

OE Threat Assessment: Oman



[TRADOC G-2 Intelligence Support Activity \(TRISA\)](#)

Complex Operational Environment and Threat Integration Directorate (CTID)





Introduction

Oman is a strategically important country in the Middle East and a key ally of the United States in the region. It is located on the southeast coast of the Arabian Peninsula, and bordered by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on the northwest, Saudi Arabia on the west, and Yemen on the southwest. The country's strategic importance is magnified by a geographically separate portion of its territory that lies on the tip of the Musandam Peninsula, directly across the Strait of Hormuz from Iran. An estimated 40% of the crude oil exported by Middle Eastern countries passes through this major shipping lane. Although Oman's diplomatic relations with the United States date to the early 1830s, prior to 1970 it was one of the most isolated and underdeveloped countries in the region. That year, with the blessing of the United Kingdom (UK), the current ruler, Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said, deposed his father in a bloodless coup, which hindsight has shown to be a quantum leap in facilitating Oman's modernization and opening the country to the outside world.

Political

Oman is a hereditary monarchy in which most of the decision-making authority resides in the head of state, Sultan Qaboos, who has led the country since 1970. Although briefly married in the 1970s, the union produced no children, so succession to the throne and continuity in government remain matters of concern to many Omanis. As things now stand, upon Sultan Qaboos's death or incapacitation, a Ruling Family Council would select a successor from the ruler's extended family. If the Ruling Family Council cannot arrive at a consensus within three days, the Defense Council will select an heir based on the Sultan's pre-stated preferences.

Oman is divided into 11 governates in addition to the capital region of Muscat: Muhafazat, Ad Dakhilyah, Al Buraymi, Al Wusta, AZ Zahirah, Janub al Batinah (Al Batinah South), Janub ash Sharqiyah (Ash Sharqiyah South), Musandam (the peninsula across from Iran), Shamal al Batinah (Al Batinah North), Shamal ash Sharqiyah (Ash Sharqiyah North), and Zufar (Dhofar.)

Although Oman has no official constitution, in November 1996 Sultan Qaboos published a royal decree that the government regards as a de facto constitution and basic law. Sultan Qaboos serves as both chief of state and head of government (prime minister). He also appoints cabinet ministers. The legislative branch of government consists of a 71-seat upper chamber (Majlis al-Dawia), appointed by the monarch, and a lower house (Majlis al-Shura) of 84 members elected by popular vote. The upper house has only advisory powers, and the lower house can draft legislation subject to the approval of the Sultan. The legal system is a mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Sharia law. The country's nascent civil court system is administered by region. Political parties are illegal in Oman.

Despite the fact that Oman's government and political system remain firmly under the control of the monarch, in 2002 Sultan Qaboos initiated a limited program of reform to broaden the



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electoral franchise. By the October 2003 elections, all Omani citizens over 21 years of age, both male and female, were enfranchised. In March of that year, Sultan Qaboos appointed the country's first female cabinet minister. With all of the changes taking place in the Arab world since the spring of 2011, the Sultan is likely to come under increasing pressure from his subjects to speed up the pace of political reform. Despite this pressure, Sultan Qaboos remains a popular monarch, and Oman appears headed in the direction of a constitutional monarchy. The majority of Omanis view the Sultan's government as legitimate.

Military

Oman's military is the third-largest among those states that belong to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Besides Oman, these countries include Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Qatar. Collectively called the Sultan's Armed Forces, Oman's military consists of the Royal Army of Oman, Royal Navy of Oman, and the Royal Air Force of Oman. All military service is voluntary. Although perhaps not the best-equipped among the armed forces of the region, the Sultan often remarks that the strength of his military is in its training. Although Oman was the first Gulf state to solidify defense arrangements with the United States following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, modernization of its armed forces accelerated after the First Gulf War of 1990-1991. Since that time it has received significant assistance from the U.S. and the UK.

Oman's major external threat is from suspected violent extremists from Yemen who periodically attempt to illegally penetrate the country's southern border. The army's mission is to protect Omani's territorial integrity by deterring or repelling any potential incursions by foreign powers. Omani naval resources act to suppress piracy, weapons smuggling, and narcotics trafficking that occurs in the Arabian Sea and along Oman's southern border with Yemen. Oman's security concerns are complicated by its close proximity to Iran and Iraq, and also because it plays a key role in keeping the Strait of Hormuz open to global maritime shipping.

The Sultan of Oman is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. In discharging this function he typically acts through the deputy prime minister for security and defense and the minister of state for defense. Sultan Qaboos is a graduate of the British military academy at Sandhurst, and his armed forces mirror the military doctrine and ideology taught at that institution. The chief of staff of the armed forces and the individual service commanders also answer to the Sultan through the defense council. Until the 1970s individual service commanders were former British officers. More recently, the Sultan has chosen indigenous Omani personnel to fill these senior positions. The country is divided into three zones for military administration. One infantry brigade is deployed in the northern portion of the country, at Muaskar al-Murtafa, another in the south at Salalah, and an independent rifle company guards the Omani tip of the Musandam Peninsula. Roughly 2,000 expatriates from Europe, South Asia, or other Arab countries also serve in the Omani military.



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Army

The personnel strength of the Omani army totals about 31,400, plus about 6,400 Royal Household troops, and 4,000 members of the Tribal Home Guard. Although the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) has conducted no major operations in recent years, some elements did engage in relief efforts in 2007 in the aftermath of Cyclone Guno. The RAO maintains its headquarters at Muaskar al-Murtafa (MAM). The configuration of the headquarters mirrors that of a British divisional headquarters. Three subordinate brigade-level headquarters are located at MAM, Salalah, and Muscat. The Omani army is configured for ground combat operations, and the Royal Guard Brigade, with a separate chain of command, is responsible for the protection of the Sultan. Ground defense of Oman is complicated by the geographical separation of its territory into two non-contiguous regions. Forces deployed on the Musandam Peninsula focus on the Strait of Hormuz, while those stationed in the larger southern region conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) operations against hostile elements attempting to enter Oman from Yemen. Most regiments in the Omani army are typically of battalion size. The army is configured in the following manner:

- 1 armored brigade
- 2 armored regiments
- 2 infantry brigades
- 8 infantry regiments
- 1 Royal Guard Brigade
- 1 armored recon regiment
- 3 field artillery regiments
- 1 air defense artillery regiment (2 batteries)
- 1 signal regiment
- 2 field engineer regiments
- 1 airborne regiment
- 1 independent rifle company

Air Force

As with the army, the overriding reality for the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) is the geographical separation of the Musandam Peninsula from the rest of the sultanate. Air force equipment inventories have been increased and upgraded in recent years by acquiring advanced fixed-wing and rotary assets from Western nations. The Omani army and navy depend on the RAFO for air support. Because UK sources formerly provided the RAFO with aircraft and equipment for a long period after it was first organized in 1959, the configuration of the RAFO essentially mirrors the UK Royal Air Force (RAF) organizational structure. Recent acquisitions of American F-16s have played an important role in RAFO modernization. The air force currently consists of 12 squadrons, including 2 squadrons of (Anglo/French) Jaguar ground attack aircraft and one squadron of American-built F-16s. The RAFO also maintains a robust transport and support contingent that includes C-130 Hercules, Skyvan, and A320 Prestige transports, and a variety of utility rotary wing assets. The RAFO maintains major air bases in the following locations:

- Al-Masirah
- Muscat-Seeb
- Salalah
- Thumrait
- Al Musana'a



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Major Royal Air Force of Oman units include:

- 4 fighter/ground attack squadrons
- 2 transport squadrons
- 3 transport helicopter squadrons
- 2 air-defense squadrons
- 1 training squadron

Navy

Approximately 4,200 active-duty personnel serve in the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), including civilians and the maritime division of the Royal Oman Police. The RNO focuses on harbor defence and surface strike capabilities. It has a long history of protecting maritime trade, and is regarded as one of the most effective in the Middle East. The RNO's primary responsibilities are to protect and defend the nearly 1,000 miles of Oman's coastline and offshore economic zones, and to assist in search-and-rescue efforts on an as-needed basis. The Omani navy has long been actively engaged in suppressing the activities of Somali-based pirates who occasionally target merchant ships that operate off the sultanate's coastline. In April 2010 an RNO warship rescued eight crew members of an Indian vessel that had come under pirate attack about 80 nautical miles off Oman's southeastern coast. The RNO also plays a major role in keeping maritime shipping lanes open in the Strait of Hormuz, and cooperates closely with the Iranian navy in accomplishing this function. RNO operations and doctrine draw heavily from those practiced by the UK's Royal Navy. Major Omani naval bases include:

- Jazirat Ghanam, Musandam
- Mina Raysut, Salalah
- Muaskar al-Murtafa
- Said Bin Sultan Naval Base (SBSNB), Wudam (repair & maintenance facility and dockyard)

ARMY (As of May 2012, US origin unless otherwise noted)					
Armored Equipment in Service		Artillery Systems in Service		AT/SAM Weapons in Service	
Challenger II Main Battle Tank (MBT), UK	38	Gun, 130-mm M-46, Russia	12	AT, BGM-71 TOW2	18
M60A1 MBT	6	Gun, 130-mm Type 59-1M towed, China	12	AT, Milan, international	32
M60 A3 MBT	73	Gun, 105-mm L118 light, UK	42	AT, VBL (TOW)	8
Scorpion light, UK	37	Gun, 40-mm L/60 towed air defense, Sweden	12	SAM, Javelin, UK	50
Stormer command vehicle Armored Personnel Carrier (APC), UK	10	Gun, 23-mm ZU-23 twin towed air defense, Russia	4	SAM, SA-7 Grail, Russia	34
Piranha APC, Switzerland	175	Gun, 35-mm GDF-005 twin anti-aircraft w/Skyguard FCS, Switzerland	10	SAM, Mistral 2, France	8
Spartan APC, UK	6	Howitzer, 155-mm G6 Rhino self-propelled, South Africa	24	SAM, Javelin, UK	14
Sultan APC, UK	13	Howitzer, 155-mm FH70 towed, Germany, Italy, UK	12	AT, Javelin, US	UNK



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VBL APC (8 with TOW), France	124	Howitzer, 122-mm D-30 towed, Russia	30	AT, Milan, European	UNK
AT-105 Saxon APC, UK	15	Mortar, 120-mm AM-50, France	12		
		Mortar, 107-mm 4.2-in M30	20		
		Mortar, 81-mm L16A1, UK	69		
		Multiple Rocket Launcher, 122-mm Type-90A, China	6		
AIR FORCE (As of May 2012, US origin unless otherwise noted)					
Fixed Wing Aircraft in Service		Rotary Wing Aircraft in Service		Missiles in Service	
Fighter, F-16 C/D	12	NH-90-TTH, Europe (20 on order)	6	Air-to-Air (ATA) AIM-9p Sidewinder	UNK
Fighter, Jaguar OS Mk1, UK	14	Super Lynx 300, UK	15	ATA AIM-120 AMRAAM	UNK
Light Attack/Trainer, Hawk Mk 203, UK	12	AB 205A transport (UH-1H Huey), to be replaced by 20 NH-90 on order	19	Air-to-Surface (ATS) Missile, AGM-65D Maverick	UNK
Transport, Skyvan 3M, UK	7	AB 212 VIP (UH-1N Huey)	3	ATS Missile, AGM-84D Harpoon	20
Transport, C-130H Hercules	3	AB 206B JetRanger liaison OH-58 Kiowa	3	Surface-to-Air (STA) Missile, Rapier, France	40
Transport, A320-300 Airbus, European	2				
Trainer, Hawk Mk 103, UK	4				
Trainer, Mfi-17 Mushshak Shahbaz, Pakistan	3				
Trainer, MFI-17 Super Mushshak, Pakistan	5				
Trainer, PC-9, Switzerland	12				
NAVY (As of May 2012, UK origin unless otherwise noted)					
Vessels/Vehicles		Missiles		Auxiliary & Amphibious	
Fast Attack Craft, QAHIR AL AMWAJ class	2	Anti-ship, MM40 Exocet, France	UNK	SABA AL BAHR-class mech. Landing craft	3
Fast Attack Craft, DHOFAR class	4	Surface-to-Air, Crotale, France	UNK	FULF AL SALAMAH class (Royal Yacht Squadron, Germany)	1
Patrol Boat, AL BUSHRA class (p400), France	3			Logistics ship, NASR AL BAHR	1
Patrol Boat, AL MARBRUKAH class (former royal yacht)	1			AL NEEMRAN class	1
Patrol Boat, SEEB class	4			AL-MUNASSIR-class landing craft, Singapore	1
				AL SULTANA-class supply craft	1

American Forces in Oman

A military cooperation agreement between Oman and the United States, most recently renewed in 2010, provides for the pre-positioning of US military forces in the sultanate with advanced notice. Although Oman has supported an American presence in the Persian Gulf since 1981, its territory has been utilized by US forces mostly as a staging area and logistical support base. During Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, the number of US military personnel reached a high point of about 4,300. Most US military assets had departed the country by November 2011. Approximately 20 US Air Force personnel still remain in a low-profile capacity, involved mainly with maintaining stores of equipment stockpiled in the sultanate. Most of the US airmen still in-country serve at Thumrait, which has a runway of sufficient length to accommodate mission requirements. However, Omani officials have



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recently enquired into the feasibility of relocating US personnel to Masirah Island, a more remote location with a shorter runway. Although this option might offer some force protection advantages, as of May 2012 the issue still remained open.

British Forces in Oman

The UK still maintains a long-standing defense and security relationship with Oman that dates to a treaty signed in 1800. Approximately 100 British military personnel are on loan to the Omani armed forces, primarily to provide defense training and education. Students attending the Royal College of Defense Studies are regularly selected to visit Oman to broaden the context of their military education. The Omanis reciprocate by providing location-specific training to UK military personnel. In 2011 Omani instructors trained a group of UK paratroopers.

Government Paramilitary Forces

There was little of an organized police presence in Oman before Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said came to power in 1970. Shortly afterward, he became the driving force in creating an effective national police force. The Royal Oman Police (ROP), essentially Sultan Qaboos's personal project, came into existence by a national decree issued in 1972. Little if any open-source information exists regarding the size and capabilities of the ROP. Since becoming part of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) in 1972, it has won a reputation as a professional national police establishment. Although the Sultan himself is the supreme commander of the ROP, he generally works through his Inspector General of Police and Customs, a position he created by royal decree in 1973.

The ROP discharges a variety of functions, to include enforcement of Oman's trade and customs laws. Its Police Aviation Directorate also maintains a fleet of support helicopters that respond to a spectrum of contingencies ranging from fire-fighting to medical evacuation to using thermal imagery as a deterrent to smuggling. The sultanate is one of the first countries in the region to establish this kind of service. Policemen mounted on horses or camels patrol terrain too inaccessible for motor vehicles. A newly-created Oil and Gas Installations Command within the ROP now protects the facilities that export Oman's natural resources, while the Police Coastguard Command has recently modernized its fleet of patrol craft.

Omani Military Functions

Mission Command

The Omani defense establishment, while small in size, is highly centralized, and considered well configured to exercise effective control over the country's armed forces. The sultan is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and operates mainly through the deputy prime minister for security and defense and the minister of state for defense. The chief of staff of the



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armed forces, along with the individual service commanders, serves on the defense council, which is directly responsible to the sultan.

Maneuver

Most of the Royal Army of Oman is comprised of armor and mechanized units that are fully capable of fighting in the country's desert environment. The navy inventory contains a limited number of landing craft and logistical supply ships, indicating a limited capability to conduct amphibious warfare. In general, the Omanis have successfully adopted Western military standards for maintaining equipment readiness, and are fully capable of maneuvering effectively on the desert terrain that dominates their country.

Information Warfare

Because the government of Oman operates a state-run broadcasting system as well as multiple radio stations, it does possess the capacity to shape public opinion throughout the country. Private ownership of media outlets is not prohibited, but few privately-owned stations exist. Criticism of government policy is permitted, but the line is drawn at publicly criticizing the Sultan. In September 2011, government authorities temporarily shut down *Az Zaman*, a prominent newspaper, for allegedly insulting the minister of justice.

RISTA

The Royal Guard Brigade of the Omani army contains a signals and support battalion as well as a special operations element called the Sultan's Special Forces (SSF). The existence of these units suggest a capacity to conduct reconnaissance operations at various depths on the battlefield. Units conduct small-scale training on a regular basis in order to ensure that soldiers maintain required levels of competence. Oman has recently awarded lucrative contracts to upgrade its current fleet of armored combat reconnaissance vehicles.

Fire Support

The Omani military possesses over 150 tubes of howitzers and cannon above 100-mm in caliber. This should be sufficient to provide a level of fire support necessary to protect its four maneuver brigades (including the Royal Guard Brigade) and airborne regiment, as well as the independent rifle company on the Musandam Peninsula. The modestly-sized but superbly-equipped and well-trained Royal Air Force of Oman possesses air-to-ground munitions that can also be brought to bear in meeting the army's close air support (CAS) needs.

Force Protection

The Royal Army of Oman possesses equipment of sufficient quality to meet its force protection needs. Maneuver units primarily operate from enclosed tanks, armored personnel carriers, or infantry fighting vehicles that provide overhead cover. The Royal Guard of Oman, whose primary mission is the protection of the sultan, has already received partial delivery on a spectrum of armored combat vehicles equipped with weapons systems that provide greater



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firepower, and engineered features that promise a higher level of strategic mobility and greater operational range.

Logistics

Thanks in part to its stable and longstanding mutual defense arrangements with the US and other Western nations, Oman's logistical support system is among the most modern and best organized in the Middle East. It recently consolidated all of its military logistics under the provisions of a contract with Miro Technologies of La Jolla, California. A single over-arching system will manage assets and transportation services across all of Oman's armed forces, including the air force, army, Ministry of Defense Engineering Service, and the National Survey Authority. The idea is for a consolidated approach to leverage off-the-shelf software solutions in a way that can efficiently support diverse major end-items from tanks, to helicopters, to a broad spectrum of munitions. A considerable proportion of Oman's logistical and maintenance support has for some time relied heavily on contractual arrangements with US and other Western firms.

Threat Actors in the OE

Although Oman has not been entirely immune from the shockwaves generated by the Arab Spring of 2011, no insurgent, guerrilla, or terrorist organization has gained traction inside the country. A State Department report on global terrorism released in July 2012 confirms that the sultanate successfully prevented terrorist attacks, and also prevented threat actors from using the country for safe haven or transport.

In 2009, an Omani businessman, Ali Abdul al-Hooti, was sentenced to life in prison for his role in a plot to carry out terrorist attacks in Oman, and for providing financial support to Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a Pakistan-based terrorist group. Since 11 September 2001, Oman has greatly assisted efforts by Western nations and Arab states to eradicate terrorism.

Popular uprisings in the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) give the Sultanate some concern over the potential these upheavals have for destabilizing the southern portion of the Arabian peninsula. To preempt this threat, Oman established refugee camps to accommodate Yemini nationals fleeing violence in their native country. To keep the Yemini refugee issue under control, and also to prevent the entry of terrorist elements, Oman has been proactive in deploying military assets along its border with Yemen.

In concert with other Gulf nations, the Royal Navy of Oman conducts operations to deter Somali pirates who have been known to venture as far north as the Arabian Sea, to include Oman's territorial waters.



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Non-Military Armed Combatants

Few if any non-military armed combatants operate inside Oman. A number of private security firms provide services associated with that trade, including protecting corporate VIPs and government officials, and furnishing escorts to ensure the safe passage of maritime shipping. Otherwise, Oman strictly limits private gun ownership. Civilians are permitted to own weapons, provided they can convince authorities that they have ample justification. The law requires that a record be maintained of the acquisition, possession, and transfer of privately held firearms. About 1 in 4 Omanis own guns. The total number of civilian gun owners is estimated at 650,000. Reports suggest that the level of firearm and ammunition smuggling in Oman is low. The typical Omani would be neutral if not supportive of any Western assistance rendered to the sultanate.

Criminal Organizations

Oman formerly had serious issues related to trafficking in persons, which indicated that at least some organized crime existed in the sultanate. However, following a review of increased Omani efforts to shut down this illegal traffic, President George W. Bush in 2008 directed that Oman be moved from "Tier 3," the worst of the Department of State's categories, and placed on the "Tier2/Watch List," where it has remained since. Oman's pursuit and prosecution of criminal elements involved in human trafficking suggest that it is making a good faith effort to comply with international guidelines designed to eliminate this trade. Still, Oman remains at least potentially a destination and transit country for men and women primarily from South and East Asia who have fallen victim to illegal forced labor.

Threat Actors' Military Functions

The Omani military and security infrastructure has effectively stifled the development of threat actor military functions within the OE. The RNO has demonstrated its prowess against pirates on many occasions, and the army in cooperation with the Omani populace has so far successfully deterred threat actors infiltrating into Oman from Yemen. The only other venue in which threat actors might plausibly expect to gain advantage would be in the information warfare arena, and thanks to a relatively high standard of living and the abiding popularity of Sultan Qaboos, their message often falls on deaf ears.

Force Protection Issues

The Sultanate of Oman is probably the safest country in the Middle East, with few violent crimes perpetrated against people, and an equally low incidence of crimes against property. US forces deployed to the country would probably be safer than in some of the more impoverished neighborhoods in American cities. For that reason, common sense should be the watchword for implementing force protection measures affecting US Soldiers serving in the OE. They should do the same things they would do in any American city to avoid falling victim to a crime of opportunity. Protective measures should include avoiding flashing large sums of money; locking vehicle and hotel room doors; physical security of wallets and passports; and a



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conscious focus on maintaining situational awareness, both on and off duty. Above all, US Soldiers serving in Oman should respect the sensitivity of the vast majority of its citizens with regard to the Muslim faith, and resolve to “make no enemies” because of cultural missteps.

Recreational boaters should avoid venturing too far from the coast into the Arabian Sea, since Somali pirates operating off the Horn of Africa have been known to range northeastward into Omani waters.

Economic

The hydrocarbon industry that is the foundation of Oman’s present-day economy is also the greatest threat to its continued prosperity over the long haul. Experts estimate that the country’s oil reserves may be depleted within 15 years. Largely for that reason, the sultanate has implemented Vision 2020, a development plan that focuses on diversification, industrialization, and privatization, with the objective of reducing the oil sector’s proportion of the Gross Domestic product (GDP) to 9% by 2020, while concurrently increasing the number of job openings in non-hydrocarbon sectors of the economy.

For the short term, Oman remains economically prosperous. High oil prices in 2011 permitted a 3.5% growth in the GDP. In that same year, the United States exported \$1.434 billion in goods to Oman and imported \$2.2 billion from Oman. Crude oil accounted for 75% of the goods imported by the US from Oman. In return, the US supplied the sultanate with automobiles, aircraft and aviation parts, and equipment and technologies used for hydrocarbon extraction.

The US is Oman’s fourth-largest trading partner. Because Oman is not a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), it is not bound by the oil export quotas imposed by that organization. Meanwhile a November 2008 agreement Oman signed with Occidental Petroleum focuses on further developing existing oil fields and searching for new ones.

Exploiting its liquid natural gas (LNG) resources represents a viable path to Oman’s economic diversification. The sultanate signed on to the Dolphin Project, a plan that envisions shipping natural gas from Qatar to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman, which would free-up Oman’s indigenous gas supplies for sale elsewhere. Oman was admitted to the World Trade Organization in September 2000. Congress subsequently ratified Oman’s most recent Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States in September, 2006. As expected, closer cooperation between Omani and US companies has been the norm since ratification occurred.

Social

Just over three million people reside within the Sultanate of Oman, including 577,000 who are non-citizens. While about 7,000 British citizens constitute the largest group of *Western*



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expatriates living in Oman, they are far outnumbered by guest workers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, India, and the Philippines. Arabs comprise Oman's largest ethnic group, so predictably Arabic is the official language, while English is commonly spoken by members of the better educated classes.

In a religious context, Oman is a demographic anomaly. 75% of the population subscribes to the Ibadi sect of Islam, the last remaining remnant of Kharijism, a set of beliefs that dates from the early schisms within the Muslim faith. This unique religious orientation shared among the vast majority of Omanis acts as a sectarian firewall that shields them from perceiving Shia and Sunni Islam as significant threats to domestic peace and stability. Accordingly, Omanis sometimes see themselves as honest brokers between extreme Sunni and Shia interests, and take considerable pride in maintaining cordial relations with all their Middle Eastern neighbors, regardless of whether their religious preferences have roots in either Arabic or Persian culture.

Omanis are a cosmopolitan and well-educated people, well known for their hospitality in both social and professional contexts. Sultan Qaboos' Basic Law, published in 1996, affirms freedom of religion, while establishing Islam as the official state religion. Non-Muslims are free to worship as they choose, provided they gather in government-approved houses of worship, and forbear proselytizing among groups that do not share their beliefs.

Omani women are probably further down the path toward social equality than is the case with their feminine counterparts in other Arab countries. They currently constitute over 30% of the Omani workforce. Sultan Qaboos has given major speeches on the equality of women and their importance as a national resource, and backed his public statements with high-profile appointments to key positions in government. Oman's ambassadors to the United States and to the United Nations are both women.

Despite these gains, women remain vulnerable to discrimination rooted in negative male reactions to Western cultural mores. Victims of spousal abuse and domestic violence in Oman have little choice but to seek redress from within the family circle. Social discrimination still occurs, based on broad variations in the way individual Omanis interpret Islamic precepts.

Information

Most Omani citizens have enthusiastically accepted twenty-first century information technologies. Although 287,600 telephone land lines remained in service as of 2011, over 4.8 million cell phones were in use at the same time. The latter number exceeds the country's population by more than a million. Satellites and undersea fiber-optic cables insure connectivity to the rest of the Middle East, Europe, and elsewhere around the globe. A state-run TV broadcaster operates in-country, while Omani-sanctioned stations transmitting from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Yemen provide viewing via satellite TV. Several radio stations



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operate under government auspices, augmented by three broadcasting companies that are privately owned. There are also an estimated 1.465 million Internet users in Oman.

Infrastructure

This venue poses special challenges in Oman, because access to clean water and modern sanitation facilities too often depends on a citizen's relative standing in the socio-economic chain. Wealthier people enjoy better facilities. Although 43% of the population can access sanitation facilities, numbers are higher in urban areas. The desert climate suppresses availability of clean water, with 102,499 gallons per person accessible for all purposes annually. The Omani Public Authority for Electricity and Water (PAEW) allotted just over a billion US dollars in 2012 for electricity and desalinization infrastructure development.

The majority of Omanis can access the electrical grid, which consumed 15.34 billion kilowatt hours (kWh) in 2012, compared with 18.59 billion kWh produced in-country during the same period. Electricity and water infrastructure development in 2012 included four new power plants in different governates, not counting 2 additional facilities in the cities of Duqm and Salalah. A 450 million watt power and desalinization plant opened in Salalah in April 2012.

Oman possesses 130 airports, 12 of which have paved runways. International flights arrive and depart daily at the capital city of Muscat. The country also has a modest merchant marine, with a chemical tanker, a passenger ship, and three cargo ships all registered in Oman, and fifteen vessels registered in other countries. There are four major seaports in Oman, located in Mina, Qabus, Salalah, and Suhar. These terminals operate modern equipment to load and unload cargo.

Oman contains 33,200 miles of roadways, of which 14,430 miles are paved. There are no railroads in Oman.

The miles of pipelines crisscrossing Oman reflect the extent of the country's involvement with hydrocarbon extraction industries. The following categories show pipeline lengths expressed in miles:

- Natural Gas: 2,615
- Refined Products: 163
- Crude Oil: 2,211
- Condensate: 65

Physical Environment

Most of central Oman is flat desert gravel plain. The Al Hajar mountains parallel the northern boundary with the UAE and part of the eastern coast where the country's primary cities are located. These include the capital city of Muscat, plus Sohar and Sur in the north and Salalah in the south. Omani territory includes two enclaves in the UAE: one is the Musandan Peninsula,



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situated on the Strait of Hormuz, directly across this waterway from Iran; the other is Madha, located about equidistant between the Musandam Peninsula and the main portion of Oman.

The climate is hot and dry with very little rainfall. Annual rainfall in Muscat averages less than 4 inches per year, and falls mostly in January. During a rainy season that lasts from late June to October, Sohar may receive as much 25 inches from monsoons, while some areas along the southeastern coast may receive no annual rainfall at all. Temperatures are extremely hot by American standards, reaching as high as 122° F between May and September.

Time

Like other Middle Eastern peoples, Omanis suffer little anxiety over punctuality. The exception may be businessmen who trade in international markets with Western counterparts. Omanis place much greater emphasis on building relationships, trust, and rapport with their business clients than on schedules and punctuality. Although foreigners often arrive on-time for meetings, native Omanis tend to run late. Business meetings are never scheduled during prayer times or on major Islamic holidays.

Although a typical workday in Oman runs from 0900 in the morning until about 2000 in the evening, it is just as typically punctuated by a 3 ½ hour lunch break between 1300 and 1630. It is no accident that this break period coincides with the hours of the most extreme midday heat. The Omani workweek runs from Saturday through Wednesday, with Thursday and Friday designated as official days of rest. Islamic holidays are observed, as are National Day, on 18 November, and the Sultan's birthday, on 19 November.

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