DYNAMICS OF OMAN'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER SULTAN QABOOS'S REIGN THROUGH THE LENSES OF NEO-CLASSICAL REALISM

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

MÜGE DEDEOĞLU

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

JANUARY 2022

Approval of the thesis:

DYNAMICS OF OMAN'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER SULTAN QABOOS'S REIGN THROUGH THE LENSES OF NEO-CLASSICAL REALISM

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ABSTRACT

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January 2022, 120 pages

For the first two decades of the 21st century, the Middle East region comprising the Gulf sub-region has witnessed crises and challenges that have induced dramatic changes in the regional states' foreign policy orientations. Despite standing in the middle of these changes and challenges of the region, Oman has maintained a high level of continuity in its independent foreign policy orientation under Sultan Qaboos bin Said in the new millennium's first decades. This research aims at explaining this high-level continuity in Omani foreign policy in the 21st century despite the sweeping international and regional changes and challenges by revealing the dynamics behind the Omani foreign policy. While doing this, Neo-Classical Realism that offers a comprehensive analysis of systemic, structural, and internal variables in the foreign policy analysis has been used as the theoretical framework. Acknowledging Qaboos was the sole and the top decision-maker, and at the core of the Omani political system, this thesis claims that some internal and structural variables impacted Oman's foreign policy decisions during Qaboos's era. In this framework, the variables were classified as core and complementary. Oman's foreign policy decision-makers, Sultan Qaboos, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry, and strategic culture of

Oman consisting of Ibadi teachings, Omani Nationalism, and the legacy of its diplomatic history since 1970 were classified as core dynamics. On the other hand, state-society relations, geopolitics, and the hydrocarbon-based economy of Oman were addressed as complementary dynamics that also impact foreign policy of Oman.
Keywords: NCR, Omani Foreign Policy, dynamics

ÖZ

NEOKLASİK REALİZM MERCEĞİNDEN SULTAN QABOOS DÖNEMİ UMMAN DIŞ POLİTİKASININ DİNAMİKLERİ

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Ocak 2022, 120 sayfa

21. yüzyılın ilk yirmi yılında, Körfez alt bölgesinin de dahil olduğu Orta Doğu, bölge devletlerinin dış politika yönelimlerinde büyük değişikliklere neden olan yıkıcı krizlere ve sınamalara tanık olmuştur. Bölgedeki bu değişikliklerin ve zorlukların ortasında olmasına rağmen Umman, yeni bin yılın ilk yıllarında Sultan Qaboos bin Said yönetimindeki bağımsız dış politika yöneliminde yüksek düzeyde bir süreklilik sağlamıştır. Bu tez, kapsamlı uluslararası ve bölgesel değişimlere ve sınamalara rağmen Umman dış politikasındaki bu üst düzey sürekliliği Umman dış politikasının dinamiklerini ortaya koyarak açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bunu yaparken, dış politikada sistemik, yapısal ve içsel değişkenlerin kapsamlı bir analizini sunan Neo-klasik Realizm, bu araştırmanın teorik çerçevesi olarak kullanılmıştır. Qaboos'un tek ve üst düzey karar verici olduğunu ve Umman siyasi sisteminin merkezinde olduğunu kabul eden bu tez, bazı iç ve yapısal değişkenlerin Qaboos döneminde Umman'ın dış politika kararlarını etkilediğini iddia etmektedir. Bu çerçevede, değişkenler temel ve tamamlayıcı olarak sınıflandırılmıştır. Umman'ın dış politika karar vericileri, Sultan Qaboos, Dışişlerinden Sorumlu Bakan ve Dışişleri Bakanlığı ile İbadî öğretileri, Umman Milliyetçiliği ve 1970 yılından bu yana diplomatik tarihinin mirasından

oluşan stratejik kültürü temel dinamikler olarak sınıflandırılmıştır. Öte yandan, devlet-toplum ilişkileri, jeopolitik ve hidrokarbona dayalı ekonomi, Umman'da dış politika kararlarını etkileyen tamamlayıcı dinamikler olarak ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Neo-Klasik Realizm, Umman Dış Politikası, dinamikler

To my beloved family…

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere feelings and heartfelt thanks to my supervisor Assist. Prof. Derya Göçer, for the support and guidance she showed me during my research. Her insightful guidance helped me draw the framework of this thesis in the right direction.

I am also thankful to my committee members Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık and Assoc. Prof.Dr. Ayşe Ömür Atmaca for their support and valuable comments on the thesis.

Special thanks to my beloved husband, Yavuz, for the endless love and support he has showed me every moment of my life. For my boys Hakan and Kerem, I could have said without you guys, this thesis could have been completed a while ago, but no, I would say everything in my life makes sense with you. You are my happiness and joy. Thank you for keeping me alive in my most desperate moments. I am also grateful to my mother, İlknur Erkanat, for being with me and providing endless motivation.

Last but not least, I thank and appreciate myself for not giving up and showing utmost effort to complete this study despite the challenges of the life that I have been subjected to since 2017.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For the first two decades of the 21st century, the Middle East region comprising the Gulf sub-region[1] has witnessed devastating crises and challenges that have induced dramatic changes in the regional states' foreign policy orientations. The September 11 terror attacks to the US and the US's response to these attacks by conducting military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, respectively, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, its repercussions in the region and peace initiatives in the new millennium, the tension over Iran's nuclear program and the US's sanctions on Iran, the effects of Arab Spring protests, the Syrian Civil War since 2011, Yemen Civil War since 2014, the rifts between Qatar and the Quartet in 2014 and 2017 have all constituted a source of challenge and tension for each state of the region including Oman.

Notwithstanding the distinct economic and political structure the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), namely Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have had, they could not have been immune from these challenges. Furthermore, in the last two decades, some Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE have increased their political presence in the international arena by pursuing proactive foreign policies intended to enlarge their sphere of influence throughout the region. In this direction, the GCC member states have even come across each other that the Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt blamed Qatar for supporting terrorism, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood.

[1] In this research, the term "Gulf Region" will be preferably used instead of the Arabian Gulf or the Persian Gulf.

Likewise, although Oman has a distinctive geopolitical position on the edge of the Middle East and across the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian countries, providing it with a wide-reaching foreign policy scope and room for maneuvers in its foreign policy choices, it could not have been immune from the challenges of the Middle East region. However, Oman has maintained a high level of continuity in its independent foreign policy orientation under Sultan Qaboos bin Said in the new millennium's first decades despite the sweeping challenges of the new century. Moreover, it could be claimed that the main feature that dominated the Omani foreign policy during Sultan Qaboos's reign from 1970 to 2020 has been to follow an independent and consistent foreign policy in line with the principle of impartiality. In this regard, Qaboos has implemented authentic foreign policy principles like being open to international and regional changes, not responding suddenly and early in the face of regional developments, not being party to any conflict, rejecting military solutions to the problems of the region, giving priority to diplomacy in all areas, non-interference into other countries internal affairs and not cutting diplomatic relations with any state throughout his reign.

Oman has constituted a striking example in the region regarding the contradiction between its internal and external politics. To make it clear, since Oman has been a monarchic state with a highly centralized decision-making system and its internal policy practices, particularly on political rights and civil liberties have been categorized as "not free" by independent watchdog organizations like Freedom House, its foreign policy behaviors could be expected more belligerent as in the case of other authoritarian states of the region (Freedom House, 2020). However, Oman has implemented its peace-oriented foreign policy approach for fifty years during Qaboos's term. Indeed, this contradiction could also constitute a source of motivation for researchers to find out the dynamics behind the foreign policy of Oman.

This thesis aims at explaining the high-level continuity in Omani foreign policy in the 21st century despite the sweeping international and regional changes and challenges by revealing the dynamics comprehensively behind the Omani foreign policy. While doing this, Neo-Classical Realism that offers a comprehensive framework of systemic

and internal variables in foreign policy analysis will be used as the theoretical framework of this research.

In this research, a qualitative research method has been conducted, and both primary and secondary sources were employed. However, due to the restraining environment of the Covid-19 pandemic and Oman's restrictive state system, ambitioned interviews could not be conducted, or interviewees did not permit the researcher to use their names and official titles. Indeed, the author of this thesis was a career diplomat in Muscat just four years ago, and this research could have been more lucrative if it had been conducted in that period. On the other hand, I think that my first-hand observation of Oman's foreign policy in the field for approximately five years between 2012 and 2017 contributed significantly to establishing the foundations of the thesis.

1.1. Literature Review

Although Oman has become scholarly attractive concurrently with the rise in its peaceful diplomatic initiatives as good office missions between conflicting parties in the Middle East and beyond, there is still a lack of literature on Oman, its foreign policy, and particularly on the dynamics of its foreign policy. Moreover, the existing literature on the Omani foreign policy mainly focuses on examining the principles and characteristics of its foreign policy rather than exploring the dynamics of Oman's foreign policy.

Since the process of Oman's foreign policy decision-making is highly personalized and proceeds through the silent and occasionally confidential way as Babood says, it is difficult for a researcher to investigate this process and its determinants properly (2016, p.107). Furthermore, the researchers who try to understand and explore the factors behind Oman's foreign policy, come up against some difficulties in reaching primary sources due to the restrictive system of the state. Therefore, the literature on the dynamics of foreign policy decision-making in Oman is quite limited. However, it is a fact that successful studies that approach the dynamics of the decision-making process of Oman from different angles have emerged recently. This thesis will hopefully contribute to this literature by drawing a comprehensive framework of

domestic and systemic factors that have impacts on Oman's foreign policy through the lenses of Neo-Classical Realism.

Another lacking element in the literature that this thesis is intended to contribute is that there are few publications on the practices of Omani foreign policy in the 21st century. Indeed, the Middle East region has witnessed many turmoils, conflicts, and civil wars in the first two decades of the 21st century. As a part of this region, Oman has directly or indirectly been affected by this disorder. Thus, it has maintained its active engagement for the peaceful resolution of the conflicts and for establishing peace and stability in the region. In this context, it is worth noting that Al Khalili's (2009) and Jones&Ridout's (2012) studies give first observations from the Omani foreign policy practices in the early years of the 21st century. On the other hand, Babood's (2016) book chapter addresses Oman's foreign policy practices till 2016 and provides a comprehensive framework for literature. In this regard, this thesis is also expected to contribute to the literature in the context of Oman's foreign policy towards recent developments in the region.

In the first section of the literature review, the characteristics of the Omani foreign policy will be addressed by underlining the concepts of independence, moderation, and pragmatism, which are commonly identified in the literature as the basic features of Oman's foreign policy. The second part will review the literature on the dynamics of Oman's foreign policy. There are several approaches and theories on the determinants of the Omani foreign policy. In this part, instead of going through the approaches and theories, the determinants and dynamics found in the literature will be analyzed. In this context, we have six sub-titles in the second part as state/regime survival, geopolitics, economy, Oman's history, Ibadhi culture, and Omani identity. Scholars in the field tend to explain the factors that impact Oman's foreign policy by using either one or a group of these determinants.

1.1.1.Main Characteristics of the Omani Foreign Policy

There is a common understanding among scholars whose studies focus on the Omani foreign policy that it has pursued independent, pragmatist, and moderate foreign

policy under Sultan Qaboos bin Said between 1970 and 2020. Indeed, pursuing an extraordinarily autonomous foreign policy in the World's most volatile region constitutes the main trigger that motivates many researchers to study the determinants of Omani foreign policy.

1.1.1.1.Independence

Regarding the origins of Oman's independent foreign policy, several views are expressed in the literature: When has Oman started to be implemented independent foreign policy? How a small state like Oman can implement independent foreign policy in the conflict-ridden region? What motivates Oman in pursuing such policy? In this context, Lefebvre (2010) describes Oman's independence in foreign policy decisions as "maintaining freedom of action" and states that Qaboos was able to implement this independent policy after he got a grip on the internal situation by the end of the 1970s (p.99). However, Kechichian (1995, 9) observes that from the early times of Sultan Qaboos's accession to the throne, he was determined to follow sui generis foreign policy principles, including non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, respect for international law, taking no sides in the conflicts, developing relations with the Arab world and pursuing neutral foreign policy orientation.

Kechichian's (1995) *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* can be identified as the cult of the studies made in the field of Oman's foreign policy. The book covers the Omani foreign policy in the first half of Sultan Qaboos's reign (1970-1994) and, as understood by its title, underlines its foreign policy's independent character. Although Kechichian (1995, 249) claims that the origins of Oman's independent foreign policy lay in the mindset of Sultan Qaboos in the early days of his reign, he accepts that the establishment of independent foreign policy orientation has taken a long time so that he classifies this process in four phases as "consolidation (1970-75), transition (1976-80), maturity (1981-85) and progress (1985-94)".

Babood, while emphasizing that the independence of Oman's foreign policy was "self-evident," he claims that as a GCC member, Oman's many foreign policy decisions were not only different from its allies but also contradicted with them in several instances (2016, p.107). In this regard, Babood gives some examples from Oman's independent foreign policy decisions under Sultan Qaboos like its support for Egyptian-Israeli Peace Accord in 1979, staying neutral during the prolonged Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, rejecting the proposal of Saudi Arabia for the formation of GCC Union in 2013 and playing a facilitator role in nuclear deal between P5+1 and Iran in 2015. Babood claims that in virtue of its capable diplomacy, Oman has carried through its membership in the GCC despite its such contrarian foreign policy decisions (pp.107-108).

Distinctively, Ezzat (2019) predicates Oman's independent stand in foreign policy decisions to the exceptionalism that she defines Oman as different from other Persian Gulf countries with its limited resources and location on the Indian Ocean. Regarding the motives behind implementing independent foreign policy in a fragile region, Sherwood (2017) claims that classic small state security strategies and impacts of threat perceptions that have been encountered through its political history had shaped Qaboos's independent foreign policy orientation.

1.1.1.2. Pragmatism

Although this thesis preferably uses principled foreign policy instead of pragmatist foreign policy while identifying the characteristics of the Omani foreign policy, pragmatism is another concept used frequently in the literature on the features of Oman’s foreign policy.

Oman's some foreign policy principles like non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations, not supporting any ideology or sect fanatically, not taking a side in any conflict, not breaking diplomatic ties with any country, and being open to dialogue for the peaceful resolution of the problems of the region are interpreted in the literature as pragmatism (Al Handhali, 2019; Al Zubair, 2017; Lefebvre, 2010; Rabi, 2005: Kechichian, 1995). Almost all academics who claim that Oman follows a pragmatist

foreign policy state that Sultan Qaboos is the source of this pragmatism. Thus, they acknowledge the leader's crucial role in shaping Oman's foreign policy orientation.

Lefebvre (2010) describes Omani pragmatism as "demonstrating flexibility in reaching an accommodation with regional and global powers" and claims that Oman's pragmatic foreign policy stemmed from "its survival instinct" (p.99). Furthermore, Lefebvre (2010, 99) lays down three rules for Oman to maintain its survival: have a protector from great powers, avoid driving this protector apart and beware of making enemies.

The reality that Oman maintains good neighborly relations with Iran while maintaining its strategic relationship with the USA is seen as a reflection of its pragmatist approach (Al Zubair, 2017). Indeed, then Secretary-General of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sayyid Badr Al Busaidi's (2003) statements in his lecture later published by Nonneman (2005) confirm the hypothesis of many scholars. Al Busaidi (2003) states that Oman's "good neighbor policy" was a principle that had been maintained for decades and acknowledged that this principle was "enhanced by a fair degree of pragmatism" (p.259). Additionally, Al Busaidi (2003) frankly expresses that it would be unwise to make your neighbor an enemy, especially if it is superior in terms of power.

For Kechichian (1995), Qaboos's foreign policy's prominent feature is pragmatism. In this context, he argues that Qaboos did not pursue hostility towards Oman's former enemies; on the contrary, he considered them a potential partner for its region's stability. Kechichian (1995) gives Oman's relations with Saudi Arabia before and after Sultan Qaboos ascended to the throne as an example of his above claim. On the other hand, O'Reilly (1998, 74) asserts a striking opinion that Oman's pragmatist policies should have been assessed as a coherent realpolitik, a policy the balance of power practitioners of the 19th century could have affirmed without hesitation.

1.1.1.3. Moderation

With independence and pragmatism, moderation is also identified as one of the main characteristics of Oman's foreign policy in the literature (Funsch,2015; Lefebvre, 2010). Lefebvre defines moderation in Omani foreign policy as "eschewing extreme positions and supporting a stable regional political-military status quo" (2010, p.99). Many scholars predicate Oman's moderation in foreign policy decisions on the Ibadi sect of Islam (Babood, 2016; Lefebvre, 2010; Jones&Ridout, 2012). Ibadism is affiliated neither with Sunni nor Shia sects, and the majority of the Omani population is accepted as Ibadi Muslim (Lefebvre, 2010). Tolerance, just rule, and conservatism are the main features of Ibadism. These features help Omani leadership and society abstain from extremism and support peaceful coexistence both internally and externally (Babood, 2016; Funsch, 2015; Lefebvre, 2010). Lefebvre further claims that Oman, thanks to its Ibadhi culture of moderation, has prevented the presence and formation of extremist and terror-affiliated movements in its soils (2010, p.111). On the other hand, some scholars argue that Oman's moderate foreign policy orientation also stemmed from its imperial history and cosmopolitan structure of its society; almost half of it consists of expatriates (Echagüe, 2015; Jones&Ridout, 2012).

Although there are other characteristics of Omani foreign policy mentioned in the literature as consistency, neutrality, and active-neutrality, the above three as independence, pragmatism, and moderation are most frequently seen in the literature.

1.1.2. Dynamics of Oman's Foreign Policy

In this part, the literature on the dynamics of Oman's foreign policy will be analyzed by concentrating on the determinants rather than theories used by the researchers studying in the field. Since this thesis aims at exploring several determinants in the literature shaping the Omani foreign policy decisions and claims that to get the factors affecting the foreign policy decision-making process in Oman straight, researchers should take both internal and external factors into account.

1.1.2.1. State/Regime Survival

Being one of the six monarchic states in the Arabian Peninsula, Oman's desire for its regime survival is pointed to as one of the main factors behind its foreign policy decisions by many scholars (Babood, 2016; Echagüe, 2015; Lefebvre, 2010; Kechichian, 1995). In this context, Babood (2016, 114-115) claims that since Oman had worried about its national security more than other Gulf monarchies, its decision-making system was quite different from theirs. In this context, Babood (2016, 115), while explaining the points behind the Sultan's desire for regime security, emphasizes that Qaboos always considered the bitter experience of Dhofar Insurgency in his domestic and external policies and therefore strove for enhancing national political institutions, on the one hand, established healthy but balanced relations with its neighbors particularly Iran and Yemen on the other.

Echagüe (2015) also states that Oman's foreign policy principle of maintaining good relations with all stems mainly from its desire to establish a peaceful atmosphere that does not pose any threat to its internal stability and regime security. On the other side, Lefebvre (2010, 99) identifies Oman as a small state in a conflict-ridden region and thus predicates its searching for "a great-power patron" on "its survival instinct". As seen in the above analyses of scholars, Oman's desire for domestic stability and regime survival is regarded as the primary motivation for Omani foreign policy executors, particularly Sultan Qaboos.

1.1.2.2. Geopolitics

Oman occupies one of the most critical geostrategic locations in the Middle East region as it stands in the middle of the Indian subcontinent, Africa, and the Middle East and holds the point which controls the passage through the Strait of Hormuz, the world's busiest strait in terms of oil shipment (Kaplan, 2013). Acknowledging this hypothesis as Oman has one of the most significant geostrategic positions in the Middle East, many scholars claim that this geostrategic position significantly impacted Oman's foreign policy decision-making (Babood, 2016; Funsch, 2015; Lefebvre, 2010; Kechichian, 1995).

Funsch (2015) sees Oman's geography as destiny as Ibn Khaldun said in the 14th century and claims that the role of its geostrategic location in shaping its history, culture, and foreign relations is undeniable. In the literature, many scholars refer to geopolitics as one of the determinants of Omani foreign policy to explain Oman's foreign policy towards Iran with whom Oman shares the control of the Strait of Hormuz (Al Zubair, 2017; Babood, 2016; Jaferi-Valdani, 2012; Kechichian, 1995). In this context, Kechichian (1995) remarks that since Qaboos came to the throne in 1970, one of his principal strategic goals was to maintain the Strait of Hormuz's control and thus the role of one of the two administrators of the only gateway of the Persian Gulf.

Lefebvre (2010) and Ezzat (2019) emphasize that Oman's geopolitics is different from other GCC countries. This difference is that Oman has historically had more interaction with South Asia than the Arabian Peninsula, and geographically, most of its coasts are in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean (Lefebvre, 2010; Ezzat, 2019). In this regard, Lefebvre (2010) states that Oman is geographically closer to Pakistan and India than the GCC states located in the north of the Persian Gulf. He further claims that with the establishment of the world-class port of Salalah on the coast of the Indian Ocean, Oman looked ahead to set itself as an international trade gateway to South Asia.

1.1.2.3. Oil-Based Economy

It is agreed in the literature that Oman's economy depends on oil and gas revenues. Due to its moderate oil and gas reserves compared to other Gulf monarchies, it has limited economic capabilities (Babood, 2016; Lefebvre, 2010; Kechichian, 1995). In Oman, oil was first discovered in 1962. However, Oman realized the first oil production for commercial purposes in 1967 (Funsch, 2015). Since Qaboos came to power in 1970, he spared no effort to implement a giant development project called the Omani Renaissance transformed the country into a modern state with oil revenues (Funsch, 2015; Lefebvre, 2010).

In the literature, the impact of Oman's economy on foreign policy decision-making is discussed from two perspectives. The first point is that oil revenues constitute half of its GDP. This dependency on oil and the sharp decline in oil prices have created more vulnerability in the Omani economy (Babood, 2016). In this regard, Babood (2016) claims that Oman pursued a foreign policy that did not affect its economy adversely because of this vulnerability. However, Babood (2016) further states that for Oman, the prediction that economic turndown might compromise foreign policy was not the case since the economy was regarded as motivation rather than an obstacle for foreign policy decision-making in Oman.

To decrease the dependency on oil revenues and prepare the country for the post-oil era, Oman implements a diversification policy in its economy (Funsch, 2015). The need to attract foreign investment to diversify the economy is the second point that impacts Oman's foreign policy decisions (Lefebvre, 2010). From Lefebvre's (2010) article, one can understand that to prepare the country for the post-oil era, encouraging foreign investors to invest in Oman and establishing good commercial relations with foreign countries are must steps, and these steps require maintaining good relations with its neighbors and beyond.

1.1.2.4. History of Oman

Oman's deep-rooted history is another determinant which many scholars agreed on its incredible impact on Oman's foreign policy in the 21st century (Babood, 2016; Kechichian, 1995; Khalili, 2004; Jones&Ridout, 2012; Ezzat, 2019; Al Zubair, 2017). Oman's presence as a political entity dated back to the 8th century; thus, its foreign policy hinges upon the long history and vast experience (Kechichian, 1995). During its long history, Oman has been subjected to invasions by Persians and occupation by the Portuguese, has experienced internal upheavals and rebellions such as Jebel Akhdar Rebellions in 1954 and 1957, Dhofar Rebellion between 1965 and 1976 (Kechichian, 1995; Babood, 2016). Furthermore, Kechichian (1995) states that Sultan Qaboos's foreign policy vision took its shape by his experiences during the long-lasting Dhofar Rebellion. Likewise, Funsch (2015) clearly expresses that these

incursions had made Omanis bear national consciousness to protect their sovereignty and independence.

Jones&Ridout (2012, 6) underlines the "historical experiences" besides the "cultural preferences" as the factors which have shaped the foreign policy orientation of Oman. In this context, they (2012) examine Oman's foreign policy determinants by picking different periods from Oman's history to analyze the consistencies in the approach to foreign policy throughout history and understand contemporary concerns from the historical perspective.

1.1.2.5. Ibadi Culture

Many scholars describe Ibadism as a sect of Islam that is neither Sunni nor Shia (Babood, 2016; Funsch, 2015; Lefebvre, 2010; Kechichian, 1995). Both Babood (2016) and Lefebvre (2010), while identifying conservatism, tolerance, and consultation (shura) as the main features of the Ibadi system of thought, they underline the principles like respect for others and peaceful compromises with adversaries as two essential principles which have a significant impact on shaping Oman's contemporary foreign policy.

In this context, Lefebvre (2010) and Babood (2016) state that Oman's foreign policy strategy, which sought peaceful co-existence in its region, was consistent with Ibadi teachings of tolerance and moderation and the fact that no Omanis have participated in extremist and terrorist movements reflected the Ibadism's attitude towards extremism. Likewise, Kechichian (1995) emphasizes the impact of Ibadi teachings that advised being modest and tolerant to others on the formation and implementation of foreign policy during the Qaboos era.

From a culturalist perspective, Jones&Ridout (2012, 3) attributes Oman's principle of staying neutral in ideological and sectarian conflicts in the region to its "unique religious heritage" alluded to the Ibadi sect of Islam. However, Ezzat (2019) states that given the internal tension between Imamate and the Sultanate during recent history, it was a problematic claim of Jones&Ridout (2012). Indeed, Ezzat (2019)

opposes the claim that Oman's culture that arose from Ibadi teachings had shaped its foreign policy. Instead, she asserts that Omani state's recent history as an institution was formed concurrently with increasing British presence in the Indian Ocean and faced the regional system's challenges after Britain withdrew from the region. In other words, according to Ezzat (2019, para. 3), these experiences from its recent history shaped the foreign policy of the Sultanate.

1.1.2.6. Omani Identity

Oman's national identity as a determinant of its foreign policy has taken its place in the literature very recently by the thesis of Khalil Al Handhali (2019). Al Handhali identifies the components of Omani national identity as Oman's history, geostrategic position, cultural heritage, and Ibadi sect of Islam and claims that Oman's contemporary foreign policy orientation mainly stems from national identity and its above components. In Oman, where the decision-making system is highly personalized, looking at the picture from just an identity perspective is not enough to explain the full concept of Oman's foreign policy determinants. However, the study is valuable in adding the national identity as a determinant of Omani foreign policy to the literature.

1.2. The Theoretical Framework of the Research: Neo-Classical Realism

By arguing that other major international relations theories like structural realism, liberalism, or constructivism little explicate foreign policy, the neo-classical realism (NCR) places states' foreign policies on its focus. Therefore, it is mostly called a foreign policy approach. However, the scope of Type III neoclassical realism, which is termed by Ripsman, Taliaferro, Lobell (2016, 1), encompasses international behaviors ranging from short-term crisis decision-making or medium and long term grand strategic adjustments by individual states up to global outcomes and structural changes.

As in structural realism, neo-classical realism also prioritizes international systemic variables for their impact on states' foreign policy decisions and orientations. Although

neoclassical realists do not ignore a range of other non-state actors in the international system, for them territorial states constitute the main units of the system. In this context, according to Gideon Rose, "neoclassical realists argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities." (Rose, 1998, 146). Ripsman et al. (2016) classify Rose's approach as Type I neoclassical realism and claim that Type I neoclassical realists mostly found structural realism's explanation of foreign policy choices of states sufficient. According to Lobell (2016), Type I neoclassical realism only examines historical anomalies in states' foreign policy decisions by using intervening variables like leaders' perception and domestic politics.

On the other hand, the second Type of neoclassical realism arises from the assumption that the approach can do more than explain anomalies; it can also present a broader range of foreign policy choices and grand strategic adjustments (Ripsman et al.,2016, 29). However, they agree with the Type I and structural realists that when states encounter overt and imminent threats and few policy choices, they often behave according to dictations of the international system. Indeed, what differentiates them from Type I and structural realists is that they claim that states are rarely faced with such strict choices (Ripsman et al., 2016, 29).

However, Type III neoclassical realists believe that while the structure of the international system can impose restraints by constraining a range of possible strategic responses and bargaining outcomes, the international system itself cannot dictate individual states' acts (Ripsman et al., 2016, 36). Likewise, states do not always choose the optimal policy responses to overcome systemic constrains, rather they select from a range of policy alternatives to survive between the constrains of the international system and internal political imperatives (Ripsman et al., 2016, 34). Nevertheless, the structure of the system and structural modifiers like geography, natural resources, the rate of technological diffusion can impose constraints and provide opportunities to the individual states in determining their foreign policy strategies. To understand foreign policy, NCR focuses on the processes of perception, decision-making and policy

implementation of individual states. In this context, Ripsman et al. explain their point of view as follows:

> …while policymakers construct policy to fit systemic stimuli, policy selection is often influenced by domestic-level intervening variables, including: leader images that interfere with accurate perceptions; strategic culture, which shapes all aspects of state responses; state-society relations, which affect the state's ability to enact and implement decisions; and domestic political institutions, which can either enable or constrain state leaders when they face societal opposition to policy selection or implementation (2016, 33-34).

Additionally, Type III neoclassical realists claim that the neoclassical realist approach should deal with a broad range of foreign policy decisions and grand strategic adjustments of states rather than just explaining anomalies in foreign policy choices (Ripsman et al., 2016). Indeed, Type III neoclassical realists, some of whom were also former Type II neoclassical realists like Ripsman, Lobell, and Taliaferro, further claim that NCR was a theory that could also explain structural changes and international outcomes that could shape international politics.

NCR, with its approach that does not exclude systemic factors but emphasizes the impacts of intervening variables in foreign policy making processes of states, has become a widely-used theory among scholars in the foreign policy analyzes of the Middle East countries, where regime/state survival and balance of power strategies are still dominant factors in foreign policies of countries in the region. In this regard, by this research, domestic and structural factors that impact Oman's foreign policy making process in the 21st century under Sultan Qaboos rule are tried to be revealed. Therefore, Type III neoclassical realism is chosen to constitute the research's theoretical framework. Hereinafter, the term neoclassical realism will be used throughout this thesis without indicating the type.

There are two main reasons behind choosing NCR as a theoretical framework for this research. Firstly, since I believe that several domestic and external factors have influenced Oman's foreign policy, NCR presents an approach considering both internal and systemic variables as well as structural modifiers in foreign policy

analyses, which provides me an extensive framework to study Omani foreign policy. Secondly, NCR's intervening variables: leaders image, strategic culture, and state-society relations are the ones best fit to domestic dynamics of foreign policy making processes in Oman that this thesis claims. Furthermore, NCR's state-centric and national power approaches, the latter "sees power as a means to end not an end unto itself" as stated by Ripsman et al. (2016, 44), help to understand Oman's unique balancing foreign policy strategies to maintain both internal and regional stability.

To sum up, in the literature, state/regime survival, geopolitics, economy, Oman's history, Ibadi culture, and Omani identity have been referred to as the dynamics behind Oman's foreign policy. However, in this thesis, both systemic and domestic variables will be considered through the lenses of Neo-Classical Realism. In this regard, firstly, as a systemic variable, the structure of the international system in which Omani foreign policy has been conducted will be examined in terms of the challenges and the restrictions it has posed to Omani foreign policy in the last twenty years. Then, the impacts of internal/domestic variables, leader's image, strategic culture, and state-society relations and the effects of structural modifiers like geography and hydrocarbon-based economy on foreign policy decision-making in Oman will be analyzed. In this framework, domestic variables and structural modifiers will be classified as the core dynamics, including leader's image and strategic culture and the complementary dynamics including state-society relations, geopolitics, and hydrocarbon-based economy according to their level of influence on the foreign policy making processes in Oman. By looking through the Neo-Classical Realist lenses, this thesis intended to reveal whether these dynamics can explain the high-level continuity in the Omani foreign policy under Sultan Qaboos's reign in the 21st century despite the sweeping challenges of this century.

In this thesis, following the introduction, the literature on characteristics and dynamics of the Omani foreign policy were analyzed in the first chapter. The second chapter will address some compelling international and regional issues and conflicts that occurred in the first twenty years of the 21st century that have posed a challenge to the security and stability of the region, and Oman’s foreign policy stance towards these challenges. In other words, the second chapter will examine the selected events which

was chosen to highlight the restrictive environment of the international system to better analyze the interaction between internal variables and dictations of the international system in Oman's foreign policy-making process. In this framework, the US military intervention in Iraq in 2003, the Syrian civil war since 2011, the Yemen civil war since 2014, tension over Iran's Nuclear Program, and the Gulf rifts of 2014 and 2017 will be examined in terms of Oman's foreign policy towards these issues.

In the third chapter, the core dynamics that could have ensured this continuity and consistency in Oman's foreign policy orientation during Qaboos' last twenty years will be discussed. In this framework, in the first part, as foreign policy decision-makers of Oman, the Sultan, the Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' role in the foreign policy decision-making process will be analyzed respectively. In the second part, the strategic culture that can be defined as the established beliefs and shared expectations and assumptions among society will be examined within the Omani foreign policy decision-making system. In this framework, this thesis argues that Oman's strategic culture under Qaboos reign has consisted of Ibadhi teachings, Omani nationalism, and the legacy of its diplomatic history since 1970.

The fourth chapter will address the state-society relations, geopolitics, and hydrocarbon-based economy as the complementary dynamics that have had impacts on the foreign policy decision-making in Oman under Qaboos reign. Under the state-society relations part, the impact of Oman's tribal structure and the influence of expatriate population in foreign policy decisions will be examined. The geopolitics of Oman that locating in between Saudi Arabia and Iran, sharing the control of the Strait of Hormuz with Iran, neighboring with Yemen in turmoil, being situated across the Indian sub-continent, will be analyzed in terms of its considerable impact on foreign policy decisions. Lastly, Oman's hydrocarbon-based economy that requires uninterrupted oil export to several countries across the world will be examined to explain the dynamics behind Oman's foreign policy towards these oil-importer countries.

After comprehensively analyzing internal and systemic variables of the Omani foreign policy making processes, the reasons behind this high-level continuity in the foreign

policy orientation of Oman under Sultan Qaboos despite the changes and challenges of the 21st century will be summed up in the conclusion. Furthermore, some prospects and predictions regarding the post-Qaboos era foreign policy orientation of Oman will also be shared in this part.

CHAPTER 2

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL CHALLANGES FOR OMAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 21st CENTURY

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Neo-Classical Realists believe that while the structure of the international system can impose restraints by constraining a range of possible strategic responses and bargaining outcomes, the international system itself cannot dictate individual states' acts (Ripsman et al., 2016, 36). Ripsman et al. further claim that to survive between the constraints of the international system and internal political imperatives, states do not always choose the optimal policy responses to overcome systemic constraints (2016, 34). Departing from this point, the restrictions imposed by the international system and regional subsystem and Oman's policy responses to these systemic stimuli in the 21st century will be discussed over the selected events in this chapter.

For centuries, the Middle East has suffered from wars, conflicts, tyrannies, struggles of superpowers, embargoes, civil wars, and terror attacks. Although the region's destiny in terms of conflicts and wars did not change in the new millennium, the internal and international dynamics altered dramatically. The failed and failing states, ethnic and sectarian-based policies, the rise of extremist groups and terrorist organizations, and mass migration waves from Syria and Yemen have constituted the main problems of recent vintage affecting the Middle East in the 21st century (Stolberg, 2012).

On the other hand, the pro-longed tension over Iran's nuclear program and its regional policies, as well as protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine have continued to occupy the agenda of the regional countries in the 21st century. 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US have constituted the turning point in many aspects for the region. Following

the attacks, the Bush administration started War on Terror international military campaign, which targeted the terror organizations and the governments that supported these organizations (Transcript of President Bush's address, 2001, http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/). To this end, the US-led coalition conducted a military campaign towards Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003.

Another milestone in the region's politics has been the vast anti-government protests called Arab Spring that emerged in North Africa in late 2010 and spread quickly to the many countries in the region. Their repercussions as ongoing civil wars in Syria and Yemen still constitute a challenge for regional states. Ethnic and sectarian-oriented foreign policies pursued by several states in the region over the ongoing conflicts by supporting certain opposition or fighting groups according to their ideology have also affected the international relations of the region. In that sense, member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council have encountered each other on the one side, Qatar, and on the other side the SA, the UAE, and Bahrain plus Egypt with the accusation of supporting terrorist organizations.

This chapter will examine the events which was chosen to highlight the restrictive environment of the international and regional sub-system to better analyze the interaction between internal variables and dictations of the international system. Given the importance of the geostrategic position of Oman surrounded by all these civil wars, conflicts, tensions, the chapter will focus on Oman's foreign policy towards them. In this context, Oman's foreign policy towards the US-led military campaign to Iraq in 2003, the Syrian civil war since 2011, the Yemen civil war since 2014, tension over Iran's Nuclear Program, and the Gulf rifts of 2014 and 2017 will be analyzed. Furthermore, by looking at Oman's past foreign policy decisions together with its foreign policy towards above events, we will prepare the ground for the analysis of change and continuity during Qaboos’s reign.

2.1. The US-led Military Campaign Towards Iraq in 2003

After September 11 terrorist attacks, the US foreign policy strategy towards the Middle East has considerably changed under the Bush administration. The US-led Global War on Terror international military campaign targeted terror organizations, and the governments claimed to support these organizations. In this framework, The US-led military campaign towards Afghanistan in 2001 targeted the Al Qaeda base in Afghanistan and the Taliban government that alleged to support Al Qaeda terror organization.

Oman has taken its place with the international community in the war on terror campaign and allowed the US forces to actively use its facilities in the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan according to the "facilities access agreement" first signed in 1980 and then renewed every ten years between the USA and the Sultanate (Katzman, 2020).

However, the Iraqi situation was seen quite differently from the Omani perspective. When Qaboos ascended to the throne, Iraq supported the rebels in the Dhofar region of Oman (Kechichian, 1995). Furthermore, Iraq also opposed Oman's membership in the Arab League in 1971 (Kechichian, 1995, p.108). After Qaboos suppressed the Dhofar rebellion at the end of 1975, Iraq approached Oman to ameliorate tense relations of the past and established diplomatic relations with the Sultanate in early 1976. As one of the coastal states of the Gulf region, Iraq has always been taken into consideration by Oman in regional security calculations. Indeed, Qaboos considered Iraq as a balancing actor in the region since the spillover possibility of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was felt throughout the region. On the other hand, while other GCC member states supported and provided Iraq with financial and military assistance against Iran, Oman has pursued active neutrality policy during the Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988, never cut its diplomatic relations with both sides, and urged them to accept UN resolutions on permanent cease-fire by discreet negotiations with both sides (Kechichian, 1995,111-112).

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 posed another security challenge for the Gulf region. Although geographically distanced from Kuwait, as a GCC ally of Kuwait, Oman immediately condemned the invasion and called Iraq to comply with the international law and UN resolutions and withdraw from Kuwait at the earliest (Al-Khalili, 2009). Nevertheless, Oman did not cut its diplomatic relations with Iraq again and engaged in diplomatic initiatives with several countries, including the USA and China, to urge Iraq to end the invasion swiftly (Al-Khalili, 2009). Furthermore, in the post-war period, Muscat did not hesitate to express its support for easing Security Council sanctions on Iraq. As seen, Oman took confident foreign policy steps during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the post-war period. It is worth mentioning here that this confidence was due primarily to the fact that Oman did not support Iraq like other Gulf countries including Kuwait and followed a neutral policy during the Iran-Iraq War.

Given the background of Oman's foreign policy towards Iraq since Qaboos came to the throne, one could claim that Oman was always against Iraq's isolation in the region and tried to find diplomatic solutions to the problems related to Iraq. Oman maintained this stance when the Bush Administration openly voiced its intention to realize a military campaign towards Iraq (The White House President George W. Bush, 2002). In other words, Oman had been publicly critical of the US's intention of military intervention in Iraq before the invasion started in March 2003. In this regard, then Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi, by referring the President Bush's calling the United Nations to act against Iraq and implying the action will be unavoidable otherwise, said that the role of the UN should not be weakened by those who thought they could impose law for their interest, they were dragging the world into instability and chaos (Al Khalili, 2009, 119).

Accordingly, Oman supported every positive step taken by the Iraqi government to prevent any possible war on Iraq. In this framework, Oman welcomed Iraq's agreement with Kuwait on recognizing Kuwait's border and pledging not to intervene in Kuwait's internal affairs (Khalili, 2019, 119). Additionally, Oman also welcomed Iraq's decision to cooperate with the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission and International Atomic Energy Agency and restated its hope for these steps preventing any military attack on Iraq which would destabilize the

country and the region (Al Kahlili, 2009, 119). These encouraging statements of Oman have also turned to concrete diplomatic initiatives that Iraqi Foreign Minister was hosted in Muscat to convene Saddam Hussain's letter to Sultan Qaboos in October 2002. Although the letter's content was not revealed yet, it was most probably seeking Qaboos's assistance in persuading the US for Iraq's sincerity on its openness to international inspection for alleged weapons of mass destruction (Al Khalili, 2009, 119).

Nevertheless, Oman has striven to avert any military attack on Iraq; Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) was launched in Mach 2003 (Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn Fast Facts, 2021). After that stage, Oman has opted for staying quiet on the issue. Furthermore, it is claimed that according to the facilities access agreement with the USA, it allowed the US forces to use Omani facilities during the OIF even though it was limited compared to OEF in Afghanistan (Katzman, 2020).

2.2. Syrian Crisis Since 2011

The wave of protests and demonstrations starting in late 2010 against autocratic governments of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have constituted one of the most devastating challenges of the 21st century for the regimes of the region. In some countries, these protests led to the overthrow of the governments like Tunisia and Egypt. Some others, like Gulf monarchies have overcome these protests by implementing some reform packages according to the demand of the protestors, on the one hand, subduing them on the other. However, in some countries like Syria and Yemen, the regime has used excessive force against the protestors, there was foreign intervention and the upheaval has turned into a civil war, which has induced enormous changes in the internal and regional dynamics.

The massive refugee flow from Syria, and the emergence of the extremist groups and terror organizations like the so-called Islamic State (DAESH/ISIS) have created social and security challenges for the regional countries. Furthermore, the involvement of global and regional powers in the Syrian civil war by supporting the opposition or the regime made the situation in Syria more complex.

Oman has seen what was happening in Syria as an internal issue of this country. It has been attentive not to directly interfere with the Syrian problem per the foreign policy principle of not interfering with other countries' internal affairs, which it implemented uncompromisingly throughout Qaboos's reign. In this regard, Oman did not severe its diplomatic relations with Syria since the Syrian crisis started in 2011. Accordingly, while withdrawing its diplomatic staff due to the security conditions from Damascus, it did not close its embassy and did not expel the Syrian Ambassador from Muscat but limited his diplomatic presence among diplomatic corps in Muscat.

Furthermore, while Oman has maintained its neutrality during the Syrian crisis, it did not hesitate to express that Oman would not cop an attitude towards Assad's Government which was elected by its people (BBC Arabic, 2015). Likewise, Oman also criticized the Arab League (AL) for breaking diplomatic relations with Syria by claiming that the AL would have been a communication channel for finding a political solution to the Syrian problem (BBC Arabic, 2015).

On the other hand, striving to contribute to the initiatives to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis, Oman was a member of the International Syria Support Group and actively participated in its meetings (The European Union External Action Service, 2015). Furthermore, Oman has also been one of the few countries that have kept diplomatic engagement with the Syrian regime and the opposition concordantly. In this context, the Syrian Regime's Foreign Minister Walid Muallim visited Oman twice in 2015 and 2018. (Neubauer, 2018). Likewise, then successive Heads of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, Khalid Khoja and Nasr Al Hariri, came to Muscat to meet Alawi in 2015 and 2018, respectively (Oman Observer, 2018). Furthermore, Minister Alawi went to Damascus twice in late October 2015 and early July 2019 to meet with Assad (Oman Observer, 2019). Considered Oman's facilitating and conciliating roles in several conflicts in the past, these diplomatic engagements of Oman with the Syrian regime have been reflected as a sign of improvements in the political solution to the Syrian problem. However, as there has not been any disclosed outcome of these interactions with the parties of the Syrian conflict regarding the solution of the problem, Oman once more manifested itself as a

potential facilitator having a dialog with all sides before the international arena. Besides that, given Oman's past experiences in carrying messages between opposing sides of the global conflicts, these interactions between Omani officials and the Syrian regime were most probably realized for similar sakes. Hence, Neubauer (2018) confirms that Alawi's visit to Damascus in 2015 was due to conveying a message from then US Secretary of State John Kerry, whom Alawi had met one month before the said visit, to Bashar al-Assad.

The refugee crisis has constituted one of the most challenging dimensions of the Syrian civil war for the region. Although Oman has stressed that its role in the Syrian crisis could only be limited to humanitarian assistance and the diplomatic sphere, it did not open its doors to the Syrian refugees fleeing from the regime's persecution (Cafiero&Sutedic, 2020). Instead, it has extended its humanitarian assistance to the Syrian refugees having sheltered in Jordanian camps via Oman Charitable Organization, Oman's official charity organization (UNHCR Gulf Report, 2014). Indeed, Oman has followed the same path as the other Gulf monarchies in assisting the Syrian refugees. By organizing donor conferences and pledging millions of US Dollars to the UN or NGOs for Syrian refugees, all the six GCC members have tried to unburden themselves and aimed to prevent any instability and insecurity in their own countries.

Likewise, as have been the other GCC member states, Oman has also been part of the US-led coalition against the ISIS. However, unlike its GCC allies, Oman has not participated in any airstrikes or conducted any military action against ISIS (NATO PA Mission Report, 2016). In doing so, Oman has maintained its foreign policy objective of preserving its soils from being a target of any terror organizations.

In brief, Oman’s foreign policy towards the most devastating crisis of the 21st century in Syria could be explained through its traditional foreign policy principles like not interfering with the internal affairs of other countries, not taking a side in conflicts, supporting peaceful means to find a solution to the problems of the region, which Qaboos has implemented since he came to the throne.

2.3. Yemeni Civil War Since 2014

Yemeni crisis has constituted another source of concern for the region and particularly Oman. The country has suffered from instability, chaos, and famine for a decade. Having started as the spillover effect of the so-called Arab Spring, the Yemeni crisis has turned into a civil war since the Houthis (officially called Ansarallah) took over the control of the capital city Sana'a in September 2014 (How Yemen's Capital Sanaa was seized by Houthi Rebels, 2014). In response to this move of the Yemeni opposition, the Saudi-led coalition launched a military campaign towards the Houthis and the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh's supporters in March 2015, intending to restore the control of President Hadi's government and establish peace and stability in Yemen. On the other side, Iran allegedly involved in the conflict by extending military support to the Houthis (Juneau, 2016). Meanwhile, benefiting from Yemen's conflict-ridden environment, the Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the ISIS terror organizations have also found fertile ground for their illegal activities in Yemen. Pithily, in just a decade, the Yemeni civil war, which caused tens of thousands of deaths and millions of people to starvation, has become one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world in the 21st century.

Oman shares a 294-km long land border with Yemen in the southwest of the country. Furthermore, Oman's geopolitical position standing in the mid of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the UAE, which have been the conflicting parties in the Yemeni civil war, has forced Oman to pursue balancing and neutral foreign policy to protect its internal stability.

Since the suppression of the South Yemen-backed Dhofar revolt in 1976, Oman did not witness any security problem in its soils. As Oman passed through the bitter experience of the Dhofar rebellion during the first decade of Qaboos reign, Qaboos attached utmost importance to the Dhofar region's stability. Thus, he maintained a pre-emptive foreign policy to prevent the Yemeni civil war's spillover effect to the Dhofar region.

As an example of Qaboos's diplomatic initiatives to transform the former enemies into current friends, Oman normalized its relations with South Yemen in the 1980s. Moreover, after the unification of South and North Yemen in 1990, Oman signed an agreement with united Yemen that established the land border between the two countries in 1992. Accordingly, an agreement on the delimitation of the maritime boundary between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Yemen was followed in 2003.

From the very beginning, Oman has seen Yemen's problem as a political conflict, not a sectarian one. It has believed that the Houthis has been a part of Yemen and was supposed to be taken into account in the steps taken after the removal of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh from office in 2011. In this context, Oman supported the GCC initiative "political transition process" and the "National Dialogue Conference," which brought together various segments of Yemeni society.

On the other hand, Oman became a party to the GCC statement, which identified the seizure of the capital Sana'a by Houthis as a coup (Ghobari, 2015). However, it did not participate in the coalition for the SA-led military action towards Houthis in Yemen (Cafiero, 2015). In one of Foreign Minister Alawi's interview to explain the reason behind Oman's rejection of participating in the Saudi-led Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen, he said that it was not appropriate to be a part of the military campaign while advocating peace efforts (Cafiero&Karasik, 2016). In this context, the Omani government has supported the peace initiatives taken within the framework of the UN and the GCC to find a political solution to the Yemeni crisis. Furthermore, Oman has maintained its initiatives to bring the parties to the negotiating table (Al Mukrashi, 2015). Thanks to its high reputation as a facilitator, Oman could host separate direct talks between the Houthis on the one side and the US officials, the representatives of the Saudi-led coalition and Iranian officials on the other (Barret, 2015).

Indeed, the civil war in Yemen has constituted one of the most challenging threats to Oman's security and stability. In this regard, having feared that the conflicts in Yemen would cause a refugee influx to its territory, the Government of Oman has increased

security measures on its border with Yemen. To this end, Oman has started to build a border fence on its 294-km long borderline with Yemen (Gill, 2018). Furthermore, Oman has also cooperated with international organizations to ensure the continuity of humanitarian assistance to Yemen. In this framework, in cooperation with the Red Cross, it has established a logistics and accommodation center in the border area (Oman: ICRC establishes a presence in the Sultanate,2015). Moreover, for increasing border security, Oman has strengthened its cooperation and communication with tribes in the region, particularly in the Al Mahra governorate of Yemen, close to Oman's borderline and have had a human bond with Omanis (Horton, 2020).

Being one of the safest countries in the MENA region according to Global Peace Index and being not targeted by any terrorist or extremist groups in its soils in the 21st century, Oman has concerned about the infiltration of the AQAP and the ISIS terrorists from Yemen into the Dhofar region (Cafiero&Ulrichsen, 2018). Given this background of security considerations and threats originating from the Yemeni civil war, it can be claimed that Oman's foreign policy towards Yemen has mainly been shaped by its geopolitics and the legacy of its diplomatic history.

2.4. Iran’s Nuclear Program

Since the Iranian regime changed with the Revolution of 1979, Iran has been accepted as a source of tension by the West, particularly the US and some regional countries, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Iraq. Indeed, the new regime's ideological foreign policy principles of demonization of the USA and exporting the revolution throughout the region have led to this concern among regional countries and the West (Rakel, 2007). Although Iran's nuclear program had been launched with the coordination of the USA in the 1950s, after the Islamic Republic was established, concerns regarding Iran's nuclear program have also started to arise among the Western countries.

In the 21st century, Iran's nuclear program has become a major source of concern for the region and the West. During Khatemi's Presidency (1997-2005), Iran has approached the issue in a more reconciliatory manner that agreed with the Foreign

Ministers of Britain, France, and Germany to fully coordinate with IAEA and suspend its uranium enrichment program in return for the three European powers' commitment to preventing the transfer of the issue to the UN Security Council in 2003 (Rakel, 2007, 183). However, the Iranian Government broke the agreement and continued its uranium enrichment process (Rakel, 2007, 183).

After the election of Ahmedinejad as the President of the Islamic Republic in 2005, Iran has gradually left its compromising stance on its nuclear program. In response to this change in the Iranian Government's stance, the IAEA has reported Iran's non-compliance with the agreed requirements to the UN Security Council in February 2006 (Al Zubair, 2017, 44). In December 2006, the UNSC started to impose a series of sanctions on Iran, targeting Iran's nuclear technology transfer. In the following years, the sanctions' scope and intensity have gradually increased as the Iranian Government intensified the uranium enrichment reported by the IAEA. In this regard, in 2010, the UNSC Resolutions imposed a complete arms embargo on Iran and froze the assets of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). In parallel to the UNSC Resolutions, the US and the EU have started to impose comprehensive sanctions on Iran, which led to more economic and financial distress for the Iranian Government and its people.

The re-election of the Obama administration in 2012 and election of the Reformist Rouhani as the President of the Islamic Republic in 2013 have paved the way for the resume of the talks on Iran's nuclear program. That this time Oman has become the facilitator and venue of the talks between P5+1 and Iran, which resulted in the signing of the historic nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in July 2015. Accordingly, after the IAEA's confirmation regarding Iran's compliance with the nuclear deal, all sanctions were lifted by the US, UN, and the EU simultaneously (Melvin&Martinez, 2016).

When it comes to Oman’s foreign policy towards all these above-stated developments in its very neighbor across the Strait of Hormuz, one of the busiest waterway of the world in terms of oil shipment, it is worth noting that Oman has pursued active diplomacy in facilitating the talks and become an integral part of the solution at the end. Oman under Sultan Qaboos administration has seen Iran geopolitically

undeniable reality for the region and thought that it was necessary to engage and cooperate with Iran to ensure peace and stability in the region. Thus, Oman, while considering regional and international balances in this process, wasted no time to develop its investment, commercial and military relations with Iran, especially since the embargoes were lifted after the agreement reached with the P5 + 1 regarding Iran's nuclear program.

To understand Oman's foreign policy stance towards Iran, it would be better to briefly look at the recent history of the relationship between Oman and Iran under Qaboos' reign. Oman and Iran have enjoyed long-standing relations since the two countries have had a deep-rooted state presence in the region. During the reign of Sultan Qaboos, Oman has constantly developed its unique relations and close cooperation with Iran with a feeling of gratitude for the military assistance it received from Iran in suppressing the Dhofar rebellion in the 1970s (Kechichian, 1995). Furthermore, Iran has become the first country with which Oman signed a border agreement (Agreement Concerning Delimitation of Continental Shelf Between Iran and Oman) in July 1974 (Kechichian, 1995, p. 100). Apart from Iranian Shah's territorial claims over UAE's islands, Qaboos agreed with Iranian Shah that regional security required cooperation with regional countries. Oman's request for military assistance from Iran in quelling the Dhofar rebellion and Iran's generous aid to this end came in this regard.

In the first years following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Oman was worried about the Revolution's spillover potential and had doubts about Iran's intentions towards the region. Thus, it started to search for a regional security mechanism to ensure stability and security in the region. It is worth noting that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established in 1981 due to this kind of concerns among the Arab monarchies of the Gulf region. In line with these security initiatives, Oman also signed a "facilities access agreement" with the USA, which allowed the use of Oman's military facilities by the US forces, despite the criticism and pressure it drew from other monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula. After this agreement signed with the US, Oman has felt more secure. Accepting the Revolution in Iran as internal affairs of that country, Oman has decided to maintain cordial relations with Iran.

Unlike the other Gulf Monarchies, Oman's neutral stance during Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and its peace initiatives to end the war have been appreciated by Iran and established confidence between the two countries. In the following period, based on this confidence, the relations between Oman and Iran have gradually improved to the stage that Oman has seen as the only possible country in which both the West and Iran could trust. In this context, Oman has played an intermediary role in releasing US citizens detained in Iran in 2011 (Schmierer, 2015, 114). As the next step of this successful diplomacy, upon the US's request, Oman has begun to explore ways to facilitate a direct dialog between the US and Iran (Schmierer, 2015, 115). To this end, Sultan Qaboos was personally involved in the process and realized a rare state visit to Tehran in 2013 to convey the letter of US President to its Iranian counterpart (A timeline of key events in US-Iran negotiations, 2013). In the following process, Oman has hosted several secret talks between representatives of P5+1 and Iran in Muscat, which paved the way for the signing of the nuclear deal between parties. However, it is worth noting here that Oman has consistently stated its support for Iran's right to have the nuclear capability for peaceful purposes according to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, of which Iran was a signatory.

However, this relative stability in the region after the nuclear deal was reached did not last long since the US unilaterally withdrew from the deal under Trump administration in May 2018. The killing of Iranian IRGC Commander Qasemi Soleimani in January 2020 further triggered the tension between the US and Iran. Although the Iranian Commander was assassinated just one week before Sultan Qaboos's passing away, Omani Foreign Minister visited Tehran two times in the same month to de-escalate the tension. However, in this crisis he said there was no room for Oman's mediation to ease the tension (Oman sees no scope for U.S.-Iran mediation for now: Kuwait newspaper, 2020).

In conclusion, the deal between P5+1 and Iran over Iran's nuclear program has proved Omani diplomacy's success as a facilitator and intermediary on a global scale. On the other hand, the lifting sanctions from Iran have also served Oman's interest in its cooperation with Iran on the trade and energy sector. Furthermore, despite the Trump administration's withdrawal from the deal in 2018, Oman had found a chance to

demonstrate to the international community that Iran's engagement with the international system, which was also Qaboos' foreign policy objective, would have paved the way for establishing peace and security in the region.

2.5. The Rifts Between GCC Members in 2014 and 2017

On 25 May 1981, six Head of States of the Arabian Peninsula, namely the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the State of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman came together in Abu Dhabi and signed the Charter of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) (Al Hasan, 2014, 9). There were several internal and external motives behind the formation of the GCC. Similar pattern of ruling system, close kinship between peoples of the member states, social and economic homogeneity, having rich oil reserves and dependency on oil revenues, and similar cultural identity were among some internal motives behind the will of the member states to form a regional organization with a view to cooperating in a range of diverse fields of their common interests.

On the other hand, despite the initial official discourse did not emphasize security issues related to the regional and international developments as the push factors for the establishment of the GCC, these developments, which had intensified during the 1970s and 1980s, have to be considered as the primary triggers behind the formation of the Council. In this regard, the first Secretary-General of the GCC Abdullah Bishara, who undertook the Secretary-General position for three consecutive terms till 1993, explained later the main reasons behind the establishment of the GCC as the inception of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran, the weakening of Arab League after the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty in 1979, the Carter Doctrine, Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, escalation between Oman and South Yemen and USSR’s involvement in this tension (Al-Najjar, 1990, as cited in Al Hassan, 2014).

Given this background, it could be claimed that in the 1980s, GCC member states have had similar security perceptions and acted in a more concerted manner to ensure their security and stability. However, in the 21st century, the challenges they have

encountered brought them to the edge of dissolution in 2014 and 2017 over a fundamental disagreement in their security perceptions. In other words, their confrontation mainly stemmed from their different foreign policy approaches to the crises of the region. Indeed, since the GCC did not evolve into an EU-like organization that pursues common foreign and security policy, its member states could have pursued different foreign policy approaches since its establishment. However, after the vast anti-government protest started to occur throughout the region, some Gulf monarchies have seen these protests as a threat to their very survival and did not tolerate any member state's support for these protests, even in other countries.

In this context, although the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood/Ikhwan (MB) in the Gulf countries dated back to 1950s and 1960s, the political friction among the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council over the Muslim Brotherhood has arisen since the commencement of the Arab uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011. While the Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain designated the MB as a terrorist organization as of 2014, Qatar politically and financially has supported this movement abroad. On the other side, although Kuwait and Oman also were against the presence of the movement in their soils, they avoided to label the movement as a terrorist organization.

When Mohamed Mursi's government was in power in Egypt from June 2012 to July 2013 Qatar has overtly extended its political and financial support to this Brotherhood led government. (Qatar Doubles Aid to Egypt, 2018). Additionally, following the military regime came to power in Egypt in July 2013, Qatar has become the most generous host country for scores of Brotherhood members fleeing from the new regime's suppression in Egypt. Qatar's that kind of policies perceived by its neighbors as an act of hostility. Although there had been disagreements among the GCC members throughout the history, they always achieved to keep them secret. However, since the effects of the Arab uprisings started to spread across the region, Qatar's relations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain have begun to strain because of its open support to Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliations abroad.

In this regard, first rift over the Muslim Brotherhood occurred among the GCC's member states in March 2014. The crisis started with the withdrawal of ambassadors of the SA, the UAE and Bahrain from Doha and ended with the return of the ambassadors to Doha in November 2014 before the GCC Summit held in Doha in December 2014 (Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain end rift with Qatar, return ambassadors, 2014).

After the 2014 crisis was over, Qatar and Saudi relations entered a period of détente for two and a half years since Qatar asked some Brotherhood members to leave the country and Saudi Arabia softened its policy towards the Brotherhood following the King Salman's ascend to the throne (Freer, 2017).

However, in June 2017, the GCC came to the point of dissolution for the first time in its history because of the imbroglio among its member states, namely the SA, the UAE, and Bahrain plus Egypt on the one and Qatar alone on the other side. Oman and Kuwait again preferred not to involve in any side but to play a mediator or facilitator role between the two sides. One of the Quartet's main accusations were again Qatar's support for "terrorist" organizations, mainly for the Muslim Brotherhood and its improving relations with Iran (Qatar crisis: What you need to know, 2017). Indeed, the MB is defined as a terrorist organization by only these four states as well as Syria and Russia in the world. The crisis of 2017 has constituted the worst crisis ever in the history of the Gulf countries, that both sides did not show any effort to find a middle ground for the solution for almost four years. By severing relations and closing their airspace and land borders with Qatar, the Quartet aimed at deterring Qatar from its foreign policy objectives and means, which made Qatar one of the most proactive and influential actors in the region. Since the rift between the two sides took a form that was perceived as a direct threat to each countries' sovereignty and survival, both sides did not want to compromise from their stance to reach a lasting solution.

Besides the ideological aspect of the rift between Gulf monarchies, the economic and discursive dimensions of the crisis have also been addressed in the literature. From the economic perspective, some scholars imply that Qatar and the UAE's competition for

being the most prominent financial hub of the region could be counted among the factors that led to imposing a blockade on Qatar (Bouoiyour&Selmi, 2020). Indeed, the Quartet's decision of applying an economic blockade instead of taking political steps on Qatar to deter it from its pro-MB foreign policy orientation could be evaluated from this perspective. On the other hand, although the Quartet aimed to dissuade Qatar from its policies by imposing heavy economic sanctions, the situation did not develop as expected. Many scholars and financial analysts share the opinion that although the shocking effects of the blockade were felt across the economy of Qatar in the first six months of the crisis, later Qatar has achieved to come out of this crisis economically successfully (Kinninmont, 2019; Kabbani, 2021; Oxford Bussiness Group, 2019). To this end, Qatar firstly took remedial measures to decrease the economic and financial risks and later implemented long term economic policy strategies, including reconstructing trade routes, enhancing its most crucial natural resource (LNG) by seeking new contracts, and developing domestic food and manufacturing sectors to ensure self-sufficiency in fulfilling daily needs of the Qatari people (Oxford Business Group, 2019). In this process, some countries including, Turkey, Iran, and Oman, have supported and assisted Qatar's endeavors in easing the economic effects of the blockade.

The discursive dimension has been at the center of the Qatar crisis from the beginning to the end. To exemplify the above statement, just ten days before the Quartet imposed a blockade on Qatar, Qatar's official news agency reportedly hacked, and the Qatari Emir's allegedly supportive statements on Iran and Hamas were posted (Krieg, 2019, p. 91). Despite the US intelligence reportedly confirmed the Emirati involvement in this hacking, no steps were taken, and the incident sparked the beginning of the blockade (DeYoung&Nakashima, 2017). Krieg (2017) describes the situation in the Gulf rift as a "war of words" in his article titled "The Gulf Rift-A war over two irreconcilable narratives". During the crisis, Qatari leadership used Al Jazeera as the indirect instrument of conveying their official discourse. However, Quartet countries, particularly the UAE, used both direct and indirect channels like direct posts by high-level officials on social media and funding US-based think tanks to publish op-eds for reaching large masses in transmitting their official narrative. In addition to the rhetoric used by two sides of the crisis, US President Donald Trump has also shaped the course

of events by his posts on social media pointing to Qatar as a target (Wintour, 2017). While the EU approached more neutral and urged the two sides to de-escalate the tension, Turkey and Iran showed solidarity with Qatar (EU's Mogherini urges de-escalation of Qatar-Gulf rift, 2017). Inside the GCC, Kuwait immediately went ahead with mediation efforts between parties; however, while preserving its neutral stance, Oman abstained from making an official statement and opted to remain silent.

During Qaboos's reign, Oman has maintained good relations with its GCC allies and, as a founding member, attached importance to preserving the GCC's institutional structure as a regional cooperation platform. On the other hand, Oman did not hesitate to take bold foreign policy decisions, which contradicted its GCC allies' decisions (Babood, 2016). Omani Foreign Minister Alawi's statements at the 9th Manama Dialogue Conference in December 2013 on Oman's decisive rejection against Saudi Arabia's proposal for the transformation of the GCC into a Union can be read from this perspective (Oman opposes Gulf union, 2013). On the sideline of this Conference, Alawi clarified his country's position to the press as "…we will not prevent a union, but if it happens, we will not be part of it…" (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Indeed, this unexpected statement of the Omani Foreign Minister shocked the other GCC members, particularly Saudi Arabia. However, it did not strain the relations among GCC members as this was not the first time that Oman took a different stance than other GCC members. Furthermore, antagonizing Oman has never served the interests of other GCC states since Oman's neutral and moderate foreign policy orientation has provided them with room for maneuver when they have needed Oman's intermediation with rival regional powers like Iran.

During the first rift in 2014, Kuwait and Oman undertook their traditional role as intermediary among the two sides (Kechichian, 2014). Oman also tended to identify the first crisis as a family matter between GCC brothers and affirmed its confidence in the strength of the organization against such kind of challenges (Kechichian, 2014).

However, the second rift among GCC members with Egypt's involvement has meant a lot for the Sultanate. Since the second crisis was much more profound, the sanctions imposed over Qatar's foreign policy choices were heavier and brought the GCC to the

brink of dissolution; Oman felt the threat that next time it might have happened to itself because of its independent foreign policies and its close relations with Iran like Qatar was accused of (Babood, 2017). In this regard, since the beginning of the crisis, Oman has declared its neutrality, supported Kuwait's and the US's peace initiatives, and maintained its economic relations with both sides (Harb, 2018).

Since Ibadism has been the dominant sect in Oman, Muslim Brotherhood could not find a fertile ground to show its presence. Nevertheless, in 1994 and 2004, upon the accusations about the alleged plot on the Omani government, Omani officials launched separate operations on the unofficial Muslim Brotherhood offshoot members in the Muscat, purged several senior officials, and arrested many (Hedges&Cafiero, 2017). Although the Royal Decrees released all the arrested members just after two years in prison, Omani officials defined the incidents as one of the most critical threats to the Sultanate since the quelling of the Dhofar insurgency in 1976. In this regard, although Oman did not get on the bandwagon in the designation of the MB as a terror organization, it has stood in the same line with the Quartet on its policy against MB's presence in its soils.

On the other side, while emphasizing its impartial stance, Oman did not hesitate to open its waterways to Qatar to help Qatar to maintain its trade of natural gas and food supplies (Cafiero&Karasik, 2017). Furthermore, it also kept its airspace open for Qatar Airways for its Africa flights (Cafiero&Karasik, 2017). In doing so, Oman has also benefited from the situation. The trade volume between Qatar and Oman has increased by 2000 percent in the first three months of the blockade compared to the pre-blockade period (Babood, 2017). By 2018, bilateral trade volume reached 2.7 billion USD, Oman's export to Qatar constituted almost 1.8 billion USD of this volume.

Furthermore, Oman's logistic sector has also benefited as Oman and Qatar have launched new shipping lines between Oman's Sohar and Salalah Ports and Qatar's Hamad Port. In a nutshell, Babood (2017, 30-31) well expressed the situation as follows "the Qatar blockade has presented Oman with some much-needed economic opportunities, especially in light of the increasing budget deficit that Oman has faced in recent years.". However, long-term regional cooperation and peace have served

more the economic and political interests of Oman than the immediate and short-term opportunities this crisis presented. Therefore, Oman has opted to remain neutral and benefited from the economic repercussions of the crisis.

In conclusion, the Gulf crises among GCC members in 2014 and 2017 have constituted the most shocking developments of the 21st century for the Gulf region. By considering that economic and political advantages of taking a side in such kind of crises presented short-term opportunities, Oman has managed to keep its balanced and neutral stance and supported Kuwait's mediation initiatives to ease the tension and find an amicable and lasting solution to both crises.

To analyze the chapter in short, during Qaboos's reign Oman has tried to navigate between the constraints of the international system and internal political imperatives. Oman's foreign policy towards Iraq before and after the start of the US-led military campaign constitutes a good example of the impacts of Qaboos's perception and strategic culture of Oman on its foreign policy decisions and implementations before the military campaign started. On the other hand, after the OIF was launched, Oman's foreign policy as staying quiet and even letting US forces use its facilities could be defined in the context of the dictations of the international system on Oman's foreign policy. Therefore, it can be claimed that Omani foreign policy under Qaboos's administration, while navigating between the constraints of the international system and domestic factors, has usually determined its foreign policy decisions under the impacts of domestic factors like Qaboos's perception and strategic culture. On the other hand, it could be said that the more imminent and dangerous the threat, the more the foreign policy decisions of Oman were affected by the dictations of the international system.

CHAPTER 3

CORE DYNAMICS OF OMAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

After drawing the framework of the international system surrounding Oman in the 21st century, in this chapter, the core dynamics that have impacted foreign policy making process in Oman during Qaboos's last twenty years will be discussed. For NCR, clarity and the nature of the state's strategic environment, whether permissive or restrictive, are accepted as the two critical systemic variables in understanding the international system (Ripsman et al., 2016, 56). According to Ripsman et al. (2016, 94), in a restrictive strategic environment with high clarity in information transfer, the impacts of society or domestic interest groups on the foreign policy decisions are expected to be limited; however, leaders' image and strategic culture of the country are regarded as the more effective intervening variables in FPE's foreign policy decision-making. Accordingly, in this thesis, the core dynamics behind Oman's foreign policy-making processes will be hierarchically put in an array in which the perception of Sultan Qaboos as the sovereign and the top decision-maker of the Sultanate takes the first place. Oman's strategic culture consisting of Ibadi teachings, Omani Nationalism, and the legacy of its diplomatic history come second in shaping the foreign policy decision-making in Oman.

The Middle East region in the 21st century could be considered one of the most restrictive strategic environments in the international system where states know that they encounter a high threat, short-term time horizons, and limited choices for foreign policy decisions. In this regard, given this environment, it would be proper to claim that the leader's image and strategic culture of the country have constituted the most prominent intervening variables that could impact Oman's foreign policy decision-making process. Furthermore, this thesis seeks to reveal these two vital variables' roles

in the continuity of Oman's foreign policy orientation in the 21st century despite the wide-ranging challenges of the period.

In this framework, in the first part, as foreign policy executives of Oman, Sultan Qaboos, the then Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' role in the foreign policy decision-making process will be investigated by focusing on their characters, personalities, professional experiences, beliefs, principles, and capabilities. In the second part, the strategic culture that can be defined as the established beliefs and shared expectations and assumptions among society will be examined within the Omani foreign policy decision-making system. Additionally, it is worth emphasizing here that for the first time in the literature, this thesis claims that Oman's strategic culture under Qaboos's reign has been made of Ibadi teachings, Omani nationalism, and the legacy of its diplomatic history since 1970.

3.1. Oman's Foreign Policy Executives

As one of the six monarchies of the Gulf region, the foreign policy of the Sultanate of Oman is mostly shaped by the ruler of the country. Therefore, as the top and main decision maker of the country, Sultan's personality, interests, world view, religiousness, educational and professional background play important roles in making both internal and external policy decisions. On the other hand, Oman's deep-rooted state tradition, a culture of consultation stemming from the Ibadi sect of Islam and multi-cultural society structure urge Sultans to use the consultation mechanism through both formal and informal means in decision making processes.

In this chapter, firstly, as the top decision maker of the country, the late Sultan Qaboos who had ruled his country for fifty years from 1970 to January 2020 will be analyzed in terms of his personal characteristics', worldview's, principles' and upbringing's impacts on his foreign policy decisions. Later, Oman's former top diplomat Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi's role in foreign policy decision making process will be discussed. Lastly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman will be analyzed in terms of its capabilities and capacity for

contributing to the foreign policy decision making process. It is worth emphasizing that since Oman's institutional structure and decision making process are not transparent as in the case of other Gulf Arab monarchies, it is very hard for researchers to obtain concrete information from primary sources.

3.1.1. Sultan Qaboos bin Said (July 1970-January 2020)

Sultan Qaboos's determining role in foreign policy decisions of his country is an undeniable fact that many scholars have agreed on it (Kechichian, 1995; Lefebvre, 2010; Babood, 2016). While this dominant role is accepted as a natural outcome of a monarchic state structure, it is also claimed that Qaboos had profoundly personified Oman's transformation process from an isolated underdeveloped state to a modern state implementing active diplomacy (Funsch, 2015).

Sultan Qaboos's personality which could be described as temperate, wise, visionary, self-confidant, calm, determined and humble, had a great role in creation of Oman's independent and moderate foreign policy orientation in between his coronation and death. Likewise, it would also not be an overstatement to say that Oman's foreign policy principles mostly reflects Sultan Qaboos's personality, worldview and life experiences. For instance, Qaboos's determination on proposing and supporting peaceful solutions to the conflicts of the region made Oman reliable intermediary between opposing parties in the region and beyond. Besides that, Qaboos's rational decisions which were taken in strategic times such as his decision to maintain good neighborly relations with Iran after Iranian regime had changed in 1979, has rendered Oman as a dialog bridge between Iran and other Arab Gulf states or Iran and the West. In this regard, thanks to Qaboos's wisdom, Oman has passed through many crises in the Middle East in the 21st century without getting damage and maintaining its neutral stance as well as security and stability of his country (Cafiero, 2020). The US intervention in Iraq in 2003, Yemen civil war started in 2014, Syrian civil war since 2011, Gulf rifts in 2014 and 2017 were among these crises that Qaboos had succeeded to pursue his neutral stance by stressing on non-interference in internal affairs of other states.

Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimur Al Said was born in 18 November 1940 in Salalah, Oman as the only son of Said bin Taimur Al Said and Mazoon bint Ahmed Al Mashani. After he got his primary and secondary education in Salalah, his father sent him to Suffolk, England for foreign language education (Hubbard, 2020). During these two years Qaboos also attended to some sessions of the Suffolk County Council to learn the dynamics of local administration (Funsch, 2015). Then, he joined the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst, the United Kingdom (Plekhanov, 2004). After his graduation, Qaboos served in the British Army in Germany for a year (Funsch, 2015). Before he returned to Oman in 1966, upon the directives of his father he had had a world tour for 3 months in company with British advisers (Plekhannov, 2004). Although Sultan Said strove to train up his only heir to the throne sophisticatedly, he did not give Qaboos any role in the government when he returned Oman. Furthermore, Sultan Said constrained his son's activities and put him under a kind of house arrest and urged him to study Islamic sciences and his country's history after his heavy exposure of the Western type of life during his education years in the UK (Funsch, 2015).

Nevertheless, in his interview with Anne Joyce (1995) upon the question of what major influences he had been in his personal thoughts, Qaboos said that his father's insistence on studying his religion as well as the history and culture of his country helped him to gain the consciousness of his responsibilities towards his fellow citizens. In this regard, although Qaboos totally altered Oman's foreign policy orientation from isolation to active engagement with its region and beyond, he did not ignore his country's deep-rooted history and culture and acted accordingly with this consciousness. On the other hand, he accepted the benefit of his Western education and military discipline he got during his career in British Army (Joyce, 1995). He further emphasized that while making domestic and foreign policy decisions of his country, he had tried to balance modernity and the established values of Omani society (Joyce,1995).

Sultan Qaboos's personal tendency in developing special relations with Britain and particularly the British Royal Family mostly stemmed from his strong feelings of gratitude for the British officials for their support and help he received first during his

education years then when ascending to the throne and lastly while suppressing the Dhofar rebellion.

Indeed, Qaboos had grown up alone (Plekhanov, 2004). He had tutors from Saidiyah School of Salalah and got his classes at home (Funsch, 2015). In his first two years in the UK, Qaboos had stayed in the house of Philip Roman and got prepared by Roman privately to Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst (Funsch, 2015). In between Qaboos' return to Oman and his ascending to the throne he had a couple of British advisers of his father around him, thus Omanis had little known about their next leader and either Qaboos did know just a few Omanis. Those British advisers had helped Qaboos to overthrow his father by a palace coup and then British troops together with Royal Air Force had played a vital role in counter-insurgency in Dhofar. During these hard times, since Oman's qualified manpower was limited, Qaboos could only trust his British allies and appointed British officers to senior public positions particularly in the intelligence units and security forces of the Sultanate. Peck (2010) claims that till 1990s senior positions of Sultan's Armed Forces had been held by British officers. In the 1990s, Omanis were appointed in place of British officers for such senior positions in the security forces of the Sultanate (Peck, 2010).

In the 21st century, although Omanis dominate the public sector, there are still many British officials behind the scenes working as advisers to senior Omani officials. The presence of British officials in the Omani public institutions undoubtedly contributes to maintaining strategic relations between the two states. On the other hand, it would be a reductive interpretation to claim that Oman's strategic partnership with Britain is just because of Qaboos' personal choice. Rather, the British presence in Oman dated back to the 19th century, and keeping Oman as a strategic ally was also Britain's choice because of many motives which could be a topic of another research.

As the longest served monarch of the Middle East, from his coming to the throne in July 1970 until his passing away in January 2020, Qaboos had ruled his country without any serious division of power. He was the top decision-maker in almost every sphere of state affairs. In other words, as the Head of State, Sultan Qaboos had held also the position of the Supreme Commander, Prime Minister as well as the Minister

of Defense, Finance and Foreign Affairs. He established Shura Council and State Council in 1981 and 1997 respectively, however neither Shura Council nor State Council have any power in decision making process of foreign policy issues.

On the other hand, according to local resources, Sultan Qaboos gave utmost importance to operating the consultation (shura) mechanism as a principle of Ibadi teachings in making domestic and foreign policy decisions. In this regard, in the foreign policy issues, the consultations were realized at the institutional level represented by various ministries and government units (R. Omani Ambassador, personal communication, 2020). Nevertheless, it can be claimed that such kinds of consultations encompassed more technical issues of foreign affairs rather than the issues directly affecting the foreign policy orientation of Oman. For the strategic decisions on foreign affairs, the consultation mechanism of Qaboos probably limited to a few advisers and Minister Alawi.

Sultan Qaboos has been accepted as the founder of modern Oman. From the moment, he ascended to the throne, he wasted no time in developing his country in almost every sphere of life from education to health, from military to transportation. However, Qaboos had always approached cautiously towards western type of modernization. He tried to establish balance between modernization and Omani culture and cultural heritage. Since Qaboos thought that his people were not ready for immediate political and social changes, he implemented political and social reforms gradually (Joyce, 1995). To this end, a decade after ascending to the throne, he had established Consultative Council, members of which had been appointed from the various segments of the Omani society. Further, at the end of the second decade, he transformed the Council into Majlis Al-Shura that members of which have been elected by general elections held every four years since then. In 1996, the first-ever constitution of the Sultanate, called the Basic Law, promulgated by Qaboos. In the section of the Basic Law titled ‘individual rights and duties’; it is said that irrespective of their gender, race, color, language, religion, sect, and social status, citizens were equal before the law and in public rights and duties (Basic Law, Article 17). Kechichian (2008) best explain Oman’s unique development process as following:

> Qaboos acknowledged that his vision for the Sultanate "was very clear from the beginning," which helped him "to formulate ideas for the building of a new society, … authentic … with its own methods of thought." The monarch affirmed that he did not mimic anyone or any system of government and, assessing his record in 1998, expressed satisfaction that sound planning protected the country "from the folly of irrational decisions" (127).

Qaboos's worldview had also played an important role in shaping Oman's foreign policy. Rationality was one of the most prominent features of Qaboos' decisions on both domestic and foreign policy issues. In this framework, he always considered Iran as a regional power that could not be ignored and should have been included in regional cooperation mechanisms to avoid confrontation. Oman's dependence on foreign manpower is another issue that Qaboos assessed the situation rationally and advised his people not to trust oil incomes even when oil revenues hit the record levels and urged them to take responsibility in every sphere of life. He frankly expressed his opinion towards his people that unless Omanis dirtied their hands, Omanization could not be achieved properly and development could not be sustained (Kechichian, 2008).

Qaboos was a true believer in tolerance, moderation, and dialogue. He belonged to the Ibadi sect of Islam, which is known for its moderation. He believed that "Islam was suitably equipped to adapt to modernity" (Kechichian, 2008), and he lived in this axis. In 1996, he changed the Ministry of Endowments' title from Islamic Affairs to Religious Affairs (Kechichian, 2008). Qaboos founded several churches and Hindu shrines for the religious requirements of the expatriate population living in Oman (Lefebvre, 2010). He was against all kind of extremism and sectarianism and did not hesitate to express his opinions explicitly in various occasions. His remarks as "Extremism, under whatever guise, fanaticism of whatever kind, factionalism of whatever persuasion would be hateful, poisonous plants in the soil of our country which will not be allowed to flourish" (Kechichian, 2008, pp.123) demonstrate his decisiveness in combatting every kind of extremism in his country. Indeed, it can be claimed that despite neighboring Yemen had become a hot bed of terrorism, given no extremist or terror affiliated groups have shown presence in Oman and no known

Omanis has joined any extremist groups yet, Qaboos was very successful in fighting extremism in his country (US Department of State, 2019).

Oman has multi-cultural and multi-sectarian society structure, but the official ratios of sects had never been announced under Qaboos administration. Oman locates in the region where sectarian conflicts are prone to transform into civil wars, thus, one of the reasons behind Qaboos' principle of non-interference in internal affairs of other countries was that he did not want to attract any hostility from any sect or group that could affect his country's national security. To exemplify, during the so-called 'Arab Spring' demonstrations of 2011 in Bahrain, the Bahraini government asked GCC allies to send troops for quelling protests (Al Jazeera, 2011). Qaboos supported the GCC's deployment of the "Peninsula Shield" force to Bahrain but avoided sending troops because of the above-mentioned political concerns (Katzman,2017).

The Sultanate's development process since 1970 has been symbolized under the name of Sultan Qaboos bin Said (Funsch, 2015). This, besides Qaboos' desire in this direction and his people's admiration towards him, stemmed from his deep understanding and incisive analysis of the dynamics of Omani society and culture. He managed this by keeping all communications channels open with his people including face to face meetings on the occasions of Royal Tours and assuring them that their voices were heard.

On the foreign policy issues, people's participation in the decision-making process was not a case, and most of the Omanis have not shown any interest regarding Oman's foreign policy issues. Although Qaboos sometimes realized bold initiatives on foreign policy like hosting the Israeli Prime Minister in Oman in several times, not cutting diplomatic ties with Egypt after the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979 and with Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait in 1991, no public reaction in the form of protest or demonstration against these decisions had been observed in Oman during Qaboos reign.

Sultan Qaboos with his personality, worldview and policies gained the respect and appreciation of his people as well as many countries from all around the world. He

successfully implemented the policy of active neutrality during his reign and put the principle of 'friend of all' to the core of Omani foreign policy. Kechichian (2008) claims that from the beginning of his reign Qaboos, like De Gaulle of France, has also had a certain idea for Oman that was expressed in his remarks as "Our principal aim is to restore the past glories of our country". Indeed, he managed to create a full-fledged modern state while preserving its unique culture. In addition, Qaboos has transformed Oman from a country that was isolated and struggling with internal and external conflicts to a peace and stability island that maintains good relations based on mutual respect and tolerance with all its neighbors and beyond.

3.1.2. Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah

Yusuf bin Alawi had been the longest served Foreign Minister in the Middle East region when he retired from his post as Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs in August 2020. Alawi had held this post since 1997; however, he had been steering the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1982 as the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. Only the title of the position was changed in 1997. Sultan Qaboos and Yusuf bin Alawi, had worked together for 38 years to establish the principles of Omani foreign policy.

Under his moderate and humble personality, Yusuf bin Alawi has had an interesting life story that stretches from being a rebel against Sultan Said to being a loyal aide of Sultan Qaboos. Takriti (2013) claimed that Yusuf bin Alawi had been one of the most important figures of Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF), that due to his strong ties with Egyptian authorities, he was appointed as the Head of DLF's Cairo office and represented the Front in many international conferences. However, in 1968, DLF convened its second congress and changed its name, aim, and means of the struggle (Worrall, 2014). The organization's name became the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG). Since then, the drive of the rebellion went to the hands of proxies of the Soviet bloc (Khalid, 2007), and it turned to be a breaking point in several terms.

After this transformation, the organization lost many of its founding members (Valeri, 2009) since they neither agreed to go under the Soviet influence nor adhered to the 'scientific socialism' doctrine. Alawi was one of them, and Takriti (2013, 263) further claims that in late 1969 Alawi and his associates tried to undermine the leftist wing in the Front with the slogan of "to defend religion against communist infiltration".

When Qaboos came to the throne in 1970, he approached the former Dhofari rebels with the policy of reconciliation and granted an amnesty to them (Kechichian, 1995). In this regard, Alawi met with Qaboos in 1970. Alawi must have believed in the new ruler's sincerity and vision for Oman; thus, he later eagerly contributed to Qaboos's development project.

In this context, Yusuf bin Alawi joined the Omani diplomatic service in 1970; after serving in Cairo and Beirut Embassies, he was appointed the Ambassador of Oman to Lebanon in 1973. After his meteoric rise in the Omani Foreign Ministry, he was tasked with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in 1982. Appointing a former rebel for one of the most crucial governmental posts firstly demonstrates Qaboos' successful policy of integration of Omani society, secondly his trust in Yusuf bin Alawi. Additionally, it is worth noting that during his DLF years, Alawi had gained diplomatic experience and established a personal network with authorities from some Arab countries, including Egypt and Kuwait, that might turn to be an advantage for him during his career in the Ministry. This experience of Alawi might also have had an impact on Qaboos's decision to choose him for such an important position.

During Qaboos's reign, the Sultan had held the title of Minister of Foreign Affairs; therefore, Alawi held the title of Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs. Accordingly, his scope of authority was mainly based on keeping the Sultan informed of other countries' international affairs and maintaining the Ministry's daily functions. In addition to these responsibilities, Alawi had jurisdiction over the opening and closing embassy in a country or appointing or withdrawing ambassadors or diplomatic personnel to/from abroad; however, it should be noted that these decisions were also bound to the Sultan's final approval (R. Omani official, personal communication, 2020).

Consequently, it can be claimed that Yusuf bin Alawi's impact on shaping the foreign policy orientation of Oman was limited. However, given his 38 years-long representation of Oman's foreign policy principles in various international arenas without any unveiled discordance with Sultan Qaboos, it can be said that his worldview and perception of international relations was in a high-level harmony with Qaboos' worldview and perception.

However, after Alawi's retirement, Sultan Haitham bin Tariq changed the Minister's title from Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs to Minister of Foreign Affairs, and he appointed former Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi to this post in August 2020. First comments from political analysts came in the direction that Sultan Haitham's administration model would be more institutionalized than his predecessor's personalized model (DeLozier, 2020). In this regard, it is expected that in this model Minister's role in the foreign policy decision-making process will enhance gradually.

3.1.3. Ministry of Foreign Affairs

By acknowledging a highly idiosyncratic decision-making system in Oman, in this part, rather than the Ministry's impact on shaping Omani foreign policy, its transformation with regards to its capability and capacity under Qaboos reign will be addressed. Indeed, Oman is not different from other monarchies in the Middle East regarding the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' impact on decision-making. In those countries with a highly-centralized decision-making system, Ministries of Foreign Affairs usually play a transmitter role between their states and other states through embassies and other diplomatic missions.

In this regard, under Qaboos reign, Omani foreign service had been mainly responsible for maintaining diplomatic relations with other countries, keeping the Minister and Sultan informed about the international relations of other states, and coordinating other Omani governmental units and ministries on foreign policy-related issues (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Oman (Mofa), 2020). Moreover, diplomats could have

prepared recommendation papers on foreign policy issues upon the request of the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court. The Ministry also has conducted consular affairs through its missions abroad. The only area in which the Ministry might have complete jurisdiction has been the issuance or refusal of the visas for diplomatic passport holders (R. Diplomat, personal communication, 2020).

After ascending to the throne, Sultan Qaboos founded the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its current form in 1970 intending to expand Oman's recognition throughout the region and beyond (Mofa, 2020). During the first years of the Ministry's establishment, a delegation consisting of few diplomats under the leadership of current Sultan Haitham's father and Qaboos' uncle Sayyid Tariq bin Taimur, the then Prime Minister, had strived for Oman's full membership to the United Nations and the Arab League and they reached their target in less than 16 months (Kechichian, 1995). After that, many countries have started to open diplomatic missions in Muscat. Today Oman has 60 diplomatic missions abroad, and there are 49 foreign embassies and consulate generals in Muscat (Mofa, 2020). Since 1970, the Ministry has gradually evolved from a boutique Ministry with few diplomats to a full-fledged and highly institutionalized Ministry of Foreign Affairs with an increasing number of skilled and well-educated diplomats.

Today, the Ministry has approximately 1200 diplomatic staff in the headquarter and abroad (R. Diplomat, personal communication, 2020). Although the male/female ratio among diplomats favors males, last years have witnessed an increasing number of female recruits. Furthermore, it should be noted that Hunaina Al Mughairy, the first-ever woman ambassador from an Arab country, served in Washington D.C. as Oman's Ambassador to the USA, one of the most prestigious positions for an Omani diplomat, between 2005 and 2020 ("Hunaina al-Mughairy," 2020). Indeed, this example is significant in two respects. Firstly, it has demonstrated Qaboos' vision of women and women's place in the workforce. Secondly, it constitutes a source of inspiration and encouragement for Omani women diplomats for their career planning.

In recent years, the recruitment process has been operated more transparently that candidates have applied online upon the announcement of open vacancies and then

they have passed through an oral and written exam in equal conditions. However, a challenge the Ministry has been facing is that since the private sector provides a more generous remuneration package for young Omanis with foreign language skills, they prefer to work in the private sector instead of the Foreign Ministry. Nevertheless, foreign language skills and higher education level among the current diplomatic staff of the Omani foreign service is pretty high thanks to Qaboos' encouraging higher education policy which has provided a scholarship to many Omani students for studying abroad. Furthermore, since 1991 the Diplomatic Institute under Foreign Ministry has been providing in-service training to newly joined diplomats and diplomats who posted abroad.

In conclusion, although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Oman has profoundly improved its capability and capacity and has realized a steady institutionalization, its impact on the foreign policy decision-making process has remained limited. The Ministry's low-profile role has most likely stemmed from the personalized decision-making system in which Sultan Qaboos has been the ultimate decision-maker. On the other hand, one could expect that the more the Omani Foreign Ministry and its cadres professionalize, the more their impact on the foreign policy-making process would enhance. Therefore, the Ministry's role in the foreign policy decision-making process is expected to increase in the coming period under the administration of Minister Badr Al Busaidi, who has been a career diplomat since 1989.

3.2. Strategic Culture

Strategic culture constitutes one of the most significant elements affecting Oman's foreign policy decision-making process. Al Rodhan (2015, para.2) well defines the strategic culture as "an attempt to integrate cultural considerations, cumulative historical memory and their influences in the analysis of states' security policies and international relations". Ripsman et al. (2016, 67) claim that strategic culture shaped the understanding and conception of foreign policy executives, elites, and even society at large. In this regard, strategic culture generates collective societal expectations and assumptions on whether strategic choices are acceptable or unacceptable. In so doing,

it shapes states' foreign policy behaviors and constrains their freedom of action (Ripsman et al., 2016, 67).

Neo-Classical Realists consider the effects of historical experiences, sets of values and beliefs, and nationalism among the components of strategic culture (Ripsman et al., 2016, 67-69). In this context, this research claims that Oman's strategic culture is composed of teachings of the Ibadi sect of Islam, Omani nationalism, and the legacy of its diplomatic history since 1970.

The strategic culture of Oman has gradually been constructed under Qaboos's reign. However, it has taken its current form in the 21st century. While some of its components, like Ibadism, have been a part of Omani culture for centuries, others like Omani nationalism have emerged recently. Furthermore, Omani independent foreign policy practices since 1970 have become another source of pride for Omani society and thus gave Omani foreign policy executives, particularly the Sultan, the responsibility of keeping on the same track.

3.2.1. Ibadism

Ibadism is a distinct sect of Islam and is usually categorized as neither Shi'ite nor Sunni (Babood, 2016; Lefebvre, 2010; Hoffman, 2012; Ghubash, 2006). Ibadism emerged after the Battle of Siffin in 657 CE as a branch of the Khawarij movement, which opposed the arbitration between Ali and Muawiyah on the selection of Caliph (Hoffman, 2012; Ghubash, 2006). However, many modern Ibadi scholars, particularly Omani Ibadis, do not accept this claim and consider it an insult to their sect (Hoffman, 2012, 3). Given the gap between the extremism of Kharijism and the moderation of Ibadism, it can be said that contemporary Ibadi scholars are right not to accept Kharijism as the origin of the Ibadi school. However, Ghubash (2006, 27) claims that historically the Ibadis split from the Khawarij movement after the Battle of Nahrawan between Caliph Ali and the Khawarij took place in 658 when the Khawarij were bitterly defeated. Since the Ibadis accepted the authority of neither Ummayad nor Abbasid Caliphs, they faced oppression during these periods in Basra. Therefore, they fled from oppression and removed the intellectual center of the Ibadi movement from

Basra to Oman (Ghubash, 2006,1). In Oman, they found high acceptance among Omanis.

Today, Oman is claimed to be the only country where Ibadism is the dominant sect of its population. It is said "claimed" because there is no available official data regarding the ratio of madhhabs among the Omani society. However, foreign scholars have made estimations on the distribution of sects in Oman. In this regard, Peterson (2004) and Valeri (2014), the two of the most referred scholars in Oman, estimate the percentage of Ibadis as 45 and 48 to 53, and the percentage of Sunnis as 50 and 45 to 49, respectively. Since Ibadism has many similarities with Sunni Islam and is also the sect of the ruling family of Oman, it is considered and reflected as the facade of the Islamic belief system in the Sultanate.

In this context, Ibadism in Oman is more than a sect; it is a school of thought and set of beliefs that shape Omani society. Omani society had been ruled through the Imamate system established according to the Ibadi teachings of Islam for centuries. According to Ghubash, the Imamate system is based on the following seven principles:

-the principles of consensus & contract, and consultation & allegiance,
-the principle of free election of the Imams,
-the Constitution,
-the Institution of the Imamate (Al majlis),
-the principle of independence of law and equality before the law,
-the law of zekah (legal alms)
-the suppression of the army in times of peace (2006, 7).

Ghubash (2006, 7) calls this system "Omani Islamic Democracy" and claims that this set of principles has created a "general will" in the Omani culture that helped to define the framework of Omani political culture. Although Oman's current political system is an absolute monarchy, the "general will" still appears in the Omani socio-culture. Even this "general will" constitutes a part of the current Omani strategic culture.

Consultation has always been at the core of the Ibadi decision-making system. Therefore, Omani society has taken part in the decision-making process of its state

throughout the centuries. Sultan Qaboos's success in state administration was to create formal and informal consultation mechanisms between his people and his government. He did it by establishing the Consultative Council (Majlis Al-Shura) and realizing Royal Tours to all corners of the country every year to hear his people's expectations, views, and frustrations by first account. On the other hand, although there is no available data in the literature regarding the efficiency of these consultation mechanisms on Oman's foreign policy decision-making process, it can be claimed that Qaboos's close contact with its people has created trust and respect for his internal and external policy decisions.

Ibadism is also known for its commendatory teachings on tolerance, peaceful co-existence with others, anti-extremism, finding amicable settlements with opponents, and so on (Babood, 2016). In this regard, once an Omani official, while explaining tolerance in Ibadi school in a personal contact said that they were as Ibadi Omanis could perform their prayers behind either Shi'ite or Sunni Imam, and added that this showed Ibadism's tolerance and respect to others (R. Omani Diplomat, personal communication, 2020). Oman's balanced foreign policy approach to Iran and Saudi Arabia as the two-sectarian-oriented foreign policy applying states of the region stems mainly from the impact of Ibadi teachings of tolerance and peaceful co-existence on its foreign policy.

On the other hand, Ibadi quietism that refuses to engage in any conflicts except in self-defense also significantly impacts the establishment of Oman's current foreign policy principles. In this context, the determined stance of Oman on not joining the Saudi-led coalition for waging war against the Houthis of Yemen can be considered an example of this impact. Furthermore, along with other strategic factors, this approach has made Oman, a reliable host for the secret talks between the Houthis and the US in 2015 and the indirect talks between Houthis and Saudi officials in 2019 (Al Jazeera, 2019).

Oman had been subjected to invasions by foreign powers several times throughout its history; thus, Omani Ibadis gave utmost importance to their independence and sovereignty and have not hesitated to fight for it when required. Ghubash counts the

principle of independence and sovereignty among "fundamental and unchanging principles of Omani history and culture" (2006, 2). Their separation from Ummayad and Abbasid states is considered an example of this feature (Ghubash, 2006). In this regard, it is possible to claim that Oman's current independent foreign policy stance has its roots in Ibadi teachings.

3.2.2. Omani Nationalism

Although Oman historically has been standing as the oldest independent political unity in the Arabian Peninsula, its national identity has been taking its current form since Qaboos ascended to the throne in 1970 (Peterson, 2019). Before that, Oman has had a tribal social structure. Therefore, subnational identities such as tribal, ethnic, or sectarian identities had prevailed over national identity. Moreover, these subnational identities had struggled with each other at times in the pre-Qaboos period. In this period, the country was called the "Sultanate of Muscat and Oman," which reflected its divided nature. On the other side, the Imamate of Oman was seeking international recognition of its independence in interior Oman with the support of some countries from the region like Saudi Arabia till 1970. Given this background, creating an Omani national identity that prioritizes being a citizen of the Sultanate of Oman constitutes another major achievement of Qaboos bin Said.

According to Peterson (2019, 8), during its long history, Omani identity has developed around some themes such as Ibadism, tribalism, and Arabness. However, Qaboos has managed to gather all these themes under Omani national identity. In his political system, Ibadism has constituted the brand of the Islamic belief system in Oman, the tribal system has been paid regard in the distribution of wealth, and the Arabness of the Omani state has been emphasized in the first article of Omani Basic Law. While establishing this system, Qaboos has never neglected any subnational identity or has not coerced his people to quit their subnational identities immediately.

On the contrary, he opted to gain his people's hearts and minds by implementing a colossal economic and social development march that provided the Omani nation with

high living standards thanks to the high oil revenues. Valeri best summarizes Qaboos's nation-building policy as:

> …the advent of a nation-state in Oman centered on the personality of the new ruler engaged with sub-national identities in order to maintain the old social order while depriving these identities of any potential for political harm to the new regime (2013, 180).

During this vertical development process called the Omani Renaissance, Qaboos has become the key figure and the father of the nation. Different from other Gulf countries, Omani society had witnessed territory expansion and losses from Africa to the Indian sub-continent throughout pre-Qaboos history. Due to these expansions and losses, it encountered the flow of migrants from different societies (Valeri, 2013, 181). Therefore, Oman's social structure has become highly cosmopolitan. Despite the hardships in creating national identity in this cosmopolitan society, the personality of Qaboos has been constructed as a binding and identifying factor for the Omani national identity (Valeri, 2013, 200). Valeri (2013, 179) explains the main aim of this nation-building policy as Qaboos's desire to place himself as the "natural sovereign" and the only person who could unite all the sects and ethnic groups living in Oman together.

Indeed, Qaboos's nation-building policy has been welcomed by the Omani society, demonstrating admiration and love for Qaboos has been considered the sign of Omani nationalism. Therefore, all segments of society have shown their admiration for Qaboos as if competing on every occasion. Valeri (2013, 200) defines this situation as the "competitive bidding of Omanity". In this regard, it is worth mentioning here as a personal observation that it was impressive to observe Omani people's joy and happiness when Sultan Qaboos returned from Germany after 8-months of treatment in April 2015. During this celebration, all streets were full of Omani people carrying Omani flags and motorcades by cars decorated with stickers of Qaboos's photos. It could be deduced from this observation that the joy Omanis showed during this celebration upon the return of Qaboos from his long-lasted treatment reflected the fear and anxiety Omanis felt during his absence for the stability of their country.

The impact of Omani nationalism in foreign policy decision-making can be evaluated from two aspects. Firstly, increasing awareness of Omani society's national identity has decreased Oman's vulnerability to foreign influence over identity politics. Secondly, as previously stated, respect and admiration for Qaboos' personality and policies have been at the center of Omani nationalism, thus as the top decision-maker of the country, Qaboos's both internal and foreign policy decisions have usually been welcomed by the Omani nation.

In the Middle East region, the heaven of sub-national identities, states with multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian social structures are subjected to foreign influence through identity politics. In this regard, Omani nationalism requiring loyalty first and foremost to the Omani state, its sultan, and the nation has impeded any foreign influence over sub-national identities. To keep this loyalty alive, Qaboos has pursued a neutral foreign policy that has not annoyed any sect, tribe, or ethnicity in Oman. Al Lawatiyya and Al Ajam communities have constituted conspicuous examples in this regard. Said families are tied to the Shia sect and have enjoyed considerable economic and political power before and after 1970 (Valeri, 2014, 183). However, they have very loose transnational networks with other Shi'a communities in the region (Valeri, 2013). Contrarily, these communities have competed to declare their loyalty to the Sultan and Omani nation for covering any political suspicions about them (Valeri, 2014, 197).

From the second perspective, Omani nationalism has created a general assumption among the Omani society on the rightness and infallibility of Sultan Qaboos in his domestic and foreign policy decisions that provided Qaboos with room for maneuver in his policies.

3.2.3. Legacy of Oman’s Diplomatic History Since 1970

Oman's diplomatic history during Sultan Qaboos's administration has been full of bold decisions, diplomatic achievements, secret negotiations, and silent initiatives. Consistency has been one of the most prominent features of Omani diplomacy during this period. Furthermore, what made the legacy of diplomatic history a part of strategic culture is the consistent foreign policy decisions Qaboos had taken for fifty years.

Sultan Qaboos altered his father's foreign policy orientation from isolation to active engagement with its neighbors and beyond when he came to the throne in 1970. He has pursued active, principled, and independent foreign policy without any severe deviation for fifty years. That rendered Qaboos and his country a respectable and reliable partner in the international arena in a short period. Furthermore, this respected position has provided international prestige for the Omani ruler and the Omani society in their engagements with other countries, be it commercial, cultural, or educational.

Indeed, when the young Sultan came to the throne, the country witnessed one of the most existential threats in its history. In southern Oman, namely the Dhofar region, there emerged rebellion against the state of isolation, suppression, and underdevelopment under Sultan Said's reign. The insurgency started at the tribal level in 1964 and then expanded gradually throughout the region (Worall, 2014). In 1965, all rebels gathered under the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) parallel to the Marxist revolution in neighboring South Yemen (Valeri, 2009).

In 1968, DLF changed its name, aim, and means of the struggle and started to be called the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG) (Worrall, 2014). Since then, the proxies of the Soviet bloc gained the drive of the rebellion, and it turned to be a breaking point in several terms (Khalid, 2007). After this transformation, the organization lost many of its founding members, such as Yusuf bin Alawi and Musallam bin Nufl (Ridout&Jones, 2015).

The transformation also affected the course of the insurgency internationally. In this regard, Britain, which had not taken the rebellion as such an existential threat for Oman before, started to increase its military involvement on the ground after the dynamics of the rebellion had changed dramatically. Likewise, Saudi Arabia changed its policy of supporting the Dhofari rebels and decided to take its part in the Sultan's side with Britain (Valeri, 2009). After Sultan Qaboos overthrew his father in 1970, the course of events went in Oman's favor because the new ruler had an ultimately different vision than his father. He immediately started the development process, intensified his diplomatic endeavors for gaining international recognition, and asked

for the support of neighboring countries in his struggle against the insurgency (Worrall, 2014). In this regard, Sultan Qaboos asked for military support from Iran and Jordan. Finally, thanks to the help of Britain and Iran, the insurgency was quelled in 1975. Sultan Qaboos officially announced the end of the war in December 1975 (Valeri, 2009).

Dhofar Rebellion has significantly impacted Qaboos's foreign policy vision and understanding (Kechichian, 1995). Although it was a bitter experience for Oman, it brought opportunities that Oman gained one of the most powerful states of the region, Iran, as an ally during the insurgency. Oman has maintained its close relations with Iran after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Iran's generous assistance in quelling the Dhofar insurgency has always been appreciated by Omanis and referred to as the backbone of current cordial relations between Oman and Iran. Furthermore, since the threat the Dhofari rebellion created expanded through the region, Oman drew the attention of the regional countries and paved the way to its recognition more promptly.

As Kechichian (1995) states, Qaboos has indicated his extra-ordinary foreign policy orientation even in the early times of his reign by committing that he would pursue specific foreign policy principles like non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, enhancing relations with Arab states, respect for international law, and the policy of non-alignment. So indeed, Qaboos has firmly implemented these principles and never hesitated to take sui generis foreign policy decisions during his half-century reign.

In this regard, Oman welcomed the Camp David Accords of 1978 and Egypt's peace agreement with Israel signed in 1979. Egypt was expelled from the Arab League after Camp David Accords, but Oman never cut its diplomatic relations with Egypt (Tran, 2019). Accordingly, Oman constantly supported the Oslo Accords signed between Israel and Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993 and 1995 and the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan in 1994. Oman has always defended the Palestinians' rights to live in peace and dignity in their independent and internationally recognized state with East Jerusalem as the capital and always backed the peace initiatives based on the afore-cited conditions. On the other hand, it has accepted Israel

as the reality for the Middle East region and thus did not hesitate to engage in some diplomatic initiatives with Israel. In this regard, Qaboos hosted the Israeli Prime Ministers Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres in 1994 and 1996, respectively, and brought Israeli and Palestinian delegations around the same table under the Middle East Desalination Research Center established in 1996 in Muscat (Kechichian, 1995).

In the first decade of his reign, even though Qaboos was in dire need of financial support from his neighboring countries, he didn't hesitate to make such bold decisions that contradicted his neighbors' foreign policies. His decisions were also indications of Oman's independent foreign policy orientation that has been implemented in the remaining four decades of Qaboos. Accordingly, even in his last years, Qaboos has maintained Oman's neutrality and the principle of seeking peaceful solutions to regional problems. In this context, Qaboos hosted Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in October 2018, and just a few days later, he hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Muscat. Qaboos's coherent policies throughout his reign have created a common acceptance and appreciation for Omani diplomacy among Omani society and the international arena. Therefore, there emerged few grievances on Qaboos's bold decisions either from the Omani community or abroad.

Qaboos's independent and bold foreign policy decisions did not just pertain to the Israel-Palestine conflict; Qaboos has taken every issue that destabilizes the Middle East region with the same understanding. Oman's positions in the Syrian and Yemeni Civil Wars since 2011 and 2014, respectively, can be explained by the continuation of its policy of not intervening in the internal affairs of other states that Oman opted to pursue after the regime had changed in Iran 1979.

Likewise, Oman's neutral stance, as well as its support for Kuwait's peace initiatives during the first and second Gulf rifts in 2014 and 2017, respectively, between Qatar on one side and the Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt on the other, can be explained in the same line with its neutral stance during Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988, and its support for UN Resolutions to end the long-lasted war between two countries.

As a result, Omani diplomatic history under Qaboos's reign from 1970 to 2020 has witnessed the implementation of bold, independent, consistent, and principled foreign policy decisions. All these experiences helped create common consent and expectations among Omani society and the international arena regarding Qaboos's foreign policy decisions. In other words, Oman's consistent diplomatic initiatives and their successful outcomes have conduced to continuing these diplomatic roles, which both internal and external actors have welcomed. As an integral part of Omani strategic culture, the legacy of Omani diplomatic history has played a prominent role in foreign policy decision-making in Oman.

In conclusion to this chapter, the perception of Sultan Qaboos and the strategic culture of Oman have impacted the foreign policy-making process, including the perception of the systemic stimuli, decision-making, and policy implementation during Qaboos's era. In this regard, Qaboos's personality, worldview, beliefs, and experiences have impacted the foreign policy-making process from the beginning as all incoming information about the outside world passed through the cognitive filters of the Sultan (Ripsman et al., 2016, 62). However, in authoritarian regimes, a leader's role in the foreign policy-making process goes beyond the perception and could affect the whole process of decision-making and policy implementation. Therefore, Qaboos's perception and personality have played an essential role in shaping Oman's foreign policy-making at every stage. On the other hand, by creating collective expectations and assumptions, strategic culture could shape the strategic understanding of political leaders, societal elites, and even society. These collective expectations and assumptions gradually turn into entrenched beliefs, constrain the state's foreign policy behaviors and freedom of action (Ripsman et al., 2016, 67). In other words, these dynamics have become interconnected while impacting the foreign policy-making process in Oman. Therefore, to analyze the foreign policy of Oman for a certain period, all dynamics should be considered together within the framework of limitations of the international system.

CHAPTER 4

COMPLEMENTARY DYNAMICS OF OMAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

In the first part of this chapter, the third intervening variable of NCR, the impacts of state-society relations on Oman's foreign policy making process, will be addressed under two subtitles as tribal social structure and expatriates' influence on foreign policy. In the second part, Oman's geopolitics and its hydrocarbon-based economy will be analyzed in terms of their limitations imposed and opportunities provided for Oman's foreign policy-making process. Although the latter two dynamics can be categorized as neither intervening nor systemic variables of the NCR, they can create constraints and provide opportunities for Oman in its foreign policy interactions within the international system. From this point of view, they are classified as "structural modifiers" that is defined by Ripsman et al. as "a class of material variables at the level of the international system or regional subsystem but which are not structural." (2016, 40).

4.1. State-Society Relations

State-society relations constitute another dynamic that has influenced foreign policy decision-making in Oman under Qaboos's administration. Neoclassical Realism addresses the state-society ties according to the essence of the interplay between the state and the several economic and societal groups (Ripsman et al., 2016, 70-71). In other words, it looks at the degree of harmony and the degree of the unconformity between the state and society on foreign policy decisions of the leaders.

As mentioned before, during Qaboos's term, the political power was centralized in the Sultan's hand. Sultan Qaboos as the founder of modern Oman has become a keystone for the Omani national identity (Valeri, 2014, 185). Therefore, the interaction between

the state and the society in Oman was first based on allegiance to the Sultan. On the other hand, the Omani people's satisfaction and consent on the state's internal and external policies were equally significant for the Sultan to maintain the regime's stability. That is to say, the state-society relations in Oman have had two facets the contentment of the society and loyalty to the Sultan that have depended on each other to survive the system. In this context, Sultan Qaboos has attached special attention to the voice of tribal society and a large amount of expatriate population while making some foreign policy decisions.

4.1.1. Tribal Social Structure

Tribes constitute the fundamental elements of the Omani societal structure. Each Omani belongs to a tribe and takes the name of this tribe as a family name. In this context, when an Omani says their name and family name, it is understood which tribe s/he belongs to. Since Oman witnessed many migrations flows throughout its history, Omani tribes vary in ethnic and/or sectarian origins. As mentioned earlier, under the Nationalism section, these tribes have shown their loyalty first and foremost to the Sultan Qaboos (Valeri, 2013, 200). They have mostly pushed their tribal identity to the background and identified themselves primarily as Omani citizen. However, tribes are the reality of Omani society and cannot be ignored politically, socially, and economically.

Peterson (2007) classifies tribal structure in the Gulf countries as ruling families, merchant families, and tribes headed by Shaikhs. In a way, this classification is valid for Oman as well. Qaboos did not designate an official heir during his term, and the relatively small ruling Al Said family was not that effective in politics as in the case of other Gulf states. Instead, Qaboos has established an idiosyncratic ruling system based on distributing wealth and government posts among tribes and merchant families while centralizing power in his hand. Nevertheless, some members of the Al Busaidi family that came from the same descendants as the Al Said family have held some prominent ministerial positions during the Qaboos era.

In the earlier Qaboos reign, Oman was financially limited and needed internal and external support for economic recovery and Qaboos's development plan. In this critical junction, merchant families like Al Zubair, Al Zawawi, Al-Sultan, and many more stood by Qaboos in his endeavors to unite the Omani society and transform the country into a modern state. Some prominent figures from these families have also held important political positions like deputy prime minister for economic and financial affairs, minister of commerce and industry, special advisor to Sultan Qaboos (Peterson, 2007, 32). By the way, it is worth mentioning that in the post-oil period, those merchant families have enlarged their businesses with the support they received from the Omani government in return for their help in the hard times of Oman. They have opened up new ventures with local and foreign partners and provided employment opportunities for Omanis. In this regard, it can be claimed that the relationship between merchant families and the state has gradually improved based on mutual benefits.

Regarding the Omani merchant families' impacts on the foreign policy decision-making process, it could be claimed that they supported Qaboos' foreign policy orientation based on the protection of the peaceful status quo (Peterson, 2007, p.32). Accordingly, Qaboos has pursued a steady and proactive foreign policy prioritizing economic cooperation with many countries. In other words, by signing free trade agreements with the US and some other countries and bilateral agreements with many countries on economic cooperation like investment promotion and prevention of double taxation, and joining international organizations like World Trade Organization, Qaboos has cleared the way for the Omani merchant families in their businesses abroad.

Tribes headed by shaikhs have constituted another group in Omani society that showed political presence in Omani state institutions. As said before, Omani tribes have varied in their ethnic and religious origin; however, this situation has never impeded the functions of Qaboos's centralized and idiosyncratic ruling system. On the contrary, Qaboos's strategy was based on distributing wealth and government posts among the tribes. Therefore, these tribes have not attempted to challenge the regime since their survival depended on the system's survival (Valeri, 2014, 185).

However, concurrently with other Middle East countries, Oman experienced widespread protests in 2011 and 2012; although not targeting the regime, it constituted the most challenging internal threat for Qaboos's government since the Dhofar rebellion was crushed in 1976. As mentioned above, the Omani government's relations with merchant families have improved mutually, and those families have become the ones who benefited most from the Qaboos development stride. Thus, this created some disturbance among other local tribes whose members were less fortunate in reaching high standard education and employment opportunities (Valeri, 2014, 203). Indeed, Oman's unemployment rate was around 15 percent in 2012 and constituted the second-highest unemployment rate among GCC member states after Bahrain, though the state did not officially announce (Worall, 2012).

In this regard, unlike the other countries in the region, the protests in Oman mainly stemmed from economic grievances rather than sectarian or ethnic motives (Valeri, 2014, 202). The protesters' key demands were better wages, job opportunities, financial amelioration, and efficient struggle against claimed corruptions of high-level officials, including ministers (Valeri, 2014, 202). Qaboos, while appeasing the protestors by implementing economic reforms like creating new job opportunities in the public sector, increasing the minimum wage, providing a monthly stipend to registered job-seekers, he also discharged some ministers who were allegedly involved in corruption cases (Oman shuffles cabinet amid protests, 2011).

On the other hand, the protesters' political and social demands should not be overlooked since their aim of increasing the Consultative Council's power has affected the decision-making system itself. In October 2011, Qaboos expanded the scope of authority of the Shura Council and increased its legislative power, with some amendments to the Basic Law (Vaidya, 2011). In this context, the Shura Council was empowered to approve or amend the draft laws received from the Council of Ministers. Furthermore, these amendments gave the Shura Council the interpellation authority by which they could call the ministers to the Shura Council to inform the Council members on specific issues. However, it is proper to mention here that since Qaboos officially held the Minister of Foreign Affairs position, Minister Responsible for

Foreign Affairs could not be called to Shura Council for interpellation for any reason. The same was true for the Finance and Defense Ministries as well.

While realizing stimulating reforms to meet the protesters' demands, Qaboos's government, on the other hand, harshly suppressed the demonstrations and arrested hundreds of protesters to prevent the spread of the protests (Valeri, 2014, p. 202).

Furthermore, to discredit the protests, the Omani government also alleged foreign influence in protests by claiming the Emirati influence on Sohar protests and Saudi influence over Dhofar protests (Valeri, 2014, 203). On the other hand, as Worall (2012, 108) emphasized, one of the most remarkable features of protests in Oman, which differentiated them from others across the region, was that they never demanded the overthrow of Sultan Qaboos.

After all, since the character of interaction between tribes and Omani state institutions was based on allegiance, respect, and trust for Sultan Qaboos, it provided confidence and room for maneuver for Sultan as the top decision-maker in the foreign policy decision-making process. Furthermore, in the literature, there could not be found any information about protesters' demands or disturbances about foreign policy issues even during the widespread demonstrations in 2011 and 2012. In this regard, it could be deduced that either Omani society did not prioritize foreign policy or deferred to Sultan on foreign policy matters. For this research, the second option is more optimal from the NCR perspective to explain the impacts of Omani society's relations with the state on the foreign policy decision-making process.

4.1.2. Impacts of Expatriates on Foreign Policy Making Process in Oman

Like other Gulf monarchies, Oman has gradually become a second home for a remarkable number of the expatriate population in the 21st century. To clarify, the expatriate population in Oman has increased 113 percent in ten years between 2010 and 2020 (Expat population increases 113 percent from 2010, 2020). Likewise, the number of expatriates stood at 623 571 in 2000, and it reached its peak at 2,123,928 in April 2017 (National Center for Statistics and Information, 2021). Furthermore, the

ratio of the expatriate population in the total population of Oman increased from 23,9 percent in 2003 to 36 percent in 2009 (De Bel-Air, 2015). Expatriates reached almost half of the population in 2017 as the percentage stood at 45,9 (Omanization leads to further drop in expat numbers, 2019).

The expatriate population in Oman is overwhelmingly from the Indian subcontinent, so Indians, Bangladeshis, and Pakistanis have constituted the majority of expatriates. Among them, Indians have been the largest and the wealthiest expatriate community in Oman. In this context, the number of Indians reached 766,735 by mid-2017 (Gulf Labor Markets and Migration, 2017). In line with the size and prosperity of their population, Indians could be regarded as the most influential expatriate community in Oman under Qaboos's reign. In that, the role of Omani citizens of Indian origin could not be ignored since they have played a significant role in the development process of Oman since 1970.

Indeed, some Indian merchants have undertaken commercial activities in Oman for centuries. After Qaboos came to the throne, he granted citizenship to some of these Indian merchant families in return for their support in Oman's development process. To exemplify, the founder of Khimji Ramdas company migrated to Oman from India in 1870 for commercial purposes (Parikh, 2013). After 1970, Qaboos granted citizenship to the great-grandson of Khimji Ramdas, and the company has gradually become one of the wealthiest and most influential family businesses in Oman in this period (Parikh, 2013). Furthermore, in the first decades of Qaboos's reign, Oman has allowed many skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled Indian immigrants to overcome the lack of Omani labor force in a wide range of professions, including doctors, nurses, engineers, business people, accountants, academics, and workers.

Although the number of Bangladeshis in Oman has surpassed the Indians from time to time, Pakistanis could be regarded as the second influential expatriate community in Oman since they have had a deep-rooted relationship with Oman. Like Indians, the interaction between Omanis and Pakistanis has dated back for centuries. In 1792, the Gwadar, a port city of today's Pakistan, was granted to the then Omani Sultan by the governor of Baluchistan, and Oman ruled it till Sultan Said, Qaboos's father, sold the

Gwadar to the Pakistani Government in return for 3 million sterling in 1958 (Peterson, 2016, 87-88). Furthermore, during the reign of Sultan Said, Balushi people were recruited from Gwadar for the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). Although statistics were not revealed officially, there has been a general opinion among scholars that Omanis of Baluchi origin have continued to constitute a significant part of the SAF and Oman Police during Qaboos's reign (Peterson, 1995, 229; Valeri, 2014, 190).

Although expatriates were welcomed to fill the lack of Omani workforce in the first half of the Qaboos's reign, the gradual increase in the number of the expatriate population in Oman has caused some resentment among Omani society in parallel with the increasing unemployment problem (Worall, 2012, 100). Thus, during demonstrations in 2011 and 2012, particularly in Sohar, protesters targeted the Lulu hypermarket as one of the most significant hypermarkets of Oman, which is owned and operated by Indians (Worall, 2012, 100).

Given their considerable proportion of Oman's population and their relative economic contribution to the Omani development process, the impacts of expatriate communities on Oman's foreign policy towards their country of origin have been an undeniable reality. On the one hand, these communities have constituted the human bond between Oman and their country of origin to enhance bilateral relations. On the other hand, they could become a restrictive factor for Oman's foreign policy decision-making process on issues concerning their country of origin.

In this regard, while Qaboos has enhanced his country's relations with expatriates' home countries by benefiting from this human bond, he avoided reacting to those countries' internal policies and international relations. In this respect, during the recent escalations between India and Pakistan over Jammu Kashmir, after the Indian parliament ended the autonomy of Kashmir in August 2019, Oman, together with Kuwait and Qatar, remained silent and avoided issuing a public statement on the issue (Cafiero, 2019). The spillover potential of the violence among Indians and Pakistanis in the Omani soils has constituted a significant factor from the security perspective behind this policy of Qaboos.

Indeed, Oman demonstrated its firm stance towards any spillover effect of Indian-Pakistani disputes in its soils in the 1990s. In this regard, although Oman officially reacted after the Babri Masjid in Ayodha was sacked by Hindu extremists in 1992, it did not allow some Pakistanis to protest in front of the Indian Embassy in Muscat and deported them from Oman immediately (Kechichian, 1995, 233). Therefore, it could be claimed that the growing number of Indian and Pakistani expatriate communities in Oman in the 21st century added a security dimension to Oman's foreign policy towards these countries.

On the other hand, it was not the first time that Oman approached the Indian-Pakistani dispute impartially. In this regard, even in the first years of Qaboos's reign, unlike most Arab states, Oman used abstain vote for Bangladesh's membership to the UN (Kechichian,1995, 225). Kechichian (1995, 225) interpreted Oman's this act as voting for its principles and claimed that Oman's vote gave a clue about its prospective behaviors in the international arena. Furthermore, according to Kechichian (1995, 225), Oman has always considered the disputes between India and Pakistan a bilateral concern and thought it should be resolved peacefully by the two sides without any third-party intervention. Nevertheless, Oman did not refrain from offering its good offices and calling parties to find political solutions on various occasions (GCC urges Pakistan, India to end tension, 2002).

To sum up, Qaboos has ruled Oman with his idiosyncratic ruling system for almost fifty years. During these years, he managed to unite his people around respect and allegiance to his personality and, accordingly, his policies. On the other hand, he has never distanced himself from his people and kept the formal and informal communication and consultation channels always open with the Omani society. That provided Qaboos with the opportunity to observe the reactions of his people on his internal and external policies. In other words, the essence of the interaction between state and society in Oman has two pillars, first allegiance to the Sultan and, second, the contentment of the Omani society on state's policies. These two pillars depended on each other to survive the system.

Consequently, while the tribal society has supported and respected Qaboos foreign policy orientation in the 21st century to protect the peaceful status quo, the increasing proportion of expatriate community among the overall population of Oman has played a restrictive role in Oman's foreign policy decisions towards the home countries of these communities

4.2. Geopolitics

As the Middle Eastern country, Oman differs from other countries of the region because of its distinctive geostrategic position that controls the gate of the Arabian/Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, with Iran, stands across the Indian subcontinent, shares land borders with Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Kaplan (2013) identifies the geostrategic position of Oman as one of the most critical in the Middle East that it stands in the middle of the Indian subcontinent, Africa, and Middle East and holds the point which controls the passage through the Strait of Hormuz, the world's busiest strait in terms of oil shipment. This geostrategic position has provided opportunities and brought some restrictions to Oman's foreign policy decision-making process during Qaboos reign.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that Oman has topographically different features consisting of approximately 309.000 km² of total lands from its neighborhood (Metz, 1994, 259). In this regard, Oman is surrounded by the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman on its shores and the Hajar Mountains and the Rub Al Khali (Empty Quarter) desert from its northeast to northwest. Rub Al Khali and Al Hajar Mountains constitute a natural security barrier between Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE (Metz, 1994, 259).

In this section, the impacts of the Sultanate’s geopolitics on its foreign policy decision-making process will be analyzed from three perspectives: Firstly, Oman’s position as the co-controller of the only gateway to the Gulf with Iran will be addressed. Secondly, Oman’s location in the mid of Africa and the Indian subcontinent, which has provided it with the prospect of being an active logistic hub and important military base, will be

analyzed. Lastly, the impacts of fragile and conflict-ridden neighborhood on its foreign policy decision-making will be discussed.

The Strait of Hormuz is geographically located between Oman and Iran and constitutes the only maritime gateway of the most Gulf littoral states and connects the Persian/Arabian Gulf to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. The narrowest point of the Strait between Oman and Iran is 33 km wide. Because of its strategic position, the Strait of Hormuz has been subjected to a struggle of supremacy between powers of the time throughout history. After large amounts of oil were discovered in the region, the importance of the Strait has increased dramatically. Particularly after the sanctions on Iran has been lifted in January 2016, the flows of oil and oil products through the Strait of Hormuz increased remarkably. The amount of oil flow in 2018 reached 21 million barrels per day which corresponded one-third of global seaborne traded oil (US Energy Information Administration, 2019). Furthermore, in 2020, more than one-fourth of global liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade passed through the Strait of Hormuz (Ratcliffe, Lee, & Blas, 2021).

Undoubtedly, the Strait of Hormuz has been of capital importance for the two controllers of the Strait, Iran, and Oman in terms of their security and economic survival. In this regard, Iran's total oil exports and 80% of its foreign trade have been carried through this Strait (Jafari-Valdani, 2012, 34). Likewise, the Strait of Hormuz has constituted the only gateway for Oman's maritime business with other littoral states of the Gulf region (Jafari-Valdani, 2012, 34). Furthermore, it is worth noting that all shipping lanes through the Strait of Hormuz fell into Oman's territorial waters (Kechichian, 1995, 87). However, Oman thought that the safety of the Strait lanes should have been under international responsibility that required close cooperation with littoral states, particularly Iran (Kechichian, 1995, 87).

On the other hand, the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran and the US and Iran made the Strait more vulnerable for any military confrontation. Although Iran has threatened the international arena, particularly the US, for blocking the Strait for free passage several times, it has never attempted such an act till now. Mohseni-Cheraglou (2020) claimed that China and other East Asian countries like Japan, India, Singapore,

have become much more dependent on the oil passing through this Strait than the US in the second decade of the 21st century, and Iran has viewed China as a significant partner due to its increasing economic and political ties with this country despite the US sanctions; therefore, Iran's such possible action could be evaluated as implausible for Iran and could harm its relations with China.

Given this fragile environment around the Strait of Hormuz and Iran's repeated threats for closing the Strait unilaterally, Oman has chosen to cooperate with Iran to establish and maintain peace and security in its region. As Kechichian (1995, 65) remarks, since Qaboos came to the throne in 1970, one of his principal strategic goals was to maintain the Strait of Hormuz's control and thus the role of one of the two administrators of the only gateway of the Persian/Arabian Gulf. Kechichian (1995, 65) further adds that Oman's relations with neighboring countries under Qaboos's reign were guided by this principle goal.

This position undoubtedly has provided some opportunities along with posing some restrictions for Oman. Firstly, it helped to attract the special attention of the US to Oman. That corresponded with Oman's need for support in providing security of the free passage through the Strait. Thus, Oman welcomed the US military presence in the region. By signing a facilities access agreement in 1980 with the US and extended the term of agreements every ten years, Oman has allowed the use of Omani military facilities by the US forces (Katzman, 2021,14).

On the other hand, Oman's privileged relations with the US have not impeded Oman from maintaining good relations with Iran. Current Foreign Minister, the then Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Oman, Badr Al Busaidi explains the impact of Oman's geostrategic position as one of the co-controllers of the Strait of Hormuz on his country's foreign policy with the following sentences: "This is very obvious in Oman's case, where the basic geostrategic reality of our position at the Straits of Hormuz ties us immediately into large global structures involving industrialized economic growth and energy demand, as well as maritime security" (Al Busaidi, 2005, 258). Furthermore, Al Busaidi (2005, 258) well explained his countries position among the US and Iran as follows:

> …the presence of American power in the Gulf region does not force Oman to follow the American line and adopt a hostile stance towards Iran (for example). But it does mean that we have to conduct our relations with Iran in a context framed (to some extent) by American hostility to Iran, and by Iran's complex responses to that hostility. We make our own choices: in this case we continue to develop and enhance our relations with Iran, at least in part in order that we might exercise some reverse influence as regard the United States, and encourage some moderation of the underlying hostility and suspicion.

Along with Qaboos's feelings of gratitude to the Iranian Shah for his support in quelling the Dhofar Rebellion during the 1970s, Oman has also believed that cooperating with Iran was a benefit of all countries of the region for their security and stability. In other words, Oman has recognized Iran as an undeniable reality for the region and thus thought that by excluding Iran from regional security arrangements, the fully operative regional security arrangement would not be possible (Al Zubair, 2017, 32). To this end, despite its concerns about Iran's regional ambitions and intentions after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 took place, Oman became the first Arab Gulf state to send a delegation to the new Iranian regime and agreed on the continuation of good neighborly relations based on the signed agreements with the previous regime (Kechichian, 1995, 101). Furthermore, in the last decades of the 20th century, Qaboos has achieved to stay neutral in the regional crises in which Iran has been apart. When it comes to the 21st century, Qaboos's neutral stance and long-standing relationship with Iran has panned out and rendered Oman a reliable back-channel for the Western countries, particularly the US, in communicating with Iran for many reasons. After practicing in helping the release of Western nationals from Iran, Oman's facilitating role in reaching the historic nuclear deal between the P5+1 and Iran has constituted the most striking example of Oman's consistent foreign policy orientation during Qaboos's era.

In this regard, it can be claimed that Oman's geostrategic position at the Strait of Hormuz has provided Oman with a room for maneuver in its policies towards Iran and the US. The role of go-between Iran and the West, particularly the US or Iran and the SA, has come up as a natural result of this geostrategic position of Oman.

Another significant feature of Oman's geostrategic position, which has impacted its foreign policy decision-making during Qaboos's era, is that, unlike its GCC allies, most of its coastline stands across the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Lefebvre (2010) well expressed this position of Oman as being closer to India and Pakistan than the GCC states located in the north of the Persian/Arabian Gulf. Oman's geographic vicinity to the Indian subcontinent and Africa have had advantages for Oman from two aspects. First, being outside of the Persian/Arabian Gulf, besides controlling the Gulf entrance, has meant that Oman has been less vulnerable to any security crisis inside the Gulf. Secondly, Oman's position as halfway between Africa and the Indian Subcontinent rendered Oman more strategic in international trade.

In other words, while enjoying the prestige of being one of the two controllers of the Strait of Hormuz, Oman has also enjoyed the advantage of being outside of the Gulf both from the security and oil trade perspective (Kaplan, 2014). By acknowledging the importance of this position, Qaboos has invested in establishing and developing full-fledged ports on the shores of the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, mainly Sohar, Duqm, Muscat, and Salalah Ports. These ports, particularly Duqm Port, have been attracting many foreign countries, including China, the US, the UK, and Iran, for military and commercial purposes. In this context, China has started to build China-Oman Industrial Park in Duqm Special Economic Zone to attract approximately 10 billion US Dollars worth of investment by 2022 (Chinese investors to build an industrial park at Oman's Duqm port, 2016). The US has expanded the scope of its "facilities access agreement" with Oman in 2019 by adding Ports of Duqm and Salalah to the agreement for the use of US forces (Katzman, 2021). Likewise, the UK has reportedly signed MoU with Oman in 2016 to establish a military base near the Port of Duqm (Katzman, 2021,14). In September 2020, the UK's Defense Secretary announced that the UK made further investments in its logistic hub at Duqm Port that would triple the current base in Duqm (Defence Secretary announces investment in strategic Omani port, 2020).

Along with the interests shown by global powers to the Ports of Oman, regional countries like Iran and India also has demonstrated their interest in these Ports. In this context, during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Modi in February 2018, India and

Oman signed an annexure to the MoU on Military Cooperation which was signed in 2005 and renewed in 2016 (Roy, 2018). It is reported that by this annex to the existing MoU, India got the right to access the Port of Duqm for military use and logistic hub (Roy, 2018). Likewise, Iran has also taken on an interest in developing projects in these ports. In this regard, Iran and Oman signed an MoU in 2016 to develop a $200 million worth joint project to establish a car production plant in Duqm Special Economic Zone (Kothaneth, 2016). Katzman claims that Iran might have used this project as an opportunity "to interact with the global economy" (2021, 10).

Indeed, what attracted the foreign countries to invest in or use these ports as military facilities, was, of course, first their geostrategic positions. However, Oman's internal stability and peaceful foreign policy approach consistently maintained under Qaboos's reign have rendered Oman a reliable partner to cooperate with.

The third component of Oman's geopolitics which has an impact on its foreign policy decision-making is its neighborhood and location in the Middle East region. Oman has total 1561 km long land boundaries with Saudi Arabia (658 km), The United Arab Emirates (609 km) and Yemen (294 km) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021). Situated at one of the most volatile and conflict-ridden region of the world, Oman tried to avoid from source of tensions and conflicts and pursued a neutral foreign policy line since Qaboos came to the throne.

Oman has been experiencing limitations along with opportunities of its geopolitical position in the Arabian Peninsula between two rival states of the region, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran, on its foreign policy towards Yemen. On the one side, Saudi Arabia has recently increased its political and economic pressure on Oman to take Oman to its side on Yemen (Lons, 2018). On the other side, Oman's relations with Iran have expanded to the security field that they have been conducting annual joint military exercises in the Strait of Hormuz since 2014 (Lons, 2018). However, by keeping the memory of the bitter experiences of the Dhofar Rebellion with its foreign connections in his mind, Qaboos has approached the ongoing civil war in neighboring Yemen with caution and maintained its neutral foreign policy by rejecting to join the Saudi-led coalition on their war against Houthis of Yemen. As mentioned in the previous

chapters, in so doing, Oman has mainly targeted to protect its territories from any spillover effect of the turmoil in Yemen.

In other words, by maintaining a neutral stance and balancing foreign policy between Saudi Arabia and Iran, even though it has been getting harder under pressure from two sides, Oman has tried to limit restrictions its geopolitical position imposed on itself. Furthermore, under the Qaboos administration, Oman has benefited from its other geopolitical feature, as addressed above, by attracting other countries' attention to its ports on the Arabian Sea to cope with these pressures and secure its economic independence (Lons, 2018).

As highly engaged in the Yemen conflict and being one of the ardent supporters of the Qatar blockade, the relations between the UAE and Oman have got tensed up recently because Oman has maintained its independent and neutral foreign policy orientation on Yemen civil war and Qatar blockade. In fact, the discontent of the UAE and other GCC states about Oman's independent foreign policy has arisen after Oman hosted the secret talks between the US and Iran in 2013 and did not inform its GCC allies of these talks (Lons, 2018). However, this discontent has never turned into an overt tension between Oman and its GCC allies, it has rather found voice in the meetings behind the doors. Nevertheless, it has also shown itself in the form of economic pressures like postponement of the deals and long truck queues on the Oman-SA and Oman-UAE borders stemming from the bureaucratic barriers (Lons, 2018).

Given such kinds of pressures from the SA and the UAE and the example of Saudi-led blockade on Qatar in which one of the accusations was Qatar's relations with Iran, Oman has felt unnerved about any possible action that these countries could take towards Oman by using the same accusations (Babood, 2017). Thus, Qaboos has believed that escalation of this row among its GCC allies could harm the GCC as an institution that has been regarded as a critical player in providing stability in the Arabian Peninsula by the Sultanate. In this context, Oman, on the one hand, has assisted Qatar to overcome the economic effects of this blockade; on the other hand,

it has supported every initiative led by Kuwait and the US for the permanent solution of this row among member states of the GCC.

To sum up, Oman's geostrategic position has constituted a significant factor in shaping its foreign policy orientation during Qaboos's era. Oman's main concerns stemming from its geostrategic position have been related to security matters. In this context, in the earlier of the first decade of his rule, Qaboos has believed in the importance of establishing regional security mechanisms including all littoral states of the Persian/Arabian Gulf without foreign interference and supported all the initiatives in this regard. However, later in that decade, in the light of regional developments like the Iranian Revolution and Iraq's rivalry with Iran and Saudi Arabia over regional hegemony, Qaboos comprehended that there would have been impossible to reach common ground among all littoral states of the Gulf on security matters thus separate agreements could have been made with Iran and Iraq, but another effort should have been made to bring Arab Gulf monarchies together (Kechician, 1995, 116). Hence, upon the Qaboos's initiative to establish a $100 million Common Defense Fund, Arab Gulf monarchies achieved to reach common ground on security matters and concluded a series of bilateral security agreements with each other (Kechichian, 1995, 117). However, even after these agreements, Qaboos could not feel sure about the security of the Straits and became the first Arab Gulf State to sign an agreement with the US for allowing the US forces to use its facilities (Katzman, 2021, 2).

In the 21st century, Oman has remained stick to its foreign policy on establishing a security structure that serves the common interests of all countries which economically and strategically engaged with the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Oman, 2021). In this regard, Oman has revised and renewed the Facilities Access Agreement with the US in 2010 and 2019 (Katzman, 2020, 14). Furthermore, as mentioned above, Oman has also made a deal with the UK and India in 2016 and 2018 respectively to allow their forces to use the Port of Duqm and Salalah. On the other hand, Oman has enhanced its cooperation with Iran on the security and defense field that regularly has held joint military friendship committee meetings and conducted annual joint military drills in the Gulf of Oman.

Consequently, the geopolitics of Oman has always been one of the determinants of its foreign policy. In other words, as Valeri (2014) underlines, Omani authorities have perceived any instability in its region as a threat to Oman's internal stability. Therefore, Qaboos has always emphasized the undeniable reality of Oman's geostrategic position and accordingly determined Oman's peace and consensus-oriented foreign policy approach, which rendered Oman "friends to all, enemy to none" (Funsch, 2015, 166).

4.3. Hydrocarbon-Based Economy

According to NCR, energy resources are accepted as an element of national power (Ripsman et al. l, 44). Cesnakas (2010, 47) claims that as NCR focuses on material power and emphasizes the significance of the domestic structure of states and leaders' perception of the international system, it provides convenient avenues for analysis of impacts of energy resources in foreign policy. Furthermore, Cesnekas (2010, 48) asserts that since the energy sector was controlled more by government in nondemocratic states, they could use the energy power by quickly and efficiently converting it into state power to maximize their interests abroad (p.48). According to Luft and Korin (2009, 9), energy producer countries "seek security of demand – the assurance that their production will be purchased at a fair price over a long term, so that national budgets can anticipate a steady and predictable revenue flow.". In this context, in the first two decades of the 21st century, since oil supply has increased and global oil prices have become more fragile, oil-producing countries, including Oman, have attached utmost importance to the long-term trade partnerships with importing countries.

Oman's economy has become heavily dependent on hydrocarbon revenues that have constituted almost half of its national income and 70 percent of its budget revenue in the 21st century. Indeed, commercial quantities of oil in Oman were first discovered in 1962; its export was started in 1967 (Funsch, 2015, 118). Since then, oil revenues have gradually become the mainstay of Oman's economy. Oman's proven oil reserves stood at 4.84 billion barrels by the end of 2019 (Oman's oil reserves at 4.84bn barrels, gas at 23.8 TCF, 2020). Though its reserves are modest compared with other oil-rich

monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula, Qaboos, during his reign of 50 years, has transformed his country from an underdeveloped state to a modern state thanks to this oil revenues. Since the time horizon for these reserves has been projected to 25-30 years, Qaboos has acknowledged the importance of diversification of the economy from his early times and started to invest in non-oil sectors like industry, tourism, agriculture, and fisheries (Babood, 2016). On the other side, the timely discovery of natural gas reserves has relieved the Omani administration's mind in terms of future economic planning.

In this context, while approaching the 21st century, the massive discovery of natural gas reserves in Oman has added fresh momentum to the Omani economy. Since its oil reserves are limited and oil prices have followed a fluctuating trend in the second decade of the 21st century, Oman has focused on developing the natural gas sector to compensate for the deficit of oil revenues in the period ahead. In this context, natural gas production has increased from 8.60 million tons in 2017 to 10.7 million tons per year in 2019 (Fairbanks, 2020). Furthermore, Oman has gradually uncovered a substantial amount of natural gas reserves which reached 23.8 trillion cubic feet (TFC) by the end of 2019 (Oman's oil reserves at 4.84bn barrels, gas at 23.8 TCF, 2020). In this context, Khazzan and Ghazeen gas fields of Oman, one of the most considerable unconventional gas resources of the Middle East and could cater the 35% of Oman's total gas demand, have been explored and operated by the joint venture of BP (60%), state-owned Oman Oil Company (30%) and Malaysian state-run company Petronas (10%) since 2017 (Bousso, 2020).

Due to the increasing dependency on oil and gas revenues, the Omani administration under Qaboos has attached utmost importance to continuing oil and gas production and trade. Thus, they had to consider this reality in their foreign policy decisions. In this regard, the impacts of Oman's hydrocarbon-based economic structure on its foreign policy decision-making process will be addressed from two perspectives in the following parts. First, the dependency on oil and gas export will be analyzed given the opportunities and limitations that Oman has encountered due to its commercial relationship with importer countries. Second, the impacts of economic diversification efforts in its foreign policy choices will be discussed. To analyze these two

perspectives in one case, Oman's foreign policy towards China's rising economic and political presence in the region will be discussed.

"Given the appalling social and economic conditions that existed in Oman in 1970, the progress that has been accomplished in a relatively short period of time is by any measure, both quantitatively and qualitatively, extraordinary." (Funsch,2015, 117). As understood by Funsch's (2015) preceding statements, Oman's transformation in terms of economic and social structure has meant a lot for Omanis, particularly those who have known the conditions of the pre-Qaboos period. Therefore, this generation has got the value of the welfare state under Qaboos's rule in perspective. However, new Omani generations born to prosperity would have been more critical of the Omani government in the face of economic distress. The protests which flared out due to economic grievances, particularly concerning the high unemployment rates (stood at 15%) in 2011, have illustrated the young Omanis' sensitivity on economic matters (Worall, 2012, 100). Thus, economic stability has become an integral part of internal stability, vital for Oman's regime survival.

This extraordinary transformation undoubtedly resulted from increasing oil prices and successful energy investments of Qaboos's administration, making Oman a welfare state. To amplify, when Qaboos came to the throne in 1970, the global price of crude oil was 2 USD per barrel, and the GDP of Oman stood at 268 million USD (World Bank, 2019). However, oil prices increased to 118 USD per barrel, and Oman's GDP reached its peak at 80.7 billion USD in 2014 (World Bank, 2019). As said before by 2019, share of oil and gas revenues constituted 74 % of total government revenues. Therefore, oil and gas exports have become the backbone of Oman's economy.

Given this macro-economic structure of Oman, China has become the top export destination for Omani oil since 2004. Before that, Japan and South Korea shared the top two places in Oman's oil export. China increased its Omani crude oil export share from 35.2% in 2000 to 82.5% in 2017 (Mogielnicki, 2020, para., 4). Mogielnicki (2020, para. 3) analyzes Oman's high-level dependency on Chinese crude oil import from an economic perspective and asserts that the economic relations between Oman and China were maintained in an imbalanced pattern; while Oman exported much of

its crude oil to China, China did not satisfy the Omani administration in terms of its investments in non-oil sectors in Oman. According to Mogielnicki (2020, para. 3), this imbalanced relationship put Oman in a weak position to handle the economic challenges of the 21st century.

From a foreign policy perspective, Oman's foreign policy towards China in the 21st century represents the best case for the role and impact of the hydrocarbon-based economy on its foreign policy decision-making process. Due to China's support for the rebels during the Dhofar Insurgency, which posed the most severe challenge to the regime survival in Oman, Oman and China had experienced a troublesome period of relations in the first years of Qaboos's reign. However, the hostility period (1965-71) of the relations between two states after almost 20 years of transition has turned into firstly interdependence, and then the cooperation period under the Belt and Road Initiative since 2013 (Fulton, 2018, 114). The central dynamic of this transformation from the Omani side was undoubtedly Oman's increasing dependence on China's hydrocarbon import.

In 1993, China changed its oil strategy and became a net oil importer due to growing domestic oil demand (Troush, 1999, para. 3). Because of Omani oil's compatibility with Chinese refineries when comparing the other oil-producing Gulf monarchies' crude oil, Oman has become one of China's primary sources of energy within a decade (Fulton, 2018, 130). As Omani oil export to China has become a significant part of Oman's export revenues, diplomatic and political interaction between the two states intensified accordingly (Fulton, 2018, 128). These bilateral interactions and contacts have allowed the two sides to widen the scope of cooperation to the other sectors like infrastructure, personal training, military, and security cooperation, etc. For instance, the increasing flow of crude oil from Gulf countries to China brought security concerns for China on the transportation of the oil through the Hormuz Strait and the Indian Ocean. To this end, China has increased its military presence in the region, and Chinese frigates have started to use Omani ports for logistical purposes.

By acknowledging the necessity of going beyond the hydrocarbon-based economy, Oman has made inroads into diversification of its economy. Notably, after the global

oil prices declined in the second half of 2014, the Omani government accelerated its diversification efforts. In this framework, by 2018, Qaboos announced Vision 2040, which is the continuation of Vision 2020 and where the diversification of the economy has remained to constitute one of its primary goals and brought Haitham bin Tariq, whom he designated as his heir in the letter of will opened after his death in January 2020, to lead this mission. To achieve Vision 2040, including diversification of the economy, Oman should have attracted foreign investment in non-oil sectors.

Within this context, China, with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has emerged as a proper partner for Oman (Fulton, 2018, 132). On the other hand, as was mentioned before, Oman's geostrategic position and its independent and neutral foreign policy orientation corresponded with China's interests in the region. That paved the way for the start of the cooperation period between Oman and China in 2013. Oman's Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) has become a leading project for Omani involvement in China's Belt and Road Initiative to link China to Europe (Fulton, 2018, p.133). Indeed, SEZAD has been developed since 2007 by the Omani government within the framework of diversification efforts. In 2016, a consortium consisting of six Chinese firms, named Oman Wanfang, signed a deal with Duqm Special Economic Zone Authority of Oman to build a 1,1172-hectare industrial park which would consist of various sectors and worth of investment of the project would be expected to reach 10 billion USD by 2022 (Chinese investors to build industrial park at Oman's Duqm port, 2016). Under this project, Chinese firms are expected to invest and operate in industrial, petrochemical, manufacturing, and hospitality sectors (Fulton, 2018, 133).

On the other hand, China's investment steps in Duqm have attracted the attention of other countries like India. As China has been operating the Gwadar Port in Pakistan since 2015 and making substantial investments in Duqm, India has accelerated its efforts to invest in Duqm Special Economic Zone and use Duqm port for military facilities to balance Chinese presence in the region. In this regard, under the Little India tourism project, Indian companies have been constructing multi-million-dollar worth luxury residential complexes and hotels by the seaside of Duqm. The project reportedly would attract 750 million USD worth of investments in ten years and

provide residency for the owners of these properties ('Little India' resort in Oman ready by 2020, 2019).

Furthermore, the United States' adding Duqm Port into the scope of expanded "facilities access agreement" with Oman in 2019 has been commented as the US's strategic move to rebuff China like Iran in the region (Lons, 2019). This deal was most welcomed from the Omani side since the US military presence in the Port constituted assurance for Oman to balance its relations with rival powers like China and the US or Iran and Saudi Arabia (Lons, 2019). In this regard, although Oman has intensified its economic relations with China in the last twenty years of Qaboos's reign due to domestic financial concerns and economic interests, the USA has been Oman's key strategic ally outside the region since the first facilities access agreement was signed in 1980. In other words, Oman has seen China's Belt and Road Initiative as an opportunity to achieve its Vision 2040 goals (Lons, 2019). Fulton (2018) well expressed Oman's foreign policy orientation towards China and the USA and vice versa in his book chapter as "In terms of China's role in helping Oman manage systemic pressures, there is no credible likelihood of Oman maneuvering away from the USA and pivoting to China. The Omani-American relationship is strategically important for both states, and there is no evidence that China sees itself as a replacement for the American security role in Oman or elsewhere in the Gulf.".

On the other hand, Oman's dependence on China's oil imports may limit Oman to a more neutral approach to China's domestic and foreign policy issues. In this context, Oman's silence over human rights violations against Uyghurs (Muslim minority in Xinjiang region) by the Chinese government could be counted in this direction. Of course, this situation did not only pertain to Oman but also other Gulf monarchies who have maintained intense economic relations with China, including SA and UAE, have opted to stay silent on this matter (Cafiero, 2019). Cafiero (2019) commends that in this silence, besides Gulf monarchies' interests in maintaining oil trade with China and being part of China's Belt and Road initiative, their concurrence with China on their sensitivity to outside scrutiny of human rights violations in their own countries have played a role.

Consequently, since Qaboos came to the throne in 1970, thanks to hydrocarbon revenues, Oman has achieved an enormous internal development process, called Omani Renaissance, in many sectors, including infrastructure, health, education, industry, etc. However, despite Qaboos's diversification efforts in the Omani economy, the country has gradually become dependent on hydrocarbon revenues. Therefore, it has become undeniable that this dependency has been reflected in the Omani government's foreign policy decisions. While creating new opportunities for Omani foreign policy, this situation has also had a restrictive effect on the foreign policy decision-making process. The historical evolution of Oman's relations with China from hostility to cooperation within fifty years thanks to increasing hydrocarbon trade have constituted a significant example in demonstrating the impact of hydrocarbon resources on foreign policy decision-making in Oman.

To sum up, the impacts of state-society relations, geopolitical position, and hydrocarbon-based economy of Oman on its foreign policy-making process were examined as the complementary dynamics of Oman's foreign policy, since their impacts were limited compared to the impacts of Sultan Qaboos's perception and strategic culture of Oman in the restrictive system of the Middle East. However, sometimes they could become the most crucial determinants in shaping Oman's foreign policy towards specific issues. To clarify this analysis, for instance, among other factors, Oman's geopolitical position, which controls the Strait of Hormuz with Iran, has played the most critical role not only in Oman's foreign policy towards Iran but also in its relations with the USA. As previously stated, Omani officials also accepted this reality and confirmed their pragmatist approach towards Iran as a powerful neighbor. Likewise, Oman's dependency on oil and gas revenues has constituted the dominant dynamic behind Oman's foreign policy towards China. In this regard, it can be claimed that some specific foreign policy decisions of Qaboos's administration could be taken under the impact of particular internal variables. However, it would be deficient in explaining Oman's independent foreign policy orientation by referring to only one or two intervening variables or structural modifiers.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis has aimed to reveal the dynamics behind Oman's foreign policy decision-making process under Sultan Qaboos's reign to explain the high-level continuity and consistency in the Omani foreign policy in the 21st century despite the sweeping changes and challenges of the new millennium. While doing this, Neo-Classical Realism has been used as a theoretical framework providing a comprehensive approach with its systemic and internal variables for this research.

Since Sultan Qaboos ascended to the throne in 1970, Oman's foreign policy orientation has altered drastically from isolation towards active engagement with its neighbors and beyond. During this period, Qaboos pursued an independent foreign policy approach which rendered the Omani foreign policy sui generis in its region. This independent character has been made by principles like being open to international and regional changes, not responding suddenly and early in the face of regional developments, not being party to any conflict, rejecting military solutions to the problems of the region, giving priority to diplomacy in all areas, non-interference into other countries' internal affairs and not cutting diplomatic relations with any state.

After reviewing the literature on Oman's foreign policy and its foreign policy decision-making system, this thesis has found that independence, moderation, and pragmatism were among the prominent features scholars in the field have used in describing the characteristics of the Omani foreign policy. On the other hand, this thesis has approached the literature on the dynamics of foreign policy decision-making in Oman from the conceptual framework instead of a theoretical one. In this regard, six concepts, namely state-regime survival, geopolitics, economy, Oman's history, Ibadi

culture, and Omani identity, have been found in the literature on identifying the dynamics behind the foreign policy decision-making process in Oman.

As stated in the first chapter, this thesis also aims to contribute to the literature by analyzing the Omani foreign policy practices in the first twenty years of the 21st century towards crises and tensions that erupted in the Middle East region and affected Oman directly or indirectly. In this regard, the US military intervention in Iraq in 2003, the Syrian civil war since 2011, the Yemen civil war since 2014, tension over Iran's Nuclear Program, and the Gulf rifts of 2014 and 2017 were examined in terms of Oman's foreign policy towards these issues. This part helped to demonstrate the high-level continuity and consistency in Oman's foreign policy orientation by exemplifying the pre-and-post 21st-century foreign policy practices of Oman towards some regional events. For instance, in this regard, Oman's foreign policy during the Iran-Iraq War and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait were analyzed together with Oman's stance towards the US-led military campaign to Iraq in 2003 to reveal the level of continuity and change in Oman's foreign policy approach towards Iraq. Consequently, it has been observed that under Qaboos's administration, Oman has always maintained its neutrality and prioritized diplomatic solutions while approaching the problems related to Iraq. Likewise, as Oman has seen the Iranian Revolution of 1979 as internal affairs of Iran and did not cut its diplomatic relations with that country after the regime changed, it also acted in the same way towards Syria after the mass demonstrations turned into a civil war.

After examining the high-level continuity of the Omani foreign policy decisions over the practices realized in the 21st century in the second chapter, the following chapters focused on the dynamics behind Oman's foreign policy decision-making process under the reign of Sultan Qaboos. Acknowledging Qaboos was the sole and the top decision-maker, and at the core of the Omani political system, this thesis has claimed that some internal and structural variables have impacted Oman's foreign policy decisions during Qaboos's era. In this framework, the variables were classified as core and complementary. Among the core dynamics, Qaboos's personality, worldview, and life experiences have been accepted as the most prominent determinants of Oman's foreign policy decision-making process. Nevertheless, to better understand Oman's foreign

policy decision-making system, then Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were analyzed in terms of their impacts and role in the decision-making system.

This thesis argued that strategic culture, defined as the established beliefs and shared expectations and assumptions among society, has played a significant role in shaping Oman's foreign policy decisions under Qaboos's rule. The thesis further claimed that Oman's strategic culture consists of Ibadhi teachings, Omani nationalism, and the legacy of Oman's diplomatic history since 1970 and that encouraged Qaboos to continue his independent foreign policy orientation in the 21st century despite colossal changes and challenges of the new century.

Furthermore, in a way, it could be claimed that the strategic culture of Oman was constructed during Qaboos's reign. Meaning that, although some components of strategic culture like Ibadism have been part of Omani culture and have shaped the state system for centuries, Qaboos put Ibadism forward as a facade of the Islamic belief system in Oman.

In this regard, the reflections of the teachings of Ibadhi Islam like tolerance, peaceful co-existence with others, anti-extremism, finding amicable settlements with opponents, quietism that refuses to engage in any conflicts except in self-defense could be observed in Oman's foreign policy decisions during Qaboos's reign. On the other hand, Omani nationalism has been built around Qaboos's personality and thus took its final form under Qaboos's administration. This thesis has examined the impacts of Omani nationalism on its foreign policy decision-making process from two perspectives. Firstly, it claimed that increasing awareness of Omani nationalism among the Omani society had decreased Oman's vulnerability to foreign influence over identity politics. Secondly, since the respect and obedience to Sultan Qaboos were placed in the middle of the Omani nationalism, this strengthened Qaboos's hands in making foreign policy decisions without any severe critics.

Qaboos's bold and independent foreign policy decisions like not cutting diplomatic relations with Egypt after Camp David Accords was signed between Egypt and Israel

in 1978, maintaining cordial ties after the regime change in Iran after 1979, signing the Facilities Access Agreement with the USA in 1980, made Omani foreign policy sui generis in its region. This uniqueness has brought prestige to the Sultanate in the international arena, and Omani society has felt this prestige in their interactions abroad. In other words, domestic and international circles have fostered Qaboos's government to maintain its independent foreign policy orientation across the sweeping challenges of the new century. Therefore, this thesis claimed that Oman's independent diplomacy in the first thirty years of Qaboos's reign had created a common expectation among the Omani society and international arena that Oman should preserve its independent foreign policy approach in the 21st century.

In this thesis, state-society relations, Oman's geopolitics, and hydrocarbon-based economy have been examined as complementary dynamics of Oman's foreign policy decision-making system. The classification of these dynamics as complementary was made according to NCR's claim that in a restrictive environment with high clarity in information transfer, the impacts of social and domestic interest groups on the foreign policy decision-making process are expected to be limited. Likewise, Oman's geopolitics and hydrocarbon-based economy could not be regarded as internal or systemic variables since they are classified as structural modifiers according to NCR. However, it is worth noting that these dynamics have significant impacts on imposing limitations and providing opportunities for Oman in its foreign policy decision-making process.

In this context, the impacts of state-society relations on foreign policy decision-making in Oman were analyzed under two subtitles tribal social structure and the effects of expatriate population on foreign policy decisions of Omani administration under Sultan Qaboos. As a result, it is inferred that while the tribal society has supported and respected Qaboos's foreign policy decisions in the 21st century to protect the peaceful status quo, the increasing proportion of expatriate community among the overall population of Oman has sometimes played a restrictive role in Oman's foreign policy decisions towards the home countries of these communities.

Oman's distinctive geostrategic position in its region that controls the Strait of Hormuz, with Iran, stands across the Indian subcontinent, shares land borders with Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, has also imposed restrictions and provided some opportunities for Qaboos's administration in the foreign policy decision-making process. In this regard, after elaborating the features of Oman's geopolitics, the position has been examined from three aspects as the co-controller of the only gateway to the Gulf with Iran, its location in the mid of Africa and the Indian subcontinent, which has provided it with the prospect of being an active logistic hub and crucial military base, and the impacts of the fragile and conflict-ridden neighborhood on its foreign policy decision-making. In the end, it was concluded that the geopolitics of Oman had always been one of the determinants of its foreign policy decision-making process, and Qaboos repeatedly emphasized the undeniable reality of Oman's geostrategic position and accordingly maintained Oman's peace and consensus-oriented foreign policy approach during his reign.

After analyzing Oman's dependency on hydrocarbon resources for its economic and political survival, the impacts of hydrocarbon-based economy on Oman's foreign policy decision-making process was examined given the opportunities and limitations that Oman has encountered due to its commercial relationship with importer countries, and the impacts of economic diversification efforts in its foreign policy choices. In this analysis, Oman's gradually enhanced relations with China were opted as the best example to explain the impacts of a hydrocarbon-based economy on Oman's foreign policy decisions.

In a nutshell, in the first two decades of the 21st century, the Middle Eastern countries have witnessed a ton of trouble and challenges ranging from proxy wars to civil unrests, from newly emerged terrorist organizations to nuclear tensions, etc. Amid the challenges of the new millennium, Oman has managed to maintain its independent foreign policy approach without any serious deviation throughout Qaboos's reign. As the longest served monarch of the Middle East, Qaboos played a critical role in this high-level continuity of the foreign policy orientation of Oman. However, since 1970 there has been created a unique decision-making system by and around Sultan Qaboos.

Many internal and structural dynamics have also come together to shape and maintain Oman's independent foreign policy orientation in this system.

To summarize, this thesis has concluded that Qaboos's personality, principles, and worldview were notably the central dynamic in explaining the high-level continuity of Oman's foreign policy practices in the 21st century. However, strategic culture, consisting of Ibadhi teachings, Omani nationalism, and the legacy of its diplomatic history, has created a common expectation and consent on the continuation of independent foreign policy approach among Omani society. In other words, on the one hand, this dynamic has supported the Omani government in maintaining an independent foreign policy approach; on the other hand, it has played a restrictive role in deviating from this approach. Furthermore, Oman's geopolitical position, hydro-carbon-based economy, and social structure have affected the foreign policy decision-making process under Qaboos's reign.

As the final analysis of this thesis, it should be noted that Oman has had an idiosyncratic, centralized, and recondite foreign policy-making process during Qaboos's era. Therefore, explaining the dynamics behind the high-level continuity in Qaboos's foreign policy orientation by referring to a couple of dynamics would be reductive. Instead, there should be a comprehensive framework to explain the individual dynamics and their interaction with each other and the particularly international system. Thanks to Neo-Classical Realism, this thesis has tried to draw this framework in which all the dynamics which impacted Oman's foreign policy-making process were revealed to explain the high-level continuity in Oman's foreign policy under Qaboos's reign.

5.1. Future Prospects for the Studies on Oman's Foreign Policy

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, studies on Oman's foreign policy have mainly focused on its distinctive characteristics in the literature. The dynamics behind these foreign policy features have generally been overlooked. In that, Qaboos's dominance over Oman's foreign policy decision-making process was the primary reason. However, after Qaboos's demise at the beginning of 2020, the new era with distressing

challenges like financial difficulties, regional tensions, and the Covid-19 pandemic has started. Therefore, future studies will focus more on the continuity and changes in the foreign policy orientation of Oman between Qaboos and Haitham's era and the dynamics behind this continuity and change. At this juncture, the author of this thesis claims that the dynamics, particularly the strategic culture of Oman, would continue to impact the foreign policy decision-making process under Haitham's administration. Thus, Sultan Haitham will follow Qaboos's independent foreign policy orientation, at least in the medium term.

In this respect, given the new Omani government's initial foreign policy practices in the post-Qaboos era, the continuity in independent and non-aligned foreign policy orientation has shown its first signs. Oman's positive reaction to Abraham Accords between the USA, Israel and the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain in 2020 and expressing its regret over four Gulf countries' diplomatic crisis with Lebanon and calling the parties to exercise restraint and address differences based on the respect and non-interference in internal affairs of other countries have shown that there is still continuity in Oman's independent foreign policy approach despite the change in the leadership.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning here that Haitham realized striking reforms that could have the potential to impact the foreign policy decision-making process in the long term. Establishing the Crown Prince position for the first time in Oman's history and converting the title of Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs to Minister of Foreign Affairs demonstrates that Sultan Haitham's decision-making system will be more institutionalized than his predecessor's personalized model. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Oman is a monarchy, and Haitham is still the country's top and sole decision-maker.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

21. yüzyılın ilk yirmi yılında, Körfez alt bölgesinin de dahil olduğu Orta Doğu, bölge devletlerinin dış politika yönelimlerinde büyük değişikliklere neden olan yıkıcı krizlere ve sınamalara tanık olmuştur. ABD'ye yönelik 11 Eylül terör saldırıları ve ABD'nin bu saldırılara sırasıyla 2001 ve 2003 yıllarında Afganistan ve Irak'a askeri harekatlar düzenleyerek tepki vermesi, İsrail-Filistin çatışması, bölgedeki yansımaları ve 21. yüzyıldaki barış girişimleri, İran'ın nükleer programı üzerindeki gerilim ve ABD'nin İran'a yönelik yaptırımları, Arap Baharı protestolarının etkileri, Suriye İç Savaşı, 2014'te iç savaşa dönüşen Yemen krizi, 2014 ve 2017 yıllarında Katar ve BAE, SA, Bahreyn, Mısır arasındaki krizler, hepsi Umman da dahil olmak üzere bölgedeki tüm ülkeler için birer sınama ve tehdit teşkil etmiştir.

Bölgedeki bu değişikliklerin ve gerilimlerin ortasında yer almasına rağmen Umman, yeni bin yılın ilk yıllarında Sultan Qaboos bin Said yönetimindeki bağımsız dış politika yöneliminde yüksek düzeyde bir süreklilik sağlamıştır. Bu tez, kapsamlı uluslararası ve bölgesel değişimlere ve sınamalara rağmen Umman dış politikasındaki bu üst düzey sürekliliği Umman dış politikasının arkasındaki dinamikleri ortaya koyarak açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Bunu yaparken, dış politika yapım sürecinde sistemik, yapısal ve içsel değişkenlerin kapsamlı bir analizini sunan Neoklasik Realizm, bu araştırmanın teorik çerçevesi olarak kullanılmıştır. Qaboos'un tek ve üst düzey karar verici olduğunu ve Umman siyasi sisteminin merkezinde olduğunu kabul eden bu tez, bazı iç ve yapısal değişkenlerin Qaboos döneminde Umman'ın dış politika kararlarını etkilediğini iddia etmektedir. Bu çerçevede, değişkenler temel ve tamamlayıcı olarak sınıflandırılmıştır. Umman'ın dış politika karar vericileri, Sultan Qaboos, Dışişlerinden Sorumlu Bakan

ve Dışişleri Bakanlığı ile İbadî öğretileri, Umman Milliyetçiliği ve 1970 yılından bu yana diplomatik tarihinin mirasından oluşan stratejik kültürü temel dinamikler olarak sınıflandırılmıştır. Öte yandan, devlet-toplum ilişkileri, jeopolitik ve hidrokarbona dayalı ekonomi, Umman'da dış politika kararlarını etkileyen tamamlayıcı dinamikler olarak ele alınmıştır.

Literatür Taraması

Umman, Orta Doğu'da ve ötesinde çatışan taraflar arasında üstlendiği barışçı diplomatik girişimlerinin artmasıyla eşzamanlı olarak akademik açıdan çekici hale gelse de Umman dış politikası ve özellikle dış politika yapım sürecinin dinamikleri hakkında literatür eksikliği bulunmaktadır. Ayrıca, Umman dış politikasına ilişkin mevcut literatür de Umman'daki dış politika karar alma dinamiklerini keşfetmekten ziyade esas olarak Umman dış politikasının ilkelerini ve özelliklerini incelemeye odaklanmaktadır.

Bu bağlamda, ilk olarak, literatürde Umman dış politikasının temel özellikleri olarak yaygın olarak kullanılan bağımsızlık, ılımlılık ve pragmatizm kavramları vurgulanmak suretiyle Umman dış politikasının özellikleri ele alınmıştır.

İkinci bölümde ise Umman'ın dış politika karar-alma sürecinin dinamikleri hakkındaki literatür gözden geçirilmiştir. Bu bölümde yaklaşımlar ve teoriler üzerinden gitmek yerine literatürde bulunan belirleyiciler ve dinamikler analiz edilmiştir. Bu bağlamda, devlet/rejim bekası, jeopolitik, hidrokarbona bağlı ekonomi, Umman tarihi, İbadî kültürü ve Umman kimliği olmak üzere altı dinamik literatürde tespit edilmiş ve incelenmiştir.

Teorik Çerçeve: Neo-Klasik Realizm

Neo-Klasik Realizm (NKR), yapısal realizm, liberalizm veya yapısalcılık gibi diğer büyük uluslararası ilişkiler teorilerinin dış politikayı çok az açıkladığını öne sürerek, devletlerin dış politikalarını odak noktasına yerleştirir. Bu nedenle daha çok dış politika yaklaşımı olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, Ripsman, Taliaferro, Lobell (2016) tarafından adlandırılan Tip III NKR, kriz zamanı kısa vadeli karar-

almadan ya da bireysel devletler tarafından orta ve uzun vadeli büyük stratejik ayarlamalardan, küresel sonuçlara ve yapısal değişikliklere kadar uzanan uluslararası davranışları kapsar (1).

Lobell'e (2016) göre, Tip I NKR, devletlerin dış politika kararlarındaki tarihsel anomalileri, liderlerin algısı ve iç siyaset gibi ara değişkenleri kullanarak inceler. Bununla birlikte, Tip III neoklasik realistler, uluslararası sistemin kendisinin bireysel devletlerin eylemlerini dikte edemeyeceğine inanırlar. Bu bağlamda, sistemin yapısı ve coğrafya, doğal kaynaklar, teknolojik yayılma hızı gibi yapısal değiştiricilerin tek tek devletlere dış politika stratejilerini belirlemede kısıtlamalar getirebileceğini ve fırsatlar sağlayabileceğini savunurlar. Ayrıca Tip III neoklasik realistler, ülkedeki dış politika karar vericisinin kişiliğinin, karakterinin ve algısının, toplumdaki stratejik kültürün ve devlet-toplum ilişkilerinin dış politika karar-alma sürecini etkileyen ara değişkenler olarak belirlerler (Ripsman et al., 2016).

NKR, devletlerin dış politika yapım süreçlerinde sistemik faktörleri dışlamayan ve iç dinamikleri vurgulayan yaklaşımıyla, rejim/devlet bekasının ve güçler dengesi stratejilerinin önemini sürdüğü Ortadoğu ülkelerinin dış politika analizlerinde akademisyenler arasında yaygın olarak kullanılan bir teori haline gelmiştir. Bu bağlamda, bu araştırma ile Umman'ın 21. yüzyılda Sultan Qaboos yönetimindeki dış politika karar-alma sürecini etkileyen iç ve sistemik faktörler ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu nedenle, araştırmanın teorik çerçevesini Tip III neoklasik realizm oluşturmaktadır. Tez boyunca neoklasik realizm terimi türü belirtilmeden kullanılmıştır.

Son olarak bu araştırmada teorik bir çerçeve olarak NKR'nin seçilmesinin iki ana nedeni bulunmaktadır. Öncelikle, Umman'ın dış politika karar verme sürecini birçok iç ve dış faktörün etkilediğine inandığım için NKR, dış politika analizlerinde hem iç hem de sistemik değişkenleri dikkate alan bir yaklaşım olması nedeniyle Umman dış politikasını incelemek için kapsamlı bir çerçeve sunmuştur. İkinci olarak, NKR'nin ara değişkenleri: lider imajı, stratejik kültür ve devlet-toplum ilişkileri, bu tezin iddia ettiği Umman'daki dış politika karar alma sürecinin iç dinamiklerine en uygun olanlardır.

21. Yüzyılda Umman Dış Politikası İçin Uluslararası ve Bölgesel Sınamalar

Bu tez ayrıca Orta Doğu bölgesinde patlak veren ve Umman'ı doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak etkileyen kriz ve gerilimlere yönelik 21. yüzyılın ilk yirmi yılındaki Umman dış politika uygulamalarını analiz ederek literatüre katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bölüm, ayrıca iç değişkenler ve uluslararası sistemin dikteleri arasındaki etkileşimi daha iyi analiz etmek için uluslararası ve bölgesel alt sistemin kısıtlayıcı ortamını vurgulamak için seçilen olayları inceleyecektir. Bu bağlamda, 2003 yılında ABD'nin Irak'a askeri müdahalesi, 2011'den bu yana Suriye iç savaşı, 2014'te iç savaşa dönüşen Yemen krizi, İran'ın Nükleer Programı üzerindeki gerilim ve 2014 ve 2017 Körfez krizleri Umman'ın bu krizlere yönelik dış politikası açısından incelenmiştir. Bu çerçevede, Umman'ın 21. yüzyıl öncesi ve sonrası dış politika uygulamaları birlikte örneklendirilerek dış politika yönelimindeki üst düzey süreklilik ve tutarlılık gösterilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Umman'ın İran-Irak Savaşı ve Irak'ın Kuveyt'i işgaline yönelik dış politikası, 2003 yılında ABD öncülüğünde Irak'a düzenlenen askeri harekata ilişkin tutumu ile birlikte analiz edilerek, Umman'ın Irak'a karşı dış politikasındaki süreklilik ve değişim düzeyi ortaya konmuştur. Sonuç olarak da Umman'ın Qaboos yönetiminde Irak ile ilgili sorunlara yaklaşırken her zaman tarafsızlığını koruduğu ve diplomatik çözümlere öncelik verdiği gözlemlenmiştir. Aynı şekilde, Umman'ın 1979 İran Devrimi'ni İran'ın iç işleri olarak görmesi ve rejim değiştikten sonra diğer Körfez monarşilerinin aksine İran ile diplomatik ilişkilerini devam ettirmesi ile 2011 yılında kitlesel gösterilerin iç savaşa dönüşmesinin ardından Suriye'ye de aynı şekilde davranması arasında dış politika kararları açısından bir süreklilik ve tutarlılık bulunduğu iddia edilmiştir.

Umman Dış Politikasının Temel Dinamikleri

21. yüzyılda Orta Doğu bölgesi, devletlerin dış politika kararları açısından yüksek tehdite karşı kısa vadeli zaman ve sınırlı seçeneklerle karşılaştıklarını bildikleri uluslararası sistemdeki en kısıtlayıcı stratejik ortamlardan biri olarak kabul edilebilir. Bu bağlamda, bu kısıtlayıcı ortam göz önüne alınarak, lider algısının ve ülkenin stratejik kültürünün Umman'ın dış politika karar-alma sürecini etkileyebilecek en önemli iç dinamikleri oluşturduğu iddia edilmiştir.

Bu çerçevede, birinci bölümde, Umman'ın dış politika yürütücüleri olarak Sultan Qaboos, dönemin Dışişlerinden Sorumlu Bakanı Yusuf bin Alawi ve Dışişleri Bakanlığı, adı geçenlerin karakterlerine, mesleki deneyimlerine, inançlarına, ilkelerine ve yeteneklerine odaklanmak suretiyle dış politika karar-alma sürecindeki rolleri araştırılmıştır. İkinci bölümde ise, toplum arasında oluşan yerleşik inançlar, paylaşılan beklentiler ve varsayımlar olarak tanımlanabilecek stratejik kültür Umman dış politika karar-alma sürecine etkisi açısından incelenmiştir. Ayrıca vurgulamak gerekir ki literatürde ilk kez bu tez, Qaboos'un saltanatı altındaki Umman'ın stratejik kültürünün İbadi öğretilerinden, Umman milliyetçiliğinden ve 1970'den bu yana diplomatik tarihinin mirasından oluştuğunu iddia etmektedir.

Dış Politika Karar Vericileri

Sultan Qaboos'un ülkesinin dış politika kararlarında belirleyici rolü, birçok akademisyenin üzerinde uzlaştığı yadsınamaz bir gerçektir (Kechichian, 1995; Lefebvre, 2010; Babood, 2016). Bu baskın rol, monarşik bir devlet yapısının doğal bir sonucu olarak kabul edilirken, Qaboos'un Umman'ın izole edilmiş azgelişmiş devletten, aktif diplomasi uygulayan modern bir devlete dönüşüm sürecini önemli ölçüde kişiselleştirdiği de iddia edilmektedir (Funsch, 2015, 59).

Sultan Qaboos'un ılımlı, bilge, vizyon sahibi, kendine güvenen, sakin, kararlı ve alçakgönüllü olarak tanımlanabilecek kişiliği, Umman'ın bağımsız ve ılımlı dış politika yöneliminin oluşmasında büyük rol oynamıştır. Örneğin, Qaboos'un bölgedeki ihtilaflara barışçı çözümler önerme ve destekleme konusundaki kararlılığı, Umman'ı bölgede ve ötesinde çatışan ülkeler arasında güvenilir bir arabulucu ve kolaylaştırıcı haline getirdi. Aynı şekilde, Qaboos'un 1979'da İran rejiminin değişmesinden sonra İran ile iyi komşuluk ilişkilerini sürdürme kararı gibi stratejik zamanlarda aldığı mantıklı ve gerçekçi kararlar, Umman'ı İran ile diğer Körfez ülkeleri veya Batı ile İran arasında bir diyalog köprüsü haline getirmiştir.

Yine, Sultan Qaboos'un yetiştirilme tarzı, ortamı ve dünya görüşünün dış politika kararlarında büyük etkisi olmuştur. Örneğin, Sultan Qaboos ilk eğitimini Umman'da

aldıktan sonra babası Sultan Said tarafından eğitim için İngiltere'ye gönderilmiştir. Sandhurst Harp Akademisini bitirdikten sonra İngiltere Silahlı Kuvvetlerinde bir yıl boyunca görev yapmış ve 1966 yılında ülkesine dönmüştür. Sultan Qaboos'un İngiltere ve özellikle İngiliz Kraliyet Ailesi ile özel ilişkiler geliştirme konusundaki kişisel eğilimi, büyük ölçüde, İngiliz yetkililere, ilk olarak eğitim yıllarında, daha sonra tahta çıkarken gerçekleştirilen Saray darbesinde ve son olarak da Dhofar isyanının bastırılması sırasında gördüğü destek ve yardımlardan dolayı duyduğu güçlü minnet duygularından kaynaklandığı söylenebilecektir.

Umman'ın dış politika karar-alma sisteminde Dışişleri Bakanı ve Dışişleri Bakanlığının rolü sınırlıdır. Bununla birlikte, Yusuf bin Alawi, Ağustos 2020'de Dışişlerinden Sorumlu Bakan olarak görevinden emekli olduğunda, Ortadoğu bölgesinde en uzun süre görev yapmış olan Dışişleri Bakanı olarak kayda geçmiştir. Bölgenin iki bilge politikacısı Sultan Qaboos ve Yusuf bin Alawi, Orta Doğu bölgesinin en barışçıl dış politikalardan biri olarak kabul edilen Umman dış politikasının ilkelerini oluşturmak için 38 yıl birlikte uyum içinde çalışmıştır. Umman Dışişleri Bakanlığı ise, Umman'daki son derece kendine özgü bir karar alma sistemi bulunduğu gözönüne alınarak, Bakanlığın Umman dış politikasını şekillendirmedeki etkisinden ziyade, Qaboos yönetimi altındaki etkinlik ve yeterlilik açısından dönüşümü ele alınmıştır. Nitekim Umman Dışişleri Bakanlığı 1970 yılından bu yana kademeli olarak, az sayıda diplomatlı butik bir Bakanlıktan, giderek artan sayıda yetenekli ve iyi eğitimli diplomatların görev yaptığı ve oldukça kurumsallaşmış bir Bakanlık'a dönüşmüştür.

Stratejik Kültür

Stratejik kültür, Umman'ın dış politika karar-alma sürecini etkileyen en önemli unsurlardan birini oluşturmaktadır. Al Rodhan (2015) stratejik kültürü, "kültürel düşünceleri, kümülatif tarihsel hafızayı ve bunların etkilerini devletlerin güvenlik politikaları ve uluslararası ilişkilerinin analizine entegre etme girişimi" olarak tanımlamaktadır (Para.2). Ripsman ve ark. (2016), stratejik kültürün dış politika yöneticilerinin, seçkinlerin ve hatta genel olarak toplumun anlayışını ve kavrayışını şekillendirdiğini iddia etmektedir (67). Bu bağlamda, stratejik kültür, stratejik

seçimlerin kabul edilebilir veya kabul edilemez olup olmadığı konusunda kolektif toplumsal beklentiler ve varsayımlar üretir. Bunu yaparken de devletlerin dış politika davranışlarını şekillendirmekte ve hareket özgürlüklerini kısıtlamaktadır (Ripsman vd., 2016, 67).

Neo-Klasik Realistler, stratejik kültürün bileşenleri arasında tarihsel deneyimlerin etkilerinin, değer ve inançların ve milliyetçiliğin yer alabileceğini iddia eder (Ripsman vd., 2016, 67-69). Bu bağlamda bu araştırma, Umman'ın stratejik kültürünün İbadi mezhebin öğretileri, Umman milliyetçiliği ve 1970'den bu yana diplomatik tarihinin mirasından oluştuğunu iddia etmektedir.

Umman'ın nüfusunun çoğunluğu İbadi olan tek ülke olduğu iddia edilmektedir. Sözkonusu iddianın gerçekliği Umman toplumu arasında mezheplerin oranı hakkında resmi bir veri olmadığı için kesinleşmemiştir. Ancak yabancı bilim adamları Umman'daki mezheplerin dağılımı konusunda tahminlerde bulunmaktadırlar. Bu bağlamda, Umman'a ilişkin en çok atıfta bulunulan akademisyenlerden ikisi olan Peterson (2004) ve Valeri (2014), İbadilerin yüzdesini sırasıyla 45 ve 48'e 53 ve Sünnilerin yüzdesini sırasıyla 50 ve 45'e 49 olarak tahmin etmektedirler. İbadizm, Sünni İslam ile pek çok benzerliğe sahip olduğu ve aynı zamanda Umman'ın yönetici ailesinin mezhebi olduğu için, Umman'da İslami inanç sisteminin ön yüzü olarak kabul edilir ve öyle yansıtılır.

Bu bağlamda Umman'da İbadizm bir mezhepten daha fazlasıdır; Umman toplumunu şekillendiren bir düşünce okulu ve inançlar dizisidir. Umman toplumu, yüzyıllardır İslam'ın İbadi öğretilerine göre kurulan İmamet sistemi ile yönetilmiştir.

İbadizm, hoşgörü, başkalarıyla barış içinde bir arada yaşama, aşırılık karşıtlığı, muhaliflerle dostane anlaşmalar bulma ve benzeri konularda övgüye değer öğretileriyle tanınmaktadır (Babood, 2016). Umman'ın bölgedeki mezhep odaklı dış politika uygulayan iki ülke olan İran ve Suudi Arabistan'a yönelik dengeli dış politika yaklaşımı, esas olarak İbadizm'in hoşgörü ve barış içinde bir arada yaşama öğretilerinin dış politikası üzerindeki etkisinden kaynaklanmaktadır.

Öte yandan, meşru müdafaa dışında herhangi bir çatışmaya girmeyi reddeden İbadi sessizliğinin de Umman'ın mevcut dış politika ilkelerinde önemli etkisi bulunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Umman'ın Yemen'deki Husilere karşı savaş açmak için Suudi Arabistan öncülüğündeki koalisyona katılmama konusundaki kararlı duruşu bu etkinin bir örneği olarak değerlendirilebilir. Ayrıca, diğer stratejik faktörlerin yanı sıra, bu yaklaşım Umman'ı 2015'te Husiler ile ABD arasındaki gizli görüşmeler ve 2019'da Husiler ile Suudi yetkililer arasındaki dolaylı görüşmeler için güvenilir bir ev sahibi haline getirmiştir (Al Jazeera, 2019).

Umman, tarihsel olarak Arap Yarımadası'ndaki en eski bağımsız siyasi birlik olarak yer alsa da ulusal kimliği, Qaboos'un 1970 yılında tahta çıkmasından bu yana bugünkü şeklini almıştır (Peterson, 2019). 1970 öncesinde Umman'ın sosyal yapısı kabile sistemine dayalıydı. Dolayısıyla kabile, etnik veya mezhepsel kimlikler gibi ulus altı kimlikler, ulusal kimliğe baskın geliyordu. Üstelik bu ulus altı kimlikler, Qaboos öncesi dönemde zaman zaman birbirleriyle mücadele de etmiştir. Nitekim, bu dönemde ülke, bölünmüş yapısını yansıtan "Muskat ve Umman Sultanlığı" olarak anılmıştır. Öte yandan Umman İmamlığı, 1970 yılına kadar bölgeden Suudi Arabistan gibi bazı ülkelerin desteğiyle Umman'ın iç kesimlerinde bağımsızlığını ilan etmiş ve bağımsızlığının uluslararası olarak tanınması için girişimlerde bulunuyordu. Bu arka plan göz önüne alındığında, Umman vatandaşı olmayı önceleyen bir Umman ulusal kimliği yaratmak Umman Sultanı Qaboos bin Said'in bir diğer önemli başarısını oluşturmaktadır.

Peterson'a (2019) göre, uzun tarihi boyunca Umman kimliği İbadizm, kabilecilik ve Araplık gibi bazı temalar etrafında gelişmiştir (8). Ancak Qaboos, tüm bu temaları Umman ulusal kimliği altında toplamayı başarmıştır. Onun siyasi sisteminde İbadizm, Umman'daki İslami inanç sisteminin markasını oluşturmuş, servetin dağılımında kabile sistemine önem verilmiş ve Umman Temel Kanunu'nun ilk maddesinde Umman devletinin Araplığı vurgulanmıştır. Qaboos, bu sistemi kurarken hiçbir ulus altı kimliği ihmal etmemiş veya halkını ulus altı kimliklerinden derhal vazgeçmeye zorlamamıştır. Aksine, yüksek petrol gelirleri sayesinde Umman milletine yüksek yaşam standartları sağlayan ekonomik ve sosyal kalkınma hamlesini gerçekleştirerek halkının kalbini ve aklını kazanmayı tercih etmiştir.

Umman Rönesansı olarak adlandırılan bu dikey gelişme sürecinde Qaboos, ulusun kilit figürü ve kurucu atası haline gelmiştir. Diğer Körfez ülkelerinden farklı olarak, Umman toplumu, Qaboos öncesi dönemde Afrika'dan Hindistan alt kıtasına kadar toprak genişlemesine ve kayıplara tanık olmuştur. Bu genişlemeler ve kayıplar nedeniyle farklı toplumlardan göçmen akışıyla karşılaşmıştır (Valeri, 2013, 181). Bu nedenle Umman'ın sosyal yapısı oldukça kozmopolit hale gelmiştir. Bu kozmopolit toplumda ulusal kimliğin yaratılmasındaki zorluklara rağmen, Qaboos'un kişiliği, Umman ulusal kimliği için bağlayıcı ve tanımlayıcı bir faktör olarak inşa edilmiştir (Valeri, 2013, 200). Valeri (2013) bu ulus kurma politikasının temel amacını, Qaboos'un kendisini Umman'da yaşayan tüm mezhepleri ve etnik grupları bir araya getirebilecek tek kişi ve "doğal egemen" olarak konumlandırma arzusu olarak açıklamaktadır (179).

Nitekim, Qaboos'un ulus oluşturma politikası Umman toplumu tarafından memnuniyetle karşılanmış, Qaboos'a duyulan hayranlık ve sevgi Umman milliyetçiliğinin işareti olarak kabul edilmiştir. Bu nedenle toplumun tüm kesimleri Qaboos'a olan hayranlığını her fırsatta rekabet edercesine göstermiştir. Valeri (2013) bu durumu “rekabete dayalı Ummanlılık” olarak tanımlamaktadır (200).

Bu çerçevede, Umman milliyetçiliğinin dış politika karar-alma sürecine etkisi iki açıdan değerlendirilmiştir. İlk olarak, Umman toplumunun ulusal kimliğine ilişkin farkındalığın artması, Umman'ın kimlik politikaları üzerinden gelebilecek yabancı etkilere karşı savunmasızlığını azaltmıştır. İkincisi, daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, Qaboos'un kişiliğine ve politikalarına saygı ve hayranlık Umman milliyetçiliğinin merkezinde yer almıştır, bu nedenle ülkenin en üst düzey karar vericisi olan Qaboos'un dış politika kararları Umman ulusu tarafından ciddi bir eleştiriyle karşılanmamıştır.

Birçok ulus altı kimliğin bulunduğu Ortadoğu bölgesinde, çok etnikli ve çok mezhepli toplumsal yapılara sahip devletler, kimlik politikaları üzerinden dış etkiye maruz kalabilmektedir. Bu bağlamda, başta Umman devletine, Sultanına ve milletine bağlılık ve sadakat olarak algılanan Umman milliyetçiliği, alt millî kimlikler üzerinde herhangi bir yabancı etkisinin olmasını engellemiştir. Qaboos, bu bağlılığı canlı tutmak için

Umman'da hiçbir mezhep, kabile veya etnik kökeni rahatsız etmeyen tarafsız bir dış politika izlemiştir.

Bir diğer perspektiften ise, Umman milliyetçiliği, Umman toplumu arasında Sultan Qaboos'un iç ve dış politika kararlarında haklılığı ve yanılmazlığı konusunda genel bir varsayım oluşturmuş ve Qaboos'a politikalarında manevra alanı sağlamıştır.

Son olarak, Umman'ın Sultan Qaboos yönetimdeki diplomatik tarihinde cesur kararlar, diplomatik başarılar, gizli müzakereler ve sessiz girişimler büyük yer tutmaktadır. Bu dönemde Umman diplomasisinin en belirgin özelliklerinden biri tutarlılık olmuştur. Diğer bir değişle, diplomatik tarihin mirasını stratejik kültürün bir parçası yapan şey de Qaboos'un elli yıl boyunca aldığı tutarlı dış politika kararlarıdır.

Sultan Qaboos, 1970 yılında tahta geçtiğinde babasının dış politika yönelimini izolasyondan komşularıyla ve ötesiyle aktif diplomasiye dönüştürmüştür. Elli yıl boyunca ciddi bir sapma olmaksızın aktif, ilkeli ve bağımsız bir dış politika izlemiştir. Bu da Qaboos'u ve ülkesini kısa sürede uluslararası arenada saygın ve güvenilir bir ortak haline getirmiştir. Ayrıca, bu saygın konum, Umman yönetimi ve Umman toplumu için her alanda diğer ülkelerle olan ilişkilerinde uluslararası prestij sağlamıştır.

Umman'ın İsrail-Filistin sorununa ve uluslararası barış girişimlerine yönelik dış politikası bu tutarlılığa örnek teşkil etmektedir. Bu bağlamda, diğer Arap monarşilerinin aksine Umman, 1978 Camp David Anlaşmalarını ve Mısır'ın 1979'da İsrail ile imzaladığı barış anlaşmasını memnuniyetle karşılamıştır. Mısır, Camp David Anlaşmalarından sonra Arap Birliği'nden ihraç edilmiş, ancak Umman Mısır ile diplomatik ilişkilerini hiçbir zaman kesmemiştir. (Tran, 2019). Ayrıca Umman, 1993 ve 1995 yıllarında İsrail ile Filistin Kurtuluş Örgütü arasında imzalanan Oslo Anlaşmalarını ve 1994 yılında İsrail ile Ürdün arasında imzalanan barış anlaşmasını da desteklemiştir. Umman, Filistinlilerin başkenti Doğu Kudüs olan bağımsız ve uluslararası tanınmış devletlerinde barış ve onur içinde yaşama haklarını her zaman savunmuş ve bu ilkeler üzerine kurulu barış girişimlerini her zaman desteklemiştir. Öte yandan, İsrail'i Ortadoğu bölgesinin gerçeği olarak kabul etmiş ve bu nedenle

İsrail ile irtibat kurmaktan çekinmemiştir. Bu bağlamda, Qaboos, sırasıyla 1994 ve 1996 yıllarında İsrail Başbakanları Yitzhak Rabin ve Shimon Peres'i ağırlamış, 1996 yılında Muskat'ta kurulan Ortadoğu Desalinasyon Araştırma Merkezi altında İsrail ve Filistin delegasyonlarını aynı masa etrafında toplamıştır (Kechichian, 1995). Umman sözkonusu tutumunu 21. yüzyılda da sürdürmüş, 2018 Ekim ayında Filistin Devlet Başkanı Mahmud Abbas'ı ağırlayan Qaboos, birkaç gün sonra da Muskat'ta İsrail Başbakanı Benjamin Netanyahu'yla görüşmüştür. Sözkonusu görüşmelerin içeriği hakkında açık kaynaklarda bilgi bulunmamakla birlikte, ziyaretlerin artarda gerçekleşmesinden Umman'ın taraflar arasında barış görüşmeleri açısından mesaj iletmiş olması yüksek ihtimaldir.

Sonuç olarak, 1970'den 2020'ye kadar Qaboos'un hükümdarlığı altındaki Umman diplomatik tarihi, cesur, bağımsız, tutarlı ve ilkeli dış politika kararlarının uygulanmasına tanık olmuştur. Tüm bu deneyimler, Umman toplumu ve uluslararası arenada Qaboos'un dış politika kararları konusunda ortak bir hoşnutluk ve beklenti oluşmasına yardımcı olmuştur. Diğer bir deyişle, Umman'ın tutarlı diplomatik girişimleri ve bunların başarılı sonuçları, hem iç hem de dış aktörlerin memnuniyetle karşıladığı bu diplomatik rollerin devam etmesine vesile olmuştur.

Umman Dış Politikasının Yardımcı Dinamikleri

Devlet-Toplum İlişkileri

Devlet-toplum ilişkileri, Qaboos'un yönetimi altındaki Umman'da dış politika kararlarını etkileyen bir diğer dinamiktir. Neoklasik Realizm, devlet ile çeşitli ekonomik ve toplumsal gruplar arasındaki etkileşimin özüne göre devlet-toplum bağlarını ele almaktadır (Ripsman vd., 2016, 70-71). Bir diğer deyişle, liderlerin dış politika kararlarında devlet ve toplum arasındaki uyumun ve uyumsuzluğun derecesine önem vermektedir.

Daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, Qaboos döneminde, siyasi güç Sultan'ın elinde merkezileşmişti. Dolayısıyla modern Umman'ın kurucusu olan Sultan Qaboos, Umman ulusal kimliğinin temel taşı olmuştur (Valeri, 2014, 185). Bu nedenle Umman'da devlet ve toplum arasındaki etkileşim öncelikle Sultan'a sadakat üzerine

kurulmuştur. Öte yandan Umman halkının devletin iç ve dış politikalarına karşı memnuniyeti ve onayı, sultanın rejimin istikrarını sürdürmesi için aynı derecede önemlidir. Bir diğer ifadeyle, Umman'da devlet-toplum ilişkileri, sistemin ayakta kalabilmesi için birbirine bağımlı olan toplumun hoşnutluğu ve sultana bağlılık olmak üzere iki yönlü olmuştur. Bu bağlamda, Sultan Qaboos, bazı dış politika kararlarını alırken kabile toplumunun önceliklerini ve neredeyse nüfusun yarısını oluşturan yabancı işgücünü göz önünde bulundurmuştur.

Peterson (2007) Körfez ülkelerindeki kabile yapısını yönetici aileler, tüccar aileler ve bir Şeyhin önderlik ettiği kabileler olarak sınıflandırır. Bu sınıflandırma bir bakıma Umman için de geçerlidir. Qaboos, görev süresi boyunca yasal bir varis belirlememiş ve iktidardaki Al Said ailesinin yönetime katılımı da diğer Körfez ülkelerinin aksine sınırlı olmuştur. Bunun yerine, Qaboos, gücü merkezileştirirken, servet ve hükümet görevlerini kabileler ve tüccar aileler arasında dağıtmaya dayanan kendine özgü bir yönetim sistemi kurmuştur. Bununla birlikte, Al Said ailesiyle aynı soydan gelen Al Busaidi ailesinin bazı üyeleri, Qaboos döneminde bazı önemli bakanlık görevlerinde bulunmuşlardır.
Ummanlı tüccar ailelerin dış politika karar alma süreçlerine etkilerine ilişkin olarak, Qaboos'un barışçıl statükonun korunmasına dayalı dış politika yönelimini destekledikleri söylenebilir (Peterson, 2007, 32). Bu doğrultuda Qaboos, birçok ülke ile ekonomik işbirliğini ön planda tutan istikrarlı ve proaktif bir dış politika izlemiştir. Başka bir deyişle, Qaboos, ABD ve diğer bazı ülkelerle serbest ticaret anlaşmaları ve yatırımların teşviki ve çifte vergilendirmenin önlenmesi gibi ekonomik işbirliği konusunda ikili anlaşmalar yaparak ve Dünya Ticaret Örgütü gibi uluslararası kuruluşlara katılarak Ummanlı tüccar ailelerin yurtdışında iş yapma konusunda önlerini açmıştır.

Umman devlet kurumlarında siyasi varlık gösteren bir diğer grubu da şeyhlerin başında bulunduğu kabileler oluşturmuştur. Daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, Umman kabileleri etnik ve dini kökenleri bakımından farklılık göstermektedir; ancak bu durum, Kâbus'un merkezi ve kendine özgü yönetim sisteminin işlevlerini hiçbir zaman engellememiştir. Aksine, Qaboos'un stratejisi, kabileler arasında servet ve hükümet görevlerinin dağıtılmasına dayanıyordu. Dolayısıyla bu kabilelerin refahlarını

sürdürmeleri sistemin devamına bağlı olduğu için rejime meydan okuma girişiminde bulunmamışlardır (Valeri, 2014, 185).

Bununla birlikte, diğer Orta Doğu ülkeleriyle eş zamanlı olarak Umman'da da 2011 ve 2012 yıllarında yaygın protestolar yaşanmıştır; sözkonusu protestolar rejimi hedef almasa da 1976'da Dhofar isyanının bastırılmasından bu yana Qaboos hükümeti için en zorlu iç tehdidi oluşturmuştur. Fakat protestolar daha çok ekonomik iyileştirme ve yolsuzluk karşıtı talepler içerdiği için, Qaboos'un bu talepleri yerine getirmesiyle etkisini kaybetmiş ve polis müdahalesiyle kısa sürede sona ermiştir.

Kısaca, Umman'da devlet-toplum ilişkilerinin özü Sultan Qaboos'a bağlılık, saygı ve güvene dayandığından, bu durum dış politika karar alma sürecinde en üst karar verici olan Sultan'a özgüven ve manevra alanı sağlamıştır. Ayrıca literatürde Umman'da 2011 ve 2012 yıllarında gerçekleşen geniş çaplı gösterilerde dahi protestocuların dış politika konularında herhangi bir talepleri veya rahatsızlıkları bulunduğuna dair bir bilgiye rastlanmamıştır. Bu durumdan iki çıkarım yapılabilecektir. İlki Umman toplumunun dış politika konusunu öncelik olarak görmemesi, ikinci ise bu konuda Sultan'a olan güven ve saygıdır ki, bu araştırma için ikinci seçenek, NKR perspektifinden Umman toplumunun devletle ilişkilerinin dış politika karar-alma süreci üzerindeki etkilerini açıklamada daha uygun olacaktır.

21. yüzyılda Umman da diğer Körfez monarşileri gibi kayda değer sayıda yabancı işgücünü ağırlayan bir ülke haline gelmiştir. Örnek vermek gerekirse, Umman'daki yabancı nüfus 2010 ve 2020 arasındaki on yılda yüzde 113 oranında artış göstermiştir (Expat population increases 113 percent from 2010, 2020). Aynı şekilde 2000 yılında 623 571 olan ülkedeki yabancı sayısı Nisan 2017'de 2.123.928 ile zirveye ulaşmıştır (National Center for Statistics and Information, 2021). Ayrıca, yabancı nüfusun Umman'ın toplam nüfusu içindeki oranı 2003 yılında yüzde 23,9 iken 2009 yılında yüzde 36'ya yükselmiştir (De Bel-Air, 2015). 2017 yılında ise sözkonusu oran yüzde 45,9'a ulaşmış ve nüfusun neredeyse yarısını oluşturmuştur (Omanization leads to further drop in expat numbers, 2019).

Umman'daki yabancı nüfusun büyük çoğunluğu Hindistan alt kıtasındandır, bu nedenle Hindistanlılar, Bangladeşliler ve Pakistanlılar yabancıların çoğunluğunu oluşturmaktadır. Umman nüfusundaki önemli oranları ve Umman kalkınma sürecine göreli ekonomik katkıları göz önüne alındığında, yabancı toplulukların Umman'ın menşe ülkelerine yönelik dış politikası üzerindeki etkileri yadsınamaz bir gerçektir. Bir yandan bu topluluklar, ikili ilişkileri geliştirmek için Umman ile kendi ülkeleri arasında insani bağı oluştururken, diğer yandan, Umman'ın menşe ülkeleriyle ilgili konularda dış politika karar-alma sürecinde kısıtlayıcı bir faktör haline gelebilmektedirler.

Jeopolitik

Kaplan (2013) Umman'ın Hindistan alt kıtası, Afrika ve Orta Doğu'nun ortasında yeralan ve petrol sevkiyatı açısından dünyanın en işlek boğazı olan Hürmüz Boğazının kontrolünü İran ile birlikte elinde tutan jeostratejik konumunu, Orta Doğu'daki en kritik konumlardan biri olarak tanımlamaktadır. Bu konum, Qaboos döneminde Umman'ın dış politika karar-alma sürecinde birçok fırsatlar sunmuş ve bazı kısıtlamalar getirmiştir.

Umman'ın jeopolitiğinin dış politika karar-alma süreci üzerindeki etkileri üç perspektiften analiz edilmiştir. İlk olarak, Umman'ın İran ile Körfez'e açılan tek geçidin eş kontrolörü olması bu konumunun getirdiği avantajlar ve kısıtlamalar açısından ele alınmıştır. İkinci olarak, Umman'ın aktif bir lojistik merkez ve önemli bir askeri üs olma potansiyelini sağlayan Afrika ve Hindistan alt kıtasının ortasındaki konumu analiz edilmiştir. Son olarak da, iç savaşın devam ettiği Yemen ve bu çatışmada taraf olarak yer alan BAE ve Suudi Arabistan ile sınır komşusu olmasının Umman dış politika karar alma sürecine etkileri tartışılmıştır.

Sonuç olarak, Umman'ın jeopolitiği her zaman dış politikasının belirleyicilerinden biri olmuştur. Başka bir deyişle, Valeri'nin (2014) altını çizdiği gibi, Ummanlı yetkililer, bölgesindeki herhangi bir istikrarsızlığı Umman'ın iç istikrarına yönelik bir tehdit olarak algılamıştır. Bu nedenle Qaboos, Umman'ın jeostratejik konumunun yadsınamaz gerçekliğini her zaman vurgulamış ve buna bağlı olarak Umman'ı

“herkesin dostu, kimsenin düşmanı” haline getiren barış ve uzlaşma odaklı dış politika yaklaşımını belirlemiştir (Funsch, 2015, 166).

Hidrokarbona Dayalı Ekonomi

Umman'ın ekonomik ve siyasi istikrarını sürdürmesi için hidrokarbon kaynaklarına bağımlılığı 21. yüzyılda giderek artmıştır. Bu çerçevede, Umman’ın hidrokarbona dayalı ekonomisinin dış politika karar verme sürecine etkileri, Umman'ın ithalatçı ülkelerle olan ticari ilişkisi nedeniyle karşılaştığı fırsatlar ve kısıtlamalar göz önünde bulundurularak incelenmiş ve dış politika tercihlerinde ekonomik çeşitlendirme çabalarının etkileri ele alınmıştır. Bu analizde, Umman'ın Çin ile kademeli olarak gelişen ilişkileri, hidrokarbona dayalı bir ekonominin Umman'ın dış politika kararları üzerindeki etkilerini açıklamak için en iyi örnek olarak seçilmiştir.

Sonuç

Özetle, 21. yüzyılın ilk yirmi yılında Ortadoğu ülkeleri vekalet savaşlarından, iç karışıklıklara, yeni ortaya çıkan terör örgütlerinden, nükleer gerilimlere kadar pek çok tehdit ve sınamayla karşı karşıya gelmiştir. Bu ortamda Umman, bağımsız dış politika yaklaşımını Qaboos'un saltanatı boyunca ciddi bir sapma olmadan sürdürmeyi başarmıştır. Ortadoğu'nun en uzun süre görevde kalan yöneticisi olan Qaboos, Umman'ın dış politika yöneliminin bu üst düzey devamlılığında kritik bir rol oynamıştır. Bununla birlikte, 1970'den itibaren Sultan Qaboos tarafından ve çevresinde kendine özgü bir karar verme sistemi oluşturulmuştur. Bu sistemde Umman’ın bağımsız dış politika yönelimini şekillendirmek ve sürdürmek için birçok iç ve yapısal dinamik de bir araya gelmiştir.

Sonuç olarak, bu tez, Qaboos'un kişiliğinin, ilkelerinin ve dünya görüşünün, 21. yüzyılda Umman'ın dış politika uygulamalarının üst düzey sürekliliğini açıklamada özellikle merkezi dinamik olduğu sonucuna varmıştır. Ancak, İbadî öğretileri, Umman milliyetçiliği ve diplomatik tarihinin mirasından oluşan stratejik kültür, Umman toplumu arasında bağımsız dış politika anlayışının sürdürülmesi konusunda ortak bir beklenti ve rıza oluşturmuştur. Diğer bir deyişle, bir yandan bu dinamik, Umman hükümetinin bağımsız bir dış politika yaklaşımını sürdürmesini desteklemiş; öte

yandan bu yaklaşımdan sapmada sınırlayıcı bir rol oynamıştır. Ayrıca Umman'ın jeopolitik konumu, hidrokarbona dayalı ekonomisi ve sosyal yapısı, Qaboos döneminde dış politika karar verme sürecini etkilemiştir.

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TEZİN ADI / TITLE OF THE THESIS (**İngilizce** / English): Dynamics of Oman's Foreign Policy Under Sultan Qaboos's Reign Through the Lenses of Neo-Classical Realism

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