

country will only lead to the international isolation of Pakistan. Thus, a new political figure is required: an incorrupt civilian politician, on the one hand, and one who suits the army, on the other hand. Imran Khan has shown his loyalty to the military in the past, owing in part to his Pashtun ancestry (the number of Pashtuns in the army is large and growing). Last but not least, Imran Khan has been popular with young people ever since he was the captain of the country's national cricket team, and managed to build on this popularity in the early years of his political career.

VLADIMIR KIRICHENKO. SULTAN QABOOS AND THE MODERNIZATION OF OMAN // *Article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World"*.

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the activities of the Sultan Qaboos (1970–2020). The Sultan of Oman made a unique contribution to the development of this country. In addition, the neutrality in foreign policy, which Oman adhered to during his reign, helped to establish relations with neighboring countries and become a mediator in conflict situations.

Sultan Qaboos bin Said was born on November 18, 1940 in the Dhofar governorate of the Sultanate of Oman. Sultan Qaboos

is the only son of Said bin Taimur (1910–1972) and Princess Mazun al-Mashani. He was the eighth sultan and direct descendant of the Al-Said dynasty, founded by Imam Ahmed bin Said in 1741.

The future sultan began his education in Oman, then, in September 1958, his father Said bin Taimur sent his son to the UK for continuation training. He spent two years at a private school in Suffolk and in 1960 entered the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst¹. After graduating from the academy, he served two years in the rifle battalion of the English army, and then completed the course of headquarters director in Germany. When he returned to the UK, he received specific training in the study of the local government in the UK. After completing his studies, Qaboos bin Said went on a trip around the world to get acquainted with the cultures and developmental delays of foreign countries. He returned to Oman in 1964, where his father, the ruling sultan, probably did not like his European experience, as a result of which the heir was placed under house arrest. Official biographies about this period say that he spent most of his time studying Sharia law, as well as the history and culture of Oman². Subsequently, Qaboos himself noted in an interview that the study of the religion, culture and history of his country influenced greatly his attitude towards the world³.

In 1966, significant oil deposits were discovered in Oman. Under the pressure of foreign companies interested in developing oil fields, Sultan Said agreed to build a modern port (Matrakha) on the coast of the Arabian Sea, lay a hard-topped highway (Muscat – Sokhar). In the spring of 1970, a modern national currency was introduced in Oman, which replaced the previous Maria Theresa thaler⁴.

In 1970, as a result of a bloodless palace coup, Qaboos bin Said came to power. This happened with the support of the Omani armed forces controlled by Britain⁵. So, on July 23, 1970, Said bin Taimur was forced to sign abdication in favor of his son.

The former sultan died in London in 1972⁶. At the same time, a united Kingdom of Oman⁷ was proclaimed.

Modernization of the country during the reign Sultan Qaboos

Having come to power, Qaboos immediately began to develop reforms to modernize the state. Radio Oman, working in Arabic and English, was launched almost immediately. A little later the same happened to Radio Salal, broadcasting in Arabic. Since 1972, daily newspapers in Arabic began to appear: Oman, and Al-Watan. In 1975, national television was launched, traditionally starting its programs with prayers broadcasting. Today, these are five channels working "in 5 directions: a general program, a foreign program, a youth program, the Koran program, a program of classical music⁸." In 1976, the construction of a satellite communications center began.

In 1976, thanks to military assistance from Iran, Jordan and Great Britain, Qaboos managed to weed out resistance of the Dhofar Liberation Front⁹. This organization fought for split from Oman since 1965. Having solved the problem with the separatists, the sultan could engage in the development of the country.

The basis for the development of Oman was and remains oil production. Oman's oil fields were discovered in 1962¹⁰. The main oil company in Oman is Petroleum Development Oman Ltd. (PDO). Until 1974, Shell owned a controlling interest. Since 1974, the Omani government has been the majority owner, and Shell, as a minority shareholder, provides technical and management services. In the early 1970s it became clear that the original Fahud oil-bearing region could not maintain production at the opening rate of about 300,000 barrels per day. In 1975, the development of fields in the Ghab region increased production from 291,000 barrels per day to about 350,000 barrels per day. In the early 1980s, the development of southern fields restored

production from 282,000 barrels in 1980 to 400,000 barrels in 1984. Since then, production has continued to grow and by the end of 1990 oil reserves reached 700,000 barrels. Gas reserves in 1988 amounted to more than 912 cubic feet with production of about 450 million cubic feet. Since then, the Omani economy has experienced impressive GDP growth, rising from \$256 million in 1970 up to \$79.66 billion in 2012¹².

Largely due to oil export revenues, Qaboos was able to begin a plan of modernization of Oman. In 1970, Oman almost didn't have modern infrastructure. There were 3 (!) schools and 10 km of asphalt roads in the country. Medical care was minimal, life expectancy did not exceed 50 years.

When Qaboos ascended the throne, he abolished slavery. Then the sultan took to infrastructure: asphalt roads were laid, bridges were built, desalinating plants and dams were built, high-speed Internet was carried. The life expectancy of Omanis began to exceed 77 years, and literacy is estimated at 96% adults¹³.

The "omanization" plan, implemented in 1988, was aimed at reducing the country's dependence on foreign labor. The policy offered reducing the share of foreign workers in both public and private sectors. The reforms also affected the private sector, the share of which increased from 14.7% in 1995 to 16.6% in 2000. At the same time, agriculture and fishing were the least affected by the plan; wholesale and retail trade; restaurants and hotels; production; construction of roads and buildings and services. These sectors employed 88% of the total number of private sector workers and 95% of the total number of foreign workers.

The highest level of "omanization" was achieved in the following sectors: transport, communications; financial insurance, real estate and labour services and mining. But only 8 per cent of the total private sector workforce was employed in these sectors¹⁴.

In November 1996, at the initiative of Qaboos, a constitution was introduced in Oman. A Council of Oman was also established, the activities of which are deliberative. Sultan

Qaboos remained an absolute monarch, combining the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Minister of Defense, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the Central Bank. However, in relation to the lieges, he behaved quite democratically. So, the monarch gathered around him vice-agents, with whom he traveled from time to time throughout the country to meet with the public. This helped him sort out priorities and respond to people's inquisities¹⁵.

The dominant direction of Islam in Oman is Ibadism, which differs from both Sunnism and Shiism. Ibadites are tolerant of other faiths. The British orientalist Bernard Lewis noted that Ibadites is – "the most extreme example of tribal independence¹⁶". Indeed, Sultan Qaboos, who received an excellent education in Europe, managed to preserve tribal traditions by making his state the most tolerant, despite fierce differences and ambitions of neighboring Gulf states.

In Oman, ibadits make up 75% of the population. In addition to them, 5% of the Shia population live in the country. Another 5% are Christians and Hindus, mainly of South Asian descent. The rest of the population is Sunni Muslims. Sunni and Shia minorities coexist peacefully in Oman¹⁷. In 2001, the construction of the majestic Sultan Qaboos Mosque was completed. The dome of the main prayer hall is located at a 45 m height, and the height of the main minaret reaches 92 m¹⁸.

Omanis enjoy freedom of thought, while there is censorship in the media. Criticism of the government and Qaboos himself, as well as religious ideas, are prohibited¹⁹.

Oman was not passed by the events of the Arab Spring 2011. However, there were no major disturbances in Oman. Thousands of people got out on the streets across the country to demand payrise, more jobs and tightening of control against corruption. Primarily, the security forces did not disperse the demonstrations, but later tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition were used to stop the protests. As a result, two people were killed and dozens were injured. Hundreds of people

were convicted of “illegal meetings” and actions “insulting the sultan”. The protests did not lead to major changes. However, Qaboos removed several officials who have long been accused of corruption, broadened the mandate of the Advisory Board and promised to create more jobs in the public sector²⁰.

Qaboos carried out a decisive administrative reform, redrawing the map of Oman in such a way that the borders of the new provinces ceased to repeat the territories of the tribes, and the governors were able to carry out Muscat decisions without looking about the opinion of the tribal leaders. Qaboos paid attention to the development of trade and business activity. The Sultan also strengthened the army by rearming it and significantly increased military payments²¹.

It should be noted that solar and wind power was also developed in Oman under Qaboos. In 2017, it was announced that the Omani government set out that by 2025 the sultanate covers 10% of its energy needs using these sources. The use of wind and solar energy is of great importance in agriculture²².

The Sultan initiated programs to help the poor. It provides housing and land throughout the country to poor families and other categories of people in need. They can get a loan from the Housing Bank, under the terms of which they are absolved from 50% of the loan disbursements. For example, in 2008, the volume of payments and benefits to families on social security increased. The minimum pension for former civil servants has been increased by 35%. At the same time, payments for other categories of the poor increased by 5–17%²³.

Foreign Policy of Sultan Qaboos: Moderation and Neutrality

Under Sultan Qaboos, Oman established diplomatic relations with its neighbors, joined the League of Arab States and the United Nations, and became one of the important members of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

All this time, Qaboos supported the independence of Oman, demonstrating the ability to build equitable relationship with a number of world and regional powers. In violation of the Arab consensus, he supported negotiations between Egypt and Israel, which led to the conclusion of the first peace treaty between Israel and the Arab state (1978).

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979), Qaboos delegated the Ambassador of Oman to Tehran to get acquainted with the new rulers of the country. This led to a meeting with Ayatollah Khomeini, who received assurances that Oman would maintain relations with the Islamic Republic, regardless of the sultanate's alliance with Western powers.

In 1978, after the conclusion of the Camp David Accords, 24 Oman was one of the few members of the League of Arab States that did not interrupt diplomatic relations with Egypt. A year later, after Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel (1979), the governments of Oman and Israel first opened trade offices in Muscat and Tel Aviv. Throughout the ongoing war in Syria, unlike most Arab states, the Omani embassy in Damascus remained open.

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In 1994, Oman became the first Gulf state which hosted the Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin arrived in the country. Subsequently, Oman did the same with Israeli Prime Ministers Shimon Peres, Netanyahu, while maintaining friendly ties with the Palestinian Authority²⁶.

Qaboos's independence and neutrality often irritated his more powerful neighbors in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates,

which vainly hoped that Oman would be in line with their regional policies. In 2011, when Saudi Arabia sent tanks to subdue the Shia revolt in Bahrain, Oman did not support that intervention. He did not interfere in the Saudi military operation against the Houthis rebels in Yemen (2015), but later Oman provided a platform for peace negotiations between the warring parties.

Oman became a mediator in Iran's negotiations with the United States and other powers. These negotiations led to an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program (2015), although President Trump withdrew from the agreement three years later²⁸. Oman has also established friendly relations with Russia and China.

In 2017, Saudi authorities accused the Qatari leadership of supporting terrorism and interfering in the internal affairs of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Oman, along with Kuwait, did not support the subsequent blockade of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Arab countries²⁹.

The following year, the first ever municipal elections were held in Oman, in which women also participated. Omani women under Qaboos one the first were qualified for the vote in the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, they can own land, hold ministerial office, and serve in the army. Today, they make up almost half of civil servants. They can also head companies and receive equal pay with men. In 1999, Oman became the first Arabian country which sent woman as its ambassador abroad³⁰.

It is worth noting that Qaboos paid great importance to ecology. In 1991, together with UNESCO, the Sultan established an award for the contribution of individuals, groups of individuals, institutions or organizations to the preservation of the environment³¹.

In 2017, the first Oman Environment Forum was held. The participants of the event noted the efforts of Qaboos to improve environmental sustainability and thanked him for preserving the environment. Rational use of Oman's natural resources has played a significant role in this³².

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said died of cancer on January 10, 2020. He was 79 years old. As it's known, the sultan did not leave heirs, so the Council of the ruling dynasty elected Haysam bin Tariq Al-Said (born 1935), a cousin of Qaboos, new sultan of Oman. A graduate of the Sorbonne, he headed the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage for many years, repeatedly was a representative of Qaboos in the international arena.

Qaboos bin Said turned Oman into a modern and stable state. Infrastructure and social development have made life in Oman comfortable. The policy of the sultan was supported by the majority of the population. This is demonstrated by the low level of interventions during the Arab Spring (2011). In addition, the policy of religious tolerance supported by the sultan has led to the peaceful coexistence of adherents of many faiths and religions in the country. And the Sultan's smart foreign policy helped Oman avoid conflicts with neighboring states and become an independent player in world politics.

Today, Oman is a small monarchy of the Persian Gulf (territory 309,500 km²), with a population of 4.6 million people, 43% of which are expats, it is considered an island of stability and tranquility in the Middle East. In 2010, Oman was recognized as the world leader in terms of development in accordance with the Human Development Index, in 2017 the sultanate took fourth place among the safest countries in the world, and in 2019 the state was in second out of 150 places in the global welfare index³³.

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