended and the southern separatists were defeated. It is important to note, however, that maintaining good relations with the parties most likely to destabilises Oman's southern border in future was a strategic imperative for Oman. This is why, following the end of the fighting, Oman granted political asylum to southern separatist leaders while maintaining close ties with the government based in northern Yemen.[499] Towards the end of the war, ass as the Northern military advanced towards Aden, Al-Beidh quarreled with the Saudis, who were angry at his apparently incompetent handling of the war, while he in turn was frustrated by their failure to fulfill their promises of support.[500] As the situation on the ground changed in favour of President Ali Saleh, the Saudis stopped supporting the southern separatists. Meanwhile, Sultan Qaboos invested a significant amount of time in negotiating with Ali Saleh to secure the peaceful surrender of Aden and safe passage for the separatist leaders. The negotiation resulted in Oman providing refuge to Ali Al-Beidh and six of his top assistants; however, it imposed severe restrictions on the separatists' political activities, so as not to jeopardise its relationship with

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[497] G. Nonneman, 'The Yemen Republic:', 1997, p.82.
[498] G. Nonneman, 'The Yemen Republic:', 1997, p.82.
[499] 'Ali Salem Al-Beidh and senior southern Yemen leaders arrive to the Sultanate', *Oman Daily newspaper*, Issue 4790, 08 July 1994, p.01.
[500] B. Whitaker, 'The birth of modern Yemen.', *Al-Bab,* 2009, p.90. https://al-bab.com/birth-modern-yemen-introduction. (accessed 01April 2021).

Yemen, and in order to ensure a good relationship between the two countries.[501] Oman was clearly determined to maintain balanced relations with both parties in the conflict by holding them equally responsible and pushing them to the negotiation table.

As highlighted above, Oman's response to the Yemeni internal conflict revealed a sustained commitment to mediation as a means of securing national independence and resist external interference and cultural destabilisation. However, unlike her first mediation efforts in the Iran-Iraq War, where mediation was one of several choices considered by policymakers, and was not their first choice, in the Yemeni case the idea that mediation would be the best way to secure Omani independence and resist external interference and cultural destabilization seems to have already been decided. This suggests that by this juncture the virtue of mediation as a means of promoting core policy goals had already become a core component of Omani policy-makers web of beliefs. Oman spared no effort, in both the international and regional arenas, to resolve the Yemeni crisis by peaceful means. In this respect, Oman's impartial stand and its steadfast commitment to act as a mediator during the Yemeni crisis was influenced by the belief that it was in the Omani national interest not to make new enemies and, with the experience of the Dhofar insurgency still in mind, not risk drawing another conflict into its own territory. Omani policy makers had no desire for the breakaway of South Yemen as an independent state, which was partly influenced by their past experience of hostility with the regime in South Yemen. Moreover, the emergence of South Yemen as an independent state would have allowed greater Saudi interference in and dominance of the Gulf states. However, they did not support the North, because that would have been regarded as a sharp break with the rest of the GCC. Underpinning

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[501] J. Kechichian, Oman and the world, p.98.

this understanding are the traditions of thought that regard Oman as distinctive and as being vulnerable to external. This self-understanding led Oman to distance herself from any regional polarisation and take different policy actions to engender and encourage peace and stability whenever possible, in order to preserve her national unity, which was built around a distinctive cultural identity. Furthermore, by carefully resisting pressure from its GCC allies to side with the DRY, especially Saudi Arabia, Oman demonstrated its desire to maintain its independence in its regional foreign and security policy in order to handle its security needs.

6.6 **Summary**

The aim of this chapter was to understand why Oman, unlike its GCC allies, decided not to take sides in the Yemeni Civil War of 1994, and sought to act as a mediator in response to the dilemma posed by the conflict. Employing Bevir's interpretive approach, the chapter demonstrated that Omani policy makers' decision to act as a mediator during this regional upheaval was set out against the background of the underlying traditions of thought of Oman as possessing a distinctive culture in the region, and as being vulnerable to external interference, that were constructed by Sultan Qaboos in his process of 'nation building', and in formulating Oman's first foreign and security policy during the 1970s. The chapter demonstrates that new developments with the outbreak of the Yemeni internal conflict created a policy dilemma for Omani policy makers, which appeared to make it harder to preserve Omani national independence and eliminate the risk of external interference. In this context, Omani policy makers were not in favour of the emergence of South Yemen as an independent state, as this would endanger Oman's national security and undermine her national independence. On the

other hand, Oman's support for the North would also lead to a sharp break with the rest of her GCC allies. As such, the dilemma for Omani policy makers under these new circumstances was how to consolidate Oman's national independence without sacrificing the country's cultural distinctiveness. This shaped Omani policy makers' thinking and structured their understanding of what the conflict was about, why it mattered, what kind of policy dilemma they faced, and what as a consequence should be done in response.

However, in line with Bevier's conception that political traditions are subject to evolution and change over time, as their inheritors have to respond to various dilemmas, the experience of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s had led Omani policy makers to believe that taking a neutral position while acting as a mediator during a regional conflict was the best policy response with which to secure Oman's national unity and preserve its national independence. Therefore, when the Yemeni Civil War erupted in early 1994, the dilemma posed by the conflict was met by acting as a mediator from the outset of the conflict. Thus, Oman carefully resisted pressure from its GCC fellow members to back the breakaway state of southern Yemen, and actively played the role of mediator between the conflicting parties, in order to contain the escalation of hostilities and assist them to resolve their dispute.

Indeed, Omani policy makers' understanding of the challenges they faced and the manner in which they acted to address them were formed against the background of the traditions of thought that were at the heart of Qaboos' political project for Oman, and its position in the region and the wider world. Sultan Qaboos' idea of Oman as possessing a distinctive culture in the region and as being vulnerable to external interference are evident in the outcomes of the policy adopted in response to the dilemma posed by the Yemeni Civil War. By resisting pressure

from the GCC states to side with southern Yemen, particularly from Saudi Arabia, as the largest player within the GCC, Oman revealed that it was willing to preserve its national unity that was built around the idea of cultural distinctiveness and to secure its independence in its foreign policy to manage its regional security environment. Furthermore, while Omani policy makers were concerned that instability in Yemen could lead to a spillover of tension, rivalries and war, they also regarded Yemen as an area in which they could project influence and assert 'national independence' from other regional actors, most importantly Saudi Arabia, through their efforts to facilitate negotiations between the conflicting parties.

7   Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Applying Bevir's interpretive approach of traditions and dilemmas, this thesis has aimed to understand Oman's mediation policy behaviour, and in particular to understand why Omani policymakers opted to play a mediating role in response to regional conflicts from 1980 to 2015. The thesis has accomplished this by examining two case studies of Oman's mediation role undertaken during regional conflicts. These are the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988, and the Yemeni Civil War of 1994. In this concluding chapter I will recapitulate the argument of the study. It will also develop a new strand of analysis by examining the negotiations leading up to the signing of the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and Oman's role in facilitating them, thereby demonstrating the depth of Oman's role and continued commitment to playing the role of mediator.

Located in the Arabian Peninsula, one of the most volatile and unstable regions in the world, Oman has pursued a remarkable foreign and security policy practice that in most aspects of regional affairs has differed remarkably from that of its Arab Gulf State counterparts. When examining the policy response of Arab Gulf states to these regional upheavals, Oman, unlike its fellow GCC neighbours, has distinguished itself as being a mediator in conflicts in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle Eastern region. Over the past few decades Oman has been active as a mediator during the Iran-Iraq War, the 1994 Yemeni Civil War, the Iranian nuclear deal, and more recently, the ongoing conflict in Yemen. While it can be argued that Oman's mediation

efforts reflect, in part, a generic small state security strategy, there are more profound motivations behind Oman's approach to mediating regional conflicts.

Two main factors arise from the literature review. Firstly, the literature on Omani foreign policy emphasised the role played by Sultan Qaboos in formulating Oman's foreign and security policies. As was illustrated, Sultan Qaboos was the dominant actor within the Omani state. He positioned himself at the center of his political project for Oman, and has retained the most influential official position, as the head of state and the head of government. He has also assumed the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of National Defense and Minister of Finance. In this way, Sultan Qaboos became the key figure in formulating the country's first foreign policy. Therefore, the practice of Oman's foreign and security policy since 1970 is essentially that of Sultan Qaboos' ideas for Oman and his interpretation of the country's national interests. Moreover, the literature on Oman's foreign and security policy have also highlighted the influence of domestic factors, such as Oman's political history and its ideological and cultural identity in shaping Oman's contemporary foreign policy. It is therefore necessary to understand the influence that these factors have had on the Sultan' perceptions of threat and his understanding of Oman's role regionally and internationally. Secondly, the literature on international mediation shows that most scholarly works focus on the notion of self-interest as the prime motive for a state to engage in mediation. As such, the ideas and beliefs of key Omani policy-makers are fundamental to understanding foreign policy practice. This implies that in order to fully understand Omani foreign and security practice, and in particular why Omani policy-makers chose to act as mediators during regional upheavals, one needs to understand the

relevant intentions, interests, beliefs, motives or ethical desires of key policy-makers. In the domain of political science this is normally described effectively as a focus on meaning.

Based on the above findings, in this research task the thesis has opted to employ the interpretive approach. Of course, there are other political science theories that demonstrate an interest in studying meanings. Behaviouralists, institutionalists and rational choice theorists sometimes study the role of beliefs and desires of political actors; however, they tend to avoid directly appealing to beliefs and desires of political actors, by reducing them to mere intervening variables whose final cause lies elsewhere.[502] An interpretive approach to political science differs from these theories in its theoretical agenda, one that privileges meanings as means to grasp a political actor's actions and practices. Political researchers can understand a political actor's action or foreign policy practice by implicitly or explicitly invoking their beliefs and desires. In this respect, Oman's mediation behaviour cannot be simply reduced to a self-interest explanation. In the context of the Persian Gulf, the six Arab Gulf states allied together in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) experience similar security challenges, yet Oman, in almost every regional upheaval, tended to act significantly differently from its allies. This means that Omani policy-makers hold different perceptions about their country's regional position and its security or national interests. Therefore, in order to fully understand Oman's mediation behaviour, we must explore the beliefs through which Omani policy-makers construct their world, including the ways they understand their country's position, and how they perceive of their national interest.

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[502] M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, 'Interpretive political science: mapping the field.', p. 5.

As outlined in the methodology chapter, in order to understand how key Omani policy-makers conceive of the world around them and how this understanding informs policy and practice, this thesis has followed Mark Bevir's interpretive theoretical framework, focusing on the study of political actors as 'situated agents' responding to policy dilemmas by drawing on– and sometimes adapting – foreign policy traditions in response to dilemmas. I found this theoretical framework very useful to achieve the primary aim of the thesis, commencing from the assumption that policy makers arrive at a decision or perform their actions against the background of inherited traditions that shape their decision making and influence their actions.[503] Within this theoretical framework, the thesis began with the empirical chapters by identifying the core underlying tradition of thought that informed Oman's foreign and security policy since Sultan Qaboos came to power in July 1970. As the analysis has shown, the thesis has identified two broadly distinct sets of key ideas and beliefs that emerged as a potent force in shaping Omani policy makers' foreign and security policy thinking during the 1970s. These are the idea of Oman as possessing a distinctive cultural identity in her region, and as being historically vulnerable to external interference by virtue of her geopolitical position.

As was outlined, Sultan Qaboos inherited a country that was in the midst of a civil war, and socially and politically divided. In other words, Oman was lacking 'national unity' and, therefore, upon ascending to power in 1970, Sultan Qaboos had to reconstruct the new Omani state, a state which would be politically united and a nation which would be socially unified. In order to consolidate Oman's 'national unity' Qaboos sought to put together a multifaceted programme for Oman, based on a series of 'old' Omani traditions intertwined with a set of 'new'

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[503] M. Bevir, O. Daddow, and I. Hall, (eds.), '*Interpreting global security*', p.6.

ideas drawn from the Sultan's reading of Oman's position and the situation he found Oman in the late 1960s, his perception of the threats and challenges that were facing the country's sovereignty. This process of nation-building came to be known in the Omani public narrative as a 'national awakening or renaissance', and the day that Sultan Qaboos came to power would be known as 'Renaissance Day', which is celebrated annually on the 23rd July. In pursuing his objectives, Sultan Qaboos embraced a constructive strategy to reshape Oman's national identity as a distinctive cultural identity within its regional context. This distinctive cultural identity revolves around two distinct themes. First is the sense of Oman's 'historical greatness'. In this respect, Sultan Qaboos revived the sense of Oman's historical greatness, relating this to Oman's historical image of being an Empire. However, in order to 'consolidate national unity', darker periods dominated by internal division and disputes in Oman's history were overlooked by Omani media outlets and excluded from the education curriculum. The second is the sense of Omani identity as both shared with other Arab states, but also distinctive in light of the influence of the 'Ibadhi' school of thought. The Ibadhi sect of Islam has been widespread throughout Oman since the early years of Islam. Consequently, Oman is the only country in Gulf region whose leadership is neither Sunni nor Shiite – putting the country in a unique position. In his project for rebuilding the modern Omani nation state, Sultan Qaboos sought to preserve the country's distinctive identity and the stature of 'Ibadhism', which gave it a distinctive cultural identity and distinguished it from other nation-states within its regional context. Both the sense of 'historical greatness' and the 'Ibadhi traditions' contributed towards reshaping Oman's national identity as a distinctive cultural identity within its regional context, one which should be preserved and protected. Because Oman regards itself as possessing a distinctive cultural identity, Oman has distanced itself from Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia, the two major

regional powers, since Sultan Qaboos came to power. This distinctive cultural identity became a shared representation of a collective self that Omani people are socialised with through the narrative of 'national renaissance' embedded within their state controlled media outlets and the education curriculum.

Alongside 'consolidating national unity', Sultan Qaboos also emphasised the importance of 'consolidating national independence'. Oman's domestic political division had long made Oman vulnerable to the interference of external powers, as the country became subject to external aggression and interference by regional and global powers. Certainly, the experience of civil war during the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s in the interior area were manifestations of historical internal political divisions between the Imamate and the Sultanate. However, Saudi, Iraqi and Egyptian support for these Imamate insurgences added a regional dimension that intensified these internal conflicts. This vulnerability of Oman's divided internal environment was further complicated by the eruption of communist insurgencies in Dhofar province in 1964, and interference by the USSR and China in providing financial and military support for the insurgents, thereby, adding international pressure to Oman's internal conflicts. This created a sense of Oman being vulnerable to foreign interference in the mind of Omani policy-makers. The historical lesson is that external foreign intervention intensified the country's internal divisions, which is why it must be avoided, and why Oman's foreign and security policy independence is therefore fundamental to the country's internal security and stability. Another factor that had contributed to the Sultan's sense of Oman being vulnerable to foreign interference was his contemporary concern over vulnerability related to the geopolitics of the Straits of Hormuz. As explored earlier, Sultan Qaboos had recognised the geostrategic

importance of the Straits of Hormuz for international shipping and the maintenance of stability and the security of Oman and the entire Gulf region. Both of these factors had played key roles in shaping Omani policy makers' understanding of Oman's geostrategic position involving the risk of foreign interference. This close connection which was drawn in the thinking of Omani policy-makers between Oman's geostrategic position and the experience of foreign interference, which led Sultan Qaboos to believe that Omani national independence is potentially threatened by external interference from regional and global powers. Consequently, promoting the importance of a national policy of independence to prevent any interference by external powers in Oman's internal affairs or imposing policy constraints on it became paramount. One of the challenges facing Sultan Qaboos in the early 1970s was that Omani national independence was potentially threatened by external interference from regional and global powers in Oman's internal affairs. Therefore, one of his objectives in the early 1970s was to eliminate this interference, to consolidate Oman's national independence by mitigating its dependence on external powers, which was regarded as a crucial element of Oman's domestic stability. In this respect, Sultan Qaboos had to free Oman from any policy constraints that could be imposed upon her by any regional power, and maintain a distance from any regional polarisation.

The thesis has demonstrated that these two broad sets of ideas and beliefs, formulated by the Sultan during the 1970s, gave rise to a cautiously crafted, 'balanced' foreign and security policy by the end of the 1970s. Sultan Qaboos' perception of regional security threats was heavily structured and influenced by his political project of nation-state building and his idea of Oman as a distinctive cultural identity in its region, one that needed to be secured and its independence preserved. To achieve this end, Sultan Qaboos crafted a very cautious 'balanced' foreign and

security policy that could accommodate rival parties and maintain an equal distance from all major regional actors. Indeed, Oman's balanced foreign and security policy was evident in its position and policy practice and actions on various regional issues. This was clearly illustrated by the Omani position during the dispute between Iran and the UAE over an island in the Persian Gulf in 1974. Oman saw itself having to balance its relationships with the Arab Gulf countries on one side, and Iran on the other, without becoming embroiled in the dispute, and without taking sides.

Oman's policy approach towards the Camp David Peace Accord between Egypt and Israel in 1978 is another example of its balanced policy towards conflicting parties. While Arab countries decided to boycott Egypt and cut their diplomatic relations with the country, with the head office of the Arab League being moved from Cairo to Tunisia, Oman took a path that was distinct from other Arab Gulf monarchies. Hence, while smaller Gulf states largely followed the Saudi lead with respect to the conflict and the means towards its solution, Oman was the exception, deciding not to cut its diplomatic relations with Egypt, while asserting its support for the Palestinian people to exercise their national rights and to have their own independent state. In this sense, Oman acted independently in response to these events and maintained a balanced approach towards both parties in the conflict.

Oman's policy of a 'balanced approach' is also evident in its relations with Iran and the Arab Gulf states following the Iranian Revolution and collapse of the Shah's regime in February 1979, that profoundly altered the nature of regional relations. Despite some tension between Oman and Iran over the Straits of Hormuz, Oman, unlike the other Arab Gulf states, did not accept the premise that the revolution would spill over into the Gulf, and urged other Gulf states not to

isolate Iran, seeking to maintain good relations with the post-revolutionary country. In pursuing this policy, Oman ensured that it safeguarded its sovereignty from any external interference, and preserved independence in its political choices and decisions without antagonising any side, irrespective of whether other countries were in support or not. Oman's tendency is to maintain an independent policy on regional issues, differing from those of the other Arab Gulf states, such as Kuwait, the UAE and Bahrain, who generally tend to follow the Saudi lead in their regional policies. This independence is clearly informed by the idea of Oman as a distinctive national cultural identity, and its unique perspective on regional affairs.

The thesis has established that, by 1980, Sultan Qaboos' ideas of Oman as possessing a distinctive cultural identity in her region and as being historically vulnerable to external interference by virtue of her geopolitical position had been a powerful force in Oman's foreign and security policy thinking. As illustrated in chapter four, these ideas were manifested in Oman's foreign and security policy practice and outcomes. Oman's balanced policy approach, as developed by the end of the 1970s, was shaped and structured by these ideas adopted by Sultan Qaboos upon ascending to power and as part of his project to create a newly independent Omani nation. As such, anyone working on Omani foreign and security policy had essentially been socialised into this kind of thinking, thereby acquiring the status of shared traditional understandings by Omani policy makers, ones that were often drawn upon and reinterpreted in response to policy dilemmas.

Having identified the core ideas and thoughts that informed Oman's first foreign and security policy practice by 1980, the thesis then turned to examining how this tradition of foreign and security policy practice was challenged by the new circumstances that were occurring in Oman's

immediate regional environment, thereby posing a policy dilemma for Omani policy-makers and, consequently, paving the way to the emergence of mediation as a new and prominent option in Oman's foreign and security policy thinking. Applying the theoretical framework of traditions and dilemmas in practice, the thesis has examined two cases of Oman's mediation roles during regional upheavals: The Iran-Iraq War (chapter 5) and Oman's mediation efforts in response to the Yemeni Civil War of 1994 (chapter 6).

The study first examined Oman's mediation role in the Iran-Iraq War, which was selected based on the fact that it is the first major example of Omani mediation playing a key role in the mediation process to end conflict. In this sense, it is the point where mediation emerged as a policy option to secure Oman's national interests in the thinking of Omani policy makers. The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980 was the first major regional conflict since the withdrawal of the British from the region, one which ushered the region into a new geopolitical situation, presenting not just Oman but all the Arab Gulf states with a real policy dilemma. As the war between Iran and Iraq broke out, the Arab Gulf states were driven by their fear of revolutionary Iran's expansionist ideological ambition, and decided to stand on the side of Iraq, providing Saddam Hussein with substantial military and financial support. Consequently, Oman came under increasing pressure from its Arab Gulf state counterparts and the wider 'Arab world' to join ranks with Iraq and form an anti-Iranian alliance. These new circumstances created by the Iran-Iraq War had challenged the existing tradition of Omani foreign and security policy. Within this context, Oman's major policy dilemma was whether to join the other Arab Gulf states in siding with Iraq, or whether it should maintain its balanced policy approach by

distancing itself from Iraq, and the other Arab Gulf states, in order to avoid complete alienation from Iran.

The thesis has illustrated that Omani policy-makers, in responding to this policy dilemma, drew heavily on the tradition of thought and its associated policy practice which was encapsulated by Sultan Qaboos during the 1970s and was in place by 1980. Omani policy makers' understanding of the war during its early phase was that it contained an ideological content that could develop into a protracted sectarian conflict between Sunni Arabs and Shia Persians, which Oman needed to avoid. This understanding incorporated two of Oman's traditions of thought. Firstly, it reflects the idea of Oman as a distinctive cultural identity in the region, as the only country with a majority of the Ibadhi sect, including the ruling family, and his idea of promoting national unity in Omani society had to take into account a significant Sunni and Shai population. Secondly, it also reflects the idea of Oman as being vulnerable to external interference. However, Oman's policy responses to the dilemma posed by the Iran-Iraq War evolved through three overlapping stages. These were applying the existing policy of 'balanced approach', adopting a 'neutral' position, and eventually acting as a mediator to help bring the war to an end. In the early days of the war, the dilemma was met in the first instance by the existing policy tradition of a 'balanced approach'. This was partially influenced by the belief that the war would not last for long and that Iraq would achieve a quick victory over Iran. Accordingly, Oman carefully resisted pressure from its Arab Gulf state counterparts to abandon its balanced policy approach, and maintained good terms with both Iran and Iraq. However, Oman joined the Arab Gulf states to shore up their collective security by the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which

was initially discussed in November 1980 and officially inaugurated in May 1981, although it rejected the idea of transforming the organisation into any form of anti-Iranian military alliance.

However, changing fortunes in the conflict by the end of 1980, with the war turning into a stalemate, led to a mounting policy dilemma for Omani policy-makers. As Iraq became overwhelmed by the Iranian military's offensive military, the other Arab Gulf states, fearing the defeat of Saddam Hussain, increased their financial and military support for Iraq, in order to prevent an Iranian victory. Omani policy-makers came to believe that the war might get out of control and would spill over into the Arab Gulf states. The need to avoid a long-drawn-out conflict, with its implication of sectarian polarisation and spillover, led Sultan Qaboos to adjust his traditional policy practice, and this time seek to promote the principle of 'neutrality', presented as a policy option for guaranteeing both regional security and Oman's unique regional position, as well as to safeguard its national security interests. Accordingly, Oman hastened to declare her official neutral position in the conflict.

Nevertheless, Oman's policy of neutrality was challenged by the further escalation of the war, and a new turn in the feature of the conflict as it became internationalised, with the beginning of the so-called 'Tanker War' by mid-1984. The changing fortunes of the war did begin to have a more significant impact on the internal security of Arab Gulf states, as Iran retaliated by attacking oil infrastructures in some of these states, particularly Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and started fomenting internal sectarian tensions in Bahrain and Kuwait. Moreover, in response to the dramatic shift in the war, with increasing attacks against merchant ships in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf states, particularly the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait initiated a plan to have their oil tanker fleet reflagged and thus protected by foreign naval powers. Omani

policy makers became more concerned about the threatening turn that the events were taking, as the war had too much potential for uncontrolled escalation, which would lead to the direct intervention of external powers, and they feared the more general regional instability that might presage. Meanwhile, their Arab Gulf state counterparts became more explicit in their alliance with Iraq, and, consequently, increased their financial and military support for the country. Omani policy makers found themselves in an uneasy position and continued to look for ways of containing the ramifications of the war. Recognising that their 'neutrality' approach was insufficient to allay fears over the Iran-Iraq War, it had to be complemented with more proactive and intensive efforts at engagement with the conflicting parties. Influenced by the sense of vulnerability to external interference, with the implications of military spill-over and superpower involvement, or turning the region into an arena for the Cold War by proxy, were the main concerns of Omani policy makers, whose objective became to end the war. Consequently, Omani policy shifted towards a more active engagement with the conflicting parties. By the end of 1984, Oman was clearly establishing itself as a mediator between Iran on one hand and the pro-Iraqi camp on the other. This represented a real break and transition in Omani foreign and security policy tradition, from being cautious by taking a neutral position, to a policy of engagement through acting as a mediator. Sultan Qaboos became increasingly engaged with mediation efforts, culminating in secret ceasefire talks held in Salalah, the southern city of Oman in August 1988, ending the eight-year war.

In this manner, the key motives behind Oman's mediation behaviour were the beliefs and traditions of thought that were at the heart of Qaboos' political project for Oman. Oman's reading of the kind of dilemma that was posed by the Iran-Iraq war and the policy response they

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chose to resolve this dilemma were all set out against the tradition of thought that was at the heart of Qaboos' political project for Oman. Oman's initial balanced approach, its 'neutral' later stance and its genuine breakthrough towards active engagement with the conflicting parties, by eventually acting as a mediator, were all structured and shaped by that particular understanding of Oman as possessing a distinctive cultural identity in her region, and as being historically vulnerable to external interference in virtue of her geopolitical position. Omani policy-makers repeatedly drew on these traditions of thought. In this sense, the evolution of mediation in Oman's foreign and security policy practice in response to the dilemma posed by the Iran-Iraq War was shaped by beliefs and traditions adopted by Sultan Qaboos and the political project that he promoted for Oman, and the way in which these beliefs structured his reading of the security dilemma, as well as the solution and practice he implemented to overcome this dilemma.

The second case examined in the study is the Yemeni Civil War of 1994, which is selected based on the consideration that it is both the next major example of Omani mediation, and the case in which the practice of mediation was first used again. As such, it is the point at which it is plausible to say that mediation is already beginning to be formulated as the policy option of choice. The study shows that when fighting between the Northern and Southern parts of Yemen erupted in May 1994, the emerging conflict was viewed very much within the same frame as the Iran-Iraq War. Omani policy makers' views on what the conflict was about, why it mattered, and what should be done in response, were formed against the background of the two broad sets of ideas Oman as possessing a distinctive cultural identity in her region, and as being historically vulnerable to external interference in virtue of her geopolitical position. As demonstrated in the

chapter, the internal conflict in Yemen presented Omani policy-makers with a real policy dilemma. The policy dilemma Oman was facing related to Omani relations with the GCC, and in particular Oman's relations with Saudi Arabia. In this respect Oman's national security considerations for political and economic imperatives required maintaining close ties with Saudi Arabia and the GCC countries in general. On the other hand, preserving cultural distinctiveness and maintaining policy independence required keeping a distance from Saudi Arabia. Therefore, amidst these unfolding circumstances it was hard for Oman to maintain the correct distance from Saudi Arabia.

However, by this time, Oman's experience of acting as a mediator in the Iran-Iraq War had influenced Omani policy makers' sense of mediation as a viable policy option in dealing with regional conflict, which in turn had a profound consequence for how Oman came to address the dilemma posed by the conflict in Yemen. In this sense, the challenge posed by the conflict was met in the first instance by acting as a mediator to solve the dispute by peaceful means. Accordingly, Oman carefully resisted pressure from its fellow GCC members to back the breakaway of southern Yemen, and did not support the North either, because that would have antagonised Saudi Arabia. Instead, Oman chose to actively play the role of mediator between the conflicting parties in order to contain any escalation. As the conflict continued, Oman nonetheless retained a steadfast commitment to act as a mediator, and eventually bring the conflict to an end. In fact, throughout the period of the conflict, Oman invested significant amounts of energy and political capital in attempting to engage with the conflicting parties and secure a negotiated settlement over the dispute. This clearly demonstrated the extent to which

Omani policy makers had, by this point, come to believe that acting as a mediator was a credible policy response to regional conflict.

In comparison with its first experience in Iran-Iraq war, Oman's experience in Yemen shows that Oman was quick in turning to mediation as a policy choice in the Yemeni case. It also shows that there was little evidence of other policies being considered. Moreover, Oman's commitment to mediation efforts in the Yemeni case was more sustained, even in the face of setbacks. Based on this, it seems reasonable to conceive of the idea of Oman as a mediator having acquired, by the mid-1990s, the status of a traditional understanding within Omani foreign policy thinking. Indeed, by mid-1995, Oman was very much on its own in occupying this type of mediation role, and had consolidated their position as a key regional player. This suggests that, as Omani policy makers responded to a series of policy dilemmas posed by regional upheavals, they had in effect developed a new policy tradition, which confirms Bevir's notion that traditions are contingent products of the way in which people develop specific beliefs, preferences and actions. In this manner, Oman's mediation behaviour has evolved as a new tradition of foreign and security policy practice. Indeed, by the early 21st century, Oman had emerged as a crucial regional player, acting as a mediator in resolving and defusing regional crisis.

As illustrated in Yemen, the idea of Oman as a mediator had become a traditional understanding in its own right by the mid-1990s within Omani foreign and security policy thinking. Oman's practice of mediation as an instrument in response to a number of particular foreign and security policy dilemmas has led to the development of Oman's reputation and built its credentials as a reliable and trustful mediator, to such an extent that Oman got called on by other parties to play this role, even when she was not facing an acute foreign and security policy dilemma of her

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own. Consequently, not all Omani mediation efforts after 1995 should be understood as responses to dilemmas. In this sense, Oman's earlier adoption of a policy of mediation as illustrated during the Iran-Iraq War and the Yemeni Civil War was a natural outgrowth of Oman's distinct cultural identity and the desire to avoid external interference, given the contingent dilemmas that arose at certain points in time and the alternative options open to Omani policy makers. However, Oman's later examples of mediation are different in this respect, where Oman has been actively supported and sometimes urged by her western allies particularly the US and the UK to play this role. Throughout the early 21st century, Oman has been approached in many instances by foreign governments to negotiate the release of foreign citizens. This is most clearly illustrated by the release of the British soldiers held by Iran in 2007, and the 2010 release of American hikers, who were arrested by Iranian security in the border area between Iran and Iraq for supposedly illegally crossing Iranian borders.[504] In return, four Iranians detained in the U.S. and U.K were released. Similarly, several Westerners detained by various factions in Yemen have also been freed from their captors via Omani mediation.

Within the above context, Oman's role as a mediator in facilitating the Iranian nuclear deal agreement in July 2015 is one of the most notable illustrative examples. Since its announcement in August 2002, Iran's nuclear program has produced considerable tension between Iran and the international community, as it is perceived to pose a serious security threat to international peace and stability, in particular undermining the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).[505] As such, the Iranian nuclear programme became an international crisis that needed to be addressed. The international community, mainly through the P5+1, attempted to resolve the

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[504] R. Schmierer, 'The Sultanate of Oman and the Iran Nuclear Deal', p.116.
[505] H. Clinton, *Hard Choices*, p.348.

Iranian nuclear crisis by engaging Iran through diplomatic efforts, spanning more than a decade. During the first phase of negotiations, a joint diplomatic initiative to address Iran's nuclear policy was launched by the United Kingdom, France and Germany.[506] Other third party states such as Turkey and Brazil had also attempted to mediate between Iran and the international community.[507] However, ultimately all mediation efforts failed to bring the Iranian nuclear programme under control. Consequently, Western powers led by the United States began seriously discussing the use of military action to destroy Iran's nuclear production facilities. Tensions were further heightened when Israel reiterated that it would prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear capabilities at any cost, with the growing possibility of Israel launching a pre-emptive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. By January 2011, the standoff over Iran's illicit nuclear programme was escalating, posing an urgent threat to regional and global security, while negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 were going nowhere. According to Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, "the prospect of armed conflict, possibly including an Israeli strike to knock out the Iranian nuclear facilities like the ones carried out against Iraq in 1981 and Syria 2007, were mounting."[508] This was the backdrop against which Oman's crucial mediation role emerged, succeeding in convincing both sides to come to the negotiation table. Subsequently, on the request of the Obama Administration, Oman facilitated several secret negotiations held in Muscat between Iran and the USA, which led to the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) with the P5+1 on July 14th, 2015.[509]

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[506] H. Clinton, *Hard Choices*, p.348.
[507] M. Ozkan, 'Turkey–Brazil Involvement in Iranian Nuclear Issue: What Is the Big Deal?', *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 35, no. 1, January 2011, p. 27.
[508] H. Clinton, *Hard choices,* p.348.
[509] H. Clinton, *Hard choices*, p.367-76.

Ultimately Oman has an interest in halting Iran's nuclear programme, not least the fact that Oman would prefer a nuclear weapons free Gulf. This was clearly expressed by the Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi in his address to the United Nations General Assembly on 30 September 2013, stressing Oman' continuous support for making the Middle East a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, urging greater support for regional partnerships in the field of security.[510] In the late 2000s, several Middle Eastern and Arab Gulf states declared their intentions to acquire nuclear technology. In particular, Saudi Arabia has made a number of statements 'threatening' that it would also develop a nuclear programme if Iran was able to militarise its uranium enrichment program.[511] Therefore, it is certainly in Oman's favor to prevent such a prospect of a nuclear arms race or the spread of nuclear weapons in the Gulf, or a military confrontation between Iran and the US, which would inevitably pose a risk to Oman's own security and to that of the region as a whole. However, Oman's mediation in the Iranian nuclear deals was not initiated in the first instance as a response to a radical or urgent foreign and security policy dilemma that required a new policy to adopt. Rather, Omani mediation in the Iranian nuclear issue was driven by the reputation that Oman has cultivated over time as a respectful and reliable mediator. According to Richard Schmierer, U.S. ambassador to Oman from 2009 to 2012, when Oman successfully facilitated the release of the American hikers from Iran, this created some optimism that their success could possibly be a stepping stone to other achievements. It also gave Oman a position from which to explore

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[510] UN News, 'At GA debate, Gulf State ministers pledge support for nuclear-free zone in Middle East', https://news.un.org/en/story/2013/09/451822-ga-debate-gulf-state-ministers-pledge-support-nuclear-free-zone-middle-east, (accessed 14 May 2015).
[511] L. El-Katiri, 'The GCC and the nuclear question.', *The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies*, University of Oxford, December 2012, https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/The-GCC-and-the-Nuclear-Question.pdf , (accessed 14 May 2015).

the possibilities of facilitating dialogue between Iran and the West.[512] In this sense Oman's

mediation role came from their earlier, established foundation of trust with both sides, which

enhanced Oman's capacity to act as a mediator in solving very complicated regional and

international disputes. As Hillary Clinton asserted, "Engagement through the P5+1 process had

stalled. Intercession by well-intentioned third parties had also failed. Again and again Iran had

proven to be intransigent and untrustworthy. Yet there was reason to think that, despite all this,

the Sultan [Qaboos] might actually be able to deliver. After all, he had done it in the case of the

imprisoned American hikers."[513]

It is important to note that by 2011 both parties, the US and Iran, felt that they were trapped in

a potentially costly predicament, and were seeking a way out in order to avoid negative

consequences. From the American point of view, they viewed Iran as appearing to be on the rise

since the removal of Saddam Hussain's regime in 2003, building their military power and

extending their influence throughout the region.[514] As such, the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran

represented a serious security threat to US national interests, as well as its allies in the region.

The prospect of military action against Iran could be very costly, and therefore, the Americans

regarded Omani efforts to facilitate negotiation to ensure that the Iranian nuclear programme

was limited to peaceful purposes as their "best chance to avoid conflict or the unacceptable

prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran."[515] As for the Iranians, they found themselves in a very

difficult position, as they had been hit hard by international economic sanctions that had been

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[512] R. Schmierer, 'The Sultanate of Oman and the Iran Nuclear Deal', p.117.
[513] H. Clinton, *Hard choices*, p.366.
[514] H. Clinton, *Hard choices*, p. 352.
[515] H. Clinton, *Hard choices*, p.348.

imposed on them by the UNSC since 2006.[516] These economic sanctions had led to a sharp contraction in economic activity, as well as higher inflation and unemployment, creating severe social tensions, and Iran's economy was seriously affected.[517] As such, both parties saw a mutual benefit in seeking a solution to the nuclear issue. However, both sides did not place much trust in each other.

Within the above context, Oman was regarded by both sides as the most suitable and trusted mediator. The high degree of confidence and trust in the capacity of Oman as a trusted intermediary to undertake this crucial role was clearly highlighted by Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, describing the Sultan as "he [Sultan Qaboos] was one of the few leaders seen by all sides as an honest broker, with close ties in Washington, the Gulf states, and Tehran."[518] The Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei had also highlighted the strong Iranian strong trust in Sultan Qaboos when he gave a speech in June 2015, confirming this:

"The Americans themselves asked for these negotiations and their proposals date back to the time of the tenth [Ahmadinejad presidency] administration. So, the negotiations with the Americans began before the arrival of the current administration. They made a request and chose an intermediary. One of the honourable personalities in the region [Qaboos] came to Iran and met with me. He said that the American president had called him, asking him to help. The American president said to him that they want to resolve the nuclear matter with Iran and that they would lift sanctions. . . . Through that intermediary, he asked us to negotiate with them

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[516] V. Astrid, "The Iran nuclear deal: the Iranian and US domestic factors that put its implementation at risk", Egmont Security Policy Brief, No. 74, *Royal Institute for International Relations*, June 2016, p.4, http://aei.pitt.edu/86896/1/SPB74.pdf , (accessed 20 May 2021).
[517] V. Astrid, 'The Iran nuclear deal', p.5.
[518] H. Clinton, Hard choices, p.348.

and to resolve the matter. I said to that honourable intermediary that we do not trust the Americans and their statements. He said, "Try it once more," and we said, "Very well, we will try it this time as well." This was how negotiations with the Americans began." [519]

Khamenei is referring here to Sultan Qaboos and his official visit to Iran in August 2013, which set the stage for secret talks between Iran and the United States. Khamenei made it very clear that they did not trust the American side, but the Iranians accepted to return to the negotiation table with the Americans, because of their strong belief and trust in Sultan Qaboos as a credible and honourable mediator.

Indeed, Oman's commitment in its past mediation efforts had helped to build confidence within both the United States and Iran of their capacity and commitment to mediate between the U.S. and Iran on the nuclear issue. As noted by Interviewee (6), "the confidence in the disputants that Oman could help them reach their preferred outcome had paved the way for the mediation process to occur, and for Oman to play this important mediating role of facilitating the nuclear deal"[520]. In fact, the manner in which Oman had become committed to mediation influenced the Obama Administration to change its policy approach towards Iran, shifting from what had been a policy of seeking regime change to one based on mutual respect.[521] Within this successful dynamic of Oman's commitment to mediation, the Obama administration approached Sultan Qaboos and presented the idea of direct negotiations with Iran, an initiative which Qaboos greatly encouraged, and a role which he agreed to take on .[522]

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[519] K. Bernd, and G. Hastedt, '*US foreign policy towards the Middle East: The realpolitik of deceit',* Taylor & Francis, 2017, p.150.
[520] Interview with Interviewee (6), 28 August 2018.
[521] R. Schmierer, "The Sultanate of Oman and the Iran nuclear deal.", p.115.
[522] H. Clinton, Hard choices, p.367.

This also demonstrates the extent to which mediation had been consolidated as a new tradition in Oman's foreign and security policy, and how it had been utilised as an aspect of Oman's wider foreign and security strategy to influence its immediate regional security environment. This is illustrated clearly in a statement made by the than Omani Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bader bin Hamad Al bu Saidi: "In the space between the big states, the major powers, both regional and global, we have room for manoeuvre that the big states themselves do not enjoy. We can operate without attracting too much attention, conduct diplomacy discreetly and quietly"[523]

Interestingly, again Oman's position on Iran's nuclear programme was unpopular among the other Arab Gulf countries, particularly with regard to Iranian nuclear ambitions, as most Arab Gulf states viewed the Iranian nuclear programme with a great deal of suspicion. Indeed they reportedly viewed the prospect of conventional war with Iran as preferable to the long term consequences of a nuclear armed Iran.[524] Like the other Arab Gulf states, Oman recognised the need to be cautious of Iran's expansionist ideological and regional desires. According to a classified U.S. diplomatic cable dated August 2008, leaked by the whistleblower site WikiLeaks, a top Omani security official and advisor to the Sultan, and one of his innermost circle, stressed Oman's concerns over Iran's deceptive tactics and expansionist ideological desires in the region during his introductory meeting with U.S. Admiral William Gortney

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[523] Cited in J. Jones and N. Ridout, 'Oman, culture and diplomacy', p.7.
[524] H. Xiaoning, "The Iranian nuclear issue and regional security: dilemmas, responses and the future.", *Department of Political Affairs, Middle East and West Asia Division*,2016, p.16. https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/The%20Iranian%20Nuclear%20Issue%20and%20Regional%20Security.pdf (accessed 10 February 2021).

Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/5th Fleet.[525] Yet, Oman chose to deal with this security concern differently from the other GCC states. As highlighted by the top Omani official, Oman's preference was for a non-military solution.[526] This clearly highlighted the importance of the key role played by the Sultan's idea of Oman's as a distinctive cultural identity within its regional context and his unique perspective on regional affairs in shaping the tradition of mediation in Omani foreign and security practice. However, Omani policy makers' sense of mediation as a viable policy option to resolve the crisis over Iran's nuclear programme was undoubtedly influenced by its longstanding experience of mediation, and the success of previous mediation efforts, which had earned Oman a reputation as a well-trusted and respected mediator.[527] In this sense, Oman's earlier mediation efforts at mediation had evolved in response to policy dilemmas, whereas their later interventions were motivated by the reputation that Oman had gained as a reliable and trusted mediator, which enhanced Oman's capacity to act as a mediator in resolving very complicated regional and international disputes.

In short, Oman's policy preference for mediation was not inevitable, but it was a natural outgrowth of Oman's distinct cultural identity and its desire to avoid external interference, given the contingent dilemmas that arose at certain points in time and the alternative options open to Oman. In this sense, Oman's mediation role developed and was shaped by Sultan Qaboos' constructed understanding of Oman as (i) an independent nation possessing a distinctive cultural

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[525] Classified U.S. diplomatic cables, leaked by the whistleblower site WikiLeaks, 'Oman Remains Wary of Iranian Expansionism', EO 12958 DECL: Thursday, 07 August 2008, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/wikileak-oman-wary-of-iranian-expansionism-august-2008 (accessed 25 February 2021)

[526] Classified U.S. diplomatic cables, leaked by the whistleblower site WikiLeaks, 'Oman Remains Wary of Iranian Expansionism', EO 12958 DECL: Thursday, 07 August 2008.

[527] Interview with Interviewee (6), 28 August 2018.

identity in her region and (ii) being acutely vulnerable to external interference. These traditions of thought played a significant role in structuring Omani policy makers' reading of regional security dilemmas and the policies and actions they put in place to overcome these dilemmas. However, while these traditions have worked as initial influences on Omani policy-makers to shape their behaviour, they did not determine the later practice they performed. In this context, Oman's earlier adaptation of a balanced policy approach towards regional and international actors, and its later 'positive neutrality' stance and active mediation role in the regional security sphere that emerged towards the end of the Iran-Iraq War all formed against the background of the tradition of thought adopted by Sultan Qaboos. Significantly, this demonstrates that Omani policy makers have, as human agents, been able over time to extend or adjust their practice and policy on how best to secure Oman's national unity and national independence as they responded to each new policy dilemma posed by regional upheavals, and in doing so, developing that inherited tradition of thought. This has arguably had a profound influence on the development of mediation as a role in Oman's foreign and security policy thinking, and informed why Omani policy makers tend to act as mediators in times of regional conflict. Accordingly, Omani policy makers have over the years developed a new policy tradition in which they refrain from getting involved in any regional conflict, and adopt an independent approach by maintaining good relations with all parties in the conflict, while trying to help find a peaceful solution to the dispute. By adopting this policy approach, Oman has been able to maintain its internal stability and security, and to preserve its independence in its policy choices.

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9 Appendixes

9.1 Appendix (A): Selected Persons Interviewed

	Interviewee	Date of Interview
1	His Majesty's Advisor for Cultural Affairs.	25 April 2018
2	The Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs.	8 May 2018
3	Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry.	15 May 2018
4	Minister of the Royal Office.	6 Jun 2018
5	Under-Secretary of the Oman Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs.	23 May 2018
6	Advisor to His Majesty the Sultan The Sultan's envoy during Iran Nuclear agreement.	28 August 2018
7	Head of External Security Service.	13 June 2018
8	The former Assistant to the Head of Internal Security Service for operations.	17 August 2018
9	Former Omani ambassador to Yemen 1990-2000.	03 August 2018
10	The Omani military representative in the Military Committee formed for the integration of military units of South and North Yemen during the unification process.	10 August 2018

9.2 **Appendix (B):**

Information sheet about this research project

My name is Juma Said Juma Al Jaradi. I am a PhD candidate in Politics and International Relations at the University of Reading. My research project investigates *Oman's reasons for becoming repeatedly involved in Conflict Mediation in the Middle East Region from 1980 to 2015.* As part of my research, I am interviewing a sample of policy makers and practitioners within the Omani government who are involved in making foreign policy decisions in general and decisions that are related to mediation initiatives in particular.

The interview will be audio recorded. For data protection purposes both of the interview audio files and transcripts will be securely saved and protected by a password to my personal computer. The data will only be used in my research and may also seek publication in scholarly journals or in an academic book. No one will get access to such data except my supervisor and once the research is done all of them will be deleted.

If you have further questions or queries about this research, please feel free to contact either me or my supervisor at the University of Reading at any time. Our contact details are as follows:

My contact details:

Name: Juma Said Juma Al Jaradi

Address: Ministry of Defence National Defence College Sultanate of Oman

P.O. Box: 650 Ruwi, Postal Code: 112

Telephone: Oman

Email: j.s.j.aljaradi@pgr.reading.ac.uk

My supervisor's contact details:

Name: Dr. Adam Humphreys

Address: Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Reading

Office: Edith Morley 311

Tel: 0118 378 6107

Email: a.r.humphreys@reading.ac.uk

This project has been subject to ethical review, according to the procedures by the University Research Ethics Committee, and has been given a favourable ethical for conduct

Your agreement to take part

I have read and had explained to me information provided above relating to the research project. I agree to take part in an interview for this project that what I say during the interview may be used on the terms specified above. I agree that (please select from the following options):

- What I say in the interview may by quoted in the report mentioned above, but my name will not be used and nothing will be included that might allow me to be identified;
- What I say in the interview may be quoted in the report mentioned above, and I am happy for my name to be used.

Your name (please print) …………………………………………………………

Signed………………………………………………………………………………….
Date……………………………

9.2 **Appendix (C)**

Interview's questions

Part one: Key traditions of thought that had shaped Omani foreign and security policy

1. How did Sultan Qaboos see Oman's position in the region and the world?
2. What were the factors that contributed to shaping the understanding and vision of Sultan Qaboos and Omani policy makers for the Omani national interest?
3. What were the most influential factors that had shaped Omani foreign and security policy in the 1970s?
4. What role did Oman's historical legacy play in shaping the Sultan's way of thinking?
5. What effects did the civil war in Dhofar have on Oman's foreign policy?
6. How did the Omani historical experience of the civil war contribute to shaping the perception of Omani policy makers of the concept of regional security?
7. What influence did Ibadhi traditions have on Oman's foreign policy orientations?
8. How did the Sultan's personality influence Oman's foreign and security policy?
9. What were the main objectives of Oman's foreign and security policy during the 1970s?
10. What were the main security concerns?
11. How did key Omani policy makers perceive Oman's regional position;
12. How did Omani policy makers conceive of Oman's national interest?
13. How had Oman's national interests been secured?
14. What were the key characteristics of Oman's foreign and security policy?
15. What beliefs explain the Omani approach to playing a mediating role during regional conflicts?

Part Two: Iran-Iraq War

1. How would you describe the strategic context of the security environment surrounding the Sultanate of Oman during the Iran-Iraq War?
2. How did Omani policy makers interpret the circumstances of the Iran-Iraq War?
3. How did the Iran-Iraq War present a dilemma or a challenge to existing Omani foreign and security policy?
4. What were the main security concerns?
5. What were the Omani national interests that Oman was seeking to secure from the repercussions of the war?
6. What were the most important factors that influenced the formation of Omani policy towards the war?
7. What policy options were available to Omani policy makers in response to the war?
8. How did they decide between different competing policy options?
9. Why did Oman not join the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in supporting Iraq?
10. How did mediation emerge as the policy option of choice?
11. Why did Oman choose to act as a mediator in response to the Iran-Iraq War?
12. To what extent do you think that playing a mediating role during the Iran-Iraq War contributed to securing Oman's national interests?

Part Three: The 1994 Yemeni Civil War

1. How would you describe the strategic context of the security environment surrounding Oman during the 1994 Yemeni Civil War?
2. How did Omani policy makers interpret the circumstances of the Yemeni Civil War?
3. How did the Yemeni internal conflict present a dilemma or challenge to existing Omani foreign and security policy?
4. What were the major security concerns?
5. Which of their national interests were Oman seeking to secure from the repercussions of the war?
6. What policy options were available to Omani policy makers in response to the conflict?
7. How did they decide between different competing policy options?
8. How did mediation emerge as a policy option of choice?
9. Why did Oman choose to act as a mediator in response to the conflict?
10. To what extent do you think that Oman's role as a mediator during the Iran-Iraq War contributed to Oman's adoption of mediation as a policy option in response to the Yemeni Civil War?
11. Why did Oman not join the rest of the GCC countries in support of South Yemen?
12. Was the option of supporting Ali Saleh on the table?
13. To what extent do you think that playing the mediating role during the Yemeni Civil War contributed to securing Oman's national interests?

Part Four: Iran's Nuclear Deal

1. How did Omani policy makers interpret the crisis over Iran's nuclear programme?
2. What were the most important security concerns for Oman regarding the Iranian nuclear programme issue?
3. To what extent did the crisis over Iran's nuclear programme represent a policy dilemma (challenge) for Omani policy makers?
4. Why did Oman choose to play a mediating role in the Iranian nuclear issue?
5. What were the most important objectives Oman sought to achieve by playing a mediating role in the Iranian nuclear affair?
6. How did Oman's previous experience in playing a mediating role during the Iran-Iraq War and the Yemeni Civil War influence her adoption of playing the mediating role in the Iranian nuclear deal?
7. To what extent do you believe that mediation was the best policy option to secure Oman's national interests?

9.4 Appendix (D)

An illustration of how I have used the traditions and dilemmas framework to analysis the interview material by presenting a sample of interviewee responses to the questions I asked about one of my cases, which is the Iran-Iraq War.

Interviewee	How did the Iran-Iraq war present Omani policymakers with a dilemma?	What policy options were available?	Why did Oman choose to act as a mediator?
Interviewee (1)	"one of the concerns that we have frequently voiced during the war was that the conflict would be bound to bring the Soviets to the region."	" at the early days of the war Oman became under pressure from the other Arab countries to side with Iraq against Iran and Sultan Qaboos consider this option, but he thought that this option would turn the war into an Arabian-Persian conflict, which Oman was trying to avoid"	"Sultan Qaboos felt that Oman was more vulnerable because of the geopolitics of the Straits of Hormuz. Therefore, he was trying to avoid to avoid being drawn into confrontation with Iran and sought that Oman's security interests would be better protected by acting as a mediator to end the war"
Interviewee (2)	"we were considered that the expansion of the war's scope would lead to the intervention of international forces in the conflict, thus increasing foreign interferences in the internal affairs of regional states. We were particularly concerned about the Soviet interference in the region."	"at the beginning of the war the Sultanate adopted a policy of balance and positive neutrality, but when the war moved towards internationalisation with the so-called the tankers war, threatening the interference of external powers we felt that this policy was insufficient to allay our fears over escalation of the	"when Iran started to retaliate against Saudi Arabia and Kuwait by the end of 1980, it was a clear indication for us that the war will spread out of its actual zone , which raised our concerns that the consequences would be very serious, the war would escalate and go out of hand, by involving Kuwait that would drag the other Arab Gulf States into the conflict, and once this happened the involvement of the outside powers would surely be a strong possibility, so our prime concerns was to avoid a long-drawn out conflict and to see the war brought to a speedy end."

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		conflict, and therefore, we need to take more active step to end the war"	
Interviewee (3)	" our fears were focused on the possibility that the spark of the war would spread to the other countries in the region, especially as it took ethnic and sectarian dimension, and this posed a great challenge to us as it would expose our own national security instability"	"there were several options that were open to us to deal with the conflict, which was either to side with one of the parties in the conflict, or to remain neutral and not to get involved in the conflict, or the other option was to work to contain the conflict and find a peaceful settlement"	" Playing the role of mediator during Iran-Iraq War came in line with our values and traditions of Omani culture and recognizing the importance of the geographical location of the Sultanate and the nature of the security environment in the region, and thus we felt acting as a mediator will allow us to influence the events in a positive way to maintain regional security and stability"
Interviewee (4)	" Sultan Qaboos was very concerned that the prolongation and expansion of the war might lead to the intervention of external forces in the region and the internationalization of the conflict, which could drag Oman into a major conflict"	"the main option was to make any possible efforts to contain the conflict and to urge the parties to dialogue and to come to the negotiation table. The other option was for Oman not to get involve as a party in the war and try to contain its negative implications on its people"	"The need to avoid a drawn-out conflict with its implication of sectarian polarisation and spillover led Sultan Qaboos to adjust his traditional policy practice, and this time seek to act as a mediator, which he sought as the best policy option for guaranteeing both regional security and Oman's unique regional position, and to safeguard its national security interests"
Interviewee (5)	"there was a fear of having this war turn into a "Sunni-Shi'a" sectarian conflict, which would in turn cause a sectarian polarisation in the region, affecting the unity of the Omani society. We felt as we were caught in the middle, during the first	"At the beginning of the war, we took a neutral position and our mediation activities began in 1985. … But I only mediated if we could see the path to success."	"we believe in non-interference, and in particular, the pursuit of good relations with all our neighbors. Which is why we have chosen to act as a mediator"

	years, it was not clear for us what direction the war would take. We did not want to be allied to either side, and thus under these circumstances our challenge was how to avoid getting involved in this kind of war."		
Interviewee (6)	"we felt that under this dramatic change in the regional security environment, and in particular the changed attitudes of Iran towards states on the other side of the Gulf, it was hard to maintain our regional policy of balanced approach as we came under increased pressure to join the other Arab Gulf states in supporting the Iraqi side."	"Oman's position in the Iran-Iraq War was first by taking neutral position at the early stage of the war and then Oman sought to mediate a settlement of the conflict."	"We did not want to provoke Iran by joining the Arab ranks in supporting Iraq, while at the same time we need to keep our close relation with the Arab Gulf states, Within this context, acting as a mediator between the two parties provide us with an opportunity to influence the evolving event of the war and avoid its negative consequences for us in the future while keeping in good term with both side"
Interviewee (7)	"we gave careful consideration to the possibility of Iranian retaliation and the blocking of the Straits of Hormuz. The consequences of Iran's closure of the Straits of Hormuz would be very serious for Oman's national security, which would put Oman in a difficult position leading to the intervention of international forces and then dragging Oman into becoming a party in the war."	"During the early phase of the war, it was not clear for Oman what direction the war would take. We considered the request from Iraq and other Arab states to support Iraq war efforts, but we looked further ahead and saw that the Gulf countries had no strength against Iran. Also, because Iran was our neighbor, it was not wise to become an enemy."	"Oman dealt with the war according to its point of view that we should not be drawn into the conflict because Oman will be there, Iran will be there, no matter what government, so it was not wise making enemy."