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BURSA ULUDAG UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**OMAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE ARAB SPRING IN
THE FRAMEWORK OF STRATEGIC HEDGING**

(MASTER DEGREE THESIS)

Shahrazad Ali Abdel Rahman ALKHAZALEH

Supervisor

Prof. Dr Ferhat Pirinççi

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OMAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE ARAB SPRING IN THE FRAMEWORK OF STRATEGIC HEDGING

At the outbreak of Arab Spring Uprisings, regional and small powers have more or less involved in the events either siding with or against new rising political regimes and movements. Consequently, counterrevolutions and sectarianism have manifested across the region. As each has engaged, Oman remained a notable exception and an interesting case to researchers of foreign policy. This thesis seeks to address the underlying factors and determinants of Omani foreign policy behaviour during the Arab Spring. For that, the thesis uses 'Strategic Hedging' as an alternative approach to explaining the foreign policy behaviour of small states where Oman is a case in point. Also, the determining factors shaping Oman's foreign policy will be examined. This study also provides an analysis of Oman's position towards the Arab spring by choosing three case studies (Egypt, Syria, and Yemen) then comparing Oman and other Gulf states' position towards those cases. Lastly, Oman's stance on the Gulf crisis will be analysed with the Strategic Hedging identification mechanism. This study concludes that Oman position towards the Gulf crisis is a successful Strategic Hedging behavior because Oman was able to avoid confrontation with other powers while maximizing its Interests.

Key Words: *Oman foreign policy, Strategic Hedging, 2017 Gulf diplomatic crisis, Arab Spring.*

ÖZET

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RİSKTEN KORUNMA STRATEJESİ ÇERÇEVESİNDE UMMAN'IN ARAP BAHARI'NA YÖNELİK DIŞ POLİTİKASI

Arap Baharı sırasında bölgesel ve küçük güçler, yükselen yeni siyasal rejimler ve hareketler, kendilerine karşı çıkan olaylara nadiren katılmışlardır. Sonuç olarak, bölgedeki karşı-devrimler ve mezhepçilik ortaya çıkmıştır. Her birinin katılımıyla, Umman dış politika araştırmacıları için dikkate değer bir istisna ve ilginç bir durum olarak kalmıştır. Bu araştırma, Riskten korunma stratejisini merkeze alarak küçük devletlerin davranışlarını açıklayan diğer Uluslararası İlişkiler teorisine alternatif olarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Tezde Umman dış politikasını şekillendiren iç faktörler ile birlikte bölgesel ve uluslararası faktörler beraber incelenecektir. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda Umman ve diğer Körfez devletlerinin konumlarını birbirleriyle karşılaştırarak Mısır, Suriye ve Yemen krizlerinde Umman'ın politikalarını analiz edecektir. Körfez kriziyle ilgili Umman'ın politikası, Riskten Korunma Stratejisi ile analiz edilmiştir. Bu çalışmada, Umman, çıkarlarını en üst düzeye çıkarırken; diğer güçlerle yüzleşmekten kaçınabilmesi dolayısıyla Umman'ın Körfez krizine karşı tutumunun başarılı bir Stratejik Riskten Korunma olduğuna varılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Umman dış politikası, Stratejik Riskten Korunma, 2017 Körfez diplomatik krizi, Arap Baharı.

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Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa region have always been a dynamic region, recently, the Arab spring events that swept the region have destabilized it and created a new regional and sub-regional orders. The Gulf states or the 'Monarchies Club' have been affected by the phenomena to a lesser extent. The Gulf states main goal is survival and security. The Gulf states have reacted to the events in a way that is compatible with each state perception of Threat and Interest. The Sultanate of Oman is considered a small Gulf state with a unique identity and foreign policy.

This thesis aim is to analyse Oman foreign policy towards the Arab Spring away from the traditional International Relations theories. The theories explaining Small states foreign policy behaviour are neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism. Several factors influence the strategic behaviour of any given state. One of the most crucial factors is the anarchic nature of the system and the distribution of power among States, and Other conditioning factors can also play a defining role in state's foreign policy behaviour.

According to neo-realism scholarship, states foreign policy behaviour can mainly be described through three strategic options: Balancing, Bandwagoning, and buck-passing. Strategic Hedging is a new theoretical framework that was introduced to International relations theories that claim to analyse states foreign policy behaviour.

The sultanate of Oman is an example of how small states can have unique foreign policy behaviour. An active and peaceful foreign policy that gave it a regional and international Status. Oman pursued a unique foreign policy in a pivotal region. This research attempts to analyse Oman Foreign policy in the framework of Strategic Hedging. By determining the key factors shaping Oman's foreign policy behaviour.

Oman has a long history of statehood. The Omani empire was known for maritime ability that enabled Oman to enlarge its territories to reach Zanzibar and Mombasa on Africa's east coast and parts of the Indian subcontinent, reflecting Oman's maritime heritage. Oman went through internal challenges during the state-building process, the disputes between the Imamate and the dynasty in Muscat, several rebellious movements (Jabal Al Akhdar civil war, Dhofar rebel). Sultan Qaboos reach to power was a turning

point in Oman's history and foreign policy in particular. There he had founded new foreign policy principles that guaranteed for Oman an active position regionally and internationally.

Research objectives

This research aims to analyse Oman's foreign policy during the period of the Arab spring, the continuity and change in Oman foreign policy behaviour considering the emerging realities and the Sultanate ability to cope with those realities. This study will contribute to the literature of Hedging behaviour of small states.

Research Questions

The main research question of this study is "How does Oman Foreign Policy apply to Strategic Hedging framework?"

The secondary research questions are:

- What are the factors determining Oman Foreign policy behaviour?
- How did Oman react to the new realities in the region imposed by the Arab spring?
- Is Oman Foreign Policy behaviour towards the Gulf crisis considered strategic Hedging?

Hypothesis

This research argues that the Foreign Policy of Oman is best explained within the framework of Strategic Hedging due to the fact:

- 1- Oman's position between two rival regional powers (Saudi Arabia and Iran).
- 2- Strategic Hedging is a rational choice for small states.
- 3- Oman implementation of several policies aim is to avoid confrontation with regional power while maximizing its interests.

Methodology

Qualitative approaches have a major role in the Study of International Relations. This research will apply the Case study methodology. Case study is defined as in-depth study of a single unit, and the aim of this is to elucidate characteristics of similar phenomena.¹ The case studies can be implemented through studying "*least likely case Studies, most similar and least similar case studies, combining cross-case and over-time comparisons*".² This research will attempt to combine cross case and over time comparison by analysing Oman foreign policy behaviour as a case study of small states implementing Strategic Hedging. Oman as a unit through different time phase's: pre sultan Qaboos, post-1970 and after the Arab Spring. Oman foreign policy will also be analysed by comparing its position to different cases with the other Gulf States.

Chapter's Breakdown

This research will examine Oman's Foreign Policy through the Strategic Hedging framework. The analysis will be done in three chapters; the first chapter will provide the theoretical framework of Strategic Hedging as an alignment behaviour. The second chapter will examine the sources of Oman foreign policy shaping factors (Domestic, regional, international factors). In the third chapter, dynamics in the Gulf will be examined during the period of Arab Spring, the variation of Gulf states' positions towards the uprisings in selected countries, then Oman's foreign policy towards the 2017 Gulf crisis will be analysed using Strategic Hedging identification mechanisms to determine if the behaviour is considered hedging behaviour.

¹ John Gerring, "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 98, no. 2 (2004), p. 341, doi:10.1017/S0003055404001182.

² Andrew Bennett, Colin Elman, "Case Study Methods in the International Relations Subfield," *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2007), p. 176, doi:10.1177/0010414006296346.

1. Chapter

Theoretical Framework

1. Neorealism

Realism has been the dominant paradigm in International Relations to explain security and foreign policy. Neorealism is considered the tool predicting weak states behaviour. It considers structural factors as more likely to explain the foreign policy of states. Neorealist scholarship argument is that the external environment is the main factor of decision making which has an effect on foreign policy. State foreign policy behaviour is considered a reaction to the restraint and incentives of its aggregate power relative to others. They assume that decision-makers will react rationally and choose foreign policy course which is likely to maximize security benefits and minimize risks.³

The neo-realist argument is that states seek to strengthen their security by adopting a strategy of either balancing or bandwagoning. External balancing is defined as allying with other States in the face of a growing power while internal balancing (by arms build-up). On the other hand, “bandwagoning” propose allying oneself with the source of the threat in order to avoid harm or to gain in any expected division of spoils.⁴ Balancing and bandwagoning have been used as the main strategies states employ when faced with strong and threatening power.⁵ The suggestion of forming alliances in order to prevent stronger powers from the domineering of weaker powers is the core assumption of the balance of power theory. According to the theory’s argument, states become part of alliances to defend themselves from States whose capabilities could pose a threat.⁶

³Shakthi De Silva, “Balancing , Bandwagoning or Hedging ? Independent Ceylon ’ s Reaction to Regional Hegemony,” *South Asian Survey*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2018), pp. 189–209, doi:10.1177/0971523117753929.

⁴Global Power Shift, “Strategic Hedging by Non Great Powers in the Persian Gulf,” *Great Powers and Geopolitics : International Affairs in a Rebalancing World*, ed. by Aharon Klieman, Springer, 2015, p. 231 , doi:DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-16289-8.

⁵Yauheni Preiherman, “Belarus ’ s Asymmetric Relations with Russia : The Case of Strategic Hedging ?,” *UPTAKE Working Paper*, no. 4 (2017).

⁶Suorsa Olli, “Maintaining A Small States ’ s Strategic Space : ‘ Omnidirectional Hedging ’ ”, *International Studies Association Hong Kong*, 2017, p. 17.

1.1. Balancing

Stephan Walt defines balancing as “*allying with others against a prevailing threat*”.⁷ Power inequality is threatening to weaker states, these states will respond by establishing defensive alliances (external balancing) or pursuing intense arms build-ups (internal balancing) to be able to counter the system leader. A variety of balance of power theories refuses the argument that stronger powers pose a threat to weaker states and suggest that certain factors like nuclear deterrence, geography, economic policy, and regime type determine the level of threat that can be posed by rising powers and the causing balancing reaction by other states.⁸

A state usually decides if it will ally with or against an external power based on the degree of threat it perceives. The more a state can be a source of threat the more other states will ally with or against it. For instance, if small power is the one who is posing the threat stronger states may be balancing against it, the standard is not the size of a state but how dangerous it is perceived by others.⁹ A core belief of balance of power theory is that states initiate an alliance to prevent a stronger power of dominating them. The goal of balancing states is to defend themselves from other states with higher capabilities and can be seen as a potential source of threat.¹⁰

He argues that the concept of balancing is enlarged to include the intention, type and degree of a balancing foreign policy. ”¹¹ *The goals of balancing could be classified as either positive or negative. Positive balancing aims to strengthen the state capacities and to consolidate its position in the international community, while Negative balancing strategy seeks to undermine the capabilities’ rival’s influence and to reduce it*”.¹²

⁷Stephen M. Walt, “The Origins of Alliances”, P17

http://www.waseda.jp/gsaps/eaui/educational_program/PDF%20SS2015/Reading/Lecture1_Reading1.pdf
Accessed 18-03-2019

⁸Brock F Tesson, “System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu,” *Security Studies*, vol. 21 (2012), pp. 197 , doi:10.1080/09636412.2012.679203.

⁹Stephen M. Walt, “The Origins of Alliances”, P17

http://www.waseda.jp/gsaps/eaui/educational_program/PDF%20SS2015/Reading/Lecture1_Reading1.pdf
Accessed 18-03-2019

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹Silva, “Balancing , Bandwagoning or Hedging ? Independent Ceylon ’ s Reaction to Regional Hegemony,” pp. 189–209.

¹²Mohammad Salman, Gustaaf Geeraerts, “Strategic Hedging and Balancing Model under the Unipolarity,” *Midwest Political Science Association*, Chicago, USA: ResearchGate, 2015.

Cheng-Chwee Kuik indicates that States balance to protect themselves from a perceived threat either by external balancing (aligning with other states) or through internal (military build-up).¹³

The external and internal balancing is focused primarily on military tools; although states tend to balance also with non-military tools (economic and diplomatic tools) which led to the emergence of the term soft balancing.

1.2. Soft balancing

Brock Tessman and Wojtek Wolfe argue that the soft balancing approach include the wider range of competitive behaviours (*economic, diplomatic, and institutional*) that are chosen by second-tier states, their criticism to soft balancing is that it does not provide a mechanism to prove that States behaviours came as a result from incentives caused by the distribution of power and not only from domestic or regional factors.¹⁴

Mohammad Salman and Gustaaf Geeraerts consider soft balancing as a crucial concept for comprehending the behaviour of second tier states against the system leader in a unipolar system.¹⁵ They added that soft balancing is not a structural approach and thus cannot be an extension of the balance of power theory. But they agree that second-tier states are aware of the distribution of power and that they behave as a reaction to the U.S predominance of power.¹⁶

Tessman addressed this matter by emphasizing that “*In order for soft balancing to be considered as an effective complement to the traditional balance of power theory, the concept needs to address behaviour that is primarily driven by the desire to counter the strength of the system leader and not the behaviour that is largely the result of specific policy differences, domestic political incentives*”.¹⁷

¹³Cheng-chwee Kuik, “The Essence of Hedging : Malaysia and Singapore ’ s Response to a Rising China,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2018), pp. 160 , <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41220503>.

¹⁴Brock Tessman, Wojtek Wolfe, “Great Powers and Strategic Hedging : The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy,” *International Studies Review*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2011), pp. 214–40, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2486.2011.01022.x.

¹⁵Salman, Geeraerts, “Strategic Hedging and Balancing Model under the Unipolarity.”

¹⁶Brock Tessman, Wojtek Wolfe, “Great Powers and Strategic Hedging : The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy,” *International Study Review*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2011), pp. 218 , doi:10.1111/j.1468-2486.2011.01022.x.

¹⁷Tessman, “System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu,” p. 207.

Salman and Geeraerts argue that the gap in economic and military terms between system leaders, the U.S and Second-tier states who are on the top of soft power (UK, France, and Germany) are widening since the beginning of Unipolarity, this gap is against the logic of soft balancing.¹⁸ For Tessman” *Soft balancing lacks an explanation for concepts that include tools that help states to achieve their objectives like the strategies of binding, transcending, and specialization. The binding power of institutional connections, normative appeal to common religious or cultural standards, and specific areas of leverage within trade relationships.*”¹⁹

Stephan G.Brooks and William C.Wohlforth share the same opinion on soft balancing explanatory power, the opponents of soft balancing consider any behaviour that challenge the hegemonic state as soft balancing without taking into consideration other behaviours. The authors argue that States’ actions are not solely directed to the hegemonic presence or the fact it may pose powers, states also behave to achieve economic interest, to improve regional security, bargaining leverage or because of domestic gains.²⁰

1.3. Bandwagoning

Bandwagoning refers to alignment with the source of danger²¹, bandwagon means that states may choose to be on the threatening power side. The reason states choose to bandwagon is primary for profit.²² Randall Schweller argued that “*bandwagoning state chooses to follow a bigger power’s line of action and stay in a subordinate role with a view to ensuring the security or economic benefits.*”²³ Bandwagoning aim is for security. Both balancing and bandwagoning are considered as part of defensive realism realm due to the fact that those strategies are defensive and their main goal is security and maximizing their interests.

¹⁸Salman, Geeraerts, “Strategic Hedging and Balancing Model under the Unipolarity.” Pp.2

¹⁹Tessman, “System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu,” pp. 206 .

²⁰ Wiliam C. Brooks, Stephaan G. Wolforth, “Hard Times for Soft Balancing,” *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 3 (2005), p. 79.

²¹ Stephen M. Walt, p.17

²²Kuik, “The Essence of Hedging : Malaysia and Singapore ’ s Response to a Rising China,” pp. 160.

²³Preiherman, “BELARUS ’ S ASYMMETRIC RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA : THE CASE OF STRATEGIC HEDGING ?”p.7

http://www.uptake.ut.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/04_preiherman.pdf

Schweller indicates that the aim of balancing is the protection of existing values, whereas bandwagoning strategy aim is profit and gain.²⁴ While focusing on the opportunities that can be created by state behaviour, he regards balancing as more costly behaviour than bandwagoning.²⁵

Balancing is alignment with the weaker side, bandwagoning with the stronger.²⁶ Balancing and bandwagoning are viewed as a response to a threat, it is important to consider other factors that will affect the level of threat that a state may pose: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power and aggressive intentions.²⁷ Weaker states are more likely to bandwagon than balance.

1.4. Critique to Neorealism

Cheng-Chwee Kuik argues that “*neo-realism is irrelevant in explaining small-state responses to a rising power. It merely suggests that the paradigm is more useful in accounting for a situation where states are confronted by an immediate security threat. In circumstances where states' security is not directly at stake, neo-realism has lost much of its explanatory strength*”.²⁸ Another critique for neorealism scholarship was that neorealism explains the outcome of states interactions, but it does not purport to explain the behaviour in details or all cases.²⁹

In the Post-cold war era, there was noticeable emerging literature on alignment choices such as, *studies on engagement, binding, buck-passing, soft balancing and recently hedging*.³⁰ Those emerging studies provided an alternative for balancing and bandwagoning.

²⁴Olli, “MAINTAINING A SMALL STATE ’ S STRATEGIC SPACE : “ OMNIDIRECTIONAL HEDGING ”

²⁵ibid.

²⁶ Stephen M. Walt, “The Origins of Alliances”, p.18 http://www.waseda.jp/gsaps/eaui/educational_program/PDF%20SS2015/Reading/Lecture1_Reading1.pdf Accessed 18-03-2019

²⁷ Ibid, p.19

²⁸Kuik, “The Essence of Hedging : Malaysia and Singapore ’ s Response to a Rising China,” pp. 197.

²⁹Gideon Rose, “Review : Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *Cambridge University Press*, vol. 51, no. 1 (1998), p. 145.

³⁰Cheng-chwee Kuik, “How Do Weaker States Hedge ? Unpacking ASEAN States ’ Alignment Behavior towards China How Do Weaker States Hedge ? Unpacking ASEAN States ’ ,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2016, pp. 501, doi:10.1080/10670564.2015.1132714.

2. Strategic Hedging

Strategic Hedging is relatively new in International Relations theories. There is consistent development on the framework led by International Relations and Security studies and several hypotheses are provided. What is agreed on is that States' Foreign Policy (SPF) strategic choices are not limited by balancing or bandwagoning as suggested in the realist approach. In respect of hedging scholars were divided into two categories some scholars considered it as a middle position between balancing and bandwagoning others considered it not only a middle position but also an opposite position. (by adapting two counteracting policies which Tessman and Wolfe refer to as "*return maximizing which is positive relation with great power and risk contingency options which aim to minimize the threat, the goal of this counteracting policies is to show that the state is not siding with any of the powers.*"³¹

Kuik also agrees on the idea that hedging is also opposing position³² Lou and Hse see that hedging function as a position between (Balancing and bandwagoning), which combines indirect balancing, engagement and bandwagoning concepts. ³³ Tessman describes it as an extension to balance of power theory by adding elements to it, but he considers hedging as a new framework in international relations theories.³⁴

There are also different hypotheses regarding which states hedge, which is a matter Hedging literature was divided on. The arguments over which states hedge are divided into three scopes: 1 – Hedging is employed by second-tier states (Tessman & Wolfe, Salman and Gaereets) 2 – Hedging is more effective when used by smaller states with less power. (Cheng–Chwee Kuik) 3– hedging is a strategy that can be employed by any state, including the United States as the system leader.

³¹Cheng-Chwee Kuik, Rozman, "LIGHT OR HEAVY HEDGING : POSITIONING BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES," n.d., pp 4, http://keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/introduction_P.503-P_light_or_heavy_hedging.pdf.

³² Cheng-chwee Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge ? Unpacking ASEAN States ' Alignment Behavior towards China '," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 25, no. 100 (2016), pp. 504, doi:10.1080/10670564.2015.1132714.

³³Ryan Yu-lin Liou, Philip Szue-chin Hsu, "The Effectiveness of Minor Powers ' Hedging Strategy : Comparing Singapore and the Philippines ," n.d., P.4.

³⁴ Brock F Tessman, "System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu," no. May (2012), doi:10.1080/09636412.2012.679203.

Different criteria were developed by scholars to measure Hedging behaviour and also empirical attempts were made to develop mechanisms to define if the state behaviour can be characterized as Hedging behaviour. Critics to the literature of Hedging include that the definition of Hedging proved to be problematic. Others consider that there should be more empirical studies to prove the effectiveness of hedging.³⁵

Majority of case studies on Hedging were about South East Asian countries, China and the United States. Some scholars also studied Hedging of small states focusing on the GCC and Arabian Peninsula (Guzansky, Imad k. Harb, Leah Shreewood, Abdullah Babood, Jean-LoupSamaan).³⁶ Scholars Studying Hedging as alignment behaviour agreed that states implement Hedging in case of uncertainty of other states behaviour but it also can be employed as state behaviour even when there is no threat to the state.

2.1. Definition of Hedging

Lee defines Strategic Hedging as the *“behaviour of a country pursuing the off-setting of risks by choosing multilateral policies with the intention of making mutually reactive effects”*.³⁷ Tessman refers that Strategic Hedging can be identified as *“part of a coherent long-term plan that is designed to maximise opportunities and minimise threats for a second-tier state in a unipolar system with a leading state that is clearly in relative decline”*.³⁸

³⁵ Liou, Hsu, “The Effectiveness of Minor Powers ’ Hedging Strategy : Comparing Singapore and the Philippines *,” pp. 1–26.

³⁶ For further information see Yoel Guzansky, “The Foreign-Policy Tools of Small Powers: Strategic Hedging in The Persian Gulf,” *Midlle East Policy*, vol. XXii, no. 1 (2015), pp. 112–22; Imad K Harb,” *SELF-PRESERVATION AND STRATEGIC HEDGING IN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL, SMALL STATES AND THE NEW SECURITY ENVIROMENT*, 2018, <http://ams.hi.is/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Self-Preservation-and-Strategic-Hedging-in-the-GCC-2.pdf>; Leah Sherwood, “Understanding Oman ’ s Foreign Policy,” *Gulf Affair*, no. November (2014), pp. 11–15; Gulf Diplomatic Crisis, “Oman and the Gulf Diplomatic Crisis by Abdullah Baabood,” n.d.; Jean-Marc Rickli, “New Alliances Dynamics in the Gulf and Their Impact on the Small GCC States,” *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 2017, doi:10.1080/23802014.2016.1188023.

³⁷As cited in Živilė Marija Vaicekauskaitė, “Security Strategies of Small States in a Changing World,” vol. 3, no. 2 (2017), pp. 11, doi:10.1515/jobs-2017-0006.

³⁸Brock F Tessman, “System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu,” no. May (2012), PP.209, doi:10.1080/09636412.2012.679203.

Tessman presented Strategic Hedging as a behaviour that helps second-tier states cope with the threats and constraints they may face in a unipolar system while preparing them for opportunities and threat that may occur with the decline of the system leader.³⁹

Tessman emphasised the importance of structural incentive on states competitive behaviour. Geeraerts and Mohammad referred to Strategic Hedging as a *“form of behaviour used by states wanting to improve their competitiveness while at the same time avoiding direct confrontation with main contenders. It is an appealing option for states facing uncertainty due to structural changes in the international system such as the present unipolarity giving way to a process of power diffusion. Under such conditions Strategic Hedging becomes an attractive alternative for other strategies like balancing, bandwagoning, and buck-passing. Especially for second-tier states, it becomes a behaviour of choice vis-a`-vis the system leader”*.⁴⁰

According to Medeiros hedging consists of *“pursuing strategies that, on one hand, stress engagement and integration mechanisms and, on the other, emphasize realist-style balancing in the form of external security cooperation and national military modernization programs”*.⁴¹

Kuik defines "hedging" as a behaviour in which a country seeks to get rid of threats by taking different policies, and the behaviour is employed in uncertainty situations. whereas security, economic and political measures are taken.⁴²

Regarding weaker states' Hedging Kuik refer to hedging *“as an insurance-seeking behaviour under high-stakes and high-uncertainty situations, where a sovereign actor pursues a bundle of opposite and deliberately ambiguous policies vis-à-vis competing for powers to prepare a fallback position should circumstances change”*.⁴³

³⁹ibid. P.203

⁴⁰Geeraerts Gustaaf, Salman Mohammad, “Measuring Strategic Hedging Capability of Second-Tier States Under Unipolarity,” *Chinese Political Science Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2016), pp. 76, doi:10.1007/s41111-016-0010-6.

⁴¹Mohammad Salman, and Geeraets Gustaaf, “The Impact of Strategic Hedging on the Foreign Politics of Great Powers : The Case of Chinese Energy Strategy in the Middle East .,” *China Goes Global*, 2013, p.4.

⁴²Kuik, “The Essence of Hedging : Malaysia and Singapore ’ s Response to a Rising China,” p.163

⁴³Kuik, “How Do Weaker States Hedge ? Unpacking ASEAN States ’ Alignment Behavior towards China How Do Weaker States Hedge ? Unpacking ASEAN States ’ ,” p. 504.

2.1.The Aim of Hedging

The purpose of hedging is not taking sides.⁴⁴ Hedging according to Kuik and Rozman contains the use of contradictory acts to acquire as many benefits from the different powers, at the same time trying to eliminate risks that may appear or arise.⁴⁵ Strategic Hedging aims to explain why the smaller states have responded to a rising power in the way they have⁴⁶. The strategic goal is also to avoid using one particular policy and by doing so it is able to eliminate confrontation with other powers.⁴⁷ Hedging is employed to reduce the risks by using different tools.⁴⁸

Strategic Hedging and defensive realism consider balancing against a threat by using policies and increase the internal capabilities of the state to improve security position.⁴⁹ Hedging is a foreign policy choice that is considered as a core strategy in unipolar deconcentrating systems and aims to maximize profits and minimize threats.⁵⁰

*Strategic Hedging behaviour can be noticed from other diplomatic friction by being part of long term plan. The long-term plan has a concrete, identifiable military or public goods objectives and, in order to be considered an instance of Strategic Hedging, the behaviour must be intended to develop or expand the means for achieving those objectives.*⁵¹

A hedger state seeks to increase their competitiveness in order to reduce the gap with the system leader, or even to bridge this gap under the unipolar conditions.⁵² Hedging is meant to adapt to the limitations forced on a state if acting indecently towards stronger states while keeping options and possibilities open.

Hedging requires investing in both directions (by keeping the alliance and having good relations with the power that pose a threat) as well as taking a risk because state

⁴⁴Kuik, "The Essence of Hedging : Malaysia and Singapore ' s Response to a Rising China," pp. 165.

⁴⁵Kuik, Rozman, "LIGHT OR HEAVY HEDGING : POSITIONING BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES.",P.2

⁴⁶Kuik, "The Essence of Hedging : Malaysia and Singapore ' s Response to a Rising China," pp. 165.

⁴⁷Živilė Marija Vaicekauskaitė, "Security Strategies of Small States in a Changing World," pp. 7–15.

⁴⁸Liou, Hsu, "The Effectiveness of Minor Powers ' Hedging Strategy : Comparing Singapore and the Philippines *," pp.7.

⁴⁹Sherwood, "Understanding Oman ' s Foreign Policy," pp. 11–15.

⁵⁰Tessman, "System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu," p 209.

⁵¹ ibid

⁵²Salman, Geeraerts, "Strategic Hedging and Balancing Model under the Unipolarity."P.3.

does not want to lose the ally while invoking a threatening power. Hedging makes it easier to predict strategies while lacking the surprise factor.⁵³

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the ultimate goal of hedging is risk-minimizing and maximization of opportunities, to avoid confrontation with great powers by using a set of different policies and to improve their competitiveness.

2.2.Hedging in International Relations

Strategic Hedging will be particularly attractive to second-tier states in a deconcentrating unipolar system however this does not mean that states only hedge in a unipolar system. Hedging can be used as a state foreign policy behaviour in any system type, hedging consists of using opposite and ambiguous policies vis-à-vis competing for power.⁵⁴

Many scholars think that strategic Hedging could be more persuasive than hard or soft balancing to draw the end of unipolarity. Strategic Hedging involves more-effective policies, which lead to improving capabilities of hedging states and to reach the balance among the great powers, along with avoiding direct confrontation with the leading state.⁵⁵

Hedging builds on the traditional balance of power theory by developing an approach that maintains a structural emphasis while accounting for the intensity, non-military strategies that second-tier states will favour under conditions of unipolarity.⁵⁶ Hedging is a behaviour that can be directly attributed to structural incentives.⁵⁷ Tessman agrees on the connection between Hedging and traditional balance of power theory and that they both focus on structural incentive in explaining state behaviour of alignment, he sees hedging as a new theoretical framework.⁵⁸

⁵³Shift, "Strategic Hedging by Non Great Powers in the Persian Gulf," P. 234.

⁵⁴Kuik, Rozman, "LIGHT OR HEAVY HEDGING : POSITIONING BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES."

⁵⁵Salman, Geeraerts, "Strategic Hedging and Balancing Model under the Unipolarity."P.2

⁵⁶Tessman, Wolfe, "Great Powers and Strategic Hedging : The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy," 2011, pp. 214–40.

⁵⁷Tessman, Wolfe, "Great Powers and Strategic Hedging : The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy," 2011, pp. 214–40.

⁵⁸Salman, and Geeraets Gustaaf, "The Impact of Strategic Hedging on the Foreign Politics of Great Powers : The Case of Chinese Energy Strategy in the Middle East .," pp. 1–13.

2.3. When do States Hedge?

Kuik indicates three conditions states need to fulfil in order to label the behaviour as hedging: 1- the absence of an immediate threat. 2: the absence of any ideological fault lines 3. the absence of an all-out Great Power rivalry (that might force smaller states to choose sides). Hedging behaviour is possible only when all three conditions are fulfilled.⁵⁹

According to Geeraetes and Salman, second-tier states engage in Strategic Hedging when their behaviour shows the following pattern: the hedging state

“ 1: develops its economic capacity to deal with short-term domestic and international costs flowing from tensions with the system leader, including increasing strategic reserves affected by the system leader’s public good provision.

2: improves its military capability in anticipation of a possible confrontation with the system leader while, at the same time, avoiding outright provocation of the system leader

*3: coordinates decisions to do so centrally at the highest levels of government since national security interests are at stake.”*⁶⁰

Kuik and Rozman indicate that hedging behaviour occurs when two conditions are met: first when there is a high stake involved in a state principal, reward maximizing and second when there is a high level of uncertainty. By employing contradictory policies states minimize risk while protecting state interests.⁶¹

2.4. Elements of Hedging

According to Liou and Hsu hedging has three elements. Also combining of policy tools, *there are two other essential components in hedging: the separation of issue areas and the diversification of targets/partners. An essential element in hedging is: the*

⁵⁹Kuik, “The Essence of Hedging : Malaysia and Singapore ’ s Response to a Rising China,” pp. 165.

⁶⁰Gustaaf, Mohammad, “Measuring Strategic Hedging Capability of Second-Tier States Under Unipolarity,” pp. 62.

⁶¹Kuik, Rozman, “LIGHT OR HEAVY HEDGING : POSITIONING BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES.”P3

*separation of issue-areas. A hedger state will attempt to align with other countries on different issues by taking advantage of the latter's niches.*⁶²

According to Kuik and Rozman hedging must entail three elements: a) not taking sides among competing powers; (b) adopting opposite and counteracting measures, and (c) using the mutually counteracting acts to preserve gains and cultivate a “fallback” position. Abandoning *any* of these elements would signify a shift from hedging to balancing or bandwagoning.⁶³

*“1-hedging is necessarily a ‘middle’ and opposite position. with full-fledged balancing representing the highest degree of power rejection, and full-scale bandwagoning is the extreme form of power acceptance.*⁶⁴

*2- ‘binding-engagement’, a policy designed to maximize diplomatic benefits by engaging and binding a big power in various institutionalized bilateral and multilateral platforms, for the functions of creating channels of communication and increasing the status-quo tendency of the power’s behaviour.*⁶⁵

*3- ‘limited-bandwagoning’, a policy intended to maximize political benefits by forging a partnership with a big power through selective deference or selective collaboration on key external issues, but without accepting a subordinate position*⁶⁶.”

Hedging is a type of behaviour that helps states cope with certain kinds of uncertainty that exist in unipolar systems. It is considered an insurance policy, it also enhance the security position of a hedger state, it might have short term costs that might occur for internal or international sources.⁶⁷

⁶²Liou, Hsu, “The Effectiveness of Minor Powers’ Hedging Strategy: Comparing Singapore and the Philippines *,” p.8.

⁶³Kuik, Rozman, “LIGHT OR HEAVY HEDGING: POSITIONING BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES.”P2

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ ibid.

⁶⁶ ibid.

⁶⁷Tessman, Wolfe, “Great Powers and Strategic Hedging: The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy,” 2011, P.216.

2.5.Comparing Hedging with Balancing, Bandwagoning and Buck-passing

Strategic Hedging aims to cover the ground between hard and soft power, where the hedging state seeks to improve its competitive capability (military and economic) while, at the same time, avoiding direct confrontation with the system leader.⁶⁸

Balancing and bandwagoning, operate when facing a significant external threat, whereas hedging can operate under the normal condition of international relations crisis. Hedging differs from balancing and soft balancing in the intention towards order, they do not intend to challenge the existing order while hedging does.⁶⁹ Small states prefer hedging over balancing or bandwagoning due to several reasons. Balancing can lead to the loss of economic gains which can be risky for a small state to follow.⁷⁰ Since hedging is a middle position it is safer than taking risky strategies like pure balancing or bandwagoning is not always economically wise and can even prove risky.⁷¹

Another factor that distinguishes Strategic Hedging behaviour from traditional balancing is focusing on intensity; while both may involve military improvements by the second-tier state, Tessman concluded that *“hedging behaviour that is simultaneously less confrontational than traditional balancing, less cooperative than bandwagoning, and more proactive than buck-passing”*.⁷² This makes it more convenient for states to choose. On the one, hand pure-bandwagoning can be profitable economically, on the other hand, it can be risky politically.⁷³

⁶⁸Gustaaf, Mohammad, “Measuring Strategic Hedging Capability of Second-Tier States Under Unipolarity,” P61.

⁶⁹Liou, Hsu, “The Effectiveness of Minor Powers’ Hedging Strategy: Comparing Singapore and the Philippines *,” P.6.

⁷⁰Kuik, C., 2008. The essence of hedging: Malaysia and Singapore’s response to a rising China. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 30(2), pp. 156-166.

⁷¹Vaicekauskaitė, Živilė Marija, 2017. Security Strategies of Small States in a Changing World. *Journal on Baltic Security*, 3(2): P.12

⁷²Brock F. Tessman, “System Structure and State Strategy: Adding Hedging to the Menu System Structure and State Strategy: Adding Hedging to the Menu.” P.139/

⁷³Kuik, “The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore’s Response to a Rising China,” p 161.

Strategic Hedging adds to the traditional balance of power theory by taking into consideration military and non-military actions, also emphasising on a system-level variable which is lacking in soft balancing.⁷⁴ Hedging has a connection with specific structural incentives. Hedging reflects lesser power states' desire not to enter in confrontation with upper powers on the short run while preparing for long-term contingencies like military disputes with the leading state (Type A), or the loss of public goods being provided by it (Type B).⁷⁵

Soft balancing is not only hard to distinguish from normal diplomatic friction, but it is hard to connect with any particular set of structural incentives.⁷⁶ While soft balancing is intended to broadly constrain the system leader's power, hedging is specifically oriented toward one of two goals: increasing long-term military leverage in ways that are particularly relevant to the way in which a confrontation between the second-tier state and system leader is likely to play out, or finding alternative methods for obtaining identifiable public goods or subsidies that the second-tier state currently receives from the system leader.⁷⁷

The definition of buck passing is *"a policy in which states shift the burden of deterrence and even fighting against the adversary to a senior member within an alliance. States that believe the advantage lies in defence may abandon allies and rely on efforts by others to balance; and, as a result, the adversary may gain the advantage"*.⁷⁸

Hedging is broader as a concept because it focuses not only on the freedom of the state to ride the efforts of its coalition partner but because of the desire to reduce costs, or because of the expectations of an improved relative situation. This is also based on an interest in its national security, including interest, which is actually given to taking effective steps regarding security towards the competitor.⁷⁹

Cheng-Chwee Kuik and Rozman refer that adopting a hedge reduces one's dependence on and vulnerability to others by cultivating alternative partner. Strategic

⁷⁴Tessman, Wolfe, "Great Powers and Strategic Hedging : The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy," 2011, pp. 217.

⁷⁵ Tessman, "System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu."

⁷⁶Tessman, "System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu," pp. 208.

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Global Power Shift, "Strategic Hedging by Non Great Powers in the Persian Gulf," pp. 231–49.

⁷⁹Ibid

Hedging is known for the new kinds of competitive strategies that second-tier states would employ in the international system.⁸⁰

Tessman and Wolfe list the characteristics of Strategic Hedging behaviour;

- 1- Strategic Hedging should be coordinated by the highest authorities in the State.
- 2- hedging state aims to achieve a major national security interest.
- 3- Strategic Hedging seeks to improve the competitive ability of hedging state in anticipation of a confrontation with the system leader.
- 4- there is a clear and explicit target of the hedging state to develop its military and economic competitiveness, in order to decrease the significant superiority of system leader under unipolar conditions.⁸¹

⁸⁰Tessman, Wolfe, "Great Powers and Strategic Hedging : The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy," 2011, pp. 236.

⁸¹Salman, Geeraerts, "Strategic Hedging and Balancing Model under the Unipolarity."

3. Mechanisms to Measure If the Behavior is Considered Strategic Hedging

Several attempts were made to measure if the behaviour of a state is considered Strategic Hedging behaviour. One of the most important attempts was made by Tessman and Wolfe in 2011. They developed a mechanism of four criteria that should be all met so the behaviour can be considered Strategic Hedging. Every criterion is set to filter the behaviour and classify it either as hedging or other behaviours (*instance of traditional hard balancing, normal diplomatic friction, simple power maximization, or something else*)⁸²

*“In order to be considered a case of Strategic Hedging, the state behaviour in question must: Improve the competitive ability of the hedging state, Avoid direct confrontation of the system leader, the behaviour should be coordinated at the highest levels of government, and that it involves an issue area that has been explicitly recognized as of major national security interest to the hedging state. It also Involve cost to the hedging state, including but not limited to acceptance of significant economic inefficiencies or diplomatic backlash.”*⁸³

Type B hedging which is considered to be mostly applied by weaker states contains developing ways to compensate for the potential loss of public goods or direct subsidies that are currently provided by the system leader.⁸⁴

In 2012 Tessman’s work “System Structure and State Strategy: Adding Hedging to the Menu” used the mechanism again and explained that the first filter serves to identify behaviour that seems to resemble either Type A or Type B Strategic Hedging. The second and third filters identify behaviours that may initially appear to be Strategic Hedging which is labelled as an example of either hard balancing or non-strategic, normal, diplomatic friction.⁸⁵

Other scholars took this mechanism and tried to build on it, for example, Salman and Geeraerts developed an index to measure states Strategic Hedging capability, the index

⁸²Tessman, Wolfe, “Great Powers and Strategic Hedging : The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy,” 2011, pp. 220.

⁸³Tessman, Wolfe, “Great Powers and Strategic Hedging : The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy,” 2011, pp. 220.

⁸⁴ibid. P.222

⁸⁵Tessman, “System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu,” pp. 209, P.210.

comprises three core dimensions (economic capability, military power and decision-making capability), which are broken down into six sub-indicators: gross domestic product (GDP), foreign exchange and gold reserves, government debt, military expenditure, growth of military arsenal, and democracy.⁸⁶

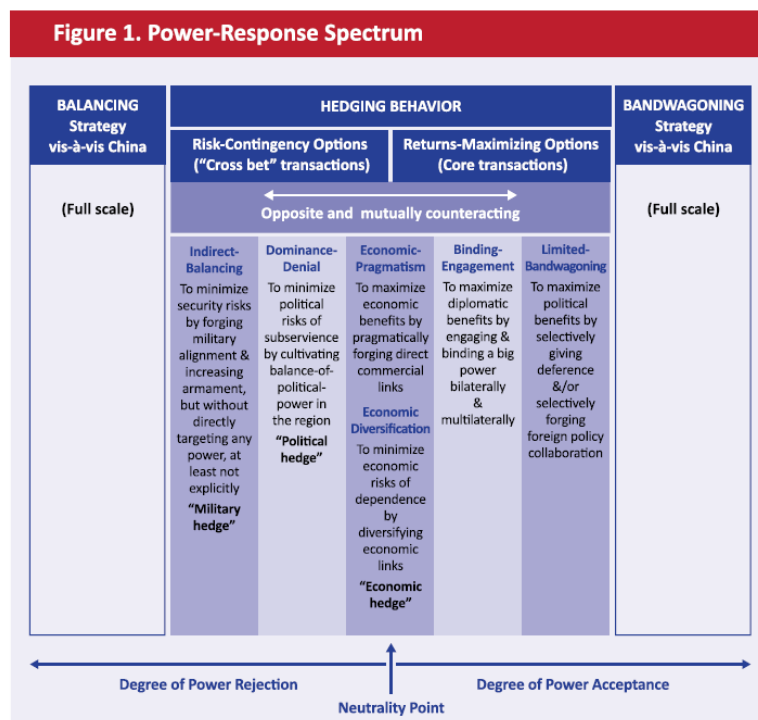
They studied the indicators of seven countries (China, UK, France, India, Germany, Japan, and Russia) in 2013, the results showed that China easily wins the Strategic Hedging race according to the index with a score of 5.61 points, which is about 3.33 points higher than Russia's. Russia ranks second with 2.28 points; followed by India, Japan, and Germany with 2.02, 1.98, 1.82 points, respectively.⁸⁷

Cheng-Chwee Kuik describes hedging as a multiple component approach situated between the two ends of the balancing-bandwagoning spectrum. This spectrum measures the degree of rejection and acceptance that weaker states use towards upper power. The state rejection of power is considered full scale balancing and full-scale bandwagoning extreme form of power acceptance.⁸⁸

⁸⁶GustaafGustaaf, Mohammad, "Measuring Strategic Hedging Capability of Second-Tier States Under Unipolarity," pp. 60.

⁸⁷ (bid, P.68

⁸⁸Kuik, Rozman, "LIGHT OR HEAVY HEDGING : POSITIONING BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES."P.3



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"This five-point composition of hedging is useful in illuminating the range of state options under uncertainty. It also provides a clearer conceptual parameter to measure – and compare – the constituent components of different actors' hedging behaviour across countries and across time. The variations can be observed from the differing (or changing) degrees and the manner in which actors (hedgers) choose to implement each of the options" ⁹⁰

Many scholars used those mechanisms on case studies (For example Desilvia used Kuik mechanism in analysing Ceylon 's Reaction to Regional Hegemony, also Salman and Geeraetes used Tessman and Wolfe 4 criteria mechanism to study China's energy strategy in the middle east.

4. Types of Hedging

Tessman divide types of Hedging into Type A and Type B: Type A hedging can be a military or economic or diplomatic form. It falls short on hard balancing (internal or external).while type B hedging is attractive to Second-tier states that is aligned by system

⁸⁹ibid. the figure in page 3

⁹⁰ibid. P.4

leader but threatened by another power. States who chose to engage in type B hedging use it as a strategy to retain their status quo and preserve power from declining.⁹¹

Kuik and Rozman classify hedging as “heavy hedgers” and “light hedgers” as actors who seek to hedge with *different degrees of emphasis* on risk-contingency measures. Heavy hedgers, for a range of internal and external reasons, are more concerned about the possible risks embedded in the uncertain great power relations and intentions.

Many studies claim that a hedger state can maximize national interests. However, hedging does not necessarily translate into this result because domestic politics can constrain hedging effectiveness.⁹² Yu Lin Leo and Szue Chin Hsu argue that state with domestic constraints such as domestic actors and territorial disputes may constrain its effectiveness of the hedging strategy.⁹³ They evaluate the effectiveness of minor powers hedging strategy by comparing Singapore’s and Philippines’ Strategic Hedging from two aspects (economy and security) they concluded that domestic factors can affect the effectiveness of hedging strategy and in the case of Philippines the territorial dispute with China limited Philippines’ Hedging effectiveness as compared to Singapore’s.⁹⁴ Conditioning factors play an important role in determining which strategic choice a state would follow⁹⁵

Strategic Hedging makes it possible to maintain close ties with threatening state and maximize the leverage, in some cases hedging is being used as a defence mechanism to deal with uncertainties and threats⁹⁶

Kuik studies weaker state hedging behaviour because “*smaller states’ inherent vulnerabilities mean that they are more exposed to a wider range of existential risks, and their relatively limited resources and capabilities mean that they possess fewer options than the big powers to cope with threats and uncertainties under anarchy, which indicates*

⁹¹Tessman, “System Structure and State Strategy : Adding Hedging to the Menu,” P.205.

⁹²Liou, Hsu, “The Effectiveness of Minor Powers’ Hedging Strategy : Comparing Singapore and the Philippines *,” pp. 3.

⁹³ Ibid ,P.2

⁹⁴Liou, Hsu, “The Effectiveness of Minor Powers’ Hedging Strategy : Comparing Singapore and the Philippines *,” pp. 1–26.P.19

⁹⁵Salman, Geeraerts, “Strategic Hedging and Balancing Model under the Unipolarity.”

⁹⁶Shift, “Strategic Hedging by Non Great Powers in the Persian Gulf,” pp. 232.

that weaker states are always under higher pressure to align with or align away from powerful actors, thereby serving as pertinent instances to capture the complex trade-offs entailed in state alignment decisions.”⁹⁷

5. Theory Selection

Strategic Hedging can be applied on different scales. On the global scale, on a regional or sub-regional level, it can explain small states’ behaviour.⁹⁸ This is the main reason this study chose Strategic Hedging to explain foreign policy behaviour of Oman.

Oman foreign policy behaviour had been described in the literature as neutral, after the independence. Oman pursued active foreign policy behaviour. Oman’s position between competing powers seeking to be a regional hegemon namely Iran and Saudi Arabia and the new dynamics in the Gulf region after the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings made it essential to evaluate Oman foreign policy behaviour through more extended lenses. Strategic Hedging provides explanations for Oman’s behaviour as a small state seeking to protect its autonomy and maximize the profits and its role in the international arena without confronting the regional aspiring powers.

Oman is doing this by implementing several tools and strategies to achieve its goals. In the first chapter, this research focused on Strategic Hedging as a theory that explains states behaviour as a result of structural dynamics. In the second chapter, this research will attempt to analyse domestic and conditioning factors that shape Oman foreign policy behaviour.

⁹⁷Kuik, “How Do Weaker States Hedge ? Unpacking ASEAN States ’ Alignment Behavior towards China How Do Weaker States Hedge ? Unpacking ASEAN States ’,” p. 503.

⁹⁸Preiherman, “BELARUS ’ S ASYMMETRIC RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA : THE CASE OF STRATEGIC HEDGING ?”

2. Chapter

Sources of Oman Foreign Policy

1. Domestic Factors Shaping Oman Foreign Policy

Oman's foreign policy had gone through a lot of progress. During Sultan Said bin Taimur the foreign policy behaviour was characterized by non-activism and isolationism. Sultan Qaboos bin Said reign which started in 1970 was characterized by activism which marked the emergence of new era for Oman's foreign policy. Qaboos was able to end years of isolationist foreign policy that shaped Sultan Said bin Timour era, Making it clear that Oman will follow neutrality in its Foreign policy while engaging in international institutions, distancing itself from interfering in other countries internal affairs, the employment of diplomacy and mediating as conflict resolution tools. This era is considered the start of the state modernization process. Sultan Qaboos vision of Oman reflected on shaping Oman foreign policy principles.

Through years Oman was able to build a reputation as a mediator that is trusted in the region and by international allies .one of Oman's most significant mediating effort was facilitating the dialogue between the United States of America and Iran to reach a nuclear deal. Oman's position as a mediator in the arbitration between Iran and the West is derived from its conflict-avoidance approach.

The Set of foreign policy principles that was coined by Sultan Qaboos bin Said in the 1970s, included having good relations with all states and take the course of diplomatic solutions for disputes, Oman does not consider the usage of hard power as a tool against any states. This position was reflected by Muscat refusal to participate in any collaboration that demands utilization of hard power, for example, Oman was not part of GCC intervention in Bahrain or Coalition led by Saudi Arabia in Yemen (Operation decisive storm).⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Mate Szalai, The Island of Stability? (2) Foreign and Security Policy Challenges Faced by the Sultanate of Oman, 2018/2019, Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade
https://kki.hu/assets/upload/18_KKI-Policy-Brief_OMN_Szalai_20190325.pdf

Several Factors impact the shaping of Oman's Foreign Policy (domestic factors, regional factors, International factors). A combination of several factors such as Oman's geographic location, tribal composition, and Ibadi Islamic ideology contributes in the making of Oman's unique identity.¹⁰⁰ In addition to this the sultanate long history of statehood and the peculiar characteristics of Sultan Qaboos are considered one of the most meaningful key aspects in the creation of Oman's foreign policy. It is noteworthy that Qaboos' policies which is characterized by pertinent and lucid approach of the political stands have received popular support from the Omani public. His foreign policy is characterized by embracing a pertinent and lucid approach of the political stands.¹⁰¹

As the second in terms of population in the gulf, Oman is considered one of the most ethnically diverse country in the region. Given that it is the only country within the GCC to experience civil war, it has a conviction of maintaining a united nation free of sectarian and tribal discord..¹⁰²

The country's location is determinant factor in its foreign policy behaviour. Oman shares the management of strait of Hormuz with Iran. The strait is important for international trade. In 2018 about 21% of global petroleum liquids consumption was transported across the strait of Hormuz.¹⁰³ Oman also has a frontier with three Gulf countries namely Yemen, UAE, and Saudi Arabia.

Majority of Oman citizens consider that they are part of Ībadism Islamic approach. Which distinguish Oman than other countries in the region. Oman is the only Muslim country that follow the Ībadism Islamic ideology. The main sects of Islam are the Sunni and Shiism. Ībadism is considered part of the *khawarej*.

Jeffrey A. Lefebvre consider that there is a third important factor besides the strategic locations and Ibadism that will elicit and constrain the actions of any future leader of

¹⁰⁰ Abdulrahman Al-Salimi, "Oman and Ibadism From a Religious Regional Perspective," *Istituto Lombardo - Accademia Di Scienze e Lettere - Incontri Di Studio*, 2017, pp. 61–72, doi:10.4081/incontri.2017.277.

¹⁰¹ Kabeer Yousef, "Friendly relations with all countries Oman Daily observer, 2018
<http://www.omanobserver.com/friendly-relations-with-all-countries/>

¹⁰² Sigurd Neubauer, "Oman : The Gulf 's Go-Between Sigurd Neubauer," 2016.

¹⁰³ "The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint", U.S Energy Information adminstartion
<https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/> accessed 20/07/2019

Oman which is the petroleum economy.¹⁰⁴ Oman's diplomacy repeatedly strays from other small Gulf States. The National identity of Oman plays a role in threat perception, for example, Oman has consistently said not to isolate Iran since the 1979 revolution; it stayed neutral during the long 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. Attempts to forge regional unity explain why Sultan Qaboos even wanted Iraq, Iran and Yemen to be members of the GCC's security architecture when early discussions on the GCC were taking place¹⁰⁵.

As a small country, Oman pursued alignments with powerful states to defend its security and stability. On the international level Oman is considered an ally for the United States and the United Kingdom, On the regional level Oman was one of the six Gulf countries that formed Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar) the main goal of GCC was a security and economic alliance that aims to protect the monarchies in the region against ideological threats perceived at that time from the republic system in Iraq and the Islamic revolution in Iran.

Since of the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council Oman ideational factors distinguish it from other Gulf countries, while Oman asserted on the importance of the council, it maintained acting in accordance with its foreign policy discourse.

1.1. Geostrategic Location

Oman is surrounded by Oman sea and the Arabian Sea in the northeast and the Indian ocean in south-east, this maritime accessibility made Oman important in trading and as a naval power. Oman's maritime links brought prosperity for Sohar.¹⁰⁶ The maritime ability helped to enlarge the influence of Omanis to other territories. During the 19 century the Omani empire ruled from Persia and Baluchistan to Zanzibar. The Sultanate is surrounded by the United Arab Emirates in the north-west, west by Saudi Arabia and south-west by Yemen. Although Oman is considered Small State in comparison with the surrounding states it is working on the safety of navigation and freedom of transit and sustains the security and stability of the region. Oman internal events and events in the neighbouring

¹⁰⁴ Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, "Oman's Foreign Policy in The Twenty-First Century," *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 1 (2010)

¹⁰⁵ Sherwood, "Understanding Oman's Foreign Policy," pp. 11–15.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Salimi, "Oman and Ibadism From a Religious Regional Perspective," p. 64.

countries influenced Oman foreign policy behaviour. For example, with the rise of nationalism in Arab World in mid 40s, Oman have chosen to maintain isolationist foreign policy. Today Oman have chosen to have an active foreign policy knowing the importance of its location as the Gulf Gate to Strait of Hormoz and a bridge between the Gulf States and Iran.

1.2. The personal attributes of Sultan Qaboos

Leaders style of leadership determine the process of foreign policy decision making.¹⁰⁷ the impact is more profound in authoritarian regimes where the power is concentrated in the palm of the ruler. In the case of Oman, Sultan Qaboos vision of Oman since he seized power had been a clear vision on how he wants to rule Oman, majority of literature on Oman foreign policy agree on that Sultan Qaboos characteristic traits are one of the main factors shaping Oman foreign policy behaviour.

The Sultan who obtain Power in 1970 From his father was 30 years old when he became the new Sultan of Oman. Oman was going through Dhofar war, internationally Oman was isolated, Sultan Said bin Taimour was afraid of the nationalism movement that spread in the Arab world so he took isolationist foreign policy, He was dealing with rebellions inside the Sultanate after the unification between the interior and Muscat.

This isolationist foreign policy was one of the first changes that Sultan Qaboos changed; He worked on Modernization and State building in Oman. He was Supported by Britain to reach the palace and to get rid of Rebellions of Jabal Al Akhadar which was a war that lasted for more than 10 years and the rebellions were gaining power, Britain and Iranian support for Sultan Qaboos helped him to get rid of the rebellious and focus on State building and modernization. Oil discovery helped to finance the development projects in the country.

Sultan Qaboos foreign policy vision included focusing on alliances and bilateral relations with neighbours and international community. Oman was one of the first Gulf

¹⁰⁷ For further information on how leadership style can have an effect on the foreign policy behaviour see Margaret G Hermann, Thomas Preston, Timothy M Shaw, "Who Leads Matters: The Effects of Powerful Individuals," *International Studies Review*, 2001, pp. 83–129.

nation that signed a military agreement with the United States of America. A treaty of friendship and navigation was signed between the United States and Muscat in 1833 which later on was replaced with the treaty of amity in 1958.¹⁰⁸ Sultan Qaboos bin Said Set new principles for the Oman foreign policy that still shaping Oman Foreign policy until today, Thus, making Oman a key regional player a key regional player.

Joseph A. Kechichian analysed Sultan Qaboos Speeches from (1970-2006) and he indicates that Sultan Qaboos was the first Arab leader who had engaged in a systematic *per annum* accounting to his subjects for his decision and actions.¹⁰⁹

Sultan Qaboos main Objective was to develop the quality of life of the Omani citizen, he asserted on the importance of treating all Omanis in the same manners, he abolished slavery when he came to power, in this manner, it became clear how Sultan Qaboos was different from Sultan Said bin Taimour.¹¹⁰

Sultan Qaboos studied since he was 16 in Britain, he continued his military studies at Sandhurst military academy, he did not agree with Sultan Sa'id bin Timour Policies and vision of the Sultanate, with the help of the British he was able to take the power from his father

Promising Omani people with modernization while maintaining the traditions that assert Oman's uniqueness in the region. Although J.E Peterson argues that there are similarities between Sultan Qaboos and Sultan Said bin Taymour,

*"Both have kept the essential reins of power very much in their own hands and have been loath to delegate responsibility to others, including senior members of their own family. Similarly, both have refused to name or groom an heir. It is also significant that both have evinced a special attraction to Dhufar (the southern region of Oman), one through adoption and the other through birth, where both have tended to spend sizeable periods of their time and been largely inaccessible there."*¹¹¹

Sultan Qaboos achievement cannot be denied, especially in education and culture sectors, also in setting Oman's foreign policy principles. The death of Sultan Qaboos

¹⁰⁸ "Oman-U.S Relations" Global Security

<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/oman-forrel-us.htm> accessed 05/09/2019

¹⁰⁹ Joseph a Kéchichian, "A VISION OF OMAN: STATE OF THE SULTANATE SPEECHES BY QABOOS BIN SAID, 1970-2006," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2008), pp. 122

¹¹⁰ Joseph A. Kechichian, *Oman And The World: The Emergence of An Independent Foreign Policy*, 1995.

¹¹¹ J.E Peterson, "The Emergence of Post-Traditional Oman," *Durham Research Online*, 2005.

marked the end of longest period of ruling in the region. Sultan Qaboos reign lasted for almost five decades. He was considered the father of Modern-day Oman. During his rule he was able to Modernize the country and set a specific foreign policy discourse that distinguish Oman from other countries in the region. The aftermath of the Sultanate and the challenge of succession was one of the main concerns Oman would face and could lead to destabilize the country. The fact that Sultan Qaboos does not have a heir meant that according to article 6 of the basic law of Oman that was issued in 1996 regarding the process of succession, after the death of the ruler, the royal family council have a three days period to choose the new sultan. In case the royal family council was not able to reach agreement regarding the new sultan. A 'letter' left by Sultan Qaboos with the name of his choice of the successor should be opened.¹¹²

The name of the new sultan had a significance not only for Omanis but also for the countries in the region. Oman's unique foreign policy behaviour matters for the regions countries, especially for those who are competing for regional influence. The relationship between those countries and the new sultan can determine Oman foreign policy approach, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and United Arab Emirates were all keen to know who the new Sultan will be to influence him.

After the death of Sultan Qaboos the royal family council decided to open the letter in the first day as a respect for the late Sultan choice of the successor. The new sultan is Haitham bin Tariq, sultan Qaboos cousin who has served as the ministry of culture¹¹³ He also was the chair of committee for the Omani vision 2040.¹¹⁴ The transition of power was fast. Sultan Haitham bin Tariq pledged to continue with Sultan Qaboos policies. Sultan Haitham bin Tariq experience in foreign policy might have been the reason for sultan Qaboos choosing him as his successor and his desire for continuity in Oman's foreign policy discourse.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Máté Szalai, "The Island of Stability? Oman Amidst the Challenges of Succession, Socio-Economic Development, and Regional Instability (1)," 2018, p. 6, https://kki.hu/assets/upload/50_KKI-Policy-Brief_OMN_Szalai_20181212.pdf.

¹¹³ cited, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ Oman Vision 2040 is a development and economic plan
<https://www.2040.om/en/#2040Themes> accessed 05/01/2020

¹¹⁵ Alexander Cornwell, "Oman's new ruler chosen to provide continuity", Reuters
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-oman-sultan-newsmaker/omans-new-ruler-chosen-to-provide-continuity-idUSKBN1ZA0KV> accessed 17/01/2020

Oman national identity consist of two main factors: tribalism and Ībadism. Oman multiethnic social structure enrich the national identity.

1.3.1.Tribalism in Oman

Arab tribes can be classified into two principal groups: Al Qahtani and Al Adnani. Al Qahtani Arabs used to reside in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula and Al Adnani Arabs in the northern part. Throughout history, both tribes have been consistently in a war before Islam.¹¹⁶

Al-farisi indicates that,

“In the second century, B.C. Qahtani Arab tribes of Azd under the leadership of Malik bin Fahm migrated to Oman. Other Adnani Arab tribes who descend from Bani Sarna had also migrated from the northern part of the Peninsula. Malik bin Fahm managed to rule Oman after defeating the Persians. Since this time, the political leadership of the country has remained in the hands of the Qahtani tribes, in particular in the hands of those belonging to the Shanuah tribal group of Azd, such as Awlad Shams, Jolanda and Yahmed (Fajh and Kharousy””,¹¹⁷

Three Main dynasties ruled Oman:

1-Nabhani dynasty (1406–1624) during this the Portuguese protectorate was imposed during the ruling of Muhammad bin Ismail in 1515.

2-Yaruba dynasty (1624–1749) Portuguese protectorate ended with their expulsion on 1 January 1650 in the ruling of Sultan bin Saif.

3-Al Said dynasty (1749–present). In 1891 the British protectorate was imposed, and it ended in 1971.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶Sulaiman H. Al-Farsi, *State. Religion and Democracy in the Sultanate of Oman*, University of leeds, 2010.

¹¹⁷ibid.P69.

¹¹⁸ The past and Future tribes in Oman, Fanack

<https://fanack.com/oman/population/tribes-in-oman/> accessed 13/08/2018

1.3.2. Ibadism

Ibadi political thought is different from the main sects of Islam (Sunni and Shiite) according to Ibadism the authority should not be limited solely in the descendants of Ali Bin Abi Taleb (according to Shiite) or the prophet's tribe (Quraysh as in the Sunni political thought). According to Ibadism all Muslims are equal and eligible to have the authority (if the Ulama agreed on its eligibility).¹¹⁹

Ibadism is a form of *khawarij* which was the first opposition movement in Islam, in 750 the mountains of Oman were home to the first imamate with tens of thousands of followers. But the 9th century was the start of the Omani Imamate.¹²⁰

Since the 8th Century Omani accepted Ibadi Sect of Islam and start the imamate form of Governing. Omanis who adopted the mores of the Ibadi sect since the time of the fourth Caliph Ali bin Abi- Talib managed for the very first time in the Islamic history to install the Islamic Imamate in 750 A.D. The same year that witnessed the end of the Umayyad dynasty. First Imamate (Julanda bin Masuod Imamate) occurred in Oman.¹²¹ Oman's history and political experience have been built with the help of prevalent Ibadi sect, but also thanks to the two-and-a-half-century legacy of the Al Bu Said dynasty.¹²² Al bu Saidi and the Imams were not always on the same page.

The second Imamate saw a tribal contract between Al Qahtani and Al Adnani tribes, The imam came from Yahmad tribe that belonged to Al Qahtani tribal block who resided in Rustaq in the interior. But the selection of the imam will be conducted by Ulama' from the Adnani tribal block.¹²³ The process of selecting the Imam was done by a number of Scholars (Ulama) who represent the people (Umma). Thomas Beirschenk indicates that

“ Imamate theory only the religious re-formulation principles of political structure. From a historical view, the Ibadi Imamate served as a vehicle for temporarily

¹¹⁹ Al-Salimi, "Oman and Ibadism From a Religious Regional Perspective," p. 66.

¹²⁰ Thomas BIERSCHEK, "RELIGION AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE : REMARKS ON IBADISM IN OMAN AND THE MZAB (ALGERIA)," *Studia Islamica*, vol. 68 (1988), p. 110, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1595760>.

¹²¹ Al-Farsi, *State. Religion and Democracy in the Sultanate of Oman*. P.71

¹²² Peterson, "The Emergence of Post-Traditional Oman." P.1

¹²³ Al-Farsi, *State. Religion and Democracy in the Sultanate of Oman*.

rallying Omani tribal society when it found itself threatened outsiders. As soon as this outside threat receded the centri- fugal forces of the tribal system re-emerge”¹²⁴

The last Imam Ahmad bin Said (1754-1783) formed the Bu-saidi dynasty which is still ruling Oman, The bu Saidi waived the spiritual authority.¹²⁵ Ibadism has a theological difference from Sunni and Shia regarding the afterlife. Oman is the Only country that follows Ibadism in the Muslim world. The coming of Sultan Qaboos to power held with it a vision for modernisation, the Sultan is not considered a spiritual leader religiously, but he is considered a civil ruler.

1.4. Regional Factors Shaping Oman Foreign Policy

Since the 1970s Oman has pragmatic manners in dealing with the regional events and disputes for instance in 1980 during the Iraq- Iran war. Oman kept a balanced stance, did not take sides like the other Gulf States. The signing of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt outraged the Arab leaders who were against the Egyptian leader Anwar Al Sadat position of the agreement. However Sultan Qaboos kept a supportive stand to the Egyptian leader.

Oman’s geographical location between Iran, Saudi Arabia and UAE and Yemen impose constraints on its foreign policy behaviour. Yemen is going through a war since 2010 that upscaled with the Houthis taking control of central cities, in 2015 a Saudi led coalition started a war against Houthis. While Oman copes and works with the geopolitical realities, it did not participate in this coalition for several reasons, first Oman takes a stance of neutrality and non-interference in other states matters. Second Oman share borders with Yemen and interference could cause spill over. Third, the Houthi rebels are supported by Iran. Thus, Oman preferred to take a neutral position towards the crisis while holding meetings between Yemeni conflicting parties.

Being surrounded by Fragile Yemen and rival regional hegemony aspiring powers Iran and Saudi Arabia, force Oman to have a neutral stance to protect its stability. Having

¹²⁴ BIERSCHENEK, “RELIGION AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE : REMARKS ON IBADISM IN OMAN AND THE MZAB (ALGERIA),” p. 113.

¹²⁵ Valeri J Hoffman, “The Articulation of Ibadi Identity in Modern Oman and Zanzibar,” *The Muslim World*, vol. 94 (2004), pp. 201–16.

a side can be costly. Also on the regional level Oman's position to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its assertion on the importance of peace process while having a Just solution have been shaping its foreign policy. although Oman and Israel do not have official diplomatic relations.

The Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visit to Oman in 2018 - following the Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas to Oman - which was the first visit from an Israeli Prime Minister to a Gulf state in two decades¹²⁶ which some finds as an insurance policy¹²⁷ taken by the sultanate to show the sultanate partners Oman commitment of diplomatic role as a mediator aiming to help conflicting parties to communicate.

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Also on the regional level Oman position to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and it asserts on the importance of peace process while having a Justice solution have been shaping its foreign policy, although Oman and Israel do not have official diplomatic relations. Oman which was one of establishing country of the GCC work as a bridge between the GCC and Iran assuring the importance of communicating channel and refusing to take part against any state.

1.5. International Factors Shaping Oman Foreign Policy

Oman foreign policy is influenced by international system structure. During cold war era. Oman was part of the British protectorate and Being part of the British protectorate shaped Oman's foreign policy, until withdrawal of the British from the Gulf Oman's foreign policy was directed by Britain. Britain provided the security alliance to Oman,

¹²⁶ Israel's prime minister visits Oman, an Arab monarchy—and is welcomed, The Economist <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/11/03/israels-prime-minister-visits-oman-an-arab-monarchy-and-is-welcomed> accessed 01/08/2019

¹²⁷ STEVEN A. COOK, Oman Just Bought Israeli Insurance Why is Sultan Qaboos cozying up to Benjamin Netanyahu? The answer is in Washington, foreign policy <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/11/07/oman-just-bought-israeli-insurance/> accessed 02/08/2019

even after the British withdrawal, Oman was one of the first Gulf countries to conduct a military agreement with the United States in 1980. Muscat kept distant from Soviet Union during cold war era due to internal issues the insurgency in Dhofar were supported by the communist. The support that Britain provided Oman with was part of western containment of Marxism in the Gulf states. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a new world order that is characterized by unipolarity. The Persian Gulf states were dependent on the united states for protection and security.¹²⁸

UK's decision to increase defence engagement with Muscat in 2018, highlight the historical strategic alliance between the UK and Oman. In Duqum port Oman and UK initiation of the UK joint logistics support base, and before that the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding and Services Agreement, emphasise on the size of engagement between the two countries.¹²⁹ Those alliances influence Oman's foreign policy decision making, giving consideration to the alliance.

2. Oman Foreign Policy Principle

Oman foreign policy is determined by geopolitical location and Oman unique identity, after Sultan Qaboos seized power, the modernization of Oman was induced by the discovery of Oil and Sultan Qaboos vision of Oman. The process of modernization included a new foreign policy discourse. Muscat foreign policy goals is survival and to achieve security. Muscat believes that diplomacy and having good relations with other state is the way to achieve security, peace. Oman unique identity" is its ability to avoid being drawn into a "pro" or "anti" camp when there is a conflict, and its belief in inclusivity and unity, not exclusivity and rejection.

"Omani foreign policy is continually being formed in accordance with a set of principles and facts. At the forefront of these principles and facts are the thoughts of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and his international vision, in order to constitute the diplomatic rhythm of Oman, which is keen now and, in the future, to establish friendly relations with

¹²⁸ Muzzafer Ercan Yilmaz, "'The New World Order': An Outline of the Post-Cold War Era Muzaffer Ercan YILMAZ *," *Alternatives Turkish Journal of International Relations*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2008), p. 45.

¹²⁹ The Anglo-Omani relationship, an example of Global Britain foreign policy, <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/the-anglo-omani-relationship-an-example-of-global-britain-foreign-policy/> accessed 17/08/2019

the entire world. Oman has worked to promote good and equal relations with other countries, and to adopt a policy of good neighbourliness and non-interference in others' internal affairs, and maintaining respect for international law, conventions and customs. ”¹³⁰

Oman awareness of the importance of foreign alliances to its security through this period articulated Oman foreign policy. Oman took a pro-western position through the 1970s and the 1980s, ending years of isolationist foreign policy this era marked the start of Modernization process.¹³¹

Omani foreign policy has always been committed to these principles:

- 1- Respect all international laws and customs and support the role of many international organizations in order to serve peace and security. That is derived from Muscat knowing its position as a small state.
- 2- Support Arab international relations and seek to resolve issues of concern to the Arab world, including the issue of Palestinian Authority.
- 3- Adopting a policy of good neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others and mutual respect; of national sovereignty.
- 4- Supporting and deepening cooperation among the Gulf States and ensuring security in the Gulf Arabi.

For enhancing these above principles, Muscat employs a set of foreign policy mechanisms:

2.1. Neutrality

For its mediatory geography, ideology, the Sultanate of Oman has always been put in an intermediate position between two regional powers: Saudi Arabia and Iran. This balancing attitude has then given Oman leverage to own independent foreign policy. Besides, neutrality has ever tended to maximize opportunities and lessen risks, therefore,

¹³⁰ As referred to in the Sultanate Ministry of Foreign affairs , Political position of the Sultanate of Oman, <https://www.mofa.gov.om/?p=798&lang=en>

¹³¹ Kechichian, *Oman And The World: The Emergence of An Independent Foreign Policy*, p. 9.

scholars and analysts of Oman's foreign affairs rather defined it as Strategic Hedging. This tool been employed since the ascendancy of Qaboos to the throne in 1970. Geopolitically, concerns of being small-sized, littoral state of the Strait of Hormuz a vital route for about 40 per cent of the world's oil shipment.

To keep the pride of being an independent state, Oman has never expressed any sort of privilege having a security partnership with Britain which caused the anger and resigning of Tariq bin Taimur, the uncle of Sultan Qaboos in 1971.¹³²

Over history, Oman has been in a go-between position "either this or that", Iraq or Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, Egyptian Sadat-Camp David Peace or other Arabs, Qatar or Saudis and Emiratis and recently Yemen or Saudi-led Coalition set up to contain Houthis. For instance, and despite its cordial relations with the Shah, Muscat has made evidence of neutrality towards the Iraqi-Iranian War.¹³³ And for its commitment to Gulf security, Oman disputed with Iran on a navy violation of its waters. On the other hand, Oman did allow the Iraqi air force to be stationed in Omani lands to attack Iran. This was a balance of refusal of both sides' demands and risks.¹³⁴ Amidst, official statements made it clear that Oman had on a neutral site as Omani Foreign Minister ensured,

*"The war produced some negative reactions from our neighbours towards Iran. During the first year, it was not clear for Oman what direction the war would take. We did not want to be allied to either party. We were neutral, we had no interest in continuing this war. This was very much appreciated by Iran, but it made a number of neighbours very unhappy. We looked far ahead and saw that GCC had no strength against Iran and Iraq."*¹³⁵

One decade later, Oman faces another test of regional foreign policy that was Second Gulf war 1990-1991. Muscat's response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was in line with the reaction of the international community. For Muscat, such war was a critical risk to the entire region and a direct threat to the stability of the international order. Officially, Oman condemned the invasion and urged Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait immediately.

¹³²Marc Valeri, "Oman's Mediatory Efforts in Regional Crises Executive Summary," 2014.

¹³³ Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, "Oman's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century", Middle East policy Council <https://mepc.org/omans-foreign-policy-twenty-first-century> accessed 03/08/2019

¹³⁴Majid Al-Khalili, *Oman's Foreign Policy: Foundations and Practice*, Florida International University, 2005, pp. 176–78.

¹³⁵Al-Khalili, *Oman's Foreign Policy: Foundations and Practice*.

Recently, in the aftermath of the Arab spring, Oman has determined not to intervene in Yemen affairs and crisis. Unlike other GCC states which relocated their embassies from Sanaa, Oman did not and kept open doors to any conciliatory attempts to resolve the crisis without siding with any party. And despite suspicion and accusations by Saudi Arabia and other GCC states, Oman has begun to deal with the Yemeni crisis from a view that Yemenis could solve their issues by themselves. Foreign Minister, Yusuf bin Alawi expressed an appeasement approach that called for national dialogue whatever complicated political structure is and debunked the regional sponsored media that

*“Dressed the Houthis in a uniform that was not of their making; for they cannot control Yemen alone, so they formed alliances with others in Yemen after they got fed up with the situation and that the Gulf states believed that the situation was under control and that the Gulf initiative was sufficient. This could not be further from the truth.”*¹³⁶

Muscat’s strategy to restore stability in Yemen via non-military means was clear in different efforts of crisis resolution. The crisis in Yemen appeared to Oman as a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia that Oman had to consider and thus detach itself from it. The Sultanate initiated a seven-point roadmap to bring an end to the crisis based on taking the warring parties to a political consensus.

2.2. Bilateral Cooperation

Omani policy has sought to transform the Sultanate into a sophisticated regional trading centre, to achieve its national interests, by developing its relations with the countries bordering the Indian Oceans basin and other Asian countries. Also to parallel and integrate in fact with the Omani activity and the strong relations and obligations of the Sultanate, in its other Gulf and Arab circles. It meant a vital mechanism to establish the association of Indian oceans states, which was announced in Mauritius in March 1955. The Sultanate was selected as a Vice-President, and the Association consists of the Sultanate of Oman, Mauritius, India and South Africa Australia, Singapore, Kenya), whose principles are to facilitate and support economic cooperation among them, and to cooperate within the Indian Ocean states, reflecting full respect for the principles of

¹³⁶Aymen Abdulkareem, “Oman Positions on the Regional Crises Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies,” *Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies*, 2017, p. 8.

sovereign equality, territorial integrity and political independence, non-interference in internal affairs, and coexistence.

3. Regional Mediation

One of Oman's foreign policy key instruments has been playing a "mediation role". of Sultan Qaboos' legacy has enhanced this policy. The mediating dimension has also been supported by the USA and respected by the region and the West as whole.

Firstly, Oman's option for mediating role came out of coordinating Washington's interests by depending on Oman's positive relations with both Arab states, Iran and Russia. This interprets the free trade agreement with Muscat in 2009.¹³⁷

Secondly, Oman's mediating tendency was a core in the perception differing position from Saudi Arabia and the UAE Thirdly, playing mediator role has always heightened Oman's regional status as a mature small power.¹³⁸ Fourthly, the Sultanate pursues such a policy to foster its lower economy if it is being compared with other richer oil Gulf states. Examples of mediatory efforts were significant particularly those pertaining to Iran's nuclear question and Yemeni crisis. Committed to its long-standing doctrine of neutrality and mediation, Muscat had attracted the world when offered an attempt to facilitate the negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran in a form of secret meetings between US and Iranian officials hosted in Muscat in mid-2013.¹³⁹

Not only limited to the Yemen crisis, but the Sultanate also pursued the same model of mediation in the Syrian crisis to find a blueprint road to peace with emphasis on a compromise between two factions. Oman's Syria policy tended to preserve the integrity and sovereignty of Syria. Muscat and Damascus swapped mutual visits at the Foreign Minister level as well as tailored roundtable talks in Vienna with an Omani constant

¹³⁷ Summary of U.S and Oman free trade agreement, International trade administration, OFFICE OF TEXTILES AND APPAREL (OTEXA)

<http://web.ita.doc.gov/tacgi/fta.nsf/FTA/Oman?opendocument&country=Oman> accessed 12/09/2019

¹³⁸ Praise for Oman's role as region's mediator, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/praise-for-oman-s-role-as-region-s-mediator-1.133590> accessed 03/03/2019

¹³⁹ Valeri, "Oman's Mediatory Efforts in Regional Crises Executive Summary."

emphasis on fighting terrorist groups such as ISIS, the Nusra Front which are not only threatening Syria but the entire region.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰Abdulkareem, “Oman Positions on the Regional Crises Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies.”

3. Chapter

Oman Foreign Policy towards the Arab spring in the Framework of Strategic Hedging

1. Dynamics in the Gulf

The Gulf cooperation council (GCC) was established for security and ideological reasons. The council includes six countries namely Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar. Before the 1970s, small Gulf states sought to gain independence, which was granted to them by Britain. The ruling families of the newly independent states benefited from oil revenues in the process of state-building and development. In a region where tribalism plays a crucial role in ruling those countries, the relationship between the ruling tribes in the region evolved through the years.

Qatar was a part of the Ottoman Empire influence in the 19 century. In 1893, Qatar became an autonomous area within the Ottoman Empire¹⁴¹. Also, the support Al Thani family had received support from the Saudi ruling family which led to its independence in 1971¹⁴² while at the same year independence of Bahrain and the unification of the United Arab Emirates occurred. In Oman itself, a long history of statehood; integration of the interior with coastal areas and attributes of Sultan Qaboos in power altogether determined the new era of modern Omani history.

The pattern of the ruling tribal alliance at that time determined their sphere of influence. Even after independence, the newly independent states had territorial disputes that they often solved either by themselves or resorted to international legal institutions. In the 1970s, tensions in the Gulf region witnessed between these independent countries, especially with Saudi Arabia (Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates). Even after resolving these conflicts, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia remains in geopolitical and economic competition with these countries.¹⁴³ In 1981 the negotiations between the Six Gulf

¹⁴¹ Olivier Decottignies and Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey's New Base in Qatar" The Washington institute <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-new-base-in-qatar> accessed 13/07/2019

¹⁴²Helem Chapin Metz, ed. *Persian Gulf States: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1993.
online page <http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/15.htm> accessed 10/04/2019

¹⁴³Imad K. Harb , **Determinants of Oman's Strategic Position on the Gulf Crisis**, Arab Centre Washington DC,23/01/2018

States led to the establishment of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as Berger indicates that *“The main goal of the council was a symbolic organization of unity against the ideational threat from anti-monarchical Iranian and Iraqi ideologies.”*¹⁴⁴

The Gulf Cooperation Council is a successful institutional alliance that the Gulf States use to protect their interests and regulate their affairs concerning some of the tensions that may arise between members of the Council. Thanks to it, those tensions did not reach the level of estrangement in diplomatic relations, which may sometimes reach international arbitration institutions, but they will soon be contained within the Council and resolved in a compromise.¹⁴⁵

By the course of time, the weakness of this alliance began to emerge despite the formation of a joint military force Peninsula Shield (Deira al-Jazirah) in 1984 in Hafar Al-Batin region northern Saudi Arabia. The first real test of this military body was in 1991 during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, where the Peninsula Shield was unable to fulfil its function which required support from the United States to liberate Kuwait.¹⁴⁶

The main focus of this research is twofold, Oman foreign policy behaviour and strategic choices, and Omani denial of the Saudi dominance, Oman emphasis on its right of having an independent foreign policy course required it to adopt a variety of foreign policy strategies to ensure keeping its unique foreign policy behaviour while avoiding any provocative and confrontation with Saudi Arabia and Iran.

In the second chapter, the sources of Oman's foreign policy were discussed, this chapter will focus on analysing Oman's foreign policy towards the Arab spring by analysing Oman-Iran relations, Oman and the Gulf states dynamics during this period and finally Oman foreign policy towards the Gulf crisis will be examined using Strategic Hedging identification mechanisms to determine if Oman behaviour in dealing with the crisis is considered Strategic Hedging or not.

Later in this chapter, the 2017 Gulf crisis will be analysed. Regarding the main causes of the conflict from a Saudi perspective, it is worth noting that the desire of Qataris to

http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/determinants-of-omans-strategic-position-on-the-gulf-crisis/

¹⁴⁴ Linda Berger, “The Gulf Cooperation Council between Unity and Discord towards the Arab Uprisings Uprisings and the Toppling Of,” *Themenschwerpunkt: Brennpunkt Nahost*, 2014, pp. 260–64.

¹⁴⁵ See Maritime Delimitation and Territorial Questions between Qatar and Bahrain (Qatar v. Bahrain), International court of Justice <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/87>

¹⁴⁶ Book review 2016 from Alliance to union

participate in the regional roles led by Saudi Arabia as well as its independence policy in managing its foreign affairs were the most important reasons.

1.1. Dynamics in the Gulf After-2010

The uprisings that spread across the MENA region in 2010 marked a new test for the Council. In recent years, the Gulf region has gained importance in international politics due to many factors including the strategic geographical location, huge oil reserves and in addition to the alliance of these monarchies with Western powers in maintaining regime survival and national security alike. With these into account, all the Gulf states are still aware of the importance of the Western umbrella and the survival of the regional status quo, despite the fluctuating role of the US in preserving it. As a result, this has made these countries review their visions about their traditional security situation.¹⁴⁷

The Arab Spring created a challenge to the security of the Gulf States as Bahrain was the most affected by the protests which propelled the GCC towards a resort of military campaign in Bahrain to assure the survival of the regime. However, this marked the first deployment of the Peninsula Shield Force to rescue one of the GCC members.¹⁴⁸ Also, it was the first time the Gulf States worked solely without the help of foreign troops, regardless of that there a kind of coordination between the GCC and Western powers.

The wave of protests that spread through the region posed a real threat to regimes' survival; created a rift in the region and changed the alliances' dynamics. Accordingly, the states had taken different positions towards those events, whereas the governments of Gulf states varied in the revaluation of threat perception, which thus confused one another's perception.

At the midst of the Arab Spring, Oman was not immune to the turmoil. Amongst other Gulf states, it was to some extent, affected in forms of job and reform protests. After the spread of protest in the city of Sohar, the security forces took action to dispel it. Gradually, the protests had reached Muscat in June 2011, and several protestors from Sohar were imprisoned (the sentences varied between 6 months to 5 years).¹⁴⁹ Another wave of arrest

¹⁴⁷ Rickli, "New Alliances Dynamics in the Gulf and Their Impact on the Small GCC States," p. 133.

¹⁴⁸ Book review (2016). From Alliance to Union: Challenges Facing Gulf Cooperation Council States) Joseph kechichian

¹⁴⁹ BBC country by country uprising, Oman page <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-12598273> accessed 03/03/2018

had targeted activists and protestors but by 2013, the authorities issued plans to increase the minimum wage and promised new jobs. By June 2013, Sultan Qaboos issued an official pardon on the protestors that were detained upon those earlier events.

A new regional order is being formed as a response to the new realities, the Arab Spring and its consequences. Overall, the Iranian-Saudi rivalry for regional hegemony which become more significant, the differences in the perception of threat between the Gulf States and the realization of the small states of the role they can play created a new division in the GCC. During the Arab spring, the smaller GCC members were able to enlarge their international influence. Therefore, they adopted different foreign policy strategies¹⁵⁰.

As Young observed the international rivalry between the West, China and Russia have its implications on the Middle East region. He argues that: *"The geopolitics dynamics proved to be power-based; differentiated domestic processes of change open the region to a broader global rivalry between Western democracies and non-Western rising powers: they aver that Middle Eastern states are now more likely to be drawn into competing sides of a zero-sum geopolitical battle between the West and authoritarian states led by China and Russia."*¹⁵¹

As mentioned earlier, although Saudi Arabia had a dominant position in the GCC being the largest country in and with the highest capabilities, this situation is challenged by some of the small Gulf States that deem to adopt independent foreign policies. As Szalai argues There is a change in Smaller Gulf state perception of Saudi dominance. He classifies foreign policy strategies of Gulf smaller states on a scale between accommodation (total acceptance of Saudi leadership (UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait) and opportunism (challenging or neglecting Saudi security interests (Qatar and Oman)).¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Máté Szalai (2017) Between Accommodation and Opportunism: Explaining the Growing Influence of Small Gulf States in the Middle East, *The International Spectator*, 52:2, 3-18, DOI: 10.1080/03932729.2017.1298881

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2017.1298881>

**Szalai refers to UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain as small Gulf States.

¹⁵¹ N. Janardhan, "Regionalisation and Omni-Balancing In the Gulf," *The Gulf States and the Arab Uprisings*, ed. by Ana Echagüe, 2013, p. 17.

¹⁵²Ibid

2. The Omani-Iranian Relations during the Arab Spring

The Omani relationship with Iran is determined by many factors, such as the intermediate geographical location between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran. All this requires it to have a good relationship with its neighbors, just as Iran and Oman participate in managing the Strait of Hormuz, not to mention the historical positions between Iran and the Sultanate of Oman and Sultan Qaboos positively. Iran was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Oman, and Oman helped to suppress the Dhofar revolution during the 1970s, while the rebels were backed by Arab countries (Egypt and Saudi Arabia). In addition, Oman's failure to stand by the Iran-Iraq war has created confidence between the two countries. Even after the Islamic Revolution, the two countries maintained their good relations.¹⁵³

The majority of the Omanis follow the Ibadi sect of Islam which promotes tolerance. Thus, several features distinguish Oman perception of Iran than the other Gulf States. The sultanate's approach towards religious freedom, the government abstention from the usage of sectarian rhetoric is reflected socially on the Omani people whereas Muslims from different sects pray at the same mosques. These characteristics assure the Omani government that there is no possibility that Iran would use the sectarian card to interfere in the Omani affairs and threaten regime stability.

Omani foreign policy principles that were set by Sultan Qaboos refuse to isolate Iran and work as a bridge between Iran and the GCC. Sultan Qaboos was the first Arab leader visiting Iran in 2014 after the election of Rouhani.¹⁵⁴

One of Oman's most recognizable mediation efforts was the part Oman took in the holding the secret meetings between the United States and Iran which resulted in the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA) in respect of Iran's nuclear program.¹⁵⁵ Iran

¹⁵³ DIANA PARTRIDGE SEPTEMBER 24, 2018," Why the Silence?: Oman's Precarious Posture on the Qatar Blockade" Inside Arabia online

<https://insidearabia.com/why-the-silence-omans-precarious-posture-on-the-qatar-blockade/>

¹⁵⁴ "What is Unique About the Omani-Iranian Relations?", IRAM 26.08.2016 by Ahmet Uysal, IRAM

<https://iramcenter.org/en/what-is-unique-about-the-omani-iranian-relations/>

¹⁵⁵ Imad K. Harb , **Determinants of Oman's Strategic Position on the Gulf Crisis**, Arab Centre Washington DC, 23-01-2018

http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/determinants-of-omans-strategic-position-on-the-gulf-crisis/

admits the importance of Oman efforts in mediating to reach the deal, according to Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif Sultan, Qaboos and his Foreign Minister Yusuf Bin Alawi played a significant role in solving the regional and international issues where Iran values Oman's position.

The Iranian appreciation was reflected with a boost in the economic cooperation between the two states. Iran invested \$4 billion in Omani port of Duqum and planned several projects in the Sultanate including gas agreement.¹⁵⁶

It is worth mentioning that Oman's position in Iran does not reflect the later position of the groups supported by Iran (Iran proxies in the region). For example, in 2016, Oman and the GCC designated "Hezbollah" the Lebanese group as a terrorist Group¹⁵⁷. This was compatible with Oman's stand of any Sectarian project.

3. Oman-GCC Relations during the Arab Spring

The GCC states share many similarities, ruled by monarchies and rentier states. Those similarities formed somehow collective identity for the Gulf States but recently, the differences between the GCC members started appearing to the Surface. Each country has its own foreign policy strategy choices based on many factors including that state identity and alignment behaviour and what each state consider as a threat and opportunity.

While some countries have chosen the role of mediator and non-interference policy, others preferred to take a stand on the matters in the region. Some preferred to diversify their alliances, and others preferred military build-ups.

Saudi Arabia as the largest member state in the GCC (in terms of size and capabilities) plays the leading role in GCC, in recent years small Gulf states felt that the Saudi dominance behaviour threat their foreign policy independence, so they started to take a dominance denial position against the Kingdom. Those countries are Qatar and Oman.

¹⁵⁶ Jeremy Jones, "Oman's Quiet Diplomacy," no. November (2013), p. 6.

¹⁵⁷ Gulf Arab states label Hezbollah a terrorist organisation, Reuters
<https://in.reuters.com/article/gulf-hezbollah-idINKCN0W412F> accessed 12/08/2019

Saudi Arabia dominant policy within the GCC led to Oman-Iran rapprochement. The geography factor, the historical relations between the two countries and political independence. Oman desires to act outside the union system and other factors led to Oman's refusal for the upgrading of the GCC into a union.¹⁵⁸ This position was made clear that appeared clearly in 2013 Manama dialogue where the Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time Saud bin Faisal Al Saud mentioned the importance of upgrading the Gulf cooperation council into a union. Oman's opposition of this statement was directly presented by the Omani Minister of Foreign Affairs Yusuf Bin Alawai. He pointed out:

*"We are not at all with the union. But if the union does happen, and there does not seem to be a wish from the other brothers at least on an agreement on steps at a time when there are strong winds, we are part of the region and we will deal with it. We are internationally at a historical crossroads that requires action for peace and security. We realise that youth make up 60–65 per cent of our citizens. This growth in demography requires establishing a new culture that can be part of the world heritage. We must not enter any conflict with anyone, be they close or far. We cannot go back to the past century. We must keep our region away from regional conflicts. With respect for all view on the future of the region, we believe that might do not mean that people should be militarised to enter into conflicts or to face conflicts."*¹⁵⁹

Although Oman refuses the suggestion to upgrade the GCC into a union, it emphasises on the importance of GCC member states working together in order to protect their stability and thrive through the council.

During the years of Arab Spring, the relations between the GCC members began to be tensioned. Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain had a specific position towards the outcomes of the uprisings. Saudi Arabia considered Qatari position towards the outcome of Arab Spring and the rising of Islamists to power as a threat to the kingdom interest. Consequently, it led to the recent on-going Gulf crisis.

Oman continued to have a non-interference and neutral position through the first years of the uprisings then started to have a more active role by mediating between the conflicting parties. While having a different position from GCC on certain aspects of foreign policy, Oman still recognises GCC's importance for regional security and

¹⁵⁸ Maryam Al-Bolushi, "'Ather Al Alaqat Al Omania Al Irania Ala Majlis Altawen Alkhaliji'"The Impact of Omani-Gulf Relations on the Security of the Gulf Cooperation Council," *Centere for Arab Unity Studies*, n.d., p. 12, <https://platform.almanhal.com/Details/Article/97571>.

¹⁵⁹ The speech was published in Gulf news, 8 december 2013 but it was accessed through Jerney Jonnes , Jeremy Jones, "Oman ' s Quiet Diplomacy," no. November (2013), p. 5.

economic cooperation, and a critical player that is contributing to the regional prosperity and peace.¹⁶⁰

The royal family "Bou Said" and other Arab monarchies have similar characteristics, knowing that the volume of bilateral trade in both exports and imports with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is twice the size with Iran (4.2 and 1.8 per cent of exports and 3.0 and 1.6 per cent of shares of Imports).¹⁶¹

In the upcoming section, the Gulf States' different positions toward the Arab Spring will be examined by analysing the GCC position towards the uprisings in Egypt, Syria, Libya and Yemen.

¹⁶⁰ 'Oman and the Gulf Diplomatic Crisis by Abdullah Baabood'.

https://www.oxgaps.org/files/commentary_-_baabood.pdf

¹⁶¹ Máté Szalai, 'THE CRISIS OF THE GCC AND THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION THE CRISIS OF THE GCC' Menara , 2018 <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_fn_14.pdf>.

https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_fn_14.pdf

4. Comparing GCC Member States Stances of the Uprisings in Egypt, Syria, Libya and Yemen.

The uprisings that spread in the Middle East region in 2010 came as a surprise and challenge for regimes stability in the region. The varying positions towards the uprisings created a new alliance dynamics. In the Gulf region, each state had a different perception of what poses a threat to their interest which resulted in the appearance of two blocks; the first block contains Saudi Arabia and the states of similar attitude namely UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait. On the other hand, Qatar has chosen to support the uprisings, especially when Doha saw that the outcome of these uprisings was a win of Muslim Brotherhood over authoritarian regimes. Qatar capitalised on the uprisings to maximise its leverage in these States, where Oman kept in a neutral position and playing the role of mediator between the parties of the conflicts and assured on the importance of finding peaceful diplomatic solutions.

For Qatar, the events were looked upon as an opportunity to maximise their leverage, where Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait consider it was threatening to the stability of their regimes. The parallel of uprisings with the rise of Muslim Brotherhood to power was surprising to the Gulf States.

Qatar showed support for the new regime by providing financial support for the emerging government (grants and loan), on the other hand, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain were very cautious about the newly elected government especially in the case of success of Islamist and found in them a potential threat to their Security. While Oman and Kuwait remained silent in the beginning and waited until the picture of the outcome became clearer.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Abdullah Baabood, "Gulf Countries and Arab Transitions : Role , Support and Effects," vol. 2014, no. July (2014), p. 42.

4.1. The Diverse Perspectives of the Gulf States on Egypt

Saudi Arabia saw the fall of Mubarak regime in Egypt a loss of an ally in the region, Riyadh was supportive to Mubarak until he was ousted. Riyadh was surprised by the events in Egypt. The Saudi's support for Mubarak was actually to maintain the statuesque in the region. After Morsi was elected as the new president, Saudi's were not able to hide their concerns.

On the other hand, Qatar wanted to portray itself as a support for the people's demands. That caused polarization between the Gulf countries. Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Libya caused a rift between the Gulf countries; they had different positions towards the actors in these countries.

The Muslim Brotherhood was able to reach power in Egypt which alarmed the Saudi regime, although Morsi's first official visit after being elected was to Saudi Arabia. The Egyptian regime rapprochement towards Iran provoked Saudi Arabia because Riyadh considers Tehran its arc enemy in the region.

Historically the Saudi regime relationship with Muslim Brotherhood went through friends and foe phases; the relationship drastically changed in the 90s after the rise of "Sahwa" awaking movement in Saudi Arabia¹⁶³. This position increased after 2011. The Arab spring outcomes and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt alarmed the Saudi regime. After the military coup, the new Egyptian classified the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation. Later on, Saudi Arabia also designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group in 2014.¹⁶⁴ The Saudi kingdom position came from its geopolitical and regional interests.¹⁶⁵ On the other hand, Qatar which does not consider the Muslim Brotherhood a threat to the regime and has a long history of guaranteeing asylum for Muslim Brotherhood lead figures. During the Arab spring, Qatar has projected itself as a supporter of democracy and the people's choice outcome.

¹⁶³ Saudi and the brotherhood from friends to foes, Al Jazeera
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/saudi-brotherhood-friends-foes-170623093039202.html>
accessed 18/06/2019

¹⁶⁴ "Saudi Arabia declares Muslim Brotherhood 'terrorist group'", BBC
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26487092> accessed 08/02/2019

¹⁶⁵ May Darwich, "Creating the Enemy, Constructing the Threat: The Diffusion of Repression against the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East," *Democratization*, vol. 24, no. 7 (2017), pp. 1289–1306, doi:10.1080/13510347.2017.1307824.

Yusuf Al Qaradawi one of the Muslim Brotherhood leading figures that were given a chance to spread his ideas in Qatar, the cleric was given a frequent appearance on Al Jazeera news channel. Qatar used Al Jazeera as soft power foreign policy tool. The aftermath of the Egyptian revolution and the presidential election resulted in Mohammad Morsi's reach to power; the event was considered an opportunity for Qatar to increase its influence in Egypt and in the region.

Doha's strategic connections to the Muslim Brotherhood and other rising actors in the states affected by revolution showed that Qatar wanted to play a bigger role in the region by filling the power vacuum. This was observed by other Gulf countries as a threat to their interest and internal stability.

Doha provided full coverage of the events in Egypt through their soft power channel Al Jazeera; it also provided an estimated assistance to the Egyptian regime of \$8 billion. In 2013 the relationship between Qatar and Egypt became hostile as a result of the military takeover and ousting of Mohamed Morsi. Al Jazeera provided full coverage of the events in Egypt especially the events related to the excessive military use of power against the protestors.¹⁶⁶ Qatar links with Muslim Brotherhood raised Doha's influence during the Arab spring.¹⁶⁷

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were supportive of the military takeover of power in Egypt; they regained Egypt as an ally. Riyadh tried to control the situation between Qatar and Egypt by trying to convince Qatar to change its position from the coup in Egypt, which Qatar refused.

The differences between Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Qatar, widened through this period which led to diplomatic tension between the countries on allegation of endangering these countries internal interests by supporting Muslim Brotherhood and Al Jazeera agenda of criticising the internal issues of these countries. The crisis was solved with the signing of a Riyadh agreement in 2014. After the reconciliation, Qatar backed Network Al Jazeera toned down the critics of the Gulf States regimes.

¹⁶⁶ David D. Kirkpatrick, "Gulf leaders back Qatar in its feud with Egypt", the New York Times <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/20/world/middleeast/gulf-cooperation-council-backs-qatar-in-dispute-with-egypt.html> accessed 18/06/2019

¹⁶⁷ David B. Roberts, "Qatar and the Brotherhood," *Survival*, vol. 56, no. 4 (2014), pp. 23–32, doi:10.1080/00396338.2014.941557.

The rivalry and the diverse position of the Gulf States can be observed in the Egyptian case. Saudi Arabia and Qatar different perception of threat and opportunity can be seen by which actor each country considered an ally and which is considered a foe.

4.2. The Diverse Perspectives of the Gulf States on the Syrian Crisis

The Syrian crisis is another example of differential position between Gulf countries. At the beginning of the crisis Gulf countries tried to mediate between the Syrian regime and the opposition to reach a political solution, with rising intensity of the conflict, the Arab League suspended Syria membership and forced economic sanctions on the Assad regime. The Gulf States began to degrade the diplomatic relation with the Syrian regime. The position of two states was different from the other GCC members, Oman and Kuwait.

Oman was the only Gulf country that kept the channels open with the Syrian regime, both Oman and Kuwait preferred mediation effort. Alawi visited Syria and discussed the situation with the Syrian regime while the opposition visited Muscat as part of Oman mediating efforts. Kuwait is considered one of the biggest donors for displaced Syrian and refugees.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates had a clear Stance about supporting Syrian opposition against the Assad regime that is supported by Iran.

Saudi Arabian clerics were divided into two categories state-affiliated clerics and opposition clerics, the first group, insisted on any help for Syria should be through government channels this Statement correspond with the Saudi government made it clear that it will be strict the sentence of those who join terrorist groups like Al-Qaida or ISIS. The second group of 53 clerics publish a statement online calling for Jihad in Syria against Russia, Iran and Assad forces.¹⁶⁹

Iran support for the Syrian regime had a strategic dimension, Iran employed sectarian rhetoric in calling for Jihad in Syria in the Name “shrines protectors”. The regional dimension for this is Iran Revolutionary ideology and the aspiration for regional

¹⁶⁸ In 2015 Kuwait was the third largest donor for Syrian refugees with \$304.6 million . see Liana Barcia, ”who’s giving the Syrian people”, <https://www.devex.com/news/who-s-giving-to-the-syrian-people-86938> accessed 09/09/2019

¹⁶⁹ Angus McDowel,” Saudi opposition clerics make sectarian call to Jihad in Syria”, Reuters <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-saudi-clerics/saudi-opposition-clerics-make-sectarian-call-to-jihad-in-syria-idUSKCN0RZ1IW20151005> Accessed 05/07/2019

dominance. The call for Jihad was through Iran supreme leader Khomeini and Iran proxies in the region like Hezbollah leaders and Pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Iraq.¹⁷⁰

GCC States' interests were not aligned. They supported different groups. Qatar was firmly supportive of the Syrian opposition against Bashar al-Assad's regime. The beneficiary of the Qatari assistance was the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁷¹ The Emir of Qatar was the first to call for international intervention in Syria to stop the war.¹⁷² The changing nature of Qatar's role can be witnessed in the Syrian and Libyan cases. Doha had an interventionist view.

The Gulf States support for different groups in Syria led to a rise in the tension between them. Regional rivalry factors should not be neglected in the case of the Syrian conflict. Iran support for Assad regime provoked Saudi Arabia support for the opposition. Both Tehran and Muscat used Sectarianism rhetoric, and the Syrian parties became a proxy for those countries that provided them with support for their interest.

4.3. The Diverse Perspectives of the Gulf States on Yemen Crisis

In every almost front of Yemen's revolutionary activism over the last decades since the 1962 revolution, Al Saud has always been concerned with the inevitable spillover of nationalist and democratic movements to Saudi Arabia through Yemen. Out of these concerns, Saudi Arabia has repeatedly dealt with Yemen.

Secondly, and most significant transformation in Saudi Arabian foreign policy behaviour is that new existential threat of the Muslim Brotherhood which has unprecedentedly unleashed in the aftermath of Arab Spring. Analytically, the rising Islamist democracies and Sunni revolutionary community similar to Iranian-backed ones have been perceived by the Saudi regime as an opponent ideology to their Wahabi unrevolutionary doctrine.

About Yemen, the Muslim Brotherhood branch namely Islah Party (Reform Party) which had a lead in the upheavals during the Arab Spring, recently hold power clout in

¹⁷⁰ Phillip Smyth, "The Shiite Jihad in Syria and Its Regional Effects," 2015, www.washingtoninstitute.org.

¹⁷¹ "Qatar and Its Neighbours," *Strategic Comments*, vol. 25 (2019), p. 3, doi:10.1080/13567888.2019.1601445.

¹⁷² Baabood, "Gulf Countries and Arab Transitions : Role , Support and Effects," p. 13.

some strategic provinces in Yemen and operates actively in Hadi government altogether persist in challenging Saudi Arabia.

Thirdly, in another front and the same prism of existential threat perception, Saudi Arabia has also faced a de facto reality in Yemen that brought about Houthis-Iranian-backed militias similar to Hezbollah in ideology and military behaviour. With this duality of threat Houthis and the Muslim Brotherhood,¹⁷³ then, Saudi Arabia since then has determined itself to deal with both based on 'let them fight each other'.

Fourthly, Saudi Arabia has worked since the beginning of Arab Spring to capitalise on positive relations with the West and Russia to handle Yemen's policy without letting any interference that might not be in favour of its sphere of influence.¹⁷⁴ This is clear in Saudi Arabian activism in Yemen since the launch of military coalition immediately some months following the Houthi's seizure of Sana'a. Not only this, it has been along with the UAE supporting the internationally recognised Hadi Government in terms of military logistics, humanitarian support, housing the president in Riyadh and advocating for the Yemeni cause through the international community channels.

The case for Oman the border delimitation led to the heyday of Omani-Yemeni relationship. Immediately, the rise of Sultan Qaboos opened a new chapter of opportunities and uncertainties. The new Sultan's foreign policy ambition led to the pursuit of regional power that began with the accession to the Arab League (AL) and the United Nations in 1971. On the other hand, the Sultan triggered a regional suspicion against Omani foreign policy when the Sultan praised the Camp David treaty, signed a security agreement with Iran on the Strait of Hormoz. Besides, Yemen posed a threat to Oman amid Dhofar Rebellion in 1976 as a spillover of the unrest and socialist movement in South Yemen.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ "Saudi faces double threat in Yemen Al Houthi takeover not only benefits Iran, but emboldens Al Qaida" Gulf News

<https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/saudi/saudi-faces-double-threat-in-yemen-1.1393999> accessed 08/08/2019

¹⁷⁴ "Russia coordinating efforts towards Yemeni settlement with US, Saudi Arabia" TAAS Russian news agency

<https://tass.com/politics/1020561> accessed 09/08/2019

¹⁷⁵ Silvia Colombo, "Foreign Policy Activism in Saudi Arabia and Oman. Diverging Narratives and Stances towards the Syrian and Yemeni Conflicts," *International Spectator*, 2017, p. 63, doi:10.1080/03932729.2017.1303965.

Stretching over a more extended border of 187-miles with Yemen, Oman has been clear and stable in its stance since the begging of the Yemeni crisis. With no surprise, Oman wanted to avoid uncertainties vulnerable from Yemen and pressure from either Iran or Saudi Arabia. Within the prism of non-involvement foreign policy, Oman decided not to join the Saudi-led coalition three reasons: first to keep committed to its traditional doctrine of neutrality, second, to keep positive relations with Iran and Yemen regardless of domestic differences and thirdly to save its image as a soft regional peacekeeper.¹⁷⁶

As the case of the study shows evidence, Sultanate of Oman had determined its position on Yemen and Saudi-led military intervention where the foreign minister in Yusuf bin Alawi, ensured immediately after the intervention March 2015 that “Oman is a nation of peace. We cannot work on peace efforts at the same time we would be part of a military campaign.” While another higher member of Omani Senate polarised Oman’s posture on the same matter that “Oman could not have participated in this coalition. It is in our constitution. We do not send troops or artillery anywhere unless requested by the United Nations.”¹⁷⁷

In its mediation role, Muscat facilitated several ways to mitigate Yemeni crisis including coordinating and hosting a number of Yemeni prisoners released from the Guantanamo Bay prison, hosted several peace negotiations rounds, helped in evacuating of Western captives in Yemen, hosting some members of various Yemeni political parties who fled to Oman after the Houthi’s control of Sanaa in 2014.

For branding itself as a regional power in the region, the Houthis seized Sanaa in 2014, offered Oman an opportunity to broker mediation in Yemen between warring parties as well as in the region. In its mediating role, Oman has featured to pursue a geopolitical game over Saudi Arabia and the UAE through allegedly hidden-hand support to Houthis for balancing at least the UAE’s over-ambition in the sub-region of Gulf. Accusations of Omani blind-eye turning in dealing with Saudi-Emirati-defined regional threats have occasionally recurred. One among others, a Gulf official figure described Oman’s stance towards Yemen as “negative neutrality.” Beyond official statements, some

¹⁷⁶ Al-Bolushi Maryam, “‘Ather Al Alaqat Al Omania Al Irania Ala Majlis Altawen Alkhaliji’The Impact of Omani-Gulf Relations on the Security of the Gulf Cooperation Council,” pp. 16.

¹⁷⁷ Theodore Karasik Giorgio Cafiero, “Yemen War and Qatar Crisis Challenge Oman’s Neutrality,” *Middle East Institute*, 2017.

reports expressed that Oman offered land bases for Iranian intelligence apparatus and Mujahedin-e Khalq, to back Houthis.¹⁷⁸

In Riyadh, the ‘Salmans’ claimed Oman seems to stagger at the back of brothers. Signs of this suspension appeared in King Salman’s visit exclusion of Oman’s after he had toured all GCC States. Another sign of Oman’s reluctance to join the Saudi-led Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism which only took part in one year later.

Also, Oman’s Yemen policy has triggered Washington’s suspicion and questioning. Trump’s accusations of Oman based on intelligence accounts incriminate Oman’s hidden support to Houthi rebels. In a secret visit in 2017, C.I.A director and deputy national security advisor, met Sultan Qaboos to reflect Washington’s displeasure on Omani ultra-appeasing with Iran and urged to cut off any Iranian arms routes passed through the borders of Oman.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

5. Omani Foreign Policy Towards the 2017 Gulf Crisis in the Framework of Strategic Hedging

In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt cut their diplomatic relations with Qatar, accusing Qatar of threatening Gulf security by supporting terrorism. Sanctions accompanied the diplomatic crisis. The embargo forced by Saudi Arabia and its ally's goal was to affect Qatar economy and pressure Doha to accept the demands set by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt.

The mentioned countries published a list of demands in order to solve the dispute, the demands included scaling down diplomatic ties with Iran and closing the Iranian diplomatic missions in Qatar, expelling members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and cutting off military and intelligence cooperation with Iran, shutting down the Turkish military base, and stopping all means funding terrorist groups and others.¹⁸⁰

Apart from others, Bahrain only shares Saudi Arabia's perception of Iran in the region; Al Khalifa family has good ties with the Saudi regime, the small emirate depends on Saudi support, as the regime is a Sunni regime while the majority of Bahraini population is Shiite. All these factors determine why Bahrain regards Iran as a threat to regime survival, and Al Khalifa fears Iran would support the Shiite majority against the Sunni minority regime in Bahrain. On the other hand, UAE has good economic relations with Iran but shares Saudi Arabian feeling about Iran political activities in the region especially the activity of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

UAE's problem with Doha is more on its position of the Muslim Brotherhood than on Doha's relations with Iran.¹⁸¹ On the other side, Kuwait has a good relationship with Iran, but it also makes sure not to act against the Saudis' interests. Kuwait does not share the fear of Iran in light of Shiite dynamic against the ruling regime. On the contrary, the Kuwaiti Shiite minority is a pro-ruling regime, especially in Parliament. Unlike, Oman

¹⁸⁰ Al JAZEERA, Arab states issue 13 demands to end Qatar-Gulf crisis, 12/07/2017 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/arab-states-issue-list-demands-qatar-crisis-170623022133024.html>

¹⁸¹ Abdullah Babood "THE MIDDLE EAST'S NEW BATTLE LINES", European council on foreign relations, https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/battle_lines/oman

rejects Saudi Arabia's anti-Shia rhetoric, due to the state tolerance tradition, historical and economic ties with Iran.¹⁸²

Comparatively, Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait would not willingly join the anti-Iran coalition¹⁸³ because they have been not affected by Iranian revolutionary activism, which may be the reason why those countries do not perceive Iran as a threat to their regime survival. On that basis, they have economic ties with Tehran.

Kuwait acts neutrally towards the Gulf crisis. Further, it also leads the mediating process hoping to bring the two sides closer. Oman is also emphasising on the importance of finding solutions to the crisis, and Muscat did not lead the mediating effort this time knowing the sensitivity of the situation, fearing to have a similar fate as Qatar.

Qatar followed the Hedging Strategy in its foreign policy and its ties with Iran is undeniable. Iran has helped Doha economically, but Doha keeps its distance from Iran in political terms. The Qatari leadership knows that allying with Iran could trigger harsh reactions not just from the coalition, but from the United States as well¹⁸⁴

This section highlighted Omani foreign policy towards the Gulf crisis, Omani unique foreign policy discourse made it play a significant mediating role on a regional and international level. All in all, it contributed to the trust-building between Western allies, GCC members and Iran.

5.1. The Reason behind the Gulf Crisis

Several reasons caused the embark of the Crisis, GCC member states adopted different perceptions on what might pose a threat to their interests. Amongst these causes, first, the Saudi-Iran rivalry for regional hegemony, Riyadh's perception of Tehran as the main threat to its interests in the region shaped a new reality for small Gulf states

¹⁸² Berger, Linda. (2014). "The Gulf Cooperation Council between Unity and Discord towards the Arab Uprisings". *Security and Peace*, Vol. 32, No. 4, Hot Spot Middle East (2014), pp. 260-264.

¹⁸³ Abdullah Babood, *Middle East battle lines*

¹⁸⁴ Máté Szalai, 'THE CRISIS OF THE GCC AND THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION THE CRISIS OF THE GCC', Menara, 2018 <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_fn_14.pdf>.
https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_fn_14.pdf

regarding their relations with Iran. Gulf States position of the Muslim Brotherhood, As well as Small Gulf states perception on their foreign policy and the usage of different strategies to handle the new reality forced by the Arab Spring.

Guzansky observes that *“Small Gulf states found themselves in a position to balance against a direct confrontation with Iran and the fear of Saudi domination and interfering in the policies of small Gulf States.”*¹⁸⁵

5.2. Qatar’s support to Muslim Brotherhood

Another reason for the crisis is Qatar’s support to Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia and UAE have classified the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group. They consider the Muslim Brotherhood a threat to regime survival. Qatar supported the Muslim Brotherhood and opposition movement in the region, especially after the Arab Spring. Doha does not consider the Muslim Brotherhood a threat to Qatar. This contrasting views towards Muslim Brotherhood fuelled the crisis. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt see Qatar support to Muslim Brotherhood a threat to their interests.

Qatar Justified its position towards Muslim Brotherhood during the Arab spring as a supportive position to the voice of Arab Street. Saudi Arabia and its Ally’s reject the Qatari stance’ they accuse Doha of having connections with ISIL in Syria while Doha rejects those accusations.

Qatar has a long history of supporting Muslim Brotherhood since the 1960s when some leading figures fled Egypt, some of them sought refuge in Saudi Arabia other like Al Qaradawi preferred Qatar. He was able to have close relations with the Qatari ruling family Al Thani. In other words, the agreement between the Muslim Brotherhood leaders and Al Thani was that the Muslim Brotherhood would not interfere in the internal matters of Qatar conditioned that Qatar will provide them with a good position in the state, for instance, cleric Al Qardawi usually appears on the Al Jazeera channel.

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Muslim Brotherhood were not always bad, and there were phases that Saudi Arabia supported Muslim Brotherhood but the

¹⁸⁵ Guzansky, “The Foreign-Policy Tools of Small Powers: Strategic Hedging in The Persian Gulf,” pp. 112–22.

relationship began to fall apart with the rise of Awakening “Sahwa” movement in Saudi Arabia by the 1990s. In contrast, the Al Saud’s main difference with Muslim Brotherhood is more of ideological in the matter of the position of correcting the leader. Al Saud believes that Muslim Brotherhood is a threat to their ruling in terms of they offer a different approach of political Islam. As a result, the Saudi royal family does not want an ideology that criticises the ruler. Eventually, since 2014, Saudi Arabia designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group.

5.3. Omani Position of the Gulf Crisis

Oman maintains economic ties with all GCC members, supports Kuwaiti mediation efforts, and emphasises its customary independence in its foreign relations beyond the GCC.

Oman followed its foreign policy principles towards the Gulf Crisis by maintaining neutrality and diplomatic forms to solve disputes; it refused to participate in the coalition of states who cut their diplomatic relations with Qatar and maintained close ties with Qatar instead. It backed Kuwaiti mediating efforts to solve the crisis and to bring both sides together towards reconciliation.

Omani position comes from its emphasising on the right of smaller Gulf States to maintain independent foreign policies. It also knows that it could have the same fate as Qatar due to its relations with Iran and the vocal rejection of Saudi’s suggestion of upgrading GCC into a union.

Oman uses Hedging strategies from the fact that it does not want any confrontation with either Saudi Arabia or Iran. This strategy allows the country to maintain ties with both sides while not being tied to one particular power.¹⁸⁶

Guzansky argues that Oman is engaging in the highest level of hedging among the smaller Gulf States. He believes that its ability to manoeuvre diplomatically, its maintenance of open channels of communication with all parties, and its close ties with the countries that threaten it have led to the recognition of its regional and international

¹⁸⁶ Lee, J. Y., 2017. Hedging Strategies of the Middle Powers in East Asian Security: the Cases of South Korea and Malaysia. *EastAsia*, 32(1), pp. 23-37.

status. Thereby reducing the risks to its national security.¹⁸⁷ Strategic Hedging helped Oman build good relations with many external actors to balance out regional pressures.

5.4. Omani Relationship with Qatar after the Crisis

While Oman stayed in political neutrality towards all parties to the crisis, it entailed implicit refusal for isolating Qatar since the begging of the crisis Oman and slightly improved its ties with Qatar. Aware of future consequences of the crisis, Oman has kept in the same political track towards all parties to the crisis. Similarly, it expressed its humanitarian stand when the embargo was imposed on Qatar by acting as a facilitator of transshipment of cargo and individuals to get in and out from Qatar.¹⁸⁸

Having Oman engaged in different economic partnerships in the region and internationally, that allows it to maximise the advantages of such foreign policy strategic choices. No doubt that Omani ties with Qatar during a sensitive concern is a validation. For instance, Oman Air has gained advantages over other airlines in the Gulf region as the restrictions caused by the crisis limited the other airlines. Similarly, Qatar Airways launched a new route to Sohar Airport; it also initiated air flights to Muscat International Airport.

On the maritime level, new lanes were opened for vessels between Hamad Port in Qatar and Salalah and Sohar ports. Omani and Qatari investors have also increased their cooperation since the early days of the crisis. Likewise, Oman has also advanced independent foreign policy by keeping peaceful and pragmatic ties with Tehran.¹⁸⁹

Although Oman's economic gains are explicit, Oman is aware of that stability, in the long run, and provides sustainable prosperity for the region preferring it on the quick gains from the crisis. According to a government official, cargo volumes were up by 30% in 2017, and nearly 150 Qatari investors showed up for a recent event in Muscat to

¹⁸⁷ Guzansky, "The Foreign-Policy Tools of Small Powers: Strategic Hedging in The Persian Gulf," pp. 112–22.

¹⁸⁸ Harb, "No Title."

¹⁸⁹ Giorgio Cafiero, Qatar And Oman's Shared Interests, Lobelog, 12/09/2017
<https://lobelog.com/qatar-and-omans-shared-interests/>

promote investment in Oman. Only 20% were expected and “a lot of deals were inked,” says an Omani businessman.¹⁹⁰

Qatar signed a memorandum of understanding with Oman on the development of bilateral investment and trade on Sunday (Jan 28 2018, nearly eight months into a crisis between the emirate and its Arab neighbours. The Omani news agency ONA said the agreement includes several sectors that will be exported from the Muscat to Doha.¹⁹¹

The crisis affected a considerable number of people. Many families were divided, students were affected too. Also, many foreigner workers in the Gulf were affected by the crisis; for example, more than 100,000 Egyptian workers live in Qatar and have no direct way of getting to and from their home country. The same is true of Saudi, Emirati and Bahraini nationals in Doha. a ‘neutral’ third country was needed to transfer those passengers; it was an opportunity for Oman to fulfil this gap and provide the accessibility for those people to travel through.¹⁹² Economic cooperation between Oman and Qatar between/June and September 2017) was increased and trade volume by almost 2000 %, totalling \$702 million in trade transactions.¹⁹³

Oman varied its alliances through the crisis, Muscat is faced with pressure from Saudi Arabia and UAE regarding the sultanate’s position of Iran. Oman dealt with these pressures with increasing economic ties with Iran, a \$3.6bn loan from China was signed in early August, and high Chinese investments in Duqum Port helped Oman to fund government spending for 2017. Usually, Muscat would have turned to GCC assistance for cash but Oman is aware of the new realities and trying to adapt to them. Those flexibility and adaption policies are the core success of Oman foreign policy behaviour. On the other hand, Oman and UAE have been affected by the border dispute, and although

¹⁹⁰ The Economist, “Oman is benefiting from the standoff over Qatar, for now”, 02/09/2017
<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2017/09/02/oman-is-benefiting-from-the-standoff-over-qatar-for-now>

¹⁹¹ The Straits times , “Isolated Qatar signs agreements with Oman”
<https://www.straitstimes.com/world/middle-east/isolated-qatar-signs-agreements-with-oman>

¹⁹² Dominic Dudley, A Winner Emerges From The Qatar Crisis: Oman's National Airline, Forbes Magazine, 07/06/2017
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2017/06/08/oman-air-takes-advantage-of-qatar-crisis/#5234fe4f25b4>

¹⁹³ DIANA PARTRIDGE **Why the Silence?: Oman’s Precarious Posture on the Qatar Blockade**
Inside Arabia online
<https://insidearabia.com/why-the-silence-omans-precarious-posture-on-the-qatar-blockade/>

in 1999 the two countries reached temporary border settlement, they were not able to finalise their borders until 2008.¹⁹⁴

6. Applying Strategic Hedging Identification Mechanism to Analyze Omani Foreign Policy towards the Gulf Crisis

Many scholars described Omani foreign policy behaviour as Strategic Hedging.¹⁹⁵ In this section, Oman's foreign policy behaviour towards the Gulf crisis will be analysed using Strategic Hedging mechanism.

The main goal of states that chose to hedge as their foreign policy behaviour is to maximise their security. Many scholars identified a mechanism to determine if state behaviour can be considered as hedging.¹⁹⁶

Using Tessman and Wolfe identification mechanism, there are four criteria to classify behaviour as hedging. Firstly, the behaviour must enhance the state abilities if someday it had to enter a conflict with major power state or the behaviour would help the state with adjusting to the loss of subsidies and goods provided by the major power. A second criterion is a behaviour prevents the state from entering a confrontation with the upper power. Thirdly, criteria are the behaviour should be taken by the highest power in the state (the government) and it must involve some aspects that are considered as national interest for the state, fourth criteria is regarding the cost (either domestic or International) the behaviour must be costly (diplomatic or economic).¹⁹⁷ It is worth mentioning that in order to describe behaviour as hedging, it must fulfil these four filters. Oman's behaviour analyses based on this mechanism.

¹⁹⁴ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman : Reform , Security , and U . S . Policy," 2016, p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ See "understanding Oman's foreign policy" by Leah shreewood , "Oman and the Gulf diplomatic crisis "Abdallah babood , "The Foreign-Policy Tools of Small Powers: Strategic Hedging in the Persian Gulf" by Yoel Guzansky , " Determinants of Oman's Strategic Position on the Gulf Crisis" by Imad K. Harb.

¹⁹⁶ Some of the identification mechanism was indicated in the first chapter

¹⁹⁷ Brock Tessman, Wojtek Wolfe, "Great Powers and Strategic Hedging: The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy," *International Studies Review*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2011), p. 220, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2486.2011.01022.x.

6.1. First criteria

“Does behaviour improve the competitive ability of the hedging state should it someday enter into a militarised dispute with the system leader? (Type A hedging) OR Does behaviour improve the ability of the hedging state to cope without global public goods or direct subsidies currently being provided to it by the system leader? Type B hedging.”

There is a distinct escalation of Oman’s military expenditure during the years of Arab spring, According to SIPRI military expenditure database; there is an obvious escalation of Omani military expenditure as a share of the GDP during the years 2011-2016.¹⁹⁸ Oman’s neutrality and belief in diplomatic solution indicate that these military build-ups are not directed against the regional powers (Iran, Saudi Arabia) which exclude the assumption that the behaviour is Type A hedging.

The Arab spring events can explain the reason for this escalation. Regimes felt threatened by the events; the regional alliance dynamics went through changes during those years and Oman had felt the threat and thus raised the military expenditures. While this increase does not come in a category of military build-ups in order to raise the competitive abilities in case that the hedger will enter in a future conflict with the higher power (in this case Saudi Arabia). Then, this reduces the possibility of identifying the behaviour as Type A.

Examining if the behaviour can be considered type B hedging, Oman is a GCC member and in a matter of capabilities, Oman is considered the second smallest GCC member after Bahrain. Economically, the Omani composition of the GDP of the GCC is 5% and dependent on GCC assistance. Both Oman and Bahrain were promised \$20 billion from GCC during the Arab Spring, but with the rise of the Gulf Crisis; Omani position

¹⁹⁸ See SIPRI military expenditure database (In 2011 Oman Military expenditure were 7.4 % of GDP, The percentage for 2012 were 12.1% of the GDP, for 2013 the percentage was 11.1% of the GDP, in 2014 the percentage was 10.1% of the GDP, in 2015 Oman military expenditure as part of the GDP 10.8%, In 2016 it was 12.0% then in 2017 it declined to 9.6% of the GDP).
<https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932018%20in%20constant%202017%29%20USD%2028pdf%29.pdf> accessed 07/05/2019

towards the crisis and refusal to join anti-Qatar front, and its role in Iran's nuclear deal complicated the situation.

Saudi Arabia and UAE expressed their dissatisfaction of the role of Oman in Iran's nuclear deal (JCPOA). They accused Muscat of weakening GCC collective security. Regarding Oman position of Qatar, the two countries have kept increasing political pressure on Oman to be on the anti-Qatari coalition side. One of the evidence on this position is King Salman's refusal to visit Muscat on his 2016 tour of the region. Saudi Arabia and UAE are taking economic measures by slowing deals with Oman and delaying promised financial assistance to Oman.¹⁹⁹

The UAE has postponed construction of a railway linking Duqm port with other countries.

Furthermore, moves by UAE are accelerating the investments in Oman's Musandam peninsula an enclave of UAE's borders. Purposefully, Oman's reactions to these moves were such efforts by UAE to make Oman more dependent economically on it.²⁰⁰

It can be concluded that Oman is coping with the loss of subsidies and goods provided by GCC (the delay of the promised financial assistance is considered as loss of subsidies and goods), Oman is coping with that loss by diversifying the alliances and making new trade deals with Iran, Qatar and China.

China is extensively interested in the region in the pre-2011 era. It was heavily invested in Syria and Iraq while in the post-2011 shows that the investment is concentrated in the Gulf States (UAE and Saudi Arabia).²⁰¹ Based on the International Monetary Fund data, the volume of trade between China and the Gulf states reached almost \$197 billion in 2017. China became the primer foreign investor in the Middle East

¹⁹⁹ Abdullah Baabood, "Oman and the Gulf Diplomatic Crisis."

https://www.oxgaps.org/files/commentary_-_baabood.pdf accessed 03/08/2019

²⁰⁰ DIANA PARTRIDGE SEPTEMBER 24, 2018, "Why the Silence?: Oman's Precarious Posture on the Qatar Blockade" Inside Arabia online Accessed 05/06/2019

<https://insidearabia.com/why-the-silence-omans-precarious-posture-on-the-qatar-blockade/>

²⁰¹ Ibrahim Fraihat, Andrew Leber, "China and the Middle East after the Arab Spring : From Status-Quo Observing to Proactive Engagement China and the Middle East after the Arab Spring : From Status-Quo Observing to Proactive Engagement," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2019), p. 13, doi:10.1080/25765949.2019.1586177.

region.²⁰² China is the largest market for Omani oil, and Chinese companies are the largest investors in Duqm port. It is essential to emphasise that Oman is heavily dependent on the relation with Western partners. Oman provided the United States with the right to enter those facilities located in Salalah and Duqm²⁰³, which indicate Omani reliance on the U.S as a foreign ally.

6.2. The Second Criteria

“The behaviour prevents the state from entering a confrontation with the upper power.”

Omani position towards the Gulf crisis is observed as continuity of Oman’s neutral foreign policy behaviour. This position between the conflicting states and Oman’s foreign policy principles compel it to avoid confrontation with the upper power (in this case Saudi Arabia), Oman realised Riyadh’s dissatisfaction with Oman’s role in Iran nuclear deal, also Muscat’s position towards the Saudi suggestion of upgrading the council into the union. Even King Salman excluding Oman from his 2016 Gulf tours are factors that make Oman uncertain of Saudi Arabian intentions. This uncertainty leads Oman to choose to hedge as its foreign policy behaviour towards the crisis and Riyadh. Hedging gives Oman ability to manoeuvre and avoid a confrontation with Saudi Arabia, mainly due to the fear of having the same fate as Qatar. One more reason, Oman is aware of its capabilities compared to Saudi Arabia, that is why it prefers hedging as foreign policy behaviour.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and UAE are aware of Omani foreign policy choices, and the behaviour towards the Gulf Crisis is a norm of how Oman would behave in such events. What was interesting in the case of the Gulf Crisis is Muscat did not lead the mediation efforts acknowledging the sensitivity of the situation. It emphasised the importance of finding a diplomatic solution to the Crisis and backed Kuwait mediation efforts. However, none of the Oman behaviours was provocative to the extent that may lead to confrontation with Saudi Arabia.

²⁰² Camille Lons, Jonathan Fulton, Naser Al-tamimi, “CHINA ’ S GREAT GAME IN THE MIDDLE EAST,” 2019, p. 12, https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/china_great_game_middle_east.pdf.

²⁰³ cited, p. 30.

6.3. Third Criteria

“The behaviour should be taken by the highest power of the state”.

In respect of the Gulf Crisis, Oman expressed the importance of solving the crisis and supported Kuwait mediating efforts. Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, the Omani Minister for Foreign Affairs, has been actively working with several envoys and ministers to find a solution for the Gulf crisis. Shortly, after the crisis, Alawi visited Qatar and met with the Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammad Abdelrahman Al Thani and discussed Kuwait mediation efforts also bilateral relations.²⁰⁴ It was a top-level decision taken by Omani decision-makers to enhance the bilateral relations with Qatar and to provide Qatar with alternatives in order to be less affected by the embargo. In a recent meeting between Sultan Qaboos and Omani ministers, he emphasised the importance of finding diplomatic solutions for the crisis in the region to enable development and stability for the people in the region.

Muscat's position came as a clear message to the Gulf States that Oman will not be pressured to change its foreign policy approach, that each of the small Gulf states has the right to protect its sovereignty by choosing the foreign policy behaviour based on its interest. Oman showed continuity in its foreign policy principles and its role as a mediator asserting on the importance of diplomatic solutions and maintain good relations with all parties.

6.4. Fourth Criteria

“Does the behaviour have observable cost “

During the Gulf crisis, Saudi Arabia and UAE were trying to pressure Oman to take their side in the crisis; both countries were not satisfied with Muscat position towards Qatar. They were several indicators of their dissatisfaction. First, King Salman's Gulf tours excluded Oman. Second, the delay of promised assistance to Oman and Bahrain. This assistance was promised during a Gulf meeting to help the Gulf two smallest states to tackle economic issues in order to immune themselves towards the wave of uprisings.

²⁰⁴ Oman, Qatar discuss efforts to solve Gulf crisis, Middle East Monitor <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170711-oman-qatar-discuss-efforts-to-solve-gulf-crisis/> accessed 08/09/2019

UAE also delayed projects between it and Oman. The loss of assistance and delay in implementing projects are considered as a cost.

By analysing the Oman position of the Gulf Crisis, we can conclude that Oman's position identifies as Strategic Hedging. The case fulfilled the 'four identification' filters that were developed by Tessman and Wolfe.²⁰⁵

Another mechanism we can use to measure Oman's behaviour towards the Gulf crisis is the Power Response Spectrum developed by Cheng-Chwee Kuik. This approach locates hedging behaviour in the middle of the spectrum between balancing and bandwagoning. In cases of uncertainty, it identifies the existence of the behaviour based on the small state's acceptance or rejection to the higher power; bandwagoning refers to power acceptance and balancing refer to power rejection.²⁰⁶

Kuik adds " this five-point composition of hedging is useful in illuminating the range of state option under uncertainty. It also provides a clearer conceptual parameter to measure and compare the constituent components of different actors' hedging behaviour across countries and cross time. The variations can be observed from the differing degrees and the manner in which actors choose to implement each option. "²⁰⁷

Omani foreign policy strategy behaviour choice (hedging Strategy), allows it to maximise its gain from the crisis by increasing economic ties with Qatar while avoiding any confrontations shortly with the region hegemony rivals (Saudi Arabia and Iran). Oman's position to the crisis is in line with its foreign policy principles. The support for the Kuwaiti initiatives to solve the crisis comes from Muscat's belief in diplomatic means to end the crisis.

Also, the role of political leaders' attributes should not be neglected in the Gulf context. It may explain why there is no solution reached to end the crisis. After more than two years under sanctions, Qatari officials assert that the country's wealth is enabling it to limit the economic effects of the Saudi-led move, but that the blockade has separated

²⁰⁵ for further information on the mechanism see Tessman and Wolfe, "Great powers and Strategic hedging: the Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy", *International Studies Review*

²⁰⁶ Kuik, Rozman, "LIGHT OR HEAVY HEDGING : POSITIONING BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES." P.3

²⁰⁷ *ibid.* p.4

families and caused other social disruptions. Qataris reportedly have rallied around their leadership to resist Saudi-led demands.²⁰⁸ Scholars argue that it may have helped to develop the Qatari national identity.

In sum, the rift is affecting the Gulf on the regional level and the dispute would benefit Iran. Add to that, the arms build-up that is happening in the Gulf because of the tension. Always the Gulf States tried to deal with the situation by diverting their foreign alliances. For example, Qatar was able to survive the embargo by strengthening the alliance with the US regarding its military base in Qatar. The signing of a “Strategic Dialogue” with the USA to strengthen the U.S.-Qatar defence partnership in 2018 and the expanding of Al Udeid Air to improve and expand accommodation for U.S. military personnel are few other examples.²⁰⁹ Also, the opening of the Turkish military base in Qatar is another sign of Qatari strategy of security partners diversification and strategic moves to maintain its sovereignty.

²⁰⁸ Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy, Congressional Research Service
<https://crsreports.congress.gov/R44533>, June 13, 2019
<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44533.pdf> Accessed June 17, 2019

²⁰⁹ Ibid

Conclusion

Oman's foreign policy behaviour witnessed drastic changes after 1970, Sultan Qaboos vision on Oman's foreign policy was different from the other Arab leaders, he wanted to pursue more active foreign policy behaviour with emphasising on principles that will rule the relationship of Oman with the world.

Oman's foreign policy principles of neutrality and respect other states internal matters and its mediation efforts put Muscat on the map as a key regional player. Many factors shape Oman foreign policy behaviour, domestic, regional and international. Oman national identity was constructed on the dynamic between tribalism and Ibadism which made Oman identity unique. Oman geographical location between the Gulf states and Iran, having access to the strait of Hormoz influence Muscat's foreign policy behaviour. On the regional level, Oman is part of the Gulf cooperation council but its refusal to the proposal of upgrading the council into a union have a strong message that Muscat wants to maintain having a separate and independent foreign policy. Which is compatible of Oman political thought of not taking sides.

The reasons why Oman is against the transformation of the council into Union are: the desire to maintain independent foreign policy behaviour. Also the Union goal would be to balance against Iran. And Oman does not share the same perception of the Iranian threat with other Gulf states. This is because Oman is aware of the limitation of Iran influence in Oman. On the other hand, while Muscat have a close relation with Saudi Arabia it shows tendencies of dominance denial towards Riyadh.

After the Arab spring the emergence of the new regional order and the Gulf states different perception of threat and Interest led to the Gulf Crisis. The diplomatic crisis is considered the worst between the Gulf countries and it lasted for more than two years because of the Gulf states different behaviour towards the Arab spring. The Gulf countries only shared a similar position towards the uprising in Bahrain. Oman strong belief in diplomacy as conflict resolution tool prevented it from participating in the Peninsula shield forces in Bahrain.

Oman had a different position from other Gulf states in Syria, Libya and Yemen.

In Syrian crisis and the Libyan crisis Muscat maintained neutrality and mediation efforts to solve the crisis. In the Yemen crisis, Oman stance was different because Yemen shares borders with Oman and Oman consider the possibility of spill over in case if it took side with any of the conflicting parties.

Strategic Hedging as a framework provides an alternative to the dominant International relations theories in concern of explaining Small States foreign policy behaviour (Neorealism, Neoliberalism and constructivism), according to Strategic Hedging theory the hedger states use different and contradicting strategies towards other states. This give the hedger state a leverage to manoeuvre. Hedging can be used towards a threat and in normal conditions and it aim to maximise the hedger state interest while avoiding confrontation with the upper power (system leader, regional power or a threatening state).

Although Oman and Qatar share similar characteristics. They are both part of the GCC, both are a small state, both plays the role of mediator in the region and both refuse Saudi Arabia dominance over the GCC. They differ in the strategies they used towards Riyadh. After analysing Oman foreign policy in the framework of Strategic Hedging it can be concluded that Oman was able to implement Strategic Hedging in its foreign behaviour which was the reason why there was no confrontation between Muscat and Riyadh. On the other hand, Qatar choice to have a bigger role in the region through support to groups like Muslim Brotherhood and Media soft power through Al Jazeera network led to a diplomatic problem between the two countries.

The current Gulf crisis, which considered the worst diplomatic problem in the region, now divided the Gulf States into two fonts. In this study Oman position toward the crisis was analysed, Oman implementation of hedging strategies guaranteed to it to stay stable and maximize its leverage without direct confrontation with any of the regional upper powers. we can conclude that Strategic Hedging is a set of foreign strategies that States employ to Survive uncertainty and maximize their leverage. It can be concluded after using the identification mechanism that Oman position towards the Gulf crisis is Strategic Hedging. Future investigations are necessary to validate the conclusions of this study and its recommended to test the hypothesis and the assumptions of Strategic Hedging in order to understand if the behaviour is successful. More empirical studies

should be done on the framework in order to specify the effectiveness of Strategic Hedging.

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