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## The Foundations of Oman's Foreign Policy and Regional Positioning in the Persian Gulf Regional System (2010-2023)

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### Extended Abstract

As one of the most important functional regions in the world, the Persian Gulf region holds a significant position in the power equations and regional arrangements, particularly in terms of politics, economy, and security. The importance of this region for governments throughout history has been a platform for political and military competitions and challenges, to the extent that most wars and security conflicts have taken place in this regional system.

Oman is one of the important and influential Arab countries - a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council - in the Persian Gulf regional system, which has traditionally been one of Iran's most important allies over the centuries. Despite having many cultural and civilizational similarities with other Persian Gulf actors, this

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country has different and distinctive characteristics, especially in its foreign policy approaches. Since the mid-1980s, Omani policy has been to adopt a policy of neutrality and build multi-layered friendships with regional and international actors, and they have generally refrained from directly engaging in issues that have a thorny aspect. Political realism has led Omanis to a position where they have simultaneously been able to establish appropriate relations between opposing and rival actors, such as the United States and Iran, China and India, and Iran and Saudi Arabia. The policy of avoiding tension is so deeply rooted in the foundations of Omani foreign policy that the country made non-interference in alignments against Iran one of its main conditions for joining the Gulf Cooperation Council, and it has striven to maintain it to this day.

Omanis do not have the same financial and oil resources as their neighbors and do not play a role in the energy market. Accordingly, they are trying to take full advantage of the confrontation between Iran and the West. In this regard, they are trying to be the axis of energy transfer from Central Asia to other regions and, given their strategic location in the Sea of Oman and the Makran region, take on the role of a "strategic actor". To achieve this goal, they are trying to create multi-layered and diverse interactions and play the role of a "mediating actor", and in this regard, Omanis have been among the most active countries present at regional and international conferences and meetings. In this regard, this research aims to examine the behavioral patterns of this country and its consequences within the framework of the foundations of Oman's foreign policy in the Persian Gulf regional system, given the importance and influence of Oman. Considering this issue, it can be said that the foundations of Oman's foreign policy, even after Sultan Qaboos, have been relatively stable based on political realism, the use of strategic-geopolitical capacities, and complex interactions with other actors. On this basis, despite the dynamics, developments, and changes in power equations and the occurrence of crises at the regional level, Oman's foreign policy in the regional system has continued in an independent, impartial, and balanced manner within the framework of intelligent diplomacy, bilateral and multilateral dialogues and cooperation in various economic, political, and security fields actively

and systematically. These behavioral patterns have ultimately introduced this country as an active actor in the Persian Gulf regional system and have paved the way for enhancing the country's position in the Persian Gulf-Middle East regional system and the international system. This article aims to explain the trends and foundations of Oman's foreign policy in achieving this positioning by raising the question of what conditions exist in Muscat's foreign policy for achieving this goal. It is of the opinion that the country's performance in the three areas of desire, capacity, and acceptance for regional positioning over the past decade has prepared the ground for this role.

Focusing on this question, the results of this article show that in the area of desire, Muscat's foreign policy, due to avoiding ideological attitudes and replacing realistic leaders, has sought growth and progress, expanding interaction, and ultimately gaining a position at the regional level. Today, Oman's declared programs at various levels and the volume of exchanges of this country in this region indicate its serious desire for regional positioning.

In the area of capacities, which can be seen in investments, exchanges, and political and economic relations in the region, Oman's economic power and the expansion of economic influence in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region clearly demonstrate the conditions for playing a role. In the current period, few researchers doubt Oman's economic, cultural, and political developments. In the area of acceptance, Oman has been able to gain the satisfaction of the countries of the region. In the theoretical field, factors such as realism, tolerance, political neutrality, etc., have made Oman attractive. In practical terms, the huge volume of exchanges between regional countries and political mediations between regional countries, especially in relation to Iran, and above all the nuclear program of the Islamic Republic, and European and Western countries, can be evaluated in this context. Therefore, the series of developments that have taken place indicate that Oman's regional positioning has been moving forward in the last decade and, despite the change in the country's internal leadership, it has still been a source of playing an effective role in filling the gaps within the region in the regional order of the Persian Gulf, and has also been able to be a reliable source for political and security exchanges between the region and the level of the international system and

the role of great powers in this region. In this study, an attempt was made to address how this role is instilled using the theoretical foundations of regional positioning; although these relations and this path were not and are not without challenges. The fragility of the region's security structure, polar divisions over fundamental regional crises such as the Palestinian issue and border disputes, and excessive expectations from regional rivals for Oman to take a clear and unilateral direction in times of crisis are the most important obstacles, the management of which by Muscat in the future could be a reflection of the success or failure of this country's regional positioning.

**Key words:** Foreign policy, Oman, Persian Gulf region, regional positioning, Middle East.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.