

# **Oman, a country study**

Federal Research Division



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## Foreword

This volume is one in a continuing series of books prepared by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress under the Country Studies/Area Handbook Program sponsored by the Department of the Army.

The last two pages of this book list the other published studies.

Most books in the series deal with a particular foreign country, describing and analyzing its political, economic, social, and national security systems and institutions, and examining the interrelationships of those systems and the ways they are shaped by cultural factors. The authors seek to provide a basic understanding of the observed society, striving for a dynamic rather than a static portrayal. Particular attention is devoted to the people who make up the society, their origins, dominant beliefs and values, their common interests and the issues on which they are divided, the nature and extent of their involvement with national institutions, and their attitudes toward each other and toward their social system and political order.

The books represent the analysis of the authors and should not be construed as an expression of an official United States government position, policy, or decision. The authors have sought to adhere to accepted standards of scholarly objectivity. Corrections, additions, and suggestions for changes from readers will be welcomed for use in future editions.

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## Preface

This edition of *Persian Gulf States: Country Studies* replaces the previous edition, published in 1984. Like its predecessor, the present book attempts to treat in a compact and objective manner the dominant historical, social, economic, political, and national security aspects of the five contemporary states of the Persian Gulf covered in this volume—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Sources of information included scholarly books, journals, and monographs; official reports and documents of government and international organizations; and foreign and domestic newspapers and periodicals. Available economic data for these countries are not always complete or may be inconsistent.

Chapter bibliographies appear at the end of the book; brief comments on some of the more valuable sources for further reading appear at the conclusion of each chapter. Measurements are given in the metric system; a conversion table is provided to assist those who are unfamiliar with the metric system (see table 1, Appendix).

The Glossary provides brief definitions of terms that may be unfamiliar to the general reader, such as the use of amir/emirate, shaykh/shaykhdom, and Al/al.

The transliteration of Arabic words and phrases posed a particular problem. For many of the words—such as Muhammad, Muslim, Quran, and shaykh—the authors followed a modified version of the system adopted by the United States Board on Geographic Names and the Permanent Committee on Geographic Names for British Official Use, known as the BGN/PCGN system; the modification entails the omission of all diacritical markings and hyphens. In numerous instances, however, the names of persons or places are so well known by another spelling that to have used the BGN/PCGN system might have created confusion. The reader will find Mecca rather than Makkah, Oman rather than Uman, and Doha rather than Ad Dawhah. In addition, although the five governments officially reject the use of the term *Persian Gulf*—as do other Arab governments—and refer to that body of water as the Arabian Gulf, the authors followed the practice of the United States Board on Geographic Names by using Persian Gulf or gulf.

The body of the text reflects information available as of January 1993. Certain other portions of the text, however, have been updated. The Introduction discusses significant events that have occurred since the completion of research; the Country Profiles include updated information as available; and the Bibliography lists recently published sources thought to be particularly helpful to the reader.

## Chapter 1. Historical Setting

*Sharjah Mosque, built in the 1980s in traditional style Figure 2. Persian Gulf States: Topography* THE FIVE COUNTRIES covered in this volume—Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman—are all Arab states on the Persian Gulf that share certain characteristics. But they are not the only countries that border the gulf. Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia share the coastline as well, and they too shared in the historical development of the area. Of the five states covered in this volume, Oman has a particular culture and history that distinguish it from its neighbors. It also is the state with the shortest coastline along the Persian Gulf. Most of Oman lies along the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea (see fig. 1).

The main element that unites these countries is the nature of their involvement with people and nations beyond the region. The gulf has been an important waterway since ancient times, bringing the people who live on its shores into early contact with other civilizations. In the ancient world, the gulf peoples established trade connections with India; in the Middle Ages, they went as far as China; and in the modern era, they became involved with the European powers that sailed into the Indian Ocean and around Southeast Asia. In the twentieth century, the discovery of massive oil deposits in the gulf made the area once again a crossroads for the modern world.

Other factors also bring these countries together. The people are mostly Arabs and, with the exception of Oman and Bahrain, are mostly Sunni (see Glossary) Muslims. Because they live in basically tribal societies, family and clan connections underlie most political and economic activity. The discovery of oil and the increasing contact with the West has led to tremendous material and social changes.

Important distinctions exist, however, among the five countries. Bahrain is an island with historical connections to the Persian Empire. Kuwait is separated from the others by Saudi Arabia. In Oman high mountain ranges effectively cut off the country's hinterland from the rest of the region (see fig. 2). Moreover, various tribal loyalties throughout the region are frequently divisive and are exacerbated by religious differences that involve the major sects of Islam—Sunni and Shia (see Glossary)—and the smaller Kharijite sect as well as Muslim legal procedures.

## THE GULF IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Archaeological evidence suggests that Dilmun returned to prosperity after the Assyrian Empire stabilized the Tigris-Euphrates area at the end of the second millennium B.C. A powerful ruler in Mesopotamia meant a prosperous gulf, and Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian king who ruled in the seventh century B.C., was particularly strong. He extended Assyrian influence as far as Egypt and controlled an empire that stretched from North Africa to the Persian Gulf. The Egyptians, however, regained control of their country about a half-century after they lost it.

A series of other conquests of varying lengths followed. In 325 B.C., Alexander the Great sent a fleet from India to follow the eastern, or Persian, coast of the gulf up to the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and sent other ships to explore the Arab side of the waterway. The temporary Greek presence in the area increased Western interest in the gulf during the next two centuries. Alexander's successors, however, did not control the area long enough to make the gulf a part of the Greek world. By about 250 B.C., the Greeks lost all territory east of Syria to the Parthians, a Persian dynasty in the East. The Parthians brought the gulf under Persian control and extended their influence as far as Oman.

The Parthian conquests demarcated the distinction between the Greek world of the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Empire in the East. The Greeks, and the Romans after them, depended on the Red Sea route, whereas the Parthians depended on the Persian Gulf route. Because they needed to keep the merchants who plied those routes under their control, the Parthians established garrisons as far south as Oman.

In the third century A.D., the Sassanians, another Persian dynasty, succeeded the Parthians and held the area until the rise of Islam four centuries later. Under Sassanian rule, Persian control over the gulf reached its height. Oman was no longer a threat, and the Sassanians were strong enough to establish agricultural colonies and to engage some of the nomadic tribes in the interior as a border guard to protect their western flank from the Romans.

This agricultural and military contact gave people in the gulf greater exposure to Persian culture, as reflected in certain irrigation techniques still used in Oman. The gulf continued to be a crossroads, however, and its people learned about Persian beliefs, such as Zoroastrianism, as well as about Semitic and Mediterranean ideas.

Judaism and Christianity arrived in the gulf from a number of directions: from Jewish and Christian tribes in the Arabian desert; from Ethiopian Christians to the south; and from Mesopotamia, where Jewish and Christian communities flourished under Sassanian rule. Whereas Zoroastrianism seems to have been confined to Persian colonists, Christianity and Judaism were adopted by some Arabs. The popularity of these religions paled, however, when compared with the enthusiasm with which the Arabs greeted Islam.

## Sunni Islam

Although originally political in nature, the differences between Sunni and Shia interpretations rapidly took on theological overtones. In principle, a Sunni approaches God directly: there is no clerical hierarchy. Some duly appointed religious figures, such as imams, however, exert considerable social and political power. Imams usually are men of importance in their communities, but they need not have any formal training. Committees of socially prominent worshipers usually are responsible for managing major mosque-owned lands. In most Arab countries, the administration of waqfs (religious endowments) has come under the influence of the state.

Qadis (judges) and imams are appointed by the government.

The Muslim year has two religious festivals: Id al Adha, a sacrificial festival held on the tenth day of Dhu al Hijjah, the twelfth, or pilgrimage, month; and Id al Fitr, the festival of breaking the fast, which celebrates the end of Ramadan on the first day of Shawwal, the tenth month. To Sunnis these are the most important festivals of the year. Each lasts three or four days, during which time people put on their best clothes and visit, congratulate, and bestow gifts on each other. In addition, cemeteries are visited. Id al Fitr is celebrated more festively because it marks the end of Ramadan. Celebrations also take place, although less extensively, on the Prophet's birthday, which falls on the twelfth day of Rabi al Awwal, the third month.

With regard to legal matters, Sunni Islam has four orthodox schools that give different weight in legal opinions to prescriptions in the Quran, to the hadith, to the consensus of legal scholars, to analogy (to similar situations at the time of the Prophet), and to reason or opinion. Named for their founders, the earliest Muslim legal schools were those of Abd Allah Malik ibn Anas (ca. 715–95) and An Numan ibn Thabit Abu Hanifa (ca. 700–67). The Maliki school was centered in Medina, and the lawbook of Malik ibn Anas is the earliest surviving Muslim legal text, containing a systematic consensus of Medina legal opinions. The Hanafi school in Iraq stressed individual opinion in making legal decisions. Muhammad ibn Idris ash Shafii (767–820), a member of the tribe of Quraysh and a distant relative of the Prophet, studied under Malik ibn Anas in Medina.

He followed a somewhat eclectic legal path, laying down the rules for analogy that were later adopted by other legal schools. The last of the four major Sunni legal schools, that of Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal (780–855), was centered in Baghdad. The Hanbali school, which became prominent in Arabia as a result of Wahhabi (see Glossary) influence, gave great emphasis to the hadith as a source of Muslim law but rejected innovations and rationalistic explanations of the Quran and the traditions (see Wahhabi Islam and the Gulf , this ch.).

## The Spread of Islam

Early Islamic polity was intensely expansionist, fueled both by fervor for the faith and by economic and social factors. After gaining control of Arabia and the Persian Gulf region, conquering armies swept out of the peninsula, spreading Islam. By the end of the eighth century, Islamic armies had reached far into North Africa and eastward and northward into Asia.

Traditional accounts of the conversion of tribes in the gulf are probably more legend than history. Stories about the Bani Abd al Qais tribe that controlled the eastern coast of Arabia as well as Bahrain when the tribe converted to Islam indicate that its members were traders having close contacts with Christian communities in Mesopotamia. Such contacts may have introduced the tribe to the ideal of one God and so prepared it to accept the Prophet's message.

The Arabs of Oman also figure prominently among the early converts to Islam. According to tradition, the Prophet sent one of his military leaders to Oman to convert not only the Arab inhabitants, some of whom were Christian, but also the Persian garrison, which was Zoroastrian. The Arabs accepted Islam, but the Persians did not. It was partly the zeal of the newly converted Arabs that inspired them to expel the Persians from Oman.

Although Muhammad had enjoined the Muslim community to convert the infidel, he had also recognized the special status of the "people of the book," Jews and Christians, whose scriptures he considered revelations of God's word and which contributed in some measure to Islam. By accepting the status of *dhimmis* (tolerated subject people), Jews and Christians could live in their own communities, practice their own religious laws, and be exempt from military service. However, they were obliged to refrain from proselytizing among Muslims, to recognize Muslim authority, and to pay additional taxes. In addition, they were denied certain political rights.

## THE AGE OF COLONIALISM

*Boys playing on cannon at Az Zubarah fort, Qatar Courtesy Anthony Toth Restored ancient fort at Az Zubarah, Qatar; similar forts exist in most Persian Gulf states.*

Courtesy Anthony Toth During the Middle Ages, Muslim countries of the Middle East controlled East–West trade. However, control changed in the fifteenth century. The Portuguese, who were building ships with deep hulls that remained stable in high seas, were thus able to make longer voyages. They pushed farther and farther down the west coast of Africa until they found their way around the southern tip of the continent and made contact with Muslim cities on the other side. In East Africa, the Portuguese enlisted Arab navigators there to take them across to India, where they eventually set themselves up in Calicut on the Malabar Coast in the southwestern part of the country.

Once in India, the Portuguese used their superior ships to transport goods around Africa instead of using the Red Sea route, thus eliminating the middlemen in Egypt. The Portuguese then extended their control to the local trade that crossed the Arabian Sea, capturing coastal cities in Oman and Iran and setting up forts and customs houses on both coasts to collect duty. The Portuguese allowed local rulers to remain in control but collected tribute from them in exchange for that privilege, thus increasing Portuguese revenues.

The ruler most affected by the rise of Portuguese power was the Safavid shah of Iran, Abbas I (1587–1629).

During the time the shaykh of Hormuz possessed effective control over gulf ports, he continued to pay lip service and tribute to the Safavid shah. When the Portuguese arrived, they forced the shaykh to pay tribute to them. The shah could do little because Iran was too weak to challenge the Portuguese. For that the shah required another European power; he therefore invited the British and the Dutch to drive the Portuguese out of the gulf, in return for half the revenues from Iranian ports.

Both countries responded to the shah's offer, but it was the British who proved the most helpful. In 1622 the British, along with some of the shah's forces, attacked Hormuz and drove the Portuguese out of their trading center there. Initially, the Dutch cooperated with the British, but the two European powers eventually became rivals for access to the Iranian market. The British won, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century Britain had become the major power in the gulf.

Struggles between Iranians and Europeans contributed to a power vacuum along the coast of Oman. The British attacks on the Portuguese coincided with the rise of the Yarubid line of Ibadi imams in the interior of Oman. The Yarubid took advantage of Portuguese preoccupation with naval battles on the Iranian side of the gulf and conquered the coastal cities of Oman around 1650. The imams moved into the old Portuguese stronghold of Muscat and so brought the Omani coast and interior under unified Ibadi control for the first time in almost 1,000 years.

A battle over imamate succession in the early eighteenth century, however, weakened Yarubid rule. Between the 1730s and the 1750s, the various parties began to solicit support from outside powers. The Yarubid family eventually called in an Iranian army, which reestablished Iranian influence on the Omani coast. But this time the Iranian hold on Oman was short-lived. In 1742 the Al Said, an Ibadi family from one of the coastal cities, convinced the local population to help it expel the Iranians; this put the leader, Ahmad ibn Said Al Said, in control of the Omani coast. His success sufficiently impressed the Ibadi leaders so that they made him imam several years later.

The title of imam gave Ahmad ibn Said control over all of Oman, and under him and his successors the country prospered for more than a century. The Omanis extended their influence into the interior and into part of the present-day United Arab Emirates (UAE), consisting of the states of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Al Fujayrah, Dubayy, Ras al Khaymah, Sharjah, and Umm al Qaywayn. They also collected tribute from as far away as present-day Bahrain and Iraq. The Omanis conquered the Dhofar region, which is part of present-day Oman but was not historically part of the region of Oman.

Oman also strengthened its hold on the Muslim cities of East Africa. These cities had been established by Omani traders in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but their connection to Oman had grown somewhat tenuous.



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At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the Al Said reasserted Omani authority in the area. Said ibn Sultan (1806–65) encouraged Omanis to settle in Zanzibar, an island off the African coast that had retained strong connections with Oman and, from Zanzibar, sent expeditions to take over several cities on the mainland (see *Historical Patterns of Governance*, ch. 6).

Although Ahmad ibn Said had succeeded in uniting Oman under an Ibadi imamate, the religious nature of his family's authority did not last long. His son, Said ibn Ahmad Al Said, was elected to the imamate after him, but no other family member won the official approval of the religious establishment. As a result, the Al Said called themselves *sultans*, a secular title having none of the religious associations of imam. They further distanced themselves from Ibadi traditions by moving their capital from Ar Rustaq, a traditional Ibadi center in the interior, to the trading center of Muscat. As a result of the move, the dichotomy between coast and interior that had traditionally split Oman was reinstated.

The relationship between coast and interior was becoming a major feature within the gulf. In the eighteenth century, tribes from the interior increasingly began to move and settle into the coastal centers. Although the economy on the Arab side of the gulf did not match past prosperity, coastal conditions remained better than those in central Arabia. Limited agriculture existed, and the gulf waters were the site of rich oyster beds for harvesting pearls. The area's easy access to India, a major market for pearls, made the pearling industry particularly lucrative, and this drew the attention of tribes in the interior. The tribal migrations that occurred around 1800 put in place the tribes and clans that in 1993 controlled Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE.

The Bani Utub moved from central Arabia into the northern gulf in the early 1800s, and one of its families, the Al Sabah, established itself as leaders of present-day Kuwait; another family, the Al Khalifa, established itself in present-day Bahrain. In the early 1800s, a number of other tribes were living along the gulf. Thus, Al Sabah and Al Khalifa control meant that these families ruled loosely over other tribes. Before taking Bahrain, the Al Khalifa had first established a settlement across the water on the peninsula that is present-day Qatar.

Although the Al Khalifa were successful in taking Bahrain, they were unable to hold Qatar. They lost the peninsula to the Al Thani, the leading family from another tribe that, like the Bani Utub, had recently moved into the area.

The exact origins of the Al Thani are unknown, but they were already in Qatar when the Al Khalifa came. The origins of the Bani Yas and the Qawasim tribes that rule in the present-day UAE are somewhat clearer. The Bani Yas originated in central Arabia and probably established themselves on the coast at Abu Dhabi around 1700; they later extended their influence to Dubayy. Historical evidence indicates that the Qawasim lived along the gulf during the pre-Islamic period and engaged in trade, pearling, and piracy.

## TREATIES WITH THE BRITISH

The increased European presence resulted in large part from widespread Qawasim piracy in the early nineteenth century. The British asked the sultan in Oman, to whom the pirates owed nominal allegiance, to end it. When the sultan proved unable, British ships launched attacks on Qawasim strongholds in the present-day UAE as early as 1809; the navy did not succeed in controlling the situation until 1819. In that year, the British sent a fleet from India that destroyed the pirates' main base at Ras al Khaymah, a Qawasim port at the southern end of the gulf. From Ras al Khaymah, the British fleet destroyed Qawasim ships along both sides of the gulf.

The British had no desire to take over the desolate areas along the gulf; they only wished to secure the area so that it would not pose a threat to shipping to and from their possessions in India. Knowing that the sultan in Oman could not be relied upon to control the pirates, the British decided to leave in power those tribal leaders who had not been conspicuously involved with piracy; they concluded a series of treaties in which those leaders promised to suppress all piracy.

As a result of these truces, the Arab side of the gulf came to be known as the "trucial coast." This area had previously been under the nominal control of the sultan in Oman, although the trucial coast tribes were not part of the Ibadi imamate. The area has also been referred to as "trucial Oman" to distinguish it from the part of Oman under the sultan that was not bound by treaty obligation.

In 1820 the British seemed primarily interested in controlling the Qawasim, whose main centers were Ras al Khaymah, Ajman, and Sharjah, which were all small ports along the southeastern gulf coast. The original treaties, however, also involved Dubayy and Bahrain. Although Dubayy and Bahrain were not pirate centers, they represented entrepôts where pirates could sell captured goods and buy supplies. The inclusion of these ports brought two other extended families, the Bani Yas and the Al Khalifa, into the trucial system.

During the next 100 years, the British signed a series of treaties having wide-ranging provisions with other tribes in the gulf. As a result, by the end of World War I, leaders from Oman to Iraq had essentially yielded control of their foreign relations to Britain. Abu Dhabi entered into arrangements similar to those of Dubayy and Bahrain in 1835, Kuwait in 1899, and Qatar in 1916. The treaty whose terms convey the most representative sense of the relationship between Britain and the gulf states was the Exclusive Agreement of 1882. This text specified that the signatory gulf states (members of the present-day UAE) could not make any international agreements or host any foreign agent without British consent.

Because of these concessions, gulf leaders recognized the need for Britain to protect them from their more powerful neighbors. The main threat came from the Al Saud in central Arabia. Although the Turks had defeated the first Wahhabi empire of the Al Saud around 1820, the family rose again about thirty years later; it threatened not only the Qawasim, who by this time had largely abandoned Wahhabi Islam, but also the Al Khalifa in Bahrain and the Ibadi sultan in Oman. In the early 1900s, the Al Saud also threatened Qatar despite its Wahhabi rulers. Only with British assistance could the Al Thani and other area rulers retain their authority.

The Al Saud were not the only threat. Despite its treaty agreement with Britain, Bahrain on several occasions has claimed Qatar because of the Al Khalifa involvement on the peninsula. The Omanis and Iranians have also claimed Bahrain because both have held the island at various times. Furthermore, the Ottomans claimed Bahrain occasionally and tried throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century to establish their authority in Kuwait and Qatar.

The British wished to maintain security on the route from Europe to India so that merchants could safely send goods between India and the gulf. Britain also sought to exclude the influence in the area of other powers, such as Turkey and France.

East-West trade through the Persian Gulf dried up in the nineteenth century after the opening of the Suez Canal, which provided a direct route to the Mediterranean Sea. Gulf merchants continued to earn substantial income from the slave trade, but international pressure, mostly from Britain, forced them to abandon this by 1900. Thereafter, the region continued to profit from the gulf pearl beds, but this industry declined in the 1930s as a result of the world depression, which reduced demand, and as a result of the Japanese development of a cheaper

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way to “breed” pearls, or make cultured pearls.

Oman, which was technically cut off from the gulf after 1820 when it lost the southern portion of the present-day UAE, fared little better during the late nineteenth century. The fifth sultan in the Al Said line, Said ibn Sultan, ruled for almost the entire first half of the nineteenth century, increasing Omani influence and revenue tremendously. The resulting prosperity, however, was short-lived. The Omani fleet could not compete with the more technologically advanced European ships; thus the sultan gradually lost much of the income he had earned from customs duties on the Indian trade. At the same time, the increasing pressure to restrict the slave trade eliminated much of the revenue the Omanis had earned from East Africa.

The final blow to Oman's economic and political viability came after the death of Said ibn Sultan. When the Al Said could not agree on a successor, the British acted. They divided the Al Said holdings and gave Oman proper to one of the claimants to the throne and awarded Omani possessions in East Africa to another. Thus, after 1856, there were two Al Said rulers. The one in Muscat, with a weakened merchant fleet and no East African revenues, was left with little support. Because of the different centers of power, the country became popularly known as Muscat and Oman.

The sultan's financial weakness contributed to his difficulty in maintaining his hold on the interior. The devout Ibadi population of the interior had long resented the more secular orientation of the coastal centers. As the sultan grew weaker, groups in the interior raised revolts against him on several occasions. Only with British help could the sultan remain in control, and his growing dependence on outsiders caused his relations with the Ibadi population to deteriorate. Whereas other gulf rulers used the British to protect them from their more powerful neighbors, the sultan needed the British to protect him from his subjects.

## INDEPENDENCE

With the exception of Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the Arab coast of the gulf was ruled by ten families: in Kuwait the Al Sabah; in Bahrain the Al Khalifa; in Qatar the Al Thani; in the present-day UAE the Al Nuhayyan in Abu Dhabi, the Al Nuaimi in Ajman, the Al Sharqi in Al Fujayrah, the Al Maktum in Dubayy, the Al Qasimi in Ras al Khaymah and Sharjah, and the Al Mualla in Umm al Qaywayn; and the Al Said in present-day Oman. These families owed their positions to tribal leadership; it was on this traditional basis that the British had negotiated treaties with their leaders in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

A major provision of these treaties was the recognition of sovereignty. The British were concerned that rulers of the weaker gulf families would yield some of their territory under pressure from more powerful groups, such as the Al Saud or the Ottomans. Accordingly, the treaties signed between 1820 and 1916 recognized the sovereignty of these rulers within certain borders and specified that these borders could not be changed without British consent. Such arrangements helped to put tribal alliances into more concrete terms of landownership. This meant that the Al Nuhayyan of Abu Dhabi, for example, not only commanded the respect of tribes in the hinterland but also owned, as it were, the land that those tribes used—in this case, about 72,000 square kilometers of Arabia.

Controlling, or owning, land became more important with the discovery of oil. When oil companies came to explore for oil, they looked for the “owner” of the land; in accordance with British treaties, they went to the area's leading families and agreed to pay fees to the heads of these families. As oil revenues increased, the leaders became rich. Although the leaders spent much of their new wealth on themselves, they also distributed it in the area they controlled according to traditional methods, which initially consisted mostly of largesse:

gifts for friends and food for whomever needed it. As time passed, the form of largesse became more sophisticated and included, for example, the construction of schools, hospitals, and roads to connect principal cities to towns in the interior.

Oil revenues did not change traditional tribal ideas about leadership. New money, however, increased the influence of area leaders by giving them more resources to distribute. Because of oil exploration, tribal boundaries became clearer, and areas were defined more precisely. Distinctions among tribes also became more evident. A new sense of identity appeared in gulf shaykhdoms and aroused a growing expectation that they should rule themselves. To do this, shaykhs had to cut themselves off from British control and protection.

By the early 1960s, this was something to which the British had little objection. India and Pakistan won their independence in 1947; this meant that Britain no longer had to worry about protecting the western flank of the subcontinent. Britain was also burdened by the tremendous sacrifices it made during World War II and could not be as globally involved as it had been before the war. Therefore, Britain yielded many of its strategic responsibilities to the United States in the postwar period or gave them up entirely. However, the British were bound to the gulf by treaties and so remained in the region, but it was clear by the 1960s that they sought to leave the gulf.

Kuwait was the first state to terminate the agreement connecting it with Britain. Oil production in Kuwait had developed more quickly than in neighboring states; as a result, Kuwaitis were better prepared for independence. They declared independence in 1961 but ran into immediate trouble when Iraq claimed the territory. The Iraqis argued that the British had recognized Ottoman sovereignty over Kuwait before World War I and, because the Ottomans had claimed to rule Kuwait from what was then the province of Iraq, the territory should belong to Iraq.

The British immediately sent troops to Kuwait to deter any Iraqi invasion. British and Kuwaiti positions were supported by the newly formed League of Arab States (Arab League), which recognized the new state and sent troops to Kuwait. The Arab League move left the Iraqis isolated and somewhat intimidated. Accordingly, when a new Iraqi government came to power in 1963, one of its first steps was to give up its claim and recognize the independence of Kuwait.

The experience of Kuwait may have increased the anxiety of other gulf leaders about declaring their independence. Even into the 1970s, Iran and Saudi Arabia continued to make claims on territory in Bahrain and the UAE, although by the end of 1971 those states were independent, and nothing came of those claims.

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Gulf leaders also faced uncertainty about the form their state should take. Should they all, with the exception of Oman whose situation was different in that its treaty relationship with Britain did not guarantee its borders as did treaties of the other gulf states, band together in the largest entity possible? Or should they break up into nine separate states, the smallest of which had little territory, few people, and no oil?

British action forced gulf leaders to decide. Because of domestic financial concerns, Britain decided in the late 1960s to eliminate its military commitments east of Suez. As a result, the gulf shaykhs held a number of meetings to discuss independence. Initially, leaders considered a state that would include all nine shaykhdoms; Qatar had even drawn up a constitution to this effect. In the end, however, so large a federation proved unworkable.

An obstacle to creating a “superstate” was the status of Bahrain, which had been occupied by Iran at various times. The shah of Iran argued that he had a stronger claim to the island than the Al Khalifa, who had only come to Bahrain in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the shah indicated that Iran would not accept a federation of Arab states that included Bahrain.

In the end, the United Nations (UN) considered the issue of Bahrain; it decided to deny the Iranian claim to the island and to allow the Bahrainis to form an independent state. Bahrain was better suited to independence than some of the other shaykhdoms because the island had been a center of British administration and had a more developed infrastructure and education system than its neighbors. Ironically, the greater British presence on Bahrain made residents more resentful of treaty ties to Britain. Bahrain was the only place in the gulf where demonstrations against Britain occurred.

Backed by the UN decision, Bahrain declared its independence on August 15, 1971. On September 3, 1971, Qatar followed, removing another state from any potential federation. Although Qatar had minimal contact with Britain, it was well suited to independence because it had a history of support from the Al Saud that went back to the beginnings of the Wahhabi state. Accordingly, at independence, Qatar could expect continued support from Saudi Arabia. It could also anticipate substantial oil revenues that had been increasing since the 1950s.

The same was not true for the other gulf states. The five southern shaykhdoms—Ajman, Al Fujayrah, Ras al Khaymah, Sharjah, and Umm al Qaywayn—had little oil in their territory and so could not afford self-sufficiency as countries. Although substantial deposits had been discovered in Abu Dhabi and Dubayy, these two states preferred the security of a confederation rather than independence. Abu Dhabi, for example, had an outstanding border dispute with Saudi Arabia and a history of poor relations with that country because of Abu Dhabi's opposition to Wahhabi Islam. Abu Dhabi might have protected itself by forming a federation with the five southern shaykhdoms, but this would not have suited Dubayy. Although Dubayy had oil of its own, its rulers, the Al Maktum, had a history of hostility toward their relatives in Abu Dhabi, the Al Nuhayyan, from whom they split in the early nineteenth century. The Al Maktum would not have liked the Al Nuhayyan to dominate a confederation of gulf leaders while they were isolated in Dubayy.

Powers beyond the gulf coast also had an interest in the state to be formed. The Saudis no longer sought to control the gulf coast, but they remained concerned about stability on the eastern border. The British and other oil-consuming countries in the West were similarly concerned, and all parties believed that the largest state would also be the most stable. Accordingly, many forces were applying pressure in 1970 to convince the seven shaykhs to stay together.

Thus, in 1971 soon after Qatar became independent, the remaining shaykhs, with the exception of the Al Qasimi in Ras al Khaymah, took the preliminary constitution that Qatar had originally drawn up for a nine-member confederation and adapted it to a six-member body. On December 2, 1971, one day after the British officially withdrew, these six shaykhdoms declared themselves a sovereign state.

Ras al Khaymah originally refused to join the confederation. The Al Qasimi, who ruled the area, claimed a number of islands and oil fields within the gulf to which Iran laid claim as well. In the negotiations to form the UAE, the Al Qasimi sought support for their claims from Arab states on the peninsula as well as from some Western powers. When their efforts proved unsuccessful, the Al Qasimi pulled out of the negotiations.

They quickly realized, however, that they could not exist on their own and joined the union in February 1972.

Oman was never considered a possible confederation member. Always geographically separate from its neighbors to the north, Oman had never entered into the agreements with Britain that governed other gulf rulers. The British had been closely involved in Oman since the middle of the nineteenth century, but they were under no official obligation to defend it.

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The issue in Oman was one of internal unity rather than of sovereignty over foreign affairs. The historical split between coast and interior had continued through the second half of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth. In 1920 the Al Said sultan, Taimur ibn Faisal, came to terms with this split by granting limited sovereignty to the tribes of the interior. Because of ambiguous language, the peoples of the interior believed that the treaty cut them off from the Al Said; the Al Said, however, never gave up their claim to all of Oman.

The dispute between the two groups was exacerbated by the exploration for oil, which began in Oman in 1924. The oil fields lay in the interior, and the oil companies negotiated for access to them with the Al Said in Muscat. This Al Said sultan gladly sold them rights to the Omani oil fields, although the tribes of the interior claimed sovereignty over the area. When the oil men went inland to explore, they were attacked by the tribes, whom the sultan considered to be rebels, leading the oil companies to complain to the British government.

Their complaints encouraged the British to continue their aid to the sultan, hoping that he would pacify the area and ensure Western access to Omani oil.

The sultan was eventually successful. In 1957 forces loyal to Said ibn Taimur captured the town of Nazwah, which the Al Said had not controlled since the nineteenth century. In 1958 the sultan withdrew to his palace in the coastal city of Salalah in Dhofar, a southern province that the Al Said had annexed in the nineteenth century, and took little interest in maintaining stability in the country. While keeping his military relationship with the British, he restricted Oman's contact with the rest of the world, discouraged development, and prohibited political reform.

In the end, the Al Said control over a united Oman survived, but Said ibn Taimur did not. Although the sultan had partially reestablished his authority in the Omani interior, he was unable to handle the increasing complexity of domestic politics. By the 1960s, Omani affairs had become international issues. Western oil companies sought to work in the interior of the country, and foreign governments, such as the Marxist state of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, were sending arms to the rebels in Dhofar.

The Al Said hold over the region remained problematic, however, and in 1964 another rebellion arose, this time in Dhofar. The Dhofar rebellion, which was not brought under control until 1976, obliged the sultan to seek foreign military assistance; therefore, British forces, particularly the air force, resumed action in the country. The rebels pointed to British involvement as an indication of the sultan's illegitimacy and brought their case to the UN, which eventually censured Britain for its continuing involvement in Oman.

Said ibn Taimur's policies frustrated many, not only in Oman but also in Britain, whose citizens were heavily involved in the sultan's military and intelligence apparatus. By 1970 these elements decided they could bear with the situation no longer; a coalition of Omani military and civilian forces, as well as British forces, attacked the palace and forced Said ibn Taimur to abdicate. They replaced him with his son, Qabus ibn Said Al Said, who had played no role in Said ibn Taimur's government. The sultan had actually locked his son in the palace for fear that Qabus ibn Said, who had been educated in Britain, would challenge his archconservative policies.

On his release, Qabus ibn Said consolidated the sultanate's hold over the interior and then solicited regional rather than British help to put down the rebellion in Dhofar. Other Arab leaders, as well as the shah of Iran, sent troops to Oman in response to Qabus ibn Said's requests; with the help of this coalition, by 1976 the sultan ended the Dhofar rebellion.

Qabus ibn Said was not an Ibadi imam as the first rulers in his line had been, but in 1970 this was less important than it had been in earlier times. Only about 60 percent of Oman's population was Ibadi, concentrated in the northern mountains. Furthermore, the province of Dhofar had a relatively short history of association with the rest of Oman.

Oman, a country study

## **PERSIAN GULF STATES — Oman**

a country study Federal Research Division Library of Congress Edited by Helem Chapin Metz Research  
Completed January 1993 Unavailable *On the cover: Symbol of the Gulf Cooperation Council, to which Bahrain,  
Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates belong Data as of January 1993 January  
1993*

## Foreword

This volume is one in a continuing series of books prepared by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress under the Country Studies/Area Handbook Program sponsored by the Department of the Army.

The last two pages of this book list the other published studies.

Most books in the series deal with a particular foreign country, describing and analyzing its political, economic, social, and national security systems and institutions, and examining the interrelationships of those systems and the ways they are shaped by cultural factors. The authors seek to provide a basic understanding of the observed society, striving for a dynamic rather than a static portrayal. Particular attention is devoted to the people who make up the society, their origins, dominant beliefs and values, their common interests and the issues on which they are divided, the nature and extent of their involvement with national institutions, and their attitudes toward each other and toward their social system and political order.

The books represent the analysis of the authors and should not be construed as an expression of an official United States government position, policy, or decision. The authors have sought to adhere to accepted standards of scholarly objectivity. Corrections, additions, and suggestions for changes from readers will be welcomed for use in future editions.

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## Preface

This edition of *Persian Gulf States: Country Studies* replaces the previous edition, published in 1984. Like its predecessor, the present book attempts to treat in a compact and objective manner the dominant historical, social, economic, political, and national security aspects of the five contemporary states of the Persian Gulf covered in this volume—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Sources of information included scholarly books, journals, and monographs; official reports and documents of government and international organizations; and foreign and domestic newspapers and periodicals. Available economic data for these countries are not always complete or may be inconsistent.

Chapter bibliographies appear at the end of the book; brief comments on some of the more valuable sources for further reading appear at the conclusion of each chapter. Measurements are given in the metric system; a conversion table is provided to assist those who are unfamiliar with the metric system (see table 1, Appendix).

The Glossary provides brief definitions of terms that may be unfamiliar to the general reader, such as the use of amir/emirate, shaykh/shaykhdom, and Al/al.

The transliteration of Arabic words and phrases posed a particular problem. For many of the words—such as Muhammad, Muslim, Quran, and shaykh—the authors followed a modified version of the system adopted by the United States Board on Geographic Names and the Permanent Committee on Geographic Names for British Official Use, known as the BGN/PCGN system; the modification entails the omission of all diacritical markings and hyphens. In numerous instances, however, the names of persons or places are so well known by another spelling that to have used the BGN/PCGN system might have created confusion. The reader will find Mecca rather than Makkah, Oman rather than Uman, and Doha rather than Ad Dawhah. In addition, although the five governments officially reject the use of the term *Persian Gulf*—as do other Arab governments—and refer to that body of water as the Arabian Gulf, the authors followed the practice of the United States Board on Geographic Names by using Persian Gulf or gulf.

The body of the text reflects information available as of January 1993. Certain other portions of the text, however, have been updated. The Introduction discusses significant events that have occurred since the completion of research; the Country Profiles include updated information as available; and the Bibliography lists recently published sources thought to be particularly helpful to the reader.

## Introduction

*Figure 1. Persian Gulf States: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, 1993* THE COUNTRIES OF THE PERSIAN GULF covered in this volume— Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates—have assumed added prominence as a result of Operation Desert Shield in 1990 and the Persian Gulf War in 1991. These states share certain characteristics while simultaneously differing from one another in various respects. Islam has played a major role in each of the Persian Gulf states, although Kuwait and Bahrain reflect a greater secular influence than the other three. Moreover, the puritanical Wahhabi (see Glossary) Sunni (see Glossary) sect prevails in Qatar; Bahrain has a majority population of Shia (see Glossary), a denomination of the faith that constitutes a minority in Islam as a whole; and the people of Oman represent primarily a minor sect within Shia Islam, the Ibadi.

The beduin heritage also exerts a significant influence in all of the Persian Gulf states. In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, a sense of national identity increasingly has superseded tribal allegiance. The ruling families in the Persian Gulf states represent shaykhs (see Glossary) of tribes that originally settled particular areas; however, governmental institutions steadily have taken over spheres that previously fell under the purview of tribal councils.

Historically, Britain exercised a protectorate at least briefly over each of the Persian Gulf states. This connection has resulted in the presence of governmental institutions established by Britain as well as strong commercial and military ties with it. Sources of military matériel and training in the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, were being provided by other countries in addition to Britain.

Because of the extensive coastlines of the Persian Gulf states, trade, fishing, shipbuilding, and, in the past, pearling have represented substantial sources of income. In the early 1990s, trade and, to a lesser extent, fishing, continued to contribute major amounts to the gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary) of these states.

Of the five states, Oman has the least coastal area on the Persian Gulf because its access to that waterway occurs only at the western tip of the Musandam Peninsula, separated from the remainder of Oman by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Partly as a result of this limited contact with the gulf and partly because of the mountains that cut off the interior from the coast, Oman has the most distinctive culture of the five states.

In general, the gulf has served as a major facilitator of trade and culture. The ancient civilization of Dilmun, for example, in present-day Bahrain existed as early as the fourth millennium B.C.

The Persian Gulf, however, also constitutes a ready channel for foreign conquerors. In addition to Britain, over the centuries the gulf states have known such rulers as the Greeks, Parthians, Sassanians, Iranians, and Portuguese. When England's influence first came to the area in 1622, the Safavid shah of Iran sought England's aid in driving the Portuguese out of the gulf.

Britain did not play a major role, however, until the early nineteenth century. At that time, attacks on British shipping by the Al Qasimi of the present-day UAE became so serious that Britain asked the assistance of the ruler of Oman in ending the attacks. In consequence, Britain in 1820 initiated treaties or truces with the various rulers of the area, giving rise to the term *Trucial Coast*.

The boundaries of the Persian Gulf states were considered relatively unimportant until the discovery of oil in Bahrain in 1932 caused other gulf countries to define their geographic limits. Britain's 1968 announcement that in 1971 it would abandon its protectorate commitments east of the Suez Canal accelerated the independence of the states. Oman had maintained its independence in principle since 1650. Kuwait, with the most advanced institutions—primarily because of its oil wealth—had declared its independence in 1961.

Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE followed suit in 1971. In the face of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, all of the Persian Gulf states experienced fears for their security. These apprehensions led to their formation, together with Saudi Arabia, of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in May 1981.

Of all the gulf states, Kuwait clearly has the greatest security concerns. By early 1994, Kuwait largely had succeeded in rebuilding its damaged infrastructure and oil industry facilities ravaged by Iraq in the course of its August 2, 1990, invasion and subsequent scorched-earth policy concerning Kuwait's oil wells. By June 1993,

Kuwait had increased its oil production to such an extent that it refused the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quota of 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd—see Glossary); instead, it demanded parity with the UAE at 2.2 million bpd, which OPEC refused.

The war and the occupation left significant scars on the Kuwaiti population. The war caused the departure of more than half the population, including two-thirds of the foreigners, many of them Palestinians and other Arabs. In the postwar period, most citizens returned, but the government apparently decided not to allow foreigners to exceed 50 percent of the population, and the number of Palestinians permitted to return dropped sharply.

The war also did away with most of the financial reserves from foreign investments that Kuwait had prudently accumulated in its Reserve Fund for Future Generations. War costs were estimated at a minimum of US\$20 billion, a reconstruction figure less than originally feared. Economic progress in 1993, however, was such that a projected current account surplus of US\$3.2 billion was predicted, together with GDP growth of 11.5 percent in 1994. Kuwait's willingness to implement World Bank (see Glossary) recommendations concerning the strengthening of its economy appeared questionable, however. The bank recommended that Kuwait eliminate subsidies, encourage government workers to move to the private sector to reduce serious government overstaffing, liberalize business regulations to promote private-sector growth, and privatize a number of state assets. Various of the recommendations would affect significantly members of the ruling family, many of whom engage in the business sector.

Kuwait's life is connected intimately with the Al Sabah, who have ruled Kuwait since 1756; the rule has alternated between the Jabir and Salim branches, descendants of two sons of the ruler Mubarak the Great. In 1963 the ruler took the first step of any gulf state to create a popular assembly. The narrow electorate and the ruler's right to dissolve the assembly have limited the influence of the legislature, and the assembly has been dissolved twice, in each case for a number of years. In October 1992, the National Assembly was reconstituted. However, only 15 percent of the Kuwaiti population was able to vote. Freedom of the press, which had been suspended in 1976, was restored in early 1992. Despite the existence of several liberal opposition movements and some Islamist (also seen as fundamentalist) pressures, the postwar government represents little change, and the ruling family continues to hold all major ministerial posts.

Apart from development of its oil industry, which dominates its economy despite attempts at diversification, Kuwait's main concern continues to be the threat from Iraq to its national security. In late 1993, incidents continued to occur along the Kuwait-Iraq border, and Iraqi media persisted in referring to Kuwait as the "nineteenth province" of Iraq. As of late 1993, Iraq was believed to hold more than 800 Kuwaiti prisoners of war.

Kuwait has taken several steps to counter the ongoing menace of Iraq. Although Kuwait sought help from its GCC allies when Iraq invaded, it recognized that the GCC states lacked the military strength to provide effective assistance. Kuwait's postwar army was reportedly down to about 8,000 from a prewar total of about 16,000 personnel. Kuwait therefore determined to build up and indigenize its own armed forces. Accordingly, a new military conscription law was enacted in December 1992. Furthermore, to upgrade matériel, a postwar 1992 decree authorized the expenditure of US\$1.7 billion on military equipment over twelve years.

Immediate orders included 218 M-1A2 United States main battle tanks, forty F/A-18 United States Hornet fighter aircraft, five United States Patriot missile fire units with missiles, 200 British Warrior armored personnel carriers, and miscellaneous French matériel. Kuwait also contracted in January 1993 with the United States Hughes Aircraft Company for an early warning system. In 1993, however, the National Assembly demonstrated its intent to review arms contracts and, if feasible, to reduce expenditures, in particular by eliminating commission payments to members of the royal family.

Other major steps included the signing of a security agreement and a Foreign Military Sales agreement with the United States in 1991, defense agreements with Britain and France in 1992—followed by additional matériel purchases in 1993—and an agreement with Russia in 1993. These agreements, as well as participation in the GCC, involve joint training exercises, thus strengthening the capabilities of the Kuwaiti armed forces. In line with its closer relations with the West, Kuwait took immediate action against perpetrators of the alleged Iraqi-inspired assassination attempt on former United States president George H W. Bush during his attendance at Kuwait's April 1993 celebration of its liberation. In a further defense measure, with private donations, Kuwait in 1993 began construction of a defensive wall along its 240-kilometer border with Iraq.

With regard to regional relations, Kuwait in 1993 made conciliatory gestures toward some of the Arab

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countries that supported Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Statements by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sabah al Ahmad Al Sabah in late June 1993 and by Crown Prince and Prime Minister Saad al Abd Allah Al Sabah in late October 1993 set forth conditions for such states to mend relations with Kuwait. The conditions covered support of United Nations (UN) resolutions condemning Iraqi aggression and pressure on Iraq to comply with UN resolutions, particularly those concerning border demarcation and release of prisoners. These statements, which did not name countries or organizations concerned, appear directed primarily at Tunisia and Yemen and to a lesser degree at the Palestine Liberation Organization. Relations with Jordan, however, continued to be chilly, and Kuwait's relations with Qatar cooled over the latter's rapprochement with Jordan in August and its restoration of diplomatic links with Iraq.

Bahrain, the only island state of the five Persian Gulf states, came under the rule of the Al Khalifa (originally members of the Bani Utub, an Arabian tribe) in 1783 after 180 years of Iranian control. Prior to 1971, Iran intermittently reasserted its claim to Bahrain, two-thirds of whose inhabitants are Shia Muslims although the ruling family is Sunni Muslim. Because of sectarian tensions, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and its aftermath had an unsettling effect on the population; the government believed that a number of Shia plots during the 1980s received clandestine support from Iran. In 1992 the island's predominantly urban population (85 percent) consisted of 34 percent foreigners, who accounted for 55 percent of the labor force. The exploitation of oil and natural gas—Bahrain was the first of the five Persian Gulf states in which oil was discovered—is the island's main industry, together with the processing of aluminum, provision of drydock facilities for ships, and operation of offshore banking units.

The Al Khalifa control the government of Bahrain and held eight of eighteen ministerial posts in early 1994.

A brief experiment in limited democracy occurred with the December 1972 elections for a Constituent Assembly. The resulting constitution that took effect in December 1973 provided for an advisory legislative body, the National Assembly, voted for by male citizens. The ruler dissolved the assembly in August 1975.

The new Consultative Council, which began debating labor matters in January 1993, is believed to have had an impact on the provisions of the new Labor Law enacted in September 1993.

Bahrain's historical concern over the threat from Iran as well as its domestic unrest prompted it to join the GCC at the organization's founding in 1981. Even within the GCC, however, from time to time Bahrain has had tense relations with Qatar over their mutual claim to the island of Hawar and the adjacent islands located between the two countries; this dispute was under review by the International Court of Justice at The Hague in early 1994. Bahrain traditionally has had good relations with the West, particularly Britain and the United States. Bahrain's cordial association with the United States is reflected in its serving as homeport for the commander, Middle East Force, since 1949 and as the site of a United States naval support unit since 1972. In October 1991, following participation in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Bahrain signed a defense cooperation agreement with the United States.

Bahrain's relationship with Qatar is long-standing. After the Al Khalifa conquered Bahrain in 1783 from their base in Qatar, Bahrain became the Al Khalifa seat. Subsequently, tribal elements remaining in Qatar sought to assert their autonomy from the Al Khalifa. Thus, in the early nineteenth century, Qatar was the scene of several conflicts involving the Al Khalifa and their rivals, the Al Thani, as well as various outsiders, including Iranians, Omanis, Wahhabis, and Ottomans. When the British East India Company in 1820 signed the General Treaty of Peace with the shaykhs of the area designed to end piracy, the treaty considered Qatar a dependency of Bahrain. Not until the signing of a treaty with Britain by Abd Allah ibn Qasim Al Thani in 1916 did Qatar enter into the Trucial States system as an "independent" protectorate. Britain's 1971 withdrawal from the Persian Gulf led to Qatar's full independence in that year.

In preparation for independence, Qatar enacted a provisional constitution in 1970 that created an Advisory Council, partly elected. Twenty members are selected by the ruler from nominees voted in each of ten electoral districts; fifteen members are appointed directly by the ruler. In January 1992, fifty leading Qataris petitioned the ruler for an elected council "with legislative powers" and "a permanent constitution capable of guaranteeing democracy and determining political, social, and economic structures"; as of early 1994, no action had been taken on these requests. Governmental control has clearly remained in Al Thani hands; in January 1994, ten of eighteen members of the Council of Ministers belonged to the family.

Exploitation of the oil discovered in Qatar in 1939 was delayed until after World War II. The petroleum

industry has grown steadily, and in 1991 the North Field natural gas project was inaugurated; the North Field, a 6,000–square–kilometer offshore field considered to be the world's largest, extends slightly into Iranian territorial waters. The Qatari government, however, has sought to encourage diversification and investment in such industries as steel, fertilizers, and petrochemicals. The work force is predominantly foreign; in 1992 Qataris were estimated to represent only 20 percent of the approximately 484,000 total population.

In part because most Qataris belong to the Wahhabi sect that originated in the Arabian Peninsula, Qatar historically has enjoyed close relations with Saudi Arabia, with which it settled its 1992 border dispute in 1993. Although Qatar supported Iraq in the Iran–Iraq War of 1980–88, it subsequently improved its relations with Iran, undoubtedly in part because of its shared gas field. As a GCC member, Qatar sent forces against Iraq in the 1991 Persian Gulf War but continued to maintain a diplomatic link with Iraq. Qatar's relations with the United States improved following Operation Desert Storm, and the two countries signed a defense cooperation agreement in June 1992 that includes a provision for the pre–positioning of supplies.

The UAE represents an independent state created by the joining together in the winter of 1971–72 of the seven former Trucial Coast states of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Al Fujayrah, Dubayy, Ras al Khaymah, Sharjah, and Umm al Qaywayn. In early 1993, UAE citizens constituted about 12 percent of the total population of nearly 2.0 million. Oil is the major source of income for the federation, but it is found in a significant amount only in Abu Dhabi and to a lesser extent in Dubayy, Ras al Khaymah, and Sharjah. In principle, each emirate is required to contribute to the federation's budget (according to the provisional constitution, each state's natural resources and wealth are its own), but in practice only Abu Dhabi and, to a lesser degree, Dubayy have financed the federation. The resulting disagreement over budget contributions as well as over the integration of defense measures and forces led to the recurring renewal at five– year intervals of the 1971 provisional constitution, rather than the intended adoption of a permanent constitution. In fact, the separation of powers is nominal; UAE organs consist of the Supreme Council of the Union (SCU) composed of the rulers of the seven emirates (Abu Dhabi and Dubayy have a veto right on proposed measures), the Council of Ministers, and the presidency. The chairman of the SCU is the president of the UAE. In addition, there is an advisory Federal National Council (FNC) of forty members appointed by the rulers of the emirates, based on proportional representation; members serve two–year terms. Following a one–year delay in naming members, the FNC met with UAE citizens in January 1993, after which it held several sessions. FNC actions included a call for private firms to employ more UAE citizens and the establishment of a federal housing loan program for UAE nationals.

Like other gulf states, the UAE has security concerns, of which one is its dispute with Iran over the islands of Abu Musa, Tunb al Kubra (Greater Tumb), and Tunb as Sughra (Lesser Tumb). This dispute flared anew in early 1992, after lying dormant for twenty years, when Iran took actions on Abu Musa that violated a shared sovereignty agreement. The UAE was concerned that Iran intended to extend its control over the entire island.

However, in November 1992 the two countries agreed to abide by the provisions of the 1971 memorandum.

The UAE would prefer a final resolution of this dispute and has expressed a willingness to have its sovereignty claims arbitrated by the International Court of Justice or the United Nations.

Militarily, the UAE participated in the 1991 Persian Gulf War and contributed personnel to the UN peacekeeping force in Somalia in 1992. The UAE's experience in the Persian Gulf War led it to consider itself inadequately prepared in terms of matériel; consequently, in February 1993 it ordered Leclerc main battle tanks and other equipment from France.

Oman is the only one of the Persian Gulf states whose ruler bears the title of *sultan* instead of *shaykh*. Until 1970 the ruler was known as the sultan of Muscat (the coastal area) and Oman (the rugged interior imamate), reflecting the diverse parts of the country. To Ibadi Muslims, the political ruler is also the imam (see Glossary); the title *sultan*, taken from Ottoman usage, indicates a Muslim ruling sovereign combining religious and political connotations.

The present sultan, Qabus ibn Said Al Said, began his rule in 1970 and immediately started emphasizing economic development and modernization. Such an emphasis was essential because Oman's oil, first produced commercially in 1967, had a relatively limited production span; 1992 estimates projected seventeen more years of output at the 1992 production rate. National development plans, therefore, have focused on reducing the dependence on oil and on confronting problems occasioned by the dramatic rural–to–urban population shift, the accompanying social transformation, and the large number of foreign workers, all in the interests of promoting

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stability. Oman never has had a census, but in 1992, for planning purposes, the government estimated the population at 2 million persons (the actual figure may be closer to 1.5 million), of whom about 500,000 were foreigners. The latter constituted approximately 55 percent of the labor force.

Oman faces a number of problems. The government must attempt to provide adequate housing and utilities, especially water; stimulate agriculture to increase food production; and discourage urban migration. Specific development goals include establishing new industries and industrial estates; training indigenous personnel; developing minerals other than oil; encouraging agriculture, fishing, and tourism; increasing privatization of state-controlled enterprises; and diminishing regional imbalances, particularly in the Dhofar region.

On coming to power, Qabus ibn Said confronted the rebellion in the Dhofar region, which had begun in 1964.

To counter the revolt, he concentrated on establishing development projects in this neglected area of the country and on improving the transportation and communications infrastructure. With the assistance of Iran, Jordan, and several gulf states, he also took military action to repress the rebellion. The sultan was aided in these efforts by the fact that the bureaucracy and major posts were largely in the hands of ruling family members. Leading government posts continued to be in the hands of ruling family members into the 1990s. For example, in early 1994 the sultan also served as prime minister, minister of defense, minister of finance, minister of foreign affairs, and chairman of the central bank. Other members of the ruling family served as deputy prime minister for legal affairs, deputy prime minister for security and defense, and minister of national heritage and culture. Still other ruling family members served as special advisers and as governors of the capital and of the Dhofar region. Close cooperation occurs between the ruling family and the merchants; tribal shaykhs now play a lesser role. Following the example of other gulf states, in 1991 Qabus ibn Said created the Consultative Council, which has representatives from the forty-one *wilayat*, or governorates, but no government officials, in contrast to the State Consultative Council, established in 1981, which the new council replaced.

In the area of foreign relations, Oman has been closely aligned with Britain and the United States; it first signed a military accord with the latter in 1980. This "facilities access" agreement was most recently renewed in 1990. In the region, Oman has sought to play an independent, nonconfrontational role. In late October 1992, Oman ended a twenty-five-year border dispute with Yemen by signing a border-delineation agreement; it also concluded a border agreement with Saudi Arabia as a result of which Oman began demarcating the boundary between the two countries. Moreover, Oman has acted as mediator between the United States and Iran and between Britain and Iran. Meanwhile, Oman has been increasing its arms purchases and building up its armed forces.

Oman's purchase of military matériel is consonant with the general pattern of Persian Gulf states, which have been spending heavily on military equipment since at least the early 1980s, primarily to compensate for their limited manpower. In most instances, women are not included in the armed forces. Lacking domestic arms production capability, the gulf states mainly need aircraft, air defense missile systems, early warning systems, and small missile attack craft, as well as main battle tanks and armored personnel carriers. The gulf countries recognize the potential threats they face, particularly from Iraq and possibly from Iran. In addition, they have experienced the need to counter domestic insurgencies, protect their ruling families and oil installations, and possibly use military force in pursuing claims to disputed territory. A partial solution to their defense needs lay in the formation of the GCC in 1981.

The Persian Gulf War brought with it, however, the realization that the GCC was inadequate to provide the gulf states with the defense they required. As a result, most of the states sought defense agreements with the United States, Britain, France, and Russia, more or less in that order. Concurrently, the gulf countries have endeavored to improve the caliber and training of their armed forces and the interoperability of military equipment through joint military exercises both within the GCC framework and with Western powers. The United States has sought to complement GCC collective security efforts and has stated that it does not intend to station forces permanently in the region.

At a November 1993 meeting, GCC defense ministers made plans to expand the Saudi-based Peninsula Shield forces, a rapid deployment force, to 25,000. The force is to have units from each GCC state, a unified command, and a rotating chairmanship. The ministers also agreed to spend up to US\$5 billion to purchase three or four more AWACS aircraft to supplement the five the Saudi air force already has and to create a headquarters in Saudi Arabia for GCC defense purposes. The UAE reportedly considered the proposed force increase insufficient;

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furthermore, Oman sought a force of 100,000 members.

In addition to these efforts, directed at the military aspects of national security, declining oil revenues for many of the states and internal sectarian divisions also have led the gulf countries to institute domestic efforts to strengthen their national security. Such efforts entail measures to increase the role of citizens in an advisory governmental capacity, to allow greater freedom of the press, to promote economic development through diversification and incentives for foreign investment, and to develop infrastructure projects that will increase the standard of living for more sectors of the population, thereby eliminating sources of discord. The ruling families hope that such steps will promote stability, counter the possible appeal of radical Islam, and ultimately strengthen the position of the ruling families in some form of limited constitutional monarchy.

January 26, 1994 Helen Chapin Metz



## Chapter 1. Historical Setting

*Sharjah Mosque, built in the 1980s in traditional style Figure 2. Persian Gulf States: Topography* THE FIVE COUNTRIES covered in this volume—Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman—are all Arab states on the Persian Gulf that share certain characteristics. But they are not the only countries that border the gulf. Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia share the coastline as well, and they too shared in the historical development of the area. Of the five states covered in this volume, Oman has a particular culture and history that distinguish it from its neighbors. It also is the state with the shortest coastline along the Persian Gulf. Most of Oman lies along the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea (see fig. 1).

The main element that unites these countries is the nature of their involvement with people and nations beyond the region. The gulf has been an important waterway since ancient times, bringing the people who live on its shores into early contact with other civilizations. In the ancient world, the gulf peoples established trade connections with India; in the Middle Ages, they went as far as China; and in the modern era, they became involved with the European powers that sailed into the Indian Ocean and around Southeast Asia. In the twentieth century, the discovery of massive oil deposits in the gulf made the area once again a crossroads for the modern world.

Other factors also bring these countries together. The people are mostly Arabs and, with the exception of Oman and Bahrain, are mostly Sunni (see Glossary) Muslims. Because they live in basically tribal societies, family and clan connections underlie most political and economic activity. The discovery of oil and the increasing contact with the West has led to tremendous material and social changes.

Important distinctions exist, however, among the five countries. Bahrain is an island with historical connections to the Persian Empire. Kuwait is separated from the others by Saudi Arabia. In Oman high mountain ranges effectively cut off the country's hinterland from the rest of the region (see fig. 2). Moreover, various tribal loyalties throughout the region are frequently divisive and are exacerbated by religious differences that involve the major sects of Islam—Sunni and Shia (see Glossary)—and the smaller Kharijite sect as well as Muslim legal procedures.

## TRADE IN THE GULF

The Persian Gulf lies between two of the major breadbaskets of the ancient world, the Tigris–Euphrates area (Mesopotamia, meaning “between the rivers”) in present–day Iraq and the Nile Valley in Egypt.

Mesopotamia, a part of the area known as the Fertile Crescent, was important not only for food production but also for connecting East to West.

Rivers provided the water that made agriculture possible. Agriculture, in turn, enabled people to settle in one area and to accumulate a food surplus that allowed them to pursue tasks besides growing food, namely, to create a civilization. They chose leaders, such as kings and priests; they built monuments; they devised systems of morality and religion; and they started to trade.

Mesopotamia became the linchpin of ancient international trade. The fertile soil between the Tigris and the Euphrates produced a large surplus of food; however, it did not support forests to produce the timber necessary to build permanent structures. The region also lacked the mineral resources to make metals. Accordingly, the early inhabitants of Mesopotamia were forced to go abroad and trade their food for other raw materials. They found copper at Magan, an ancient city that lay somewhere in the contemporary state of Oman and, via Magan, traded with people in the Indus Valley for lumber and other finished goods.

Trade between Mesopotamia and India was facilitated by the small size of the Persian Gulf. Water provided the easiest way to transport goods, and sailors crossed the gulf fairly early, moving out along the coasts of Persia and India until they reached the mouth of the Indus. Merchants and sailors became middlemen who used their position to profit from the movement of goods through the gulf. The people of Magan were both middlemen and suppliers because the city was a source of copper as well as a transit point for Indian trade.

Over time, other cities developed that were exclusively entrepôts, or commercial way stations. One of the best known of these cities was Dilmun.

Dilmun probably lay on what is now the island state of Bahrain. Excavations on the island reveal rich burial mounds from the Dilmun period (ca. 4000 to 2000 B.C.). Scholars believe the monuments on the island indicate that residents, in addition to farming, earned money from the East–West trade and that other cities on the gulf coast survived similarly.

The trading cities on the gulf were closely linked to Mesopotamia, reflected in the similarities between the archaeological finds in the two areas. The similar finds suggest that the people of the gulf coast and the people of the Tigris and Euphrates valley developed increasingly complex societies and beliefs.

The people of the gulf coast differed from those of the interior of the Arabian Peninsula. The people in the interior were nomads who had no time to build cities or monuments and no need to develop elaborate social structures. When the desert provided insufficient food for their flocks, the tribes pushed into the date groves or farmlands of the settled towns. Centers on the gulf coast were subject to such nomadic incursions, as were the people of Mesopotamia. As a result, after the second millennium B.C. the gulf began to take on an increasingly Arab character. Some Arab tribes from the interior left their flocks and took over the date groves that ringed the region's oases, while others took up sailing and began to take part in the trade and piracy that were the region's economic mainstays. These nomadic incursions periodically changed the ethnic balance and leadership of the gulf coast.

Meanwhile, trade flourished in the second millennium B.C., as reflected in the wealth of Dilmun. In about 1800 B.C., however, both the quality and the amount of goods that passed through Dilmun declined, and many scholars attribute this to a corresponding decline in the Mesopotamian markets. Concurrently, an alternate trade route arose that linked India to the Mediterranean Sea via the Arabian Sea, then through the Gulf of Aden, thence into the Red Sea where the pharaohs had built a shallow canal that linked the Red Sea to the Nile. This new route gave access not only to Mediterranean ports but also, through the Mediterranean ports, to the West as well.

One of the ways that rulers directed goods toward their own country was to control transit points on the trade routes. Oman was significant to rulers in Mesopotamia because it provided a source of raw materials as well as a transshipment point for goods from the East. Although a valuable prize, Oman's large navy gave it influence over

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other cities in the gulf. When Mesopotamia was strong, its rulers sought to take over Oman.

When Oman was strong, its rulers pushed up through the gulf and into Mesopotamia. One of the basic conflicts in gulf history has been the struggle of indigenous peoples against outside powers who sought to control the gulf because of its strategic importance.

Competition between Red Sea and Persian Gulf trade routes was complicated by the rise of new land routes around 1000 B.C. Technological advances in the second and first millennia B.C. made land routes increasingly viable for moving goods. The domestication of the camel and the development of a saddle enabling the animal to carry large loads allowed merchants to send goods across Arabia as well. As a result, inland centers developed at the end of the first millennium B.C. to service the increasing caravan traffic.

These overland trade routes helped to Arabize the gulf by bringing the nomads of the interior into closer contact with their relatives on the coast.

## THE GULF IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Archaeological evidence suggests that Dilmun returned to prosperity after the Assyrian Empire stabilized the Tigris-Euphrates area at the end of the second millennium B.C. A powerful ruler in Mesopotamia meant a prosperous gulf, and Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian king who ruled in the seventh century B.C., was particularly strong. He extended Assyrian influence as far as Egypt and controlled an empire that stretched from North Africa to the Persian Gulf. The Egyptians, however, regained control of their country about a half-century after they lost it.

A series of other conquests of varying lengths followed. In 325 B.C., Alexander the Great sent a fleet from India to follow the eastern, or Persian, coast of the gulf up to the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and sent other ships to explore the Arab side of the waterway. The temporary Greek presence in the area increased Western interest in the gulf during the next two centuries. Alexander's successors, however, did not control the area long enough to make the gulf a part of the Greek world. By about 250 B.C., the Greeks lost all territory east of Syria to the Parthians, a Persian dynasty in the East. The Parthians brought the gulf under Persian control and extended their influence as far as Oman.

The Parthian conquests demarcated the distinction between the Greek world of the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Empire in the East. The Greeks, and the Romans after them, depended on the Red Sea route, whereas the Parthians depended on the Persian Gulf route. Because they needed to keep the merchants who plied those routes under their control, the Parthians established garrisons as far south as Oman.

In the third century A.D., the Sassanians, another Persian dynasty, succeeded the Parthians and held the area until the rise of Islam four centuries later. Under Sassanian rule, Persian control over the gulf reached its height. Oman was no longer a threat, and the Sassanians were strong enough to establish agricultural colonies and to engage some of the nomadic tribes in the interior as a border guard to protect their western flank from the Romans.

This agricultural and military contact gave people in the gulf greater exposure to Persian culture, as reflected in certain irrigation techniques still used in Oman. The gulf continued to be a crossroads, however, and its people learned about Persian beliefs, such as Zoroastrianism, as well as about Semitic and Mediterranean ideas.

Judaism and Christianity arrived in the gulf from a number of directions: from Jewish and Christian tribes in the Arabian desert; from Ethiopian Christians to the south; and from Mesopotamia, where Jewish and Christian communities flourished under Sassanian rule. Whereas Zoroastrianism seems to have been confined to Persian colonists, Christianity and Judaism were adopted by some Arabs. The popularity of these religions paled, however, when compared with the enthusiasm with which the Arabs greeted Islam.

## EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM

Islam is a system of religious beliefs and an all-encompassing way of life. Muslims believe that God (Allah) revealed to the Prophet Muhammad the rules governing society and the proper conduct of society's members. It is incumbent on the individual, therefore, to live in a manner prescribed by the revealed law and incumbent on the community to build the perfect human society on earth according to holy injunctions. Islam recognizes no distinctions between the religious institution and the state. The distinction between religious and secular law is a recent development that in part reflects the more pronounced role of the state in society and Western economic and cultural penetration. The impact of religion on daily life in Muslim countries is extensive, usually greater than that found in the West.

The area that constitutes the present-day Persian Gulf states was on the immediate periphery of the rise of Islam. In A.D. 610, Muhammad—a merchant of the Hashimite branch of the ruling Quraysh tribe in the Arabian town of Mecca—began to preach the first of a series of revelations that Muslims believe was granted him by God, some directly and some through the angel Gabriel. A fervent monotheist, Muhammad denounced the polytheism of his fellow Meccans. Because the town's economy was based in part on a thriving pilgrimage business to the shrine called the Kaaba and to numerous other pagan religious sites in the area, his censure earned him the enmity of the town's leaders. In 622 he and a group of followers accepted an invitation to settle in the town of Yathrib, later known as Medina (the city), because it was the center of Muhammad's activities.

The move, or *hijra* (see Glossary), known in the West as the *hegira*, marks the beginning of the Islamic era and of Islam as a force in history; the Muslim calendar begins in 622. In Medina, Muhammad continued to preach, and he eventually defeated his detractors in battle. He consolidated the temporal and the spiritual leadership in his person before his death in 632. After Muhammad's death, his followers compiled those of his words regarded as coming directly from God into the Quran, the holy scripture of Islam. Others of his sayings, recalled by those who had known him, became the *hadith* (see Glossary). The precedent of Muhammad's deeds is called the *sunna*. Together they form a comprehensive guide to the spiritual, ethical, and social life of an orthodox Sunni Muslim.

The major duties of Muslims are found in the five pillars of Islam, which set forth the acts necessary to demonstrate and reinforce the faith. These are the recitation of the *shahada* ("There is no god but God [Allah], and Muhammad is his prophet"), daily prayer (*salat*), almsgiving (*zakat*), fasting (*sawm*), and pilgrimage (*hajj*). The believer is to pray in a prescribed manner after purification through ritual ablutions each day at dawn, midday, midafternoon, sunset, and nightfall. Prescribed genuflections and prostrations accompany the prayers, which the worshiper recites while facing toward Mecca. Whenever possible, men pray in congregation at the mosque with an imam (see Glossary), and on Fridays they are required to do so. The Friday noon prayers provide the occasion for weekly sermons by religious leaders. Women may also attend public worship at the mosque, where they are segregated from the men, although most frequently women pray at home. A special functionary, the *muezzin*, intones a call to prayer to the entire community at the appropriate hour.

The ninth month of the Muslim calendar is Ramadan, a period of obligatory fasting in commemoration of Muhammad's receipt of God's revelation. Throughout the month, all but the sick and the weak, pregnant or lactating women, soldiers on duty, travelers on necessary journeys, and young children are enjoined from eating, drinking, smoking, or sexual intercourse during the daylight hours. Those adults excused are obliged to endure an equivalent fast at their earliest opportunity. A festive meal breaks the daily fast and inaugurates a night of feasting and celebration. The pious well-to-do usually do little or no work during this period, and some businesses close for all or part of the day. Because the months of the lunar year revolve through the solar year, Ramadan falls earlier in the solar year each successive year. A considerable test of discipline at any time of the year, a fast that falls in summer imposes severe hardship on those who must do physical work.

All Muslims, at least once in their lifetimes and if circumstances permit, should make the *hajj* to Mecca to participate in special rites held there during the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. Muhammad instituted this requirement, modifying pre-Islamic custom, to emphasize sites associated with God and Abraham (Ibrahim),

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founder of monotheism and father of the Arabs through his son, Ismail.

The lesser pillars of the faith, which all Muslims share, are jihad, or the permanent struggle for the triumph of the word of God on earth, and the requirement to do good works and to avoid all evil thoughts, words, and deeds. In addition, Muslims agree on certain basic principles of faith based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad: there is one God, who is a unitary divine being in contrast to the trinitarian belief of Christians; Muhammad, the last of a line of prophets beginning with Abraham and including Moses and Jesus, was chosen by God to present God's message to humanity; and there is a general resurrection on the last, or judgment, day.

During his lifetime, Muhammad held both spiritual and temporal leadership of the Muslim community.

Religious and secular law merged, and all Muslims have traditionally been subject to the sharia, or religious law. A comprehensive legal system, the sharia developed gradually through the early centuries of Islam, primarily through the accretion of interpretations and precedents set by various judges and scholars. During the tenth century, legal opinion began to harden into authoritative rulings, and the figurative *bab al ijtihad* (gate of interpretation) closed. Thereafter, rather than encouraging flexibility, Islamic law emphasized maintenance of the status quo.

After Muhammad's death, the leaders of the Muslim community consensually chose Abu Bakr, the Prophet's father-in-law and one of his earliest followers, to succeed him. At that time, some persons favored Ali ibn Abu Talib, Muhammad's cousin and the husband of his daughter, Fatima, but Ali and his supporters (the Shiat Ali, or Party of Ali) eventually recognized the community's choice. The next two caliphs (successors)—Umar, who succeeded in 634, and Uthman, who took power in 644—enjoyed the recognition of the entire community. When Ali finally succeeded to the caliphate in 656, Muawiyah, governor of Syria, rebelled in the name of his murdered kinsman, Uthman. After the ensuing civil war, Ali moved his capital to Iraq, where he was murdered shortly thereafter.

Ali's death ended the last of the so-called four orthodox caliphates and the period in which the entire community of Islam recognized a single caliph. Muawiyah proclaimed himself caliph from Damascus. The Shiat Ali refused to recognize him or his line, the Umayyad caliphs, and withdrew in the great schism of Islam to establish the dissident sect, known as the Shia, who supported the claims of Ali's line to the caliphate based on descent from the Prophet. The larger faction, the Sunnis, adhered to the position that the caliph must be elected, and over the centuries they have represented themselves as the orthodox branch.

## Sunni Islam

Although originally political in nature, the differences between Sunni and Shia interpretations rapidly took on theological overtones. In principle, a Sunni approaches God directly: there is no clerical hierarchy. Some duly appointed religious figures, such as imams, however, exert considerable social and political power. Imams usually are men of importance in their communities, but they need not have any formal training. Committees of socially prominent worshipers usually are responsible for managing major mosque-owned lands. In most Arab countries, the administration of waqfs (religious endowments) has come under the influence of the state.

Qadis (judges) and imams are appointed by the government.

The Muslim year has two religious festivals: Id al Adha, a sacrificial festival held on the tenth day of Dhu al Hijjah, the twelfth, or pilgrimage, month; and Id al Fitr, the festival of breaking the fast, which celebrates the end of Ramadan on the first day of Shawwal, the tenth month. To Sunnis these are the most important festivals of the year. Each lasts three or four days, during which time people put on their best clothes and visit, congratulate, and bestow gifts on each other. In addition, cemeteries are visited. Id al Fitr is celebrated more festively because it marks the end of Ramadan. Celebrations also take place, although less extensively, on the Prophet's birthday, which falls on the twelfth day of Rabi al Awwal, the third month.

With regard to legal matters, Sunni Islam has four orthodox schools that give different weight in legal opinions to prescriptions in the Quran, to the hadith, to the consensus of legal scholars, to analogy (to similar situations at the time of the Prophet), and to reason or opinion. Named for their founders, the earliest Muslim legal schools were those of Abd Allah Malik ibn Anas (ca. 715–95) and An Numan ibn Thabit Abu Hanifa (ca. 700–67). The Maliki school was centered in Medina, and the lawbook of Malik ibn Anas is the earliest surviving Muslim legal text, containing a systematic consensus of Medina legal opinions. The Hanafi school in Iraq stressed individual opinion in making legal decisions. Muhammad ibn Idris ash Shafii (767–820), a member of the tribe of Quraysh and a distant relative of the Prophet, studied under Malik ibn Anas in Medina.

He followed a somewhat eclectic legal path, laying down the rules for analogy that were later adopted by other legal schools. The last of the four major Sunni legal schools, that of Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal (780–855), was centered in Baghdad. The Hanbali school, which became prominent in Arabia as a result of Wahhabi (see Glossary) influence, gave great emphasis to the hadith as a source of Muslim law but rejected innovations and rationalistic explanations of the Quran and the traditions (see Wahhabi Islam and the Gulf , this ch.).

## Shia Islam

Shia Muslims hold the fundamental beliefs of other Muslims (see Sunni Islam , this ch.). In addition to these tenets, however, Shia believe in the imamate, which is the distinctive institution of Shia Islam. Whereas Sunni Muslims view the caliph as a temporal leader only and consider an imam to be a prayer leader, Shia Muslims hold a hereditary view of Muslim leadership. They believe the Prophet Muhammad designated Ali to be his successor as Imam (when uppercase, Imam refers to the Shia descendant of the House of Ali), exercising both spiritual and temporal leadership. Only those who have *walayah* (spiritual guidance) are free from error and sin and have been chosen by God through the Prophet. Each Imam in turn designated his successor—through twelve Imams—each holding the same powers.

The imamate began with Ali, who is also accepted by Sunni Muslims as the fourth of the “rightly guided caliphs” to succeed the Prophet. Shia revere Ali as the First Imam, and his descendants, beginning with his sons Hasan and Husayn, continue the line of the Imams until the twelfth. Shia point to the close lifetime association of the Prophet with Ali. When Ali was six years old, he was invited by the Prophet to live with him, and Shia believe Ali was the first person to make the declaration of faith in Islam. Ali also slept in the Prophet's bed on the night of the hijra, when it was feared that the house would be attacked by unbelievers and the Prophet stabbed to death. He fought in all the battles the Prophet did, except one, and the Prophet chose him to be the husband of one of his favorite daughters, Fatima.

Among Shia, the term *imam* traditionally has been used only for Ali and his eleven descendants. None of the twelve Imams, with the exception of Ali, ever ruled an Islamic government. During their lifetimes, their followers hoped that they would assume the rulership of the Islamic community, a rule that was believed to have been wrongfully usurped. Because Sunni caliphs were cognizant of this hope, Imams generally were persecuted under the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. Therefore, the Imams tried to be as unobtrusive as possible and to live as far as was reasonable from the successive capitals of the Islamic empire.

During the eighth century, Caliph Al Mamun, son and successor to Harun ar Rashid, was favorably disposed toward the descendants of Ali and their followers. He invited Imam Reza, the Eighth Imam (765–816), to come from Medina to his court at Marv (Mary in present-day Turkmenistan). While Reza was residing at Marv, Al Mamun designated him as his successor in an apparent effort to avoid conflict among Muslims.

Reza's sister, Fatima, journeyed from Medina to be with her brother but took ill and died at Qom, in present-day Iran. A major shrine developed around her tomb, and over the centuries Qom has become a major Shia pilgrimage site and theological center.

Al Mamun took Reza on his military campaign to retake Baghdad from political rivals. On this trip, Reza died unexpectedly in Khorasan. Reza was the only Imam to reside in, or die in, what is now Iran. A major shrine, and eventually the city of Mashhad, grew up around his tomb, which is the major pilgrimage center in Iran.

Several theological schools are located in Mashhad, associated with the shrine of the Eighth Imam.

Reza's sudden death was a shock to his followers, many of whom believed that Al Mamun, out of jealousy for Reza's increasing popularity, had the Imam poisoned. Al Mamun's suspected treachery against Imam Reza and his family tended to reinforce a feeling already prevalent among his followers that Sunni rulers were untrustworthy.

The Twelfth Imam is believed to have been only five years old when he became Imam in 874 on the death of his father. Because his followers feared he might be assassinated, the Twelfth Imam was hidden from public view and was seen only by a few of his closest deputies. Sunnis claim that he never existed, or that he died while still a child. Shia believe that the Twelfth Imam never died, but disappeared in about 939. Since then, the greater occultation of the Twelfth Imam has been in force, which will last until God commands the Twelfth Imam to manifest himself on earth again as the mahdi or messiah. Shia believe that during the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, he is spiritually present—some believe that he is materially present as well—and he is besought to reappear in various invocations and prayers. His name is mentioned in wedding invitations, and his birthday is one of the most jubilant of all Shia religious observances.

The Shia doctrine of the imamate was not fully elaborated until the tenth century. Other dogmas developed



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still later. A characteristic of Shia Islam is the continual exposition and reinterpretation of doctrine.

A significant practice of Shia Islam is that of visiting the shrines of Imams in Iraq and in Iran. In Iraq, these include the tomb of Imam Ali in An Najaf and that of his son, Imam Husayn, in Karbala, because both are considered major Shia martyrs. Before the Iran–Iraq War (1980–88), tens of thousands made the visits each year. Other principal pilgrimage sites in Iraq are the tombs of the Seventh Imam and the Ninth Imam at Kazimayn near Baghdad. In Iran, pilgrimage sites include the tomb of the Eighth Imam in Mashhad and that of his sister in Qom. Such pilgrimages originated in part from the difficulty and the expense of making the hajj to Mecca in the early days.

In commemoration of the martyrdom of Husayn, killed near Karbala in 680 during a battle with troops supporting the Umayyad caliph, processions are held in the Shia towns and villages of southern Iraq on the tenth day of Muharram (Ashura), the anniversary of his death. Ritual mourning (*taaziya*) is performed by groups of five to twenty men each. Contributions are solicited in the community to pay transportation for a local group to go to Karbala for *taaziya* celebrations forty days after Ashura. There is great rivalry among groups for the best performance of the *taaziya* passion plays.

Shia practice differs from Sunni practice concerning divorce and inheritance in that it is more favorable to women. The reason for this reputedly is the high esteem in which Fatima, the wife of Ali and the daughter of the Prophet, was held.

Like Sunni Islam, Shia Islam has developed several sects. The most important of these is the Twelver, or Ithna–Ashari, sect, which predominates in the Shia world generally. Not all Shia became Twelvers, however.

In the eighth century, a dispute arose over who should lead the Shia community after the death of the Sixth Imam, Jaafar ibn Muhammad (also known as Jaafar as Sadiq). The group that eventually became the Twelvers followed the teaching of Musa al Kazim; another group followed the teachings of Musa's brother, Ismail, and were called Ismailis. Ismailis are also referred to as Seveners because they broke off from the Shia community over a disagreement concerning the Seventh Imam. Ismailis do not believe that any of their Imams have disappeared from the world in order to return later. Rather, they have followed a continuous line of leaders represented in early 1993 by Karim al Husayni Agha Khan IV, an active figure in international humanitarian efforts. The Twelver Shia and the Ismailis also have their own legal schools.

Another group, the Kharijites, arose from events surrounding the assassination of Uthman, the third caliph, and the transfer of authority to the fourth caliph, Ali. In the war between Ali and Muawiyah, part of Ali's army objected to arbitration of the dispute. They left Ali's camp, causing other Muslims to refer to them as “kharijites” (the ones who leave). The term *Kharijites* also became a designation for Muslims who refused to compromise with those who differed from them. Their actions caused the Sunni community to consider them assassins.

In the eighth century, some Kharijites began to moderate their position. Leaders arose who suppressed the fanatical political element in Kharijite belief and discouraged their followers from taking up arms against Islam's official leader. Kharijite leaders emphasized instead the special benefits that Kharijites might receive from living in a small community that held high standards for personal conduct and spiritual values. One of these religious leaders, or imams, was Abd Allah ibn Ibad, whose followers founded communities in parts of Africa and southern Arabia. Some of Abd Allah's followers, known as Ibadis, became the leaders of Oman.

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## The Spread of Islam

Early Islamic polity was intensely expansionist, fueled both by fervor for the faith and by economic and social factors. After gaining control of Arabia and the Persian Gulf region, conquering armies swept out of the peninsula, spreading Islam. By the end of the eighth century, Islamic armies had reached far into North Africa and eastward and northward into Asia.

Traditional accounts of the conversion of tribes in the gulf are probably more legend than history. Stories about the Bani Abd al Qais tribe that controlled the eastern coast of Arabia as well as Bahrain when the tribe converted to Islam indicate that its members were traders having close contacts with Christian communities in Mesopotamia. Such contacts may have introduced the tribe to the ideal of one God and so prepared it to accept the Prophet's message.

The Arabs of Oman also figure prominently among the early converts to Islam. According to tradition, the Prophet sent one of his military leaders to Oman to convert not only the Arab inhabitants, some of whom were Christian, but also the Persian garrison, which was Zoroastrian. The Arabs accepted Islam, but the Persians did not. It was partly the zeal of the newly converted Arabs that inspired them to expel the Persians from Oman.

Although Muhammad had enjoined the Muslim community to convert the infidel, he had also recognized the special status of the "people of the book," Jews and Christians, whose scriptures he considered revelations of God's word and which contributed in some measure to Islam. By accepting the status of *dhimmi* (tolerated subject people), Jews and Christians could live in their own communities, practice their own religious laws, and be exempt from military service. However, they were obliged to refrain from proselytizing among Muslims, to recognize Muslim authority, and to pay additional taxes. In addition, they were denied certain political rights.

## THE GULF IN THE MIDDLE AGES

*Ar Rustaq fort, Oman, restored by Omani Ministry of National Heritage and Culture Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington Building a dhow in Sur, Oman's ancient port; ship construction is a major enterprise of Persian Gulf states.*

Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington In the Islamic period, the prosperity of the gulf continued to be linked to markets in Mesopotamia.

Accordingly, after 750 the gulf prospered because Baghdad became the seat of the caliph and the main center of Islamic civilization. Islam brought great prosperity to Iraq during this period, thus increasing the demand for foreign goods. As a result, gulf merchants roamed farther and farther afield. By the year 1000, they were traveling regularly to China and beyond, and their trading efforts were instrumental in spreading Islam, first to India and then to Indonesia and Malaysia.

The Islam they spread, however, was often sectarian. Eastern Arabia was a center for both Kharijites and Shia; in the Middle Ages, the Ismaili Shia faith constituted a particularly powerful force in the gulf. Ismailis originated in Iraq, but many moved to the gulf in the ninth century to escape the Sunni authorities. Whereas the imam was central to the Ismaili tradition, the group also recognized what they referred to as “missionaries”

(*dua*; sing., *dai*), figures who spoke for the imam and played major political roles. One of these missionaries was Hamdan Qarmat, who sent a group from Iraq to Bahrain in the ninth century to establish an Ismaili community. From their base in Bahrain, Qarmat's followers, who became known as Qarmatians, sent emissaries throughout the Muslim world.

The Qarmatians are known for their attacks on their opponents, including raids on Baghdad and the sack of Mecca and Medina in 930. For much of the tenth century, the Ismailis of Bahrain were the most powerful force in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. They controlled the coast of Oman and collected tribute from the caliph in Baghdad as well as from a rival Ismaili imam in Cairo, whom they did not recognize.

By the eleventh century, Ismaili power had waned. The Qarmatians succumbed to the same forces that had earlier threatened centers on the gulf coast—the ambitions of strong leaders in Mesopotamia or Persia and the incursion of tribes from the interior. In 985 armies of the Buyids, a Persian dynasty, drove the Ismailis out of Iraq, and in 988 Arab tribes drove the Ismailis out of Al Ahsa, an oasis they controlled in eastern Arabia.

Thereafter, Ismaili presence in the gulf faded, and in the twentieth century the sect virtually disappeared.

Ibadis figured less prominently than the Shia in the spread of Islam. A stable community, the Ibadi sect's large following in Oman has helped to distinguish Oman from its gulf neighbors. Ibadis originated in Iraq, but in the early eighth century, when the caliph's representative began to suppress the Ibadis, many left the area.

Their leader at the time, Jabir ibn Zayd, had come to Iraq from Oman, so he returned there. Jabir ibn Zayd's presence in Oman strengthened the existing Ibadi communities; in less than a century, the sect took over the country from the Sunni garrison that ruled it in the caliph's name. Their leader, Al Julanda ibn Masud, became the Ibadi imam of Oman.

In the Ibadi tradition, imams are elected by a council of religious scholars, who select the leader that can best defend the community militarily and rule it according to religious principles. Whereas Sunnis and Shia traditionally have focused on a single leader, referred to as caliph or imam, Ibadis permit regions to have their own imams. For instance, there have been concurrent Ibadi imams in Iraq, Oman, and North Africa.

Because of the strong sense of community among Ibadis, which resembles tribal feelings of community, they have predominated in the interior of Oman and to a lesser degree along the coast. In 752, for example, a new line of Sunni caliphs in Baghdad conquered Oman and killed the Ibadi imam, Al Julanda. Other Ibadi imams arose and reestablished the tradition in the interior, but extending their rule to the coastal trading cities met opposition. The inland empires of Persia and Iraq depended on customs duties from East–West trade, much of which passed by Oman. Accordingly, the caliph and his successors could not allow the regional coastal cities out of their control.

As a result, Oman acquired a dual nature. Ibadi leaders usually controlled the mountainous interior while, for

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the most part, foreign powers controlled the coast. People in the coastal cities have often been foreigners or have had considerable contact with foreigners because of trade. Coastal Omanis have profited from their involvement with outsiders, whereas Omanis in the interior have tended to reject the foreign presence as an intrusion into the small, tightly knit Ibadi community. Ibadi Islam has thus preserved some of the hostility toward outsiders that was a hallmark of the early Kharijites.

While the imam concerned himself with the interior, the Omani coast remained under the control of Persian rulers. The Buyids in the late tenth century eventually extended their influence down the gulf as far as Oman.

In the 1220s and 1230s, another group, the Zangids—based in Mosul, Iraq—sent troops to the Omani coast; around 1500 the Safavids, an Iranian dynasty, pushed into the gulf as well. The Safavids followed the Twelver Shia tradition and imposed Shia beliefs on those under their rule. Thus, Twelver communities were established in Bahrain and to a lesser extent in Kuwait.

Oman's geographic location gave it access not only to the Red Sea trade but also to ships skirting the coast of Africa. By the end of the fifteenth century, however, a Persian ruler, the shaykh of Hormuz, profited most from this trade. The shaykh controlled the Persian port that lay directly across the gulf from Oman, and he collected customs duties in the busy Omani ports of Qalhat and Muscat. Ibadi imams continued to rule in the interior, but until Europeans entered the region in the sixteenth century, Ibadi rulers were unable to reclaim the coastal cities from the Iranians.

## THE AGE OF COLONIALISM

*Boys playing on cannon at Az Zubarah fort, Qatar Courtesy Anthony Toth Restored ancient fort at Az Zubarah, Qatar; similar forts exist in most Persian Gulf states.*

Courtesy Anthony Toth During the Middle Ages, Muslim countries of the Middle East controlled East–West trade. However, control changed in the fifteenth century. The Portuguese, who were building ships with deep hulls that remained stable in high seas, were thus able to make longer voyages. They pushed farther and farther down the west coast of Africa until they found their way around the southern tip of the continent and made contact with Muslim cities on the other side. In East Africa, the Portuguese enlisted Arab navigators there to take them across to India, where they eventually set themselves up in Calicut on the Malabar Coast in the southwestern part of the country.

Once in India, the Portuguese used their superior ships to transport goods around Africa instead of using the Red Sea route, thus eliminating the middlemen in Egypt. The Portuguese then extended their control to the local trade that crossed the Arabian Sea, capturing coastal cities in Oman and Iran and setting up forts and customs houses on both coasts to collect duty. The Portuguese allowed local rulers to remain in control but collected tribute from them in exchange for that privilege, thus increasing Portuguese revenues.

The ruler most affected by the rise of Portuguese power was the Safavid shah of Iran, Abbas I (1587–1629).

During the time the shaykh of Hormuz possessed effective control over gulf ports, he continued to pay lip service and tribute to the Safavid shah. When the Portuguese arrived, they forced the shaykh to pay tribute to them. The shah could do little because Iran was too weak to challenge the Portuguese. For that the shah required another European power; he therefore invited the British and the Dutch to drive the Portuguese out of the gulf, in return for half the revenues from Iranian ports.

Both countries responded to the shah's offer, but it was the British who proved the most helpful. In 1622 the British, along with some of the shah's forces, attacked Hormuz and drove the Portuguese out of their trading center there. Initially, the Dutch cooperated with the British, but the two European powers eventually became rivals for access to the Iranian market. The British won, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century Britain had become the major power in the gulf.

Struggles between Iranians and Europeans contributed to a power vacuum along the coast of Oman. The British attacks on the Portuguese coincided with the rise of the Yarubid line of Ibadi imams in the interior of Oman. The Yarubid took advantage of Portuguese preoccupation with naval battles on the Iranian side of the gulf and conquered the coastal cities of Oman around 1650. The imams moved into the old Portuguese stronghold of Muscat and so brought the Omani coast and interior under unified Ibadi control for the first time in almost 1,000 years.

A battle over imamate succession in the early eighteenth century, however, weakened Yarubid rule. Between the 1730s and the 1750s, the various parties began to solicit support from outside powers. The Yarubid family eventually called in an Iranian army, which reestablished Iranian influence on the Omani coast. But this time the Iranian hold on Oman was short-lived. In 1742 the Al Said, an Ibadi family from one of the coastal cities, convinced the local population to help it expel the Iranians; this put the leader, Ahmad ibn Said Al Said, in control of the Omani coast. His success sufficiently impressed the Ibadi leaders so that they made him imam several years later.

The title of imam gave Ahmad ibn Said control over all of Oman, and under him and his successors the country prospered for more than a century. The Omanis extended their influence into the interior and into part of the present-day United Arab Emirates (UAE), consisting of the states of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Al Fujayrah, Dubayy, Ras al Khaymah, Sharjah, and Umm al Qaywayn. They also collected tribute from as far away as present-day Bahrain and Iraq. The Omanis conquered the Dhofar region, which is part of present-day Oman but was not historically part of the region of Oman.

Oman also strengthened its hold on the Muslim cities of East Africa. These cities had been established by Omani traders in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but their connection to Oman had grown somewhat tenuous.

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At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the Al Said reasserted Omani authority in the area. Said ibn Sultan (1806–65) encouraged Omanis to settle in Zanzibar, an island off the African coast that had retained strong connections with Oman and, from Zanzibar, sent expeditions to take over several cities on the mainland (see *Historical Patterns of Governance*, ch. 6).

Although Ahmad ibn Said had succeeded in uniting Oman under an Ibadi imamate, the religious nature of his family's authority did not last long. His son, Said ibn Ahmad Al Said, was elected to the imamate after him, but no other family member won the official approval of the religious establishment. As a result, the Al Said called themselves *sultans*, a secular title having none of the religious associations of imam. They further distanced themselves from Ibadi traditions by moving their capital from Ar Rustaq, a traditional Ibadi center in the interior, to the trading center of Muscat. As a result of the move, the dichotomy between coast and interior that had traditionally split Oman was reinstated.

The relationship between coast and interior was becoming a major feature within the gulf. In the eighteenth century, tribes from the interior increasingly began to move and settle into the coastal centers. Although the economy on the Arab side of the gulf did not match past prosperity, coastal conditions remained better than those in central Arabia. Limited agriculture existed, and the gulf waters were the site of rich oyster beds for harvesting pearls. The area's easy access to India, a major market for pearls, made the pearling industry particularly lucrative, and this drew the attention of tribes in the interior. The tribal migrations that occurred around 1800 put in place the tribes and clans that in 1993 controlled Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE.

The Bani Utub moved from central Arabia into the northern gulf in the early 1800s, and one of its families, the Al Sabah, established itself as leaders of present-day Kuwait; another family, the Al Khalifa, established itself in present-day Bahrain. In the early 1800s, a number of other tribes were living along the gulf. Thus, Al Sabah and Al Khalifa control meant that these families ruled loosely over other tribes. Before taking Bahrain, the Al Khalifa had first established a settlement across the water on the peninsula that is present-day Qatar.

Although the Al Khalifa were successful in taking Bahrain, they were unable to hold Qatar. They lost the peninsula to the Al Thani, the leading family from another tribe that, like the Bani Utub, had recently moved into the area.

The exact origins of the Al Thani are unknown, but they were already in Qatar when the Al Khalifa came. The origins of the Bani Yas and the Qawasim tribes that rule in the present-day UAE are somewhat clearer. The Bani Yas originated in central Arabia and probably established themselves on the coast at Abu Dhabi around 1700; they later extended their influence to Dubayy. Historical evidence indicates that the Qawasim lived along the gulf during the pre-Islamic period and engaged in trade, pearling, and piracy.

## WAHHABI ISLAM AND THE GULF

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a turbulent time for Arabia in general and for the gulf in particular. To the southeast, the Al Said of Oman were extending their influence northward, and from Iraq the Ottoman Turks were extending their influence southward. From the east, both the Iranians and the British were becoming increasingly involved in Arab affairs.

The most significant development in the region, however, was the Wahhabi movement. The name *Wahhabi* derived from Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab, who died in 1792. He grew up in an oasis town in central Arabia where he studied Hanbali law, usually considered the strictest of Islamic legal schools, with his grandfather. While still a young man, he left home and continued his studies in Medina and then in Iraq and Iran.

When he returned from Iran to Arabia in the late 1730s, he attacked as idolatry many of the customs followed by tribes in the area who venerated rocks and trees. He extended his criticism to practices of the Twelver Shia, such as veneration of the tombs of holy men. He focused on the central Muslim principle that there is only one God and that this God does not share his divinity with anyone. From this principle, his students began to refer to themselves as *muwahhidun* (sing., *muwahhid*), or “unitarians.” Their detractors referred to them as “Wahhabis.”

Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab considered himself a reformer and looked for a political figure to give his ideas a wider audience. He found this person in Muhammad ibn Saud, the amir (see Glossary) of Ad Diriyah, a small town near Riyadh. In 1744 the two swore a traditional Muslim pledge in which they promised to work together to establish a new state (which later became present-day Saudi Arabia) based on Islamic principles.

The limited but successful military campaigns of Muhammad ibn Saud caused Arabs from all over the peninsula to feel the impact of Wahhabi ideas.

The Wahhabis became known for a fanaticism similar to that of the early Kharijites. This fanaticism helped to intensify conflicts in the gulf. Whereas tribes from the interior had always raided settled communities along the coast, the Wahhabi faith provided them with a justification for continuing these incursions to spread true Islam. Accordingly, in the nineteenth century Wahhabi tribes, under the leadership of the Al Saud, moved at various times against Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman. In Oman, the Wahhabi faith created internal dissension as well as an external menace because it proved popular with some of the Ibadi tribes in the Omani interior.

Wahhabi thought has had a special impact on the history of Qatar. Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab's ideas proved popular among many of the peninsula tribes, including the Al Thani clan, before the Al Khalifa attempted to take over the area from Bahrain at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As a result, Wahhabi beliefs motivated Al Thani efforts to resist the attempt of the Al Khalifa, who rejected Wahhabism, to gain control of the peninsula. In the early 1990s, Wahhabism distinguished Qatar religiously from its neighbors.

Wahhabi fervor was also significant in the history of the present-day UAE. The Qawasim tribes that had controlled the area since the eighteenth century adapted Wahhabi ideas and transferred the movement's religious enthusiasm to the piracy in which they had traditionally engaged. Whereas Wahhabi thought opposed all that was not orthodox in Islam, it particularly opposed non-Muslim elements such as the increasing European presence in the Persian Gulf.

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## TREATIES WITH THE BRITISH

The increased European presence resulted in large part from widespread Qawasim piracy in the early nineteenth century. The British asked the sultan in Oman, to whom the pirates owed nominal allegiance, to end it. When the sultan proved unable, British ships launched attacks on Qawasim strongholds in the present-day UAE as early as 1809; the navy did not succeed in controlling the situation until 1819. In that year, the British sent a fleet from India that destroyed the pirates' main base at Ras al Khaymah, a Qawasim port at the southern end of the gulf. From Ras al Khaymah, the British fleet destroyed Qawasim ships along both sides of the gulf.

The British had no desire to take over the desolate areas along the gulf; they only wished to secure the area so that it would not pose a threat to shipping to and from their possessions in India. Knowing that the sultan in Oman could not be relied upon to control the pirates, the British decided to leave in power those tribal leaders who had not been conspicuously involved with piracy; they concluded a series of treaties in which those leaders promised to suppress all piracy.

As a result of these truces, the Arab side of the gulf came to be known as the "trucial coast." This area had previously been under the nominal control of the sultan in Oman, although the trucial coast tribes were not part of the Ibadi imamate. The area has also been referred to as "trucial Oman" to distinguish it from the part of Oman under the sultan that was not bound by treaty obligation.

In 1820 the British seemed primarily interested in controlling the Qawasim, whose main centers were Ras al Khaymah, Ajman, and Sharjah, which were all small ports along the southeastern gulf coast. The original treaties, however, also involved Dubayy and Bahrain. Although Dubayy and Bahrain were not pirate centers, they represented entrepôts where pirates could sell captured goods and buy supplies. The inclusion of these ports brought two other extended families, the Bani Yas and the Al Khalifa, into the trucial system.

During the next 100 years, the British signed a series of treaties having wide-ranging provisions with other tribes in the gulf. As a result, by the end of World War I, leaders from Oman to Iraq had essentially yielded control of their foreign relations to Britain. Abu Dhabi entered into arrangements similar to those of Dubayy and Bahrain in 1835, Kuwait in 1899, and Qatar in 1916. The treaty whose terms convey the most representative sense of the relationship between Britain and the gulf states was the Exclusive Agreement of 1882. This text specified that the signatory gulf states (members of the present-day UAE) could not make any international agreements or host any foreign agent without British consent.

Because of these concessions, gulf leaders recognized the need for Britain to protect them from their more powerful neighbors. The main threat came from the Al Saud in central Arabia. Although the Turks had defeated the first Wahhabi empire of the Al Saud around 1820, the family rose again about thirty years later; it threatened not only the Qawasim, who by this time had largely abandoned Wahhabi Islam, but also the Al Khalifa in Bahrain and the Ibadi sultan in Oman. In the early 1900s, the Al Saud also threatened Qatar despite its Wahhabi rulers. Only with British assistance could the Al Thani and other area rulers retain their authority.

The Al Saud were not the only threat. Despite its treaty agreement with Britain, Bahrain on several occasions has claimed Qatar because of the Al Khalifa involvement on the peninsula. The Omanis and Iranians have also claimed Bahrain because both have held the island at various times. Furthermore, the Ottomans claimed Bahrain occasionally and tried throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century to establish their authority in Kuwait and Qatar.

The British wished to maintain security on the route from Europe to India so that merchants could safely send goods between India and the gulf. Britain also sought to exclude the influence in the area of other powers, such as Turkey and France.

East-West trade through the Persian Gulf dried up in the nineteenth century after the opening of the Suez Canal, which provided a direct route to the Mediterranean Sea. Gulf merchants continued to earn substantial income from the slave trade, but international pressure, mostly from Britain, forced them to abandon this by 1900. Thereafter, the region continued to profit from the gulf pearl beds, but this industry declined in the 1930s as a result of the world depression, which reduced demand, and as a result of the Japanese development of a cheaper



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way to “breed” pearls, or make cultured pearls.

Oman, which was technically cut off from the gulf after 1820 when it lost the southern portion of the present-day UAE, fared little better during the late nineteenth century. The fifth sultan in the Al Said line, Said ibn Sultan, ruled for almost the entire first half of the nineteenth century, increasing Omani influence and revenue tremendously. The resulting prosperity, however, was short-lived. The Omani fleet could not compete with the more technologically advanced European ships; thus the sultan gradually lost much of the income he had earned from customs duties on the Indian trade. At the same time, the increasing pressure to restrict the slave trade eliminated much of the revenue the Omanis had earned from East Africa.

The final blow to Oman's economic and political viability came after the death of Said ibn Sultan. When the Al Said could not agree on a successor, the British acted. They divided the Al Said holdings and gave Oman proper to one of the claimants to the throne and awarded Omani possessions in East Africa to another. Thus, after 1856, there were two Al Said rulers. The one in Muscat, with a weakened merchant fleet and no East African revenues, was left with little support. Because of the different centers of power, the country became popularly known as Muscat and Oman.

The sultan's financial weakness contributed to his difficulty in maintaining his hold on the interior. The devout Ibadi population of the interior had long resented the more secular orientation of the coastal centers. As the sultan grew weaker, groups in the interior raised revolts against him on several occasions. Only with British help could the sultan remain in control, and his growing dependence on outsiders caused his relations with the Ibadi population to deteriorate. Whereas other gulf rulers used the British to protect them from their more powerful neighbors, the sultan needed the British to protect him from his subjects.

## DISCOVERY OF OIL

At the end of World War I, the Arab states of the gulf were weak, with faltering economies and with local rulers who maintained their autonomy only with British assistance. The rulers controlled mainly the small port cities and some of the hinterland. The sultan in Oman claimed a somewhat larger area, but resistance to his rule made it difficult for him to exert his authority much beyond Muscat.

The discovery of oil in the region changed all this. Oil was first discovered in Iran, and by 1911 a British concern, the Anglo–Persian Oil Company (APOC), was producing oil in Iran. The British found oil in Iraq after World War I. In 1932 Standard Oil Company of California (Socal) discovered oil in commercial quantities in Bahrain. Socal then obtained a concession in Saudi Arabia in 1933 and discovered oil in commercial quantities in 1938.

A flurry of oil exploration activity occurred in the gulf in the 1930s with the United States and Britain competing with one another for oil concessions. One reason for the increased activity was that in 1932 the new Iranian government of Reza Shah Pahlavi revoked APOC's concession. Although the shah and the British later agreed on new terms, the threat of losing Iranian oil convinced the British in particular that they must find other sources. The small states of the Persian Gulf were a natural place to look. Geological conditions were similar to those in Iran, and, because of treaties signed between 1820 and 1920, the British had substantial influence and could restrict foreign access.

Oil exploration did not mean immediate wealth for Arab rulers of the area. Although the oil companies struck large deposits of oil in Bahrain almost immediately, it took longer in other countries to locate finds of commercial size. Oman, for instance, was unable to export oil until 1967. World War II delayed development of whatever fields had been discovered in the 1930s; so it was not until the 1950s that countries still technically dependent on Britain for their security began to earn large incomes. The oil fields in Kuwait were developed the fastest, and by 1953 that nation had become the largest oil producer in the gulf. Considerably smaller fields in Qatar came onstream in commercial quantities in the 1950s, and Abu Dhabi began to export offshore oil in 1962. Dubayy began to profit from offshore oil deposits in the late 1960s.

Until the 1970s, foreign companies owned and managed the gulf oil industry. In most cases, European– and United States–based concerns formed subsidiaries to work in specific countries, and these subsidiaries paid fees to the local rulers, first for the right to explore for oil and later for the right to export the oil. When the first arrangements were made, local rulers had a weak bargaining position because they had few other sources of income and were eager to get revenues from the oil companies as fast as possible. Moreover, in 1930 no one knew the size of gulf oil reserves.

As production increased and the extent of oil deposits became known, indigenous rulers improved their terms.

In the 1950s, rulers routinely demanded an equal share of oil company profits in addition to a royalty fee. By the 1970s, most of the gulf countries, which by then were independent of British control, bought major shares in the subsidiary companies that worked within their borders. By the early 1990s, many of these subsidiaries had become completely state–owned concerns. They continued to employ Western experts at the highest decisionmaking levels, but the local government had ultimate responsibility and profits.

## INDEPENDENCE

With the exception of Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the Arab coast of the gulf was ruled by ten families: in Kuwait the Al Sabah; in Bahrain the Al Khalifa; in Qatar the Al Thani; in the present-day UAE the Al Nuhayyan in Abu Dhabi, the Al Nuaimi in Ajman, the Al Sharqi in Al Fujayrah, the Al Maktum in Dubayy, the Al Qasimi in Ras al Khaymah and Sharjah, and the Al Mualla in Umm al Qaywayn; and the Al Said in present-day Oman. These families owed their positions to tribal leadership; it was on this traditional basis that the British had negotiated treaties with their leaders in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

A major provision of these treaties was the recognition of sovereignty. The British were concerned that rulers of the weaker gulf families would yield some of their territory under pressure from more powerful groups, such as the Al Saud or the Ottomans. Accordingly, the treaties signed between 1820 and 1916 recognized the sovereignty of these rulers within certain borders and specified that these borders could not be changed without British consent. Such arrangements helped to put tribal alliances into more concrete terms of landownership. This meant that the Al Nuhayyan of Abu Dhabi, for example, not only commanded the respect of tribes in the hinterland but also owned, as it were, the land that those tribes used—in this case, about 72,000 square kilometers of Arabia.

Controlling, or owning, land became more important with the discovery of oil. When oil companies came to explore for oil, they looked for the “owner” of the land; in accordance with British treaties, they went to the area's leading families and agreed to pay fees to the heads of these families. As oil revenues increased, the leaders became rich. Although the leaders spent much of their new wealth on themselves, they also distributed it in the area they controlled according to traditional methods, which initially consisted mostly of largesse:

gifts for friends and food for whomever needed it. As time passed, the form of largesse became more sophisticated and included, for example, the construction of schools, hospitals, and roads to connect principal cities to towns in the interior.

Oil revenues did not change traditional tribal ideas about leadership. New money, however, increased the influence of area leaders by giving them more resources to distribute. Because of oil exploration, tribal boundaries became clearer, and areas were defined more precisely. Distinctions among tribes also became more evident. A new sense of identity appeared in gulf shaykhdoms and aroused a growing expectation that they should rule themselves. To do this, shaykhs had to cut themselves off from British control and protection.

By the early 1960s, this was something to which the British had little objection. India and Pakistan won their independence in 1947; this meant that Britain no longer had to worry about protecting the western flank of the subcontinent. Britain was also burdened by the tremendous sacrifices it made during World War II and could not be as globally involved as it had been before the war. Therefore, Britain yielded many of its strategic responsibilities to the United States in the postwar period or gave them up entirely. However, the British were bound to the gulf by treaties and so remained in the region, but it was clear by the 1960s that they sought to leave the gulf.

Kuwait was the first state to terminate the agreement connecting it with Britain. Oil production in Kuwait had developed more quickly than in neighboring states; as a result, Kuwaitis were better prepared for independence. They declared independence in 1961 but ran into immediate trouble when Iraq claimed the territory. The Iraqis argued that the British had recognized Ottoman sovereignty over Kuwait before World War I and, because the Ottomans had claimed to rule Kuwait from what was then the province of Iraq, the territory should belong to Iraq.

The British immediately sent troops to Kuwait to deter any Iraqi invasion. British and Kuwaiti positions were supported by the newly formed League of Arab States (Arab League), which recognized the new state and sent troops to Kuwait. The Arab League move left the Iraqis isolated and somewhat intimidated. Accordingly, when a new Iraqi government came to power in 1963, one of its first steps was to give up its claim and recognize the independence of Kuwait.

The experience of Kuwait may have increased the anxiety of other gulf leaders about declaring their independence. Even into the 1970s, Iran and Saudi Arabia continued to make claims on territory in Bahrain and the UAE, although by the end of 1971 those states were independent, and nothing came of those claims.

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Gulf leaders also faced uncertainty about the form their state should take. Should they all, with the exception of Oman whose situation was different in that its treaty relationship with Britain did not guarantee its borders as did treaties of the other gulf states, band together in the largest entity possible? Or should they break up into nine separate states, the smallest of which had little territory, few people, and no oil?

British action forced gulf leaders to decide. Because of domestic financial concerns, Britain decided in the late 1960s to eliminate its military commitments east of Suez. As a result, the gulf shaykhs held a number of meetings to discuss independence. Initially, leaders considered a state that would include all nine shaykhdoms; Qatar had even drawn up a constitution to this effect. In the end, however, so large a federation proved unworkable.

An obstacle to creating a “superstate” was the status of Bahrain, which had been occupied by Iran at various times. The shah of Iran argued that he had a stronger claim to the island than the Al Khalifa, who had only come to Bahrain in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the shah indicated that Iran would not accept a federation of Arab states that included Bahrain.

In the end, the United Nations (UN) considered the issue of Bahrain; it decided to deny the Iranian claim to the island and to allow the Bahrainis to form an independent state. Bahrain was better suited to independence than some of the other shaykhdoms because the island had been a center of British administration and had a more developed infrastructure and education system than its neighbors. Ironically, the greater British presence on Bahrain made residents more resentful of treaty ties to Britain. Bahrain was the only place in the gulf where demonstrations against Britain occurred.

Backed by the UN decision, Bahrain declared its independence on August 15, 1971. On September 3, 1971, Qatar followed, removing another state from any potential federation. Although Qatar had minimal contact with Britain, it was well suited to independence because it had a history of support from the Al Saud that went back to the beginnings of the Wahhabi state. Accordingly, at independence, Qatar could expect continued support from Saudi Arabia. It could also anticipate substantial oil revenues that had been increasing since the 1950s.

The same was not true for the other gulf states. The five southern shaykhdoms—Ajman, Al Fujayrah, Ras al Khaymah, Sharjah, and Umm al Qaywayn—had little oil in their territory and so could not afford self-sufficiency as countries. Although substantial deposits had been discovered in Abu Dhabi and Dubayy, these two states preferred the security of a confederation rather than independence. Abu Dhabi, for example, had an outstanding border dispute with Saudi Arabia and a history of poor relations with that country because of Abu Dhabi's opposition to Wahhabi Islam. Abu Dhabi might have protected itself by forming a federation with the five southern shaykhdoms, but this would not have suited Dubayy. Although Dubayy had oil of its own, its rulers, the Al Maktum, had a history of hostility toward their relatives in Abu Dhabi, the Al Nuhayyan, from whom they split in the early nineteenth century. The Al Maktum would not have liked the Al Nuhayyan to dominate a confederation of gulf leaders while they were isolated in Dubayy.

Powers beyond the gulf coast also had an interest in the state to be formed. The Saudis no longer sought to control the gulf coast, but they remained concerned about stability on the eastern border. The British and other oil-consuming countries in the West were similarly concerned, and all parties believed that the largest state would also be the most stable. Accordingly, many forces were applying pressure in 1970 to convince the seven shaykhs to stay together.

Thus, in 1971 soon after Qatar became independent, the remaining shaykhs, with the exception of the Al Qasimi in Ras al Khaymah, took the preliminary constitution that Qatar had originally drawn up for a nine-member confederation and adapted it to a six-member body. On December 2, 1971, one day after the British officially withdrew, these six shaykhdoms declared themselves a sovereign state.

Ras al Khaymah originally refused to join the confederation. The Al Qasimi, who ruled the area, claimed a number of islands and oil fields within the gulf to which Iran laid claim as well. In the negotiations to form the UAE, the Al Qasimi sought support for their claims from Arab states on the peninsula as well as from some Western powers. When their efforts proved unsuccessful, the Al Qasimi pulled out of the negotiations.

They quickly realized, however, that they could not exist on their own and joined the union in February 1972.

Oman was never considered a possible confederation member. Always geographically separate from its neighbors to the north, Oman had never entered into the agreements with Britain that governed other gulf rulers. The British had been closely involved in Oman since the middle of the nineteenth century, but they were under no official obligation to defend it.

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The issue in Oman was one of internal unity rather than of sovereignty over foreign affairs. The historical split between coast and interior had continued through the second half of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth. In 1920 the Al Said sultan, Taimur ibn Faisal, came to terms with this split by granting limited sovereignty to the tribes of the interior. Because of ambiguous language, the peoples of the interior believed that the treaty cut them off from the Al Said; the Al Said, however, never gave up their claim to all of Oman.

The dispute between the two groups was exacerbated by the exploration for oil, which began in Oman in 1924. The oil fields lay in the interior, and the oil companies negotiated for access to them with the Al Said in Muscat. This Al Said sultan gladly sold them rights to the Omani oil fields, although the tribes of the interior claimed sovereignty over the area. When the oil men went inland to explore, they were attacked by the tribes, whom the sultan considered to be rebels, leading the oil companies to complain to the British government.

Their complaints encouraged the British to continue their aid to the sultan, hoping that he would pacify the area and ensure Western access to Omani oil.

The sultan was eventually successful. In 1957 forces loyal to Said ibn Taimur captured the town of Nazwah, which the Al Said had not controlled since the nineteenth century. In 1958 the sultan withdrew to his palace in the coastal city of Salalah in Dhofar, a southern province that the Al Said had annexed in the nineteenth century, and took little interest in maintaining stability in the country. While keeping his military relationship with the British, he restricted Oman's contact with the rest of the world, discouraged development, and prohibited political reform.

In the end, the Al Said control over a united Oman survived, but Said ibn Taimur did not. Although the sultan had partially reestablished his authority in the Omani interior, he was unable to handle the increasing complexity of domestic politics. By the 1960s, Omani affairs had become international issues. Western oil companies sought to work in the interior of the country, and foreign governments, such as the Marxist state of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, were sending arms to the rebels in Dhofar.

The Al Said hold over the region remained problematic, however, and in 1964 another rebellion arose, this time in Dhofar. The Dhofar rebellion, which was not brought under control until 1976, obliged the sultan to seek foreign military assistance; therefore, British forces, particularly the air force, resumed action in the country. The rebels pointed to British involvement as an indication of the sultan's illegitimacy and brought their case to the UN, which eventually censured Britain for its continuing involvement in Oman.

Said ibn Taimur's policies frustrated many, not only in Oman but also in Britain, whose citizens were heavily involved in the sultan's military and intelligence apparatus. By 1970 these elements decided they could bear with the situation no longer; a coalition of Omani military and civilian forces, as well as British forces, attacked the palace and forced Said ibn Taimur to abdicate. They replaced him with his son, Qabus ibn Said Al Said, who had played no role in Said ibn Taimur's government. The sultan had actually locked his son in the palace for fear that Qabus ibn Said, who had been educated in Britain, would challenge his archconservative policies.

On his release, Qabus ibn Said consolidated the sultanate's hold over the interior and then solicited regional rather than British help to put down the rebellion in Dhofar. Other Arab leaders, as well as the shah of Iran, sent troops to Oman in response to Qabus ibn Said's requests; with the help of this coalition, by 1976 the sultan ended the Dhofar rebellion.

Qabus ibn Said was not an Ibadi imam as the first rulers in his line had been, but in 1970 this was less important than it had been in earlier times. Only about 60 percent of Oman's population was Ibadi, concentrated in the northern mountains. Furthermore, the province of Dhofar had a relatively short history of association with the rest of Oman.

## DEVELOPMENTS SINCE INDEPENDENCE

Since the early 1970s, increased oil production and regional instability have dominated events in the Persian Gulf. Revenues from the oil industry grew dramatically after oil producers raised their prices unilaterally in 1973; as a result, funds available to gulf rulers increased. Governments began massive development projects that brought rapid material and social change. As of 1993, the turmoil that these changes caused had not yet stabilized. Those states that had benefited longest from oil money, such as Kuwait and Bahrain, made the greatest progress in adjusting to the new oil wealth. Oman—which has used its oil reserves only since the early 1970s and which had suffered under the repressive policies of Said ibn Taimur—saw substantially less progress.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 challenged gulf stability. Many gulf leaders agreed with some of the social goals of the revolution and its efforts to tie Iran more firmly to its Islamic roots. But Iran's desire to spread the movement beyond its borders clearly threatened gulf leaders. Furthermore, several gulf states have significant Shia or Iranian minorities (Bahrain has a Shia majority although the ruling family is Sunni), and gulf rulers feared that Iran would use ethnic or sectarian loyalties to stir up such minorities.

As of 1993, however, Shia of the western gulf had not responded enthusiastically to the Iranian call. Kuwait and Bahrain, which have the largest Shia populations, experienced some limited pro-Iranian demonstrations in 1979. In general, however, Shia in both these states feel that they have more to gain by supporting the existing regimes than by supporting the convulsive changes that have taken place in Iran.

Iran was perhaps more threatening to gulf stability because of its strong anti-Western stance in world and in regional politics. The new Iranian position stood in stark contrast to the gulf amirs' long history of involvement with the British and the close ties to the West that the oil industry entailed. Thus, the Iranian political worldview was one to which rulers in the gulf states could not subscribe.

In 1980 the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War made the Iranian threat more concrete. For the first six years of the conflict, the gulf states sought to mediate between the two countries and to remain neutral. Their position changed, however, in 1986, when fighter aircraft attacked tankers belonging to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Whether Iran or Iraq was responsible for the first attacks remains uncertain, but the gulf states decided to blame the Iranians and began to take Iraq's side in the war. Iran responded by opening up a limited secret campaign against the gulf states. A number of explosions occurred in Kuwait and Bahrain for which many believed Iran was responsible. Such attacks made all the states in the region more concerned about external threats.

In 1981, partly in response to these concerns, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, and the UAE formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (see Collective Security under the Gulf Cooperation Council, ch. 7). The goal of the GCC has been to provide for regional defense and to coordinate policy on trade and economic issues. Although the GCC has taken steps to increase the military capabilities of various members, the region has remained dependent to a great extent on the protection of the Western powers. For instance, when the Iran-Iraq War made the gulf unsafe for oil tankers in the late 1980s, it was ships from Europe and the United States that protected shipping and cleared the area of mines.

Whereas broader, regional alliances in the gulf have changed dramatically since the 1970s, individual political systems have remained relatively unchanged. All the gulf countries grant ultimate power to a single family, whose leading member rules as amir, but they also provide for an advisory body whose members are drawn from outside the royal family. Kuwait and Bahrain have gone beyond this and have set up separate parliaments with limited power to draft legislation. However, the Al Sabah and the Al Khalifa have sometimes dissolved these bodies; thus, it remains uncertain whether parliaments will become a permanent feature of gulf politics.

The ruling families' hold on power has been challenged at various times. More problematic is the manner in which the gulf states have distributed individual citizenship. Since the 1930s, the population has increased dramatically because of the oil boom, but the number of citizens has not increased correspondingly. Most of the gulf states place restrictions on citizenship, requiring that an individual trace his or her roots in the country to before 1930. Accordingly, the millions of people that have poured into the region since the 1940s have only

## Oman, a country study

partial legal status and lack political rights in the countries in which they reside. Although they may have lived there for two generations, they can be asked to leave at any time.

## TRIBAL NATURE OF GULF SOCIETY

Gulf states have not granted citizenship freely for two reasons. First, they are reluctant to share wealth with recent arrivals; second, the tribal nature of gulf society does not admit new members easily. A tribe usually traces its lineage to a particular eponymous ancestor. The standard Arabic reference to tribe is *bani fulan*, or “the sons [*bani*] of so—and– so.” The Bani al Murrah in Saudi Arabia, for example, trace their line back to a figure named Murrah, who lived some time before the Prophet.

Over a period of 1,500 years, the sons of Murrah, or any other ancient figure, have tended to become numerous, making further distinctions necessary. Accordingly, tribes are divided into clans and then into households (*fukhud*; sing., *fakhd*). Households include groups of single families. Together this extended group of families calls itself a tribe. Each tribe has certain characteristics, such as different speech, dress, and customs. But since the 1950s, speech has become less of a distinguishing factor because of the fluidity of gulf society.

The name of a tribe may also reflect some past event. For example, the name *Utub*—the tribe to which the Al Sabah of Kuwait and the Al Khalifa of Bahrain belong—comes from the Arabic word for wander (*atab*). In 1744 the tribe “wandered” out of the desert and into the gulf area and became the Utub.

Two of the most important tribal groups in Arabia are the Qahtan and the Adnan, whose roots stem from the belief that tribes in the north of the peninsula were descended from Adnan, one of Ismail's sons, and that tribes in the south were descended from Qahtan, one of Noah's sons. People in the gulf often attribute the structure of tribal alliances to this north–south distinction, and many still classify their tribes as Adnani or Qahtani.

Historically, the tribal nature of society has occasioned petty warfare in the gulf. Arab tribes have attacked each other since before Islam, but tribal customs have prevented these attacks from turning into random violence. Clans, however, have defected from their tribe and made alliances with other tribes, and tribes have sometimes banded together to form a more powerful group.

Moreover, although some tribes may trace their lineage to some heroic figure, the real identity of the tribe lies in the people that currently compose it. In the tribe, an individual bases his or her sense of self–esteem on the honor of the tribe as a whole.

In Arabia it was impossible to survive in the desert alone, and so families banded together to find water and move their flocks to new grazing lands. Once they established the necessary resources through collective effort, they guarded them jealously and refused to share them with outsiders. It therefore became necessary to set up boundaries between members of the group or between the tribe and outsiders. The tribe worked to restrict membership in order to preserve its sense of solidarity. As a result, birth into the right family tended to be the only way to become a member of a tribe. Marriage sometimes extended the tribal line beyond blood lines, but, in general, people tended to marry within the tribe and only went outside to establish alliances with other tribes.

The emphasis on the group precluded the rise of a strong leader. Accordingly, tribal leadership is often described as “the first among equals,” suggesting a collective leadership in which one among a number of leaders is recognized as the most authoritative. This principal leader must continue to consult with his lesser colleagues and so rules by consensus.

An extension of this pattern of leadership is the concept of leading families within the tribe. Although tribalism tends to discourage inherited authority, traditions of leadership are nevertheless passed down, and tribes expect that certain families will furnish them with leaders generation after generation. This pattern occurred when tribes that were previously nomadic settled down in oases or coastal areas. It then became more likely that certain families would accumulate wealth, whether in food or in goods, and with this wealth would increase their authority. In this way, the individual families that in the 1990s controlled the gulf states established themselves around 1800. Relations with the British and the discovery of oil continued that process.

The existence of these ruling families is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of Arab tribalism in gulf society in 1993. Another manifestation is the collective manner in which these families rule. In most of these states, the position of amir is not passed from father to son but alternates among different parallel patrilineal lines. This makes the appointment of the next amir an open issue and something on which the entire family must agree.



## Oman, a country study

The family also participates in the various consultative bodies that exist to advise the leader. Such bodies, which include figures outside the ruling family, help to institutionalize the first among equals system in these states.

The way that government officials are appointed reflects the importance of tribal connections. Members of the ruling family are accommodated first, followed by families and tribes with whom the rulers have been traditionally allied. In Bahrain, for example, the ruling Al Khalifa have given the major positions in the bureaucracy to Sunni Arabs from tribes that helped them rule the island in the nineteenth century. The Al Khalifa have given lesser positions to Shia Arabs from merchant families with whom they engaged in the pearl industry but with whom they had no tribal alliances. But the Al Khalifa have been reluctant to give positions of authority to Shia farmers of Iranian descent to whom they had neither tribal nor economic ties.

Tribal cohesiveness is also reflected in the efforts of the gulf states to restrict citizenship. The gulf has always been relatively cosmopolitan, and its port cities have included Arab Shia from Iraq, freed slaves from Africa, Indian pearl traders, and Iranian farmers and merchants, in addition to tribal Sunni Arabs. (In 1939, for example, before the oil boom started, 39 percent of Qatar's population was non-Arab.) The dominant Arab tribes have accommodated many of these groups, and those who arrived in the region before 1930 became full citizens of the gulf states, albeit without the connections of tribal Arabs. The tremendous influx since 1940, however, has caused the naturally restrictive nature of tribal society to reassert itself to prevent a further dilution of tribal identities.

Ironically, those foreigners closest to the tribal Arabs, the nontribal Arabs, represent the greatest threat. Only Arabs from other Arab states might conceivably stay in the gulf and expect to be citizens. Others, even Muslims from the coasts of Pakistan and India, whose history is intertwined with that of the gulf, would have a difficult time arguing in the twentieth century that they should be citizens of an Arab state.

Modern Arab politics, however, often speaks of a single Arab nation in which all Arabs might be citizens.

This has led to the notion that Arabs should have rights in the gulf states simply because of their ethnicity.

The continuing exodus of millions of Palestinian Arabs since 1948, and their subsequent residence throughout the Arab world, has added urgency to the demand that individual Arab states define their qualifications for citizenship. Many Arabs argue that Palestinians in particular, but other Arabs as well, should be accepted as citizens in the gulf. Gulf leaders have understandably opposed this for fear that nontribal Arabs would challenge traditional ways of rule. Although people from all over the world may come to the gulf to work, sovereignty and citizenship are closely guarded by the predominantly tribal population that has its roots in the Arabian Peninsula. In this way, the Persian Gulf coast has preserved its ties with the Arab interior that form the essence of its identity.

\* \* \* The literature on Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman may be divided into two groups: books on Oman and books on the rest of the gulf states. Calvin Allen has a relatively brief study of the modern history of Oman entitled *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate*. John C. Wilkinson has written a number of scholarly studies on Oman, including his recent work, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. This is an excellent and detailed study of most aspects of Omani history.

For the rest of the gulf, a number of brief studies exist, of which the most recent is *The Arab Gulf and the Arab World*, a collection of articles on various aspects of modern gulf life edited by B R. Pridham; it contains little on the history of the region. For more historical background, the reader may consult an older but more substantial collection edited by Alvin Cottrell entitled *The Persian Gulf States*. Further history can be found in Donald Hawley's *The Trucial States*.

Of books on particular countries or issues, the best is Fuad Khuri's *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, which considers the social, religious, and ethnic divisions of the island nation. A recent brief work on the UAE by Malcolm C. Peck, *The United Arab Emirates*, is very good. Abdulrasool al-Mossa's study, *Immigrant Labor in Kuwait*, provides a description of the situation of foreign workers in the gulf. Religious disturbances in the gulf are discussed in relevant chapters of Robin Wright's *Sacred Rage*. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

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## **Chapter 6. Oman**

*Crest of the Sultanate of Oman* **Oman — Country Profile**

## COUNTRY

*Formal Name:* Sultanate of Oman.

*Short Form:* Oman.

*Term for Citizens:* Omani(s); adjectival form, Omani.

*Capital:* Muscat.

**GEOGRAPHY** *Size:* About 212,000 square kilometers, although estimates vary.

*Topography:* Mostly desert; 15 percent land mountainous. Four major regions: Musandam Peninsula, Al Batinah coastal plain, Oman interior, and Dhofar region.

*Climate:* Hot and dry, except for Dhofar, which has light monsoons.

*Boundaries:* Yemen and Saudi Arabia demarcated borders with Oman in 1992.

## SOCIETY

*NOTE*—The Country Profile contains updated information as available.

**Population:** In 1992, for planning purposes, government estimated 2 million; actual figure may be closer to 1.5 million. Growth rate 3.5 percent in 1994. Foreigners estimated at 17.5 percent of population in 1992.

**Education:** Free public schools consist of primary level of six years, lower secondary level of three years, and upper secondary level of three years. Most teachers (60 percent) foreign.

**Health:** Improvement and expansion of health care facilities major ongoing government priority. In 1994 infant mortality estimated at thirty–seven per 1,000. In 1994 life expectancy at birth sixty–eight years on average, with sixty–six years for males and seventy years for females.

**Ethnic Groups:** Most Omanis are Arabs, although numerous citizens of non–Arab African origin. Foreign community includes Egyptians, Pakistanis, Indians, and others.

**Religion:** Most Omanis are Muslims; Ibadis constitute largest group.

## ECONOMY

*Gross Domestic Product (GDP):* In 1991 GDP about RO4.0 billion, orUS\$10.5 billion; per capita RO2,696, or US\$7,000.

*Oil Industry:* In 1991 accounted for about 43 percent of GDP, 95 percent of export earnings, and 82 percent of government revenues.

*Agriculture and Fishing:* Contributed about 3.8 percent of GDP in 1991.

*Currency and Exchange Rate:* Omani rial. In 1994 exchange rate US\$1 = R00.3845 (fixed rate).

*Fiscal Year:* Calendar year.

## TRANSPORTATION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

*Transportation:* In 1992 about 6,000 kilometers paved roads and 20,000 kilometers gravel or earthen roads. Expressway from Muscat along Gulf of Oman runs to Dubayy in United Arab Emirates. Major airport As Sib International Airport near Muscat. Major port Mina Qabus, near Muscat, being expanded in 1994.

*Telecommunications:* Telecommunications internationally via satellites; domestic telephone service very limited but being expanded. Televisions available throughout Oman, but radio broadcast facilities limited.

## GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

*Government:* Sultan Qabus ibn Said ibn Taimur Al Said as head of state and prime minister presides over Council of Ministers. Consultative Council has advisory role but no legislative powers. No constitution.

*Politics:* No political parties. Important political actors are persons close to sultan, including Western-educated administrators and special advisers.

*Foreign Relations:* Member of United Nations and its specialized agencies, League of Arab States, Organization of the Islamic Conference, and Gulf Cooperation Council. June 1980 agreement allows United States use of military facilities in Oman.

## NATIONAL SECURITY

*Armed Forces:* In mid-1993 personnel strength 36,700, including 3,700 foreign personnel, as follows: Royal Oman Land Forces, 20,000; Royal Oman Navy, 3,500; Royal Oman Air Force, 3,500; and Royal Household, 6,000 (including Royal Guard, 4,500; Special Forces, 700; Royal Yacht Squadron, 150; and other, 650). Army primarily infantry force but has some tanks and armored cars. Navy a coastal patrol force, expanding and modernizing by acquiring guided missile (Exocet) craft and new gunboats. Air force has more than fifty combat aircraft, all of British manufacture.

### Overview

**SINCE 1970, WHEN OMAN'S RULER, Sultan Qabus ibn Said Al Said, assumed power, the sultanate has moved from a poor underdeveloped country toward a modern nation state. Indexes of development measuring per capita gross national product, infant mortality, literacy rates, and availability of social services validated the government's claim that its policies have effected positive change. Although the government's administrative structure expanded to accommodate public services, change in the political system has been slow. Oman remains a conservative monarchy, with the sultan relying on the support of a traditional political elite comprising the Al Said ruling family, established merchant families, and, to a lesser extent, tribal shaykhs.**

Until the commercial production and export of oil in 1967, Oman's budget was exclusively dependent on religious taxes (*zakat*), customs duties, and British loans and subsidies. The bulk of this revenue served as a mechanism through which the sultan could co-opt his traditional allies among the merchant families and tribal shaykhs. By transferring income from the state treasury, the sultan was able to draw in influential segments of Omani society and ensure continuance of Al Said rule. Post-1970 economic developments were in part constructed on these antecedents. Income distribution remained a principal mechanism for ensuring political stability, but the network involved a state administrative structure rather than the more direct and personal individual-ruler relationship. Also, the system expanded to incorporate the average Omani through the creation of a public sector. The net effect has been the establishment of a salaried middle class whose economic interests are closely tied with the government.

Since the development of the country's infrastructure in the 1970s, national development plans have given priority to reducing dependency on oil exports and encouraging income-generating projects in non-oil sectors (diversification), promoting private sector investment, and effecting a wider geographical distribution of investments to correct regional imbalances. Such a wider distribution is intended to narrow the gap in the standard of living in different regions, develop existing areas of population, and discourage migration to densely populated urban centers, such as Muscat (also seen as Masqat), the capital. Equally important are the national goals to develop local human resources, to increase indigenous participation in the private sector, and to improve government management and organization.

Constraints on the government in implementing its economic diversification program include the limited growth potential of alternative sectors, such as agriculture, fishing, and industry. Constraints also include the limited involvement of the private sector in businesses other than trade, the low-skilled labor force, the limited water resources, and the inability of government ministries to manage and expand services.

Sultan Qabus ibn Said, therefore, faced different challenges in 1993 than those he confronted when he assumed power in 1970 through a palace coup d'état. Then, the rebellion of tribes in southern Dhofar (also seen as Zufar) region and the exploitation of the country's oil reserves had taken precedence.

Opportunities in urban centers stimulated a rural-urban shift, reducing the number of individuals engaged in agricultural labor and contributing to the key role of the oil sector in the economy. On the one hand, an increasingly urbanized population has the potential to be better educated and better enumerated. On the other hand, the small indigenous population has necessitated the presence of a large foreign labor force. This has contributed to an informal caste system, with Omanis clearly ranked highest in the hierarchy, followed by Westerners, with non-Western foreigners at the bottom.

Economic development has resulted in social transformation, not only in terms of diminishing the importance



## Oman, a country study

of the tribal element in Oman and stratifying Omani society but also in terms of inadvertently engendering a sense of entitlement among the public, common to social welfare states. In doing so, the government has been under increasing pressure to provide suitable employment for new migrants to the cities from village communities and to new graduates from colleges, to expand its social services, and to maintain the security of the country.

To fulfill these expectations, the government must ensure sustainable economic growth. Therefore, the policies of diversification and indigenization have taken on greater importance. Diversification is needed to ensure growth in the post-oil era; indigenization potentially eliminates the demand for foreign labor and increases opportunities for Omani nationals. The problems of the 1990s are resistant to change, however. The depletion of the country's proven oil reserves (at the production rate of 1992, reserves will be depleted within seventeen years) heightens the need for economic diversification, but so far, non-oil sectors have shown limited potential.

The net effect of the government's policies has been to link economic conditions with political stability. The suppression of the Dhofar rebellion in the first half of the 1970s provided a lesson for Sultan Qabus ibn Said.

By addressing the gross economic neglect of the south, the government was able to ensure some political quiescence. In providing the majority of Omanis with adequate income through employment in the public sector, health and medical services, education, and other social services, the government has similarly ensured a modicum of public political support.

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## Oman — Geography and Population

### Geography

*Figure 13. Oman, 1993* Oman is located in the southeastern quarter of the Arabian Peninsula and, according to official estimates, covers a total land area of approximately 300,000 square kilometers; foreign observer estimates, however, are about 212,000 square kilometers, roughly the size of the state of Kansas. The land area is composed of varying topographic features: valleys and desert account for 82 percent of the land mass; mountain ranges, 15 percent; and the coastal plain, 3 percent.

The sultanate is flanked by the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, and the Rub al Khali (Empty Quarter) of Saudi Arabia, all of which contributed to Oman's isolation. Historically, the country's contacts with the rest of the world were by sea, which not only provided access to foreign lands but also linked the coastal towns of Oman.

The Rub al Khali, difficult to cross even with modern desert transport, formed a barrier between the sultanate and the Arabian interior. The Al Hajar Mountains, which form a belt between the coast and the desert from the Musandam Peninsula (Ras Musandam) to the city of Sur at Oman's easternmost point, formed another barrier. These geographic barriers kept the interior of Oman free from foreign military encroachments (see fig. 13).

Natural features divide the country into seven distinct areas: Ruus al Jibal, including the northern Musandam Peninsula; the Al Batinah coastal plain; the Muscat–Matrah coastal area; the Oman interior, comprising Al Jabal al Akhdar (Green Mountain), its foothills, and desert fringes; the barren coastline south to Dhofar; Dhofar region in the south; and the offshore island of Masirah.

The northernmost area, Ruus al Jibal, extends from the Musandam Peninsula to the boundary with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) at Hisn al Diba. It borders the Strait of Hormuz, which links the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, and is separated from the rest of the sultanate by a strip of territory belonging to the UAE. This area consists of low mountains forming the northernmost extremity of the Al Hajar al Gharbi (Western Al Hajar) Mountains. Two inlets, Elphinstone (Khawr ash Shamm) and Malcom (Ghubbat al Ghazirah), cleave the coastline about one-third the distance from the Strait of Hormuz and at one point are separated by only a few hundred meters of land. The coastline is extremely rugged, and the Elphinstone Inlet, sixteen kilometers long and surrounded by cliffs 1,000 to 1,250 meters high, has frequently been compared with fjords in Norway.

The UAE territory separating Ruus al Jibal from the rest of Oman extends almost as far south as the coastal town of Shinas. A narrow, well-populated coastal plain known as Al Batinah runs from the point at which the sultanate is reentered to the town of As Sib, about 140 kilometers to the southeast. Across the plains, a number of wadis, heavily populated in their upper courses, descend from the Al Hajar al Gharbi Mountains to the south. A ribbon of oases, watered by wells and underground channels (*falaj*), extends the length of the plain, about ten kilometers inland.

South of As Sib, the coast changes character. For about 175 kilometers, from As Sib to Ras al Hadd, it is barren and bounded by cliffs almost its entire length; there is no cultivation and little habitation. Although the deep water off this coast renders navigation relatively easy, there are few natural harbors or safe anchorages.

The two best are at Muscat and Matrah, where natural harbors facilitated the growth of cities centuries ago.

West of the coastal areas lies the tableland of central Oman. The Al Hajar Mountains form two ranges: the Al Hajar al Gharbi Mountains and the Al Hajar ash Sharqi (Eastern Al Hajar) Mountains. They are divided by the Wadi Samail (the largest wadi in the mountain zone), a valley that forms the traditional route between Muscat and the interior. The general elevation is about 1,200 meters, but the peaks of the high ridge known as Al Jabal al Akhdar (Green Mountain)—which is considered a separate area but is actually part of the Al Hajar al Gharbi Mountains—rise to more than 3,000 meters in some places. Al Jabal al Akhdar is the only home of the Arabian *tahr*, a unique species of wild goat. In the hope of saving this rare animal, Sultan Qabus ibn Said has declared part of Al Jabal al Akhdar a national park. Behind the Al Hajar al Gharbi Mountains are two inland regions, Az Zahirah and inner Oman, separated by the lateral range of the Rub al Khali. Adjoining the Al Hajar ash Sharqi Mountains are the sandy regions of Ash Sharqiyah and Jalan, which also border the desert.

The desolate coastal tract from Jalan to Ras Naws has no specific name. Low hills and wastelands meet the

## Oman, a country study

sea for long distances. Midway along this coast and about fifteen kilometers offshore is the barren island of Masirah. Stretching about seventy kilometers, the island occupies a strategic location near the entry point to the Gulf of Oman from the Arabian Sea. Because of its location, it became the site of military facilities used first by the British and then by the United States, following an access agreement signed in 1980 by the United States and Oman.

Dhofar region extends from Ras ash Sharbatat to the border of Yemen. Its exact northern limit has never been defined, but the territory claimed by the sultan includes the Wadi Mughshin, about 240 kilometers inland. The southwestern portion of the coastal plain of Dhofar is regarded as one of the most beautiful in Arabia, and its capital, Salalah, was the permanent residence of Sultan Said ibn Taimur Al Said and the birthplace of the present sultan, Qabus ibn Said. The highest peaks are about 1,000 meters. At their base lies a narrow, pebbly desert adjoining the Rub al Khali to the north.

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## Climate

With the exception of Dhofar region, which has a light monsoon climate and receives cool winds from the Indian Ocean, the climate of Oman is extremely hot and dry most of the year. Summer begins in mid-April and lasts until October. The highest temperatures are registered in the interior, where readings of more than 50° C in the shade are common. On the Al Batinah plain, summer temperatures seldom exceed 46° C, but, because of the low elevation, the humidity may be as high as 90 percent. The mean summer temperature in Muscat is 33° C, but the *gharbi* (literally, western), a strong wind that blows from the Rub al Khali, can raise temperatures from the towns on the Gulf of Oman by 6° C to 10° C. Winter temperatures are mild and pleasant, ranging between 15° C and 23° C.

Precipitation on the coasts and on the interior plains ranges from twenty to 100 millimeters a year and falls during mid- and late winter. Rainfall in the mountains, particularly over Al Jabal al Akhdar, is much higher and may reach 700 millimeters. Because the plateau of Al Jabal al Akhdar is porous limestone, rainfall seeps quickly through it, and the vegetation, which might be expected to be more lush, is meager. However, a huge reservoir under the plateau provides springs for low-lying areas. In addition, an enormous wadi channels water to these valleys, making the area agriculturally productive in years of good rainfall. Dhofar, benefiting from a southwest monsoon between June and September, receives heavier rainfall and has constantly running streams, which make the region Oman's most fertile area.

## Population

A comprehensive population census has never been conducted, but in 1992 the sultanate solicited help from the United Nations (UN) Fund for Technical and Financial Assistance in taking a full census. For planning purposes, the government in 1992 estimated the population at 2 million, but the actual figure may be closer to 1.5 million, growing at a rate of 3.5 percent per annum. The population is unevenly distributed; the coastal regions, the Al Batinah plain, and the Muscat metropolitan area contain the largest concentration.

The population is heterogeneous, consisting of an ethnic and religious mix derived in large part from a history of maritime trade, tribal migrations, and contacts with the outside world. Although Arabs constitute the majority, non-Arab communities include Baluchis—from the Makran coast of Iran and Pakistan—who are concentrated in Muscat and the Al Batinah coast and play a significant role in the armed forces; ex-slaves (a legacy of Oman's slave trade and East African colonies); and Zanzibari Omanis, who are well represented in the police force and the professions. The integration of Omanis of African descent is often circumscribed by a language barrier (they often speak Swahili and English but not always Arabic). The presence of Omanis of Indian descent in Muscat reflects the historical commercial ties between the sultanate and the Indian subcontinent. The Khoja community in Matrah, of Indian origin, is perhaps the richest private group in Oman, and its members are among the best educated. The Shihuh of the northern Musandam Peninsula numbered about 20,000 in the early 1990s. They speak Arabic and a dialect of Farsi and engage primarily in fishing and herding.

Because of the small indigenous population, the government has been obliged to use foreign labor. In 1992 about 60 percent of the labor force was foreign. Some 350,000 foreign workers and their families (primarily Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Filipinos, and Sri Lankans) live in Oman. The high percentage of foreigners in the work force, combined with improvements in the country's education system, has prompted the government to institute a program of indigenization whereby Omani nationals gradually replace foreigners (see Labor, this ch.).

## Oman — Society

### Religion

The majority of Omanis are Ibadi Muslims, followers of Abd Allah ibn Ibad (see Shia Islam , ch. 1).

Approximately 25 percent are Sunni (see Glossary) Muslims and live primarily in Sur and the surrounding area and in Dhofar. They form the largest nonIbadi minority. The Shia (see Glossary) minority live along the Al Batinah coast in the Muscat–Matrah region. This minority includes the Khojas, the Baharina of Iraqi or Iranian descent, and the Ajam, of vague origin but generally considered to originate in Iran.

Ibadism is an outgrowth of the Kharijite movement, a variant form of Islam practiced by descendants of a sect that seceded from the principal Muslim body after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in A.D. 632.

Kharijites reject primogeniture succession of the Quraysh, the tribe of Muhammad, and assert that leadership of Islam, the caliphate, should be designated by an imam (see Glossary) elected by the community from candidates who possess spiritual and personal qualities. Ibadi leadership is vested in an imam, who is regarded as the sole legitimate leader and combines religious and political authority. The imam is elected by a council of prominent laymen or shaykhs. Adherence to Ibadism accounts in part for Oman's historical isolation.

Considered a heretical form of Islam by the majority Sunni Muslims, Ibadis were not inclined to integrate with their neighbors.

## Education

*Sultan Qabus University at Al Khawd, west of Muscat Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington*  
*Sultan Qabus ibn Said Al Said presenting gifts to the first graduates of Sultan Qabus University Courtesy*  
*Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington* As in other sectors of Omani society, the education system was radically altered after the accession of Sultan Qabus ibn Said. Prior to 1970, there were only three primary schools in the sultanate—in Muscat, Matrah, and Salalah. These were reserved for approximately 900 boys personally selected by the sultan from among many applicants. Additionally, in Muscat there was a religious institute with an enrollment of fifty boys, three private schools for Hyderabadis (Indians), and one United States missionary school serving fifty foreign girls.

Sultan Qabus ibn Said initiated a shift in the government's policies and priorities from neglect to expansion of the school system, increasing the public's access to general education.

The education system is guided by the policy-making body of the Council for Education chaired by the sultan and operated by the Ministry of Education and Youth. General education is divided into three levels: primary (grades 1–6); lower secondary (grades 7–9); and upper secondary (grades 10–12). Teacher-training colleges provide training programs for primary and lower secondary school teachers.

Education accounted for a modest 11.2 percent of the government's current expenditures in 1990, up from only 2.4 percent in 1975 but still considerably less than the 28 percent planned and less than the proportion recorded by other countries in the process of expanding their school systems. By the 1989–90 academic year, the percentage of students enrolled in primary schools was almost 100 percent in the respective age-group, compared with 53 percent in 1977–78 (see table 32, Appendix). The percentage of girls attending primary schools also rose rapidly during this period, from 37 percent in 1977–78 to 97 percent in 1989–90. The student-teacher ratio at the primary level was twenty-seven to one in 1988–89. Secondary school enrollment lagged behind primary school attendance and rose from 8 percent of secondary-school-age youth in 1977–78 to 48 percent in 1989–90. In 1986 Sultan Qabus University opened at Al Khawd, west of Muscat, with faculties of agriculture, education, engineering, Islamic studies, medicine, and science. Faculties for commerce, economics and the arts are planned.

Rapid expansion and enrollment have exceeded the capacity of the ministry to plan and administer the system.

This has produced problems in planning, budgeting, curriculum development, and teacher training. Often, inappropriate sites for facilities are selected, and programs are of poor quality or unavailable. Lower secondary education remains underdeveloped, contributing to the low enrollment rates in upper secondary school, particularly for females.

The government emphasizes teacher training for Omanis, in order to create an indigenous teaching force. The dependency on foreign staff, and hence the high turnover rate and lack of continuity, further compromises the quality of education. In the 1980–81 academic year, 618 of a total 5,663, or 11 percent of the teaching staff, were Omanis. By the 1985–86 academic year, the number had increased to 18 percent. The majority of ministry employees (55 percent in 1990) are non-Omanis, of whom more than 70 percent are Egyptians; the balance consists of Jordanians, Pakistanis, Sudanese, Indians, Filipinos, and others. As of 1990, there were six teacher-training colleges providing a two-year program and enrolling a total of about 700 students.

Secondary school teachers receive training at the Faculty of Education at Sultan Qabus University.

The government's medium-term objectives are to ensure that all six-year-olds are enrolled in primary school and to expand access to primary and secondary education in rural areas. The government also seeks to expand teacher-training facilities; to increase the number of trained nationals staffing schools by increasing the number of teacher-training colleges; to improve teacher-class ratios and school-building operations; and to introduce student testing and new programs.

## Health

Developments in the health and medical sector paralleled those in education. In 1970 there was one twelve-bed hospital operated by United States missionaries and nine government health centers. In 1990 there was a total of forty-seven hospitals, compared with fourteen in 1980. The number of doctors increased from 294 to 994 in the same ten-year period, and the number of nurses more than quadrupled from 857 to 3,512.

The government's health policy is directed at achieving a level of health care that approaches its goal of Health for All by the Year 2000. Included among the health priorities of the Ministry of Health are strengthening curative services, particularly in urban areas, and improving preventive services, with the emphasis on communicable diseases and immunization. The Public Health Department of the Ministry of Health is responsible for mass immunizations for smallpox and other infectious diseases. The government stresses delivering maternal and child health care at the village level to decrease the infant mortality rate, estimated in mid-1992 at forty-four per 1,000. Life expectancy in mid-1992 was sixty-four years for males and sixtyeight years for females. The government is also expanding its education program, especially with regard to maternal and child health care. In July 1987, the country held its first workshop on acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) to increase awareness of the problem in the medical community. Contraceptives are available at private hospitals and dispensaries and through commercial outlets. Abortion is illegal except when the mother's life is endangered.

Although adequate health facilities exist in urban centers, coverage in rural areas remains insufficient. As a result, the government is continuing to develop health services as an integral part of national development.

The Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1991-95) allocated RO48 million (for value of the Omani riyal—see Glossary), which is equivalent to US\$124.7 million, for this purpose. Ministry of Health plans include a 100-bed hospital in Al Buraymi and a 200-bed hospital at Ar Rustaq, southeast of Qurayyat, to replace the existing medical facility in Ar Rustaq and to serve as a central, referral hospital for the region.

Other projects include replacing all outpatient clinics at the Royal Hospital polyclinic in the capital and building a new 200-bed hospital at Ibri and a 200-bed hospital at Tanam, in the interior north of Ibri.



## Oman — The Economy

Omani economic development may be divided into three phases: a period of rapid expansion between 1970 and 1986; economic retrenchment and rationalization between 1986 and 1989 as a result of the 1985–86 oil price collapse; and a period of stabilized growth since 1990. Economic growth and structural change have proceeded rapidly in Oman during the rule of Sultan Qabus ibn Said. Oman, however, lagged behind such neighboring gulf amirates as Kuwait and the UAE as a result of the late discovery of oil, financial constraints, and political instability in the first half of the 1970s. Nonetheless, increased government expenditure as a result of the commercial production and export of oil transformed the standard of living in Oman. By the latter half of the 1980s, Oman emerged as a middle-income country after entering the development process as one of the poorest Arab states. Per capita income rose from US\$360 in 1970 to US\$3,140 in 1980 and to US\$7,000 in 1991.

When Sultan Qabus ibn Said assumed power in 1970, he immediately implemented an economic development and modernization program. Priority was given to expanding the country's almost nonexistent infrastructure.

In the early 1970s, substantial progress was made in developing physical and social infrastructure, mainly in the form of roads, a new deepwater port, an international airport, electricity-generating plants, desalination plants, and schools, hospitals, and low-cost housing. Government revenue derived almost exclusively from oil receipts made this possible.

Economic growth was accompanied by uneven structural development, however. In 1960 agriculture accounted for 75 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary); by Oman's fiscal year 1991, its share had fallen to less than 3 percent. By contrast, industry (including petroleum), which accounted for only 8 percent of GDP in 1960, increased to 59 percent by 1985. Manufacturing increased only from 1 percent to 3 percent and services from 18 percent to 38 percent in the same period.

As a result, in 1993 Oman's economy was dominated by the petroleum sector and the services sector. Aware of the vulnerability produced by dependency on a depletable natural resource, the government has increased funding for sectors based on renewable natural resources that can provide sustainable economic growth. The government is concentrating on the agriculture and fishing sectors, encouraging tourism, and constructing light industrial parks with the objective of exporting consumer goods to its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) partners.

## Public Finance and the Five-Year Development Plans

Prior to 1970, the financial position of the sultan was virtually synonymous with the public finances of the sultanate. After Qabus ibn Said's accession to the throne, a formal separation was initiated. The first government budget was announced in 1971, and the First Five-Year Development Plan was initiated in 1976.

After recovering somewhat in 1987 after the collapse of oil prices in 1986, government revenue fell again in 1988 to RO1,198 million (see table 33, Appendix). Iraq's invasion of Kuwait resulted in a sharp rise in oil prices: average crude oil spot prices increased from US\$16 per barrel in July 1990 to almost US\$40 per barrel in September. Higher oil prices resulted in increased 1990 oil revenues, up 38 percent from 1989. The restoration of the Al Sabah monarchy in Kuwait and the defeat of Iraqi forces by an allied coalition stabilized the international oil market's uncertainty about supplies, and prices collapsed to precrisis levels. Omani government revenues dropped to RO1,570 million in 1991, from RO1,859 million in 1990. The government budget for 1992 was based on an estimate that total revenues would increase to RO1,628 million as a result of slightly higher oil income and as a result of increases in gas revenues and other domestic indirect taxes.

Although the government stresses investment, government expenditures are largely current expenditures, suggesting the importance the government places on maintaining its security, against both internal and external threats, and on its civil administration. Public corporations and ministries have provided a mechanism for income distribution and the creation of a salaried middle class. Reducing expenditures through public sector cuts is regarded as politically sensitive and therefore has been avoided, even after the oil price collapse in the mid-1980s and the associated loss of income.

The 4.3 percent per annum increase in total expenditures after 1986 largely resulted from these concerns.

Between 1987 and 1991, total government spending rose from RO1,576 to RO1,853 million. During this period, current expenditures grew at 5 percent per annum. Although barely keeping pace with domestic inflation and increasing at a slower growth rate than that of the preceding ten years—when current outlays rose at 19.7 percent per annum—maintaining domestic income and defense and security expenditures prevented any retrenchment, despite wild fluctuations in income. Capital expenditures, however, had to be reduced between 1987 and 1990 and fell by 4 percent per annum. Higher oil prices in 1991 allowed the government to boost investment spending to pre-1986 levels, with a 37 percent increase over 1990. This adjustment restored the share of capital outlays in total government spending to 23 percent, after falling to about 12 percent in 1990. The 1992 budget called for further increases in spending to RO1,876 million, of which capital expenditures were slated to rise to RO404 million, or 22 percent of the total.

With the exception of a short period in the early 1980s, the government budget has registered sizable deficits.

During 1986 the deficit (RO700 million) peaked at 28 percent of GDP. It was sharply reduced during the latter half of the 1980s but has continued to hover close to 10 percent of GDP. A lag in increased spending to match the rise in oil revenues late in 1990 permitted the government almost to balance the budget. But in 1991 spending more than offset oil revenues, and the actual budget deficit rose to RO283 million, or 10 percent of GDP. The 1992 budget forecast indicated another deficit of this magnitude.

The government has financed these budget deficits by drawing down on the Contingency Fund and by small amounts of commercial borrowing. Economic difficulties have compelled the government to raise money on international capital markets. In 1986 the government received a US\$500 million syndicated Euroloan, the major sponsors of which were Gulf International Bank (in which the government is a shareholder) and Chase Investment Bank. In 1988 the government obtained a Japanese yen-denominated loan valued at US\$130 million and a second US\$100 million loan. Balanced fiscal conditions permitted the authorities to pay some of Oman's debt outstanding in 1990. During 1991 and 1992, authorities instituted a domestic development bond scheme, which has financed roughly one-half the fiscal shortfall.

The Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1991–95) projected government revenue at RO8,571 million, up 22.8 percent from the previous plan. Oil revenue is expected to account for more than 76 percent of total revenue and to increase by an average of about 5 percent each year, reaching RO1,785 million in 1995 on a gross basis

## Oman, a country study

and RO1,429 million on a net basis (that is, gross oil revenues less subventions to the State General Reserve Fund and the Contingency Fund). The plan was based on an assumed average oil price of US\$20 per barrel in the five years. During the first two years of the plan, total revenues roughly kept pace with planned earnings because oil prices held at those levels.

Expenditures during the Fourth Five-Year Development Plan were set at RO9,450 million, with current expenditures accounting for 76 percent of the total, investment expenditures set at 22 percent, and additional support to the private sector set at 1.4 percent. Defense and national security and civil ministries continue to make up the bulk of current expenditures. With expenditures exceeding revenues, the government projects a cumulative deficit of RO879 million. The government plans to finance the deficit by issuing RO430 million in government bonds on the Muscat securities market and by further drawdowns on the Contingency Fund.

The State General Reserve Fund is to be strengthened by allocating 15 percent of oil revenues to the fund, up from the previous 5 percent. This policy change was made possible after the creation of the Contingency Fund in 1990, which receives 7.5 percent of net oil revenues if the oil price is US\$18 to US\$20 per barrel and 10 percent if the oil price rises to US\$20 to US\$22 per barrel. Both policies are directed toward smoothing out the effects of oil price fluctuations and reducing the economy's vulnerability to unexpected changes in the international oil market.

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## Foreign Trade and the Balance of Payments

Oman's exports are dominated by oil earnings. Total exports peaked in 1985 at almost US\$5.0 billion before the oil price collapse in 1986. During the preceding decade, exports rose by a factor of 3.5, largely because of the higher volume of crude and refined product sales overseas and the sustained rise in international oil prices.

Petroleum exports constituted 98 percent of foreign merchandise earnings in 1985. Exports declined to US\$2.9 billion in 1986 but have steadily risen since then as a result of further increases in the volume of oil shipped and higher oil prices. In 1990 total exports rose to US\$5.5 billion, of which oil exports were just under US\$5.2 billion (see table 34, Appendix). Non-oil exports accounted for only 3.4 percent of total exports in 1990, up from 2 percent in 1986. The bulk of non-oil exports includes livestock and some metals.

Oman also made considerable strides in increasing textile and mineral exports during the early 1990s. Most exports go to other Middle Eastern countries, followed by Japan and other Asian countries (see table 35, Appendix).

Domestic government expenditures and rising incomes have stimulated a steady increase in merchandise imports. Total imports rose from US\$907 million in 1975 to a peak of US\$3 billion in 1985 before economic retrenchment and weaker domestic economic conditions caused a slight reduction in foreign purchases. After falling to below US\$2 billion in 1987, the improved oil revenue situation and the onset of the Fourth Five Year Development Plan raised imports to US\$3.3 billion in 1991. Development goods, notably machinery and transportation equipment, and defense items dominate the imports profile. In 1991 machinery and transportation items constituted 42 percent of the total import bill, and other manufactured goods made up 18 percent. Oman's total food imports fell in 1991 to 18 percent from a mid-1980s average of 20 percent.

Imports came mostly from other Middle Eastern countries and from Japan.

Despite the vagaries of international oil markets and sharp fluctuations in oil prices, Oman has succeeded in maintaining a surplus on its merchandise trade account, except in 1986. A deficit in the services account, however, continues to constitute a leakage in the government's external position. Workers' remittances and payments on external debt account for more than one-half of the services deficit. Although the net outflow from workers' remittances slowed after the mid-1980s because of the recessionary climate in the region and the reduction in the number of foreign workers, the value of workers' remittances constituted just under US\$1 billion per annum on the balance of payments. The program of indigenization was intended to reduce this leakage, but limited local manpower skills remain a bottleneck for indigenization. Interest on the foreign debt is the second largest item of services imports. It peaked at US\$320 million in 1990 but declined in 1991 as a result of lower international interest rates and some repayment of the foreign debt. Interest receipts on official and commercial bank assets abroad (totaling US\$350 million in 1991) are insufficient to offset services outflows.

During the 1980s, Oman registered sizable surpluses on its current account. In 1981 the surplus reached just over US\$1 billion; it tapered off rapidly thereafter with the decline in oil prices. In 1986 Oman registered a deficit just over US\$1 billion on its current account, recovered to a US\$784 million surplus in 1987, a smaller deficit in 1988, and a surplus in 1989. Higher oil prices in 1990 boosted the balance to a record US\$1.2 billion surplus, but a rapid rise in imports and some weakening in external earnings left the current account in balance in 1991.

Before 1986 the capital account was dominated by increases in external reserves. The cumulative increase in external assets of the government was US\$2.5 billion between 1978 and 1985. Despite a shrinking surplus on the current account, the government could raise foreign assets because of a sizable program of foreign borrowing and direct foreign investment, mainly in the oil sector. In 1986 the government had to reduce foreign reserves by US\$612 million to fortify the capital account. This was necessary despite nearly US\$765 million of loans secured on international markets. Since then, continued access to international loan markets and a steady rise in foreign direct investment, not to mention higher oil prices, have permitted the government to replenish foreign assets. At the end of 1991, the government's published foreign assets totaled US\$1.6 billion; the World Bank (see Glossary) estimate of Oman's foreign debt at the end of 1990 was US\$2.5 billion.

## Hydrocarbon Sector

*Figure 14. Oman: Oil Fields, Gas Fields, and Refineries, 1993* Since the first commercial field was discovered at Jibal, west of Adam, in 1962, the petroleum industry has dominated the economy. In 1991 the industry contributed about 43 percent of GDP and 82 percent of government revenues. The government's heavy reliance on crude oil export earnings to maintain its income distribution system and political stability made continued development of this sector a priority.

By early 1977, the newly organized Ministry of Petroleum, Fisheries, and Agriculture prematurely assumed that production had probably peaked at more than 350,000 barrels per day (bpd— see Glossary) and would decline. Exploration activity in the south was insignificant, deterred by political instability in the region, and production at the main fields of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) in the north, including Jibal, was in decline (see fig. 14). The suppression of the Dhofar rebellion in the mid-1970s helped reverse an output decline. Foreign exploration companies, satisfied with the restoration of political stability, began to sign area exploration and production agreements with the government. Enhanced oil recovery (EOR) techniques at existing fields, combined with new fields coming onstream, raised average output to 708,000 bpd in 1991.

The principal problem the government faced in the early 1990s was a diminishing reserve base. Proven reserves were estimated at 4.6 billion barrels in 1992, small in comparison with other gulf states. At the mid-1992 rate of production of 725,000 bpd, Oman's crude reserves are sufficient to permit seventeen years of output, compared with nearly 350 years for Saudi Arabia.

Oil prospecting began in 1924 when the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later renamed British Petroleum) obtained a concession; however, unsuccessful exploratory drilling discouraged further interest. Discoveries in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia during the 1930s stimulated exploration activity. The first concession agreement was signed with Petroleum Concessions, a Western consortium formed by the owners of the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). In 1951 the concessionaire's name was changed to Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). In 1993 PDO remained the principal operating company and controlled the bulk of oil reserves and output.

After several years of costly and unsuccessful exploratory drilling, most IPC partners wanted to withdraw from their concession area. In 1960 Royal Dutch Shell acquired an 85 percent interest in PDO; Participations and Explorations (Partex) held the remaining 15 percent share. In 1967 the French firm TotalCompagnie Française des Pétroles acquired 10 percent of Partex's 15 percent interest. In December 1973, the government of Oman, following the participation agreements negotiated by several gulf countries, acquired a 25 percent share of PDO. In July 1974, the government's stake was raised to 60 percent, retroactive to January 1, 1974.

Since 1974 the remaining 40 percent has been held by Royal Dutch Shell with 34 percent, Total-Compagnie Française des Pétroles with 4 percent, and Partex with 2 percent.

PDO operates two main production areas: a group of northern oil fields, including Jibal, Fuhud, and Sayh Nuhaydah, that produce lighter grades of crude oil; and a group of southern fields, including Rima, Mamul, Amal, Nimr, Mukhaizna, and Sayyala, that produce heavier crudes. Development of the southern fields was contingent on the suppression of the Dhofar rebellion and the reestablishment of political stability in the sultanate.

## Reserves

As of January 1992, official proven crude reserves were estimated at 4.6 billion barrels, up almost 6 percent from 1991 and up 83 percent from the oil reserve estimate in 1980. The relatively gradual increments to Oman's reserve base since 1980 were attributable to the discovery of new, smaller oil fields and revised estimates for existing fields.

More than one-half of Oman's total reserves are concentrated in the northern region, where six fields—Jibal, Natih, Fuhud, Al Huwaysah, Al Khuwayr, and Shaybikah—are part of a single geological structure containing recoverable reserves of more than 2 billion barrels. Similarly, in the south, eight principal producing fields also come from a single geological structure.

Several foreign companies that are engaged in exploration and production activities, such as France's Elf Aquitaine Oman, the Occidental Petroleum Corporation (Occidental Oman), and the American Oil Company (Amoco), signed agreements in the 1970s. Others, such as the Japan Exploration Company (Japex Oman) and Canada's International Petroleum, followed in 1981 and 1984, respectively.

## Oil Production and Exports

During the period from 1967 to 1980, crude oil production peaked in 1976 at 365,000 bpd but subsequently declined. Producing fields are concentrated in the northern region around Jibal, Fuhud, and Natih, all three of which were discovered in the 1960s. The Dhofar rebellion inhibited exploration farther south and suspended development activity around Mamul, discovered in 1957 and holding 600 million barrels of gross proven and probable oil reserves. Because of the declining production from northern fields, total output fell. In 1979 average output was 285,000 bpd.

Once hostilities ceased in 1975 and confidence in the authority of the central government returned, southern exploration and production activities resumed, facilitating new discoveries in the late 1970s and 1980s. The Rima field, with gross proven and probable reserves estimated at 270 million barrels, was discovered in 1979; Amal, with 145 million barrels of reserves, was discovered in 1982; and Mukhaizna, with 130 million barrels, was discovered in 1985. All were brought onstream by PDO. As a result, oil output increased throughout the 1980s. Crude oil production averaged 708,000 bpd in 1991, compared with 685,000 bpd in 1990 (see table 36, Appendix). Output for 1992 averaged 745,000 bpd. Most of this, about 670,000 to 680,000 bpd, was lifted by PDO. According to Minister of Petroleum and Minerals Said Ahmad ash Shanfari, there are plans to maintain output at that level into the twenty-first century.

Apart from PDO, which contributes the bulk of the output, three other groups have interests in the producing fields. These are Occidental Oman (28,000 bpd), Elf Aquitaine Oman (15,000 bpd), and Japex Oman (8,000 bpd).

To maintain output at current levels and avoid future declines, the government is pursuing a two-pronged strategy of developing smaller fields and applying EOR and secondary techniques at existing fields. The strategy appears successful because 1992 was the twelfth consecutive year in which production increased.

However, a pattern has emerged whereby the number of fields discovered holding large (greater than 500 million barrels of gross proven and probable) reserves has been declining. The potential for discovering fields with a reserve base and production rates comparable to Jibal appears remote, given Oman's mature exploration history.

EOR techniques are applied to the mature fields. In the north, additional wells have been drilled, and water injection facilities have been constructed at the Jibal field. Gas injection is used at Fuhud and Natih. At Mamul, in the south, high-pressure steam injection techniques have been used since 1985.

Most of the increase in output will come from PDO's Al Khuwayr field in north-central Oman, where a US\$500 million development project was designed to increase the field's output from 25,000 bpd to more than 120,000 bpd when completed in 1993. The project involves gas lift and water injection facilities. Output will compensate for falling output from existing producing fields. Apart from the pilot waterflood project at Al Khuwayr, near Izki, the Sayh Nuhaidah gas-condensate field is a potential candidate for an analogous waterflood development program.

More than 90 percent of oil production is exported. The majority of Oman's exports are destined for the Far East market. Japan, the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Singapore, China, Taiwan, Thailand, and the Philippines accounted for 85 percent of total crude exports in 1990. Japan accounted for 40 percent of total exports, South Korea for 26 percent, and Singapore for 7 percent. Less than 7 percent of crude exports was destined for the United States market.

All crude oil from the northern and southern fields is collected and blended into Omani export blend. The country's only refinery and terminal is at Mina al Fahl, near Muscat. The refinery, completed in 1982 with an initial throughput capacity of 50,000 bpd and expanded to 80,000 bpd in 1987, was designed to meet domestic demand for petroleum products. Operated by the Oman Oil Refinery Company, in which the Ministry of Petroleum and Minerals held a 99 percent share and the Central Bank of Oman held 1 percent, the refinery produces liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), butane, jet fuel, and two grades of gasoline.

## Foreign Downstream Ventures

The Oman Oil Company (OOC), established in the late 1980s, is responsible for the government's foreign petroleum activities. The board of directors consists of former government officials and private advisers and is responsible to the Ministry of Petroleum and Minerals. The OOC engages in international oil trading, including the purchase and sale of Omani crude oil, and in acquiring foreign downstream (see Glossary)

holdings. Acquiring foreign downstream holdings is the most recent development in the ministry's oil policies, lagging behind such other Arab oil producers as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Libya, which have actively pursued foreign downstream ventures to ensure a secure market for crude oil sales.

As of late 1992, the OOC was negotiating equity interest in a foreign downstream venture, the acquisition of a 20 percent stake in Thailand's fifth refinery, in Rayong Province in the south. The refinery is designed to process up to 120,000 bpd of crude and will cost US\$600 million. Operations are scheduled to begin in 1996 and will involve Oman's supplying part of the refinery's feedstock. Also, as a member of a consortium including Chevron Corporation of the United States, the OOC has committed itself to build an export pipeline to transport oil from the Tengiz and Korolyov fields in Kazakhstan to international markets. The pipeline complements an agreement signed on June 18, 1992, by the government of Oman with Kazakhstan for exploration and production of oil and gas in the former Soviet republic. The Tengiz and Korolyov fields are said to have a potential output of 700,000 bpd by 2010.



## Gas Development and Production

The depletion of the sultanate's crude oil reserves accelerated the government's bid to increase the use of gas in electric power generation and industry. In the early 1970s, the sultanate began to use gas in electric power generation. Gas pipelines were laid, and generators were converted from diesel to gas. This was done in the Muscat metropolitan area just before the second oil price shock despite resistance by importers of diesel.

Plans were to increase gas use by extending the government gas grid linking the south and the east to the north. Power generation facilities north of Muscat in 1992 were using gas as a feedstock, and plans were to increase gas-fired units elsewhere.

Although the government has promoted the industrial use of gas, oil firms remain the principal consumers, using a total of 8.5 million cubic meters per day of associated gas. Gas is required for reinjection, compression fuel, and power generation to support facilities at producing fields. This is likely to continue in the short term, given the slow pace of switching industrial use from petroleum. The government's focus in the 1990s on exploiting natural gas reserves and increasing output to meet rising demand complements its priority in maintaining current oil output levels. It seeks to do this without depleting crude reserves by using gas produced in association with oil output for reinjection at mature fields to increase production and, by substituting gas for oil, to release greater volumes of crude oil for export.

On February 8, 1992, the Ministry of Petroleum and Minerals signed a cooperation protocol with Royal Dutch Shell for a comprehensive evaluation of Oman's gas reserves, estimated in June 1992 at 482 billion cubic meters, the bulk of which is in nonassociated form. According to the minister of petroleum and minerals, some studies indicate a reserve base as high as 935 million cubic meters. A preliminary feasibility study conducted by Royal Dutch Shell indicated the potential for exploiting gas reserves at a rate of 142,000 cubic meters per year as exports over a twenty-year-period and for meeting domestic demand for the next fifty years.

Most of the gas produced is in associated form and comes from PDO's Jibal field; smaller volumes come from the Natih and Sayh Nuhaidah fields in northern Oman and the Birba field in the south. Gas plants have been constructed in Jibal, Fuhud, Sayh Nuhaidah, Sayyala, and Rima, providing Oman with a gas-processing capacity of almost 18 million cubic meters per day. Despite increased gas production, gas throughput at these plants ran at about one-half of total capacity in 1989.

Evaluation of the commercial viability of the northern offshore Bukha natural gas and condensate field, discovered in 1986 by its concession operator, the International Petroleum Company of Canada, was completed in June 1992. The company estimates the life expectancy of the Bukha field at fifteen years, a capacity of 28 million cubic meters per day of gas and 5,000 to 10,000 bpd of condensate, and a requirement of an approximately US\$60 million capital investment to bring the field onstream. Production was scheduled to begin in 1993.

The government planned to drill wells in the central fields (Sayh Rawl, Sayh Nuhaidah, Barik, and Mabruk) at a cost of RO47 million (US\$18 million) between 1992 and 1995. Output from these structures will supply the US\$9 billion LNG project, which was finalized on May 6, 1992, by a memorandum of understanding. In this project, the government will be responsible for all upstream (see Glossary) activities. A new consortium was established, comprising the Omani government at 51 percent, PDO's foreign shareholders (Royal Dutch Shell, Total-Compagnie Française des Pétroles, and Partex) at 42 percent, and three Japanese firms (Mitsubishi, Mitsui, and C. Itoh) undertaking downstream operations under a service contract. Deliveries of LNG are not expected to begin before 1999. The Japanese market is expected to be the most probable destination for output.

If increasing volumes of gas are lifted, the government may consider new gas-based industries such as methanol, fertilizers, and methyl tertiary-butyl ester (MTBE). During 1992 talks were conducted with Iran concerning joint development of the Bukha and Henjam offshore fields, where limited drilling has indicated a gas and gas liquids potential. Omani officials have also conducted talks with Qatar regarding the purchase of natural gas from Qatar's North Field. The proposal to build a gas line from Qatar to Dubayy may be expanded to include a spur line to Oman. Minister of Petroleum and Minerals Shanfari indicated that Oman is prepared to purchase a volume up to 113 million cubic meters per day of gas from Qatar if an acceptable price can be negotiated. The

## Oman, a country study

regional gas line proposal was being considered among gulf countries for much of the 1980s.

As of early 1993, a definitive decision on a regional (Arabian Peninsula) coordinated, long-term gas plan that would rationalize supply and demand for decades had not been completed.

## Agriculture and Fishing

*Falaj Alin at Al Jabal al Akhdar; the falaj is an ancient irrigation system used for Omani agriculture.*

Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington Al Jabal al Akhdar, showing terraced farming in one of Oman's main agricultural areas Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington The government's economic development policy emphasizes the expansion of such non-oil sectors as agriculture, fishing, industry, and mining in its bid to diversify the economy and diminish its dependence on oil exports. The goal is to establish a sustainable economic base in preparation for the time when hydrocarbon reserves are depleted. The government launched several economic campaigns, naming 1988 and 1989 as Years of Agriculture and 1991 and 1992 as Years of Industry. Through these campaigns, the government has encouraged private-sector investment by allocating generous amounts of cash support for private industry to be disbursed mainly through official development banks. For example, the Oman Bank for Agriculture and Fisheries, created in 1981, extends loans at concessionary rates to individuals for whom farming or fishing is the principal activity. The bank acts as a distributive institution, receiving an interest subsidy from the government. In 1990 there were 1,308 loans, totaling RO4.7 million. Development programs also incorporate the government's policy of indigenization, with a large component of funds allocated for domestic technical training and academic training, often in the United States or indeveloping countries.

## Agriculture

Oman has five distinct agricultural regions. Going roughly from north to south, they include the Musandam Peninsula, the Al Batinah coast, the valleys and the high plateau of the eastern region, the interior oases, and Dhofar region, along the narrow coastal strip from the border with Yemen to Ras Naws and the mountains to the north.

In the early 1990s, interior farming areas accounted for more than one-half of the country's cultivated land.

Rainfall, although greater in the interior than along the coast, is insufficient for growing crops. Most of the water for irrigation is obtained through the *falaj* system, in which a vertical shaft is dug from the surface to reach water in porous rock. From the bottom of this shaft, a gently sloping tunnel is dug to tap the water and allow it to flow to a point on the surface at a lower level or into a cistern or underground pool from which it can be lifted by bucket or pump.

A *falaj* may be many kilometers in length and require numerous additional vertical shafts to provide fresh air to the workers digging the tunnels and to permit the removal of the excavated rock and soil. A *falaj* requires tremendous expenditure of labor for maintenance as well as for construction. Because private maintenance efforts during the 1970s and early 1980s proved inadequate, the government initiated repair and maintenance of the *falaj* system to increase the quantity of water available to cultivated areas.

The cooler climate on the high plateau of the Al Jabal al Akhdar enables the growing of apricots, grapes, peaches, and walnuts. The Al Batinah coastal plain accounts for about two-fifths of the land area under cultivation and is the most concentrated farming area of the country. Annual rainfall along the coast is minimal, but moisture falling on the mountains percolates through permeable strata to the coastal strip, providing a source of underground water only about two meters below the surface. Diesel motors are used to pump water for irrigation from these shallow wells.

By the mid-1980s, the water table along the Al Batinah coast had dropped to a low level, and salinity of the wells had increased, significantly reducing the water quality. This was caused by the combined effect of cultivating land too close to the sea and pumping more well water than was being recharged by nature, thereby permitting seawater to encroach.

Overfarming and attendant water problems caused the government to establish the Ministry of Water Resources in 1990 with the mandate of limiting water consumption and improving irrigation. A freeze on new wells was imposed in addition to delimiting several "no drill zones" in areas where groundwater supplies are low. The ministry is also considering the installation of water meters. Recharge dams are designed to hold rainwater in the wadis for a period of time to facilitate the trickling of water down into the ground; replenishing aquifers have been built mainly in the northeastern Al Batinah region, where the groundwater levels are up to five meters below sea level.

Apart from water problems, the agricultural sector has been affected by rural-urban migration, in which the labor force has been attracted to the higher wages of industry and the government service sector, and by competition from highly subsidized gulf producers. As a result, agriculture and fishing have declined in relative sectoral importance. In 1967 the two sectors together contributed about 34 percent of GDP; by 1991 they accounted for 3.8 percent of GDP (see table 37, Appendix). The government encourages farming by distributing land, offering subsidized loans to purchase machinery, offering free feedstock, and giving advice on modern irrigation methods. As a result, the area under cultivation has increased, with an accompanying rise in production. But extensive agricultural activity has also depleted freshwater reserves and underground aquifers and has increased salinity.

The area under cultivation increased by almost 18 percent to 57,814 hectares over the period from 1985 to 1990. Fruits were grown on 64 percent, or 36,990 hectares, of the area under cultivation in crop year 1989-90.

Dates accounted for 45 percent of the total area, or 70 percent of the area under fruit cultivation. Grains such as barley, wheat, and corn accounted for 19.2 percent, or 11,092 hectares, and vegetables accounted for 16.8 percent, or 9,732 hectares, of the total area under cultivation.

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In the same five-year period, overall agricultural production increased by 3 percent to 699,000 tons. Field crops, largely alfalfa, accounted for more than one-half of total production, or 354,300 tons, a 40 percent increase in the five-year period. Fruit production (including dates and limes) was 182,400 tons, up from 154,500 tons. Vegetable production totaled 162,300 tons, an increase of almost 50 percent.

## Fishing

Historically, fishing was second only to farming as an economic activity in pre-oil Oman. Both the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea offer a variety of catch, including sardines, bluefish, mackerel, shark, tuna, abalone, lobsters, and oysters. Fishermen harvest their catch in the waters near the coast, using the traditional, small seagoing canoe, to which an outboard motor has been added.

The fishing sector (along with agriculture) is considered one of the most promising areas for commercial attention and accounts for the highest non-oil export revenue. However, sales in 1990 totaled RO17.3 million, dwarfed by oil export earnings of RO1.9 billion. The GCC provided the largest fish export market. The fishing sector also provided employment opportunities to 19,296 fishermen registered in 1990, of whom 18,546 were employed in traditional fisheries and 750 in industrial fisheries. Like agriculture, fishing has been affected by the diminishing number of people employed in the sector. As increasing numbers of fishermen turn to more remunerative employment, there has been a gradual decrease in the amount of fish caught.

The government has stressed modernizing and expanding the fishing industry and developing its export potential. The Joint United States-Oman Commission funded the Oman Fisheries Development and Management Project to strengthen the technical, administrative, and management skills of the Directorate General of Fisheries Resources (DGFR). In strengthening the DGFR, the government hopes to increase private-sector confidence in the fishing industry and, in the long term, to create private-sector-led development of the industry.

The government is following a dual strategy—internally, to improve the capacity of the DGFR to manage Oman's fishing resources and, externally, to provide incentives for fishermen to remain in their occupations.

The government provides subsidies to purchase fiberglass boats and outboard engines; to construct workshops, cold storage facilities, and jetties along the coastline; and to establish companies to market fish both domestically and internationally.

## Non-oil Minerals

*Copper mine near Suhar; copper has been mined in Oman since ancient times.*

Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington View of multiple-highway system near Al Khuwayr, linking the sultanate's major cities Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington The sultanate produces copper, chromite, gold, and silver. Oman's main copper reserves are in the Suhar area on the Al Batinah coast. The processing of ore at the Suhar complex, operated by the government-owned Oman Mining Company, began in 1983. The production of chromite by the Oman Mining Company also began in 1983 in the Suhar area. Exports of the Oman Mining Company are primarily destined to the Far East market. In 1990 Taiwan accounted for 38.5 percent of exports, followed by Japan with 11.1 percent and South Korea with 2.9 percent.

In July 1991, the government established the Oman Chrome Company (OCC), in which it holds a 15 percent share. The remainder of the shares are held by the private sector. The OCC was created to develop the country's chromite reserves—estimated by the Robertson Group of Britain and the Bureau des Recherches Géologiques et Minières of France at 2 million tons of chromite— at 600 sites throughout the country. The public offering of OCC shares reflects the government's official policy of encouraging private-sector participation in industry and manufacturing.

Limestone for cement production is mined in both the northern and the southern areas to supply the Oman Cement Company's plant in the Rusayl Industrial Estate near As Sib and the Raysut Cement Corporation's plant near Salalah. Tile and marble are also produced for local construction.

Surveys have indicated deposits of numerous other materials— asbestos, coal, iron ore, lead, manganese, nickel, silver, and zinc. Large deposits of metal ores are located at the Sayh Hatat area (northeast of Izki) and the Al Jabal al Akhdar area. Substantial deposits of zinc and lead are known to exist in Dhofar, Jalan, and Hawshi Huqf (southwest of Al Ghabah). The feasibility of exploiting coal reserves at Al Kamil, near Sur, to replace oil in electric power generation, is being studied. A preliminary study on coal completed in 1990 by the UN Department of Technical Cooperation for Development estimates coal reserves in the sultanate at 22 million tons, a figure considered adequate for domestic use but not for export.

## Industry

The government's program to diversify from the oil industry emphasizes the industrial sector, with a steady increase in small- and medium-sized industries based on heavily subsidized industrial parks. The first industrial estate, at Ar Rusayl, fifteen kilometers from As Sib International Airport, was developed in the mid-1980s and housed about sixty enterprises, including manufacturers of cement, soap, crackers, and copper cathodes. The sultanate's second industrial estate, a 100-hectare site at Raysut, was developed in the early 1990s by the local firm of Shanfari and Partners. The sultanate's third industrial estate is a planned fifty-hectare project at Suhar. Other estates are planned at Nazwah, Sur, Al Khasab, and the Al Buraymi Oasis. The government is also studying the feasibility of establishing cottage industries to produce such items as pottery, rose water, and frankincense. As a result of these efforts, by 1991 manufacturing contributed 3.5 percent of Oman's GDP.

A few small-scale traditional industries use primitive methods, such as in the production of ghee (clarified butter) and the drying of fish, dates, and limes. Some handicraft industries remain, but their importance is steadily being eclipsed. Silversmiths practice their trade, and artisans work with clay at Bahla, just west of Adam, an important center for the production of household pottery. Goldsmiths follow their trade in the Muscat metropolitan area and its environs. In several regions, workers fashion low-quality, hand-made cloth from locally produced wool. The coastal towns remain boat-building centers.

Whereas the industrial sector during the 1970s and 1980s was aimed at import-substitution industrialization (see Glossary), the objective in the 1990s was to encourage export industries for the gulf market. However, this assumes that Oman will be able to operate effectively in an increasingly competitive market, attract foreign investors, and increase the role of privatesector industry.

To increase its ability to compete with its gulf neighbors, particularly Dubayy, where the Mina Jabal Ali Duty Free Zone permits fully owned foreign subsidiaries, Oman needs to overhaul its commercial and economic laws. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry set up three working teams in early 1992 to recommend amendments to existing laws for discussion with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Consultative Council. The government revised laws to permit GCC nationals to own up to 49 percent of the shares in twenty specified Omani companies, ten of which are banks. The OCCI has introduced an industrial consultations unit, computer-linked with the Vienna-based United Nations Industrial Development Organization, offering investment advice on twenty industrial sectors as well as data on equipment suppliers and training needs.



## **Tourism**

The government promotes tourism, consistent with its policy of economic diversification, with emphasis on the Muscat metropolitan area and coastal towns where principal hotels are located. The Ministry of National Heritage and Culture is restoring historical sites at Muscat and in the coastal towns. The forts at Nazwah, Ar Rustaq, Al Hazm, Bidbid, and Jabrin in the interior are accessible by automobile.

Oman has seven international hotels, the majority located in the Muscat metropolitan area. AZD Enterprises, set up by Qais ibn Tariq Al Said, Sultan Qabus ibn Said's first cousin, is planning a new tourism project at Bandar Jissah, a weekend coastal retreat in the north. The site of the planned hotel and sports facilities, including a large golf course, will be near the Al Bustan Palace Hotel, the most luxurious hotel in Oman.

## Transportation

*View of multiple highway system seen near Al Khuwayr, linking the sultanate's major cities Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington* The Omani transportation system, as with virtually all the sultanate's physical infrastructure, was a post-1970 development. It includes an expanding highway network, two modern deepwater ports, an oil port at Mina al Fahl, and two international airports facilitating international, intraregional, and domestic service. By 1992 there were 6,000 kilometers of paved roads and 20,000 kilometers of gravel or earthen roads, in a contrast to 1970, when there was one ten-kilometer paved highway and limited coastal and air traffic.

The sultanate's modern transportation system links all significant populated places within Oman and gives easy access to many international destinations. A four-lane highway runs west from Muscat along the Gulf of Oman to Dubayy in the UAE. A second major paved highway in the interior connects locations from just east of Al Ayn in the UAE to Salalah on Oman's south coast. Good land connections link Oman only with the UAE, however. No roads extend across the Saudi or Yemeni borders. The sultanate's principal airport, As Sib International Airport, has regularly scheduled flights to numerous cities worldwide and also to five domestic destinations. Muscat's natural harbor has long been a haven for ships, and its port facilities are among the best in the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula.

Transportation planning and administration, with the exception of the Muscat metropolitan area highways, are administered by the Ministry of Communications through the northern and southern directorates general of roads. The Development Council is responsible for recommending and monitoring overall sectoral objectives and priorities and reports directly to the Council of Ministers. Laying pipelines and certain roads and port facilities related to oil production are under the direction of PDO.

With the major infrastructure in place by the mid-1980s, there was a shift from construction to maintenance and improvement of the existing network. Until 1984 ministry budgets reflected a marginal outlay for maintenance as a result of the relatively new paved road system. However, starting in 1984, maintenance of paved roads became important, and a program of bituminous surface treatment and regravelling was begun.

The emphasis in the early 1990s has been on maintaining and upgrading the present highway infrastructure, but the government continues to allocate substantial resources to the development plan for the Muscat metropolitan area, where severe urban traffic problems are being addressed by the construction of interchanges and expansion of some highways to two-lane systems.

Further expansion of the existing transportation system includes enlarging both As Sib International Airport and the port, Mina Qabus, near Muscat. Mina Qabus is expected to be inadequate to accommodate the projected increase in cargo traffic by the year 2000. An expansion project is designed to increase port capacity from 1.6 million tons to 2.6 million tons. The project involves converting two berths to container berths, building a new berth for the Royal Yacht Squadron, creating a storage area, and building a sea wall. The expansion is partially funded by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. The possibility of a port at Suhar, to be used as a transshipment site for destinations farther up the gulf, is under consideration.

## Telecommunications

Modern telecommunications facilities were introduced in 1975, but major investment in such facilities occurred only after 1982. In 1989 the sultanate had almost 87,000 telephones, or about 6.8 telephones per 100 inhabitants, a figure considerably lower than for Oman's Persian Gulf neighbors. Service is unevenly distributed; more than 50 percent of the telephones are in the Muscat area. Service is entirely automatic, with international direct dial available to all customers.

International telecommunications to Europe, Asia, and the Americas go via a satellite ground station, working with the International Telecommunications Satellite Corporation's (Intelsat) Indian Ocean satellite. Calls to other countries in the region are routed through a ground station linked to the Arab Satellite Communication Organization (Arabsat) satellite. A third system of eight ground stations is used for domestic calls.

In 1992 broadcast facilities were limited. Television service was more widespread than radio. There are only two AM radio stations, one in Muscat and one in Salalah, and three FM radio stations, two in Muscat and the other in Al Khasab in northernmost Oman. A powerful shortwave station that broadcasts in Arabic and English can be received worldwide. Television service is available throughout the country; seven large transmitters are located in major towns, and twenty-five smaller relay stations broadcast in rural areas.

The government's priorities in the 1990s are to expand the local telephone facilities in existing telephone switching centers, to provide telephone service to rural communities without service, and to expand domestic long-distance and international telephone facilities. The Fourth Five-Year Development Plan allocated RO93 million (US\$242 million) to telecommunications projects. Plans of the state-owned General Telecommunications Organization include launching public paging, data communications, and telephone expansion services.

## Labor

A foreign work force was the key to the development of Oman's physical and administrative infrastructure.

However, in 1993 indigenization was among the government's principal priorities. Only 23 percent of the private-sector work force is Omani, whereas the public-sector work force is dominated by Omani nationals.

In 1990 Omanis made up 80 percent of public corporation employees, 52 percent of diwan employees, and 65 percent of the civil service. In certain organizations and ministries—such as the Oman News Agency and the ministries of foreign affairs; interior; justice, awqaf [religious endowments], and Islamic affairs; national heritage and culture; and social affairs and labor—Omanis exceed 90 percent of the work force.

In the banking sector, 70.8 percent of the work force was Omani in 1990; in the oil sector, it was 61.0 percent, with a large disparity between producing and nonproducing companies. Of PDO's work force, 61.0 percent was Omani, compared with 53.4 percent of Elf Aquitaine Oman, 20 percent of Occidental Oman, and 21.0 percent of Japex Oman (see Hydrocarbon Sector , this ch.). In non-oil-producing companies, Omanis averaged 31.6 percent of the work force. In 1990 only 24.0 percent of insurance-sector workers and 19.0 percent of hotel-sector workers were Omanis.

The government hopes that an increasing number of Omanis will enter trade and industry, increasing the number of Omanis in the private sector to 45.2 percent by 1995. RO40 million (US\$104 million) was allocated to training in 1990, with the intent of training 100,000 individuals and creating 160,000 job opportunities. In March 1991, the Higher Committee for Vocational Training and Labor was established to generate employment for Omanis and to establish other policies for the indigenous and foreign work force.

Institution building has been largely a foreign initiative. The professional core of the civil administration has consisted mainly of British and United States citizens, influencing the development of ministries, the judiciary, development planning, and resource management. The dependency on foreign advisers in the 1990s is likely to grow, given increasing Western, notably United States, involvement in the gulf after Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm, particularly in defense and security areas. Also, the emphasis of the Joint United States-Oman Commission on institution building and privatization has resulted in sustained foreign influence in the sultanate (see International Relations , this ch.).

The government not only faces a skills barrier to its indigenization program but also a psychological obstacle.

As a result of the initiation of a civil administrative structure, a sense of entitlement has arisen in the public psyche. By ensuring positions in the public sector for Omani nationals, the government inadvertently created the notion that it was the universal provider for its citizens. This notion may be difficult to reverse and perhaps will become a source of political instability if the government proves unable to fulfill its obligations should an economic downturn and consequent financial difficulties occur.

## Water and Power

The country's water resources are a key to its economic future, and continued development will require much more water than has been available. Rainfall is so scant that crop production is impossible without irrigation.

Livestock raising is restricted to areas having a dependable supply of drinking water for animals. Any substantial expansion of agricultural production will therefore require developing new water sources.

Industrial expansion, increased tourism, and an improved standard of living combine to increase the requirements for water.

In the 1990s, water sources include wells for village water supplies, the *falaj* system, and desalination plants.

Although the Muscat metropolitan area, Salalah, and Raysut are supplied with adequate water distribution and sewerage systems, such systems remain underdeveloped in many rural areas.

In 1969 Oman had only one electric power generating station, which produced one megawatt of electricity for the Muscat metropolitan area. Since then, electricity has been introduced in an increasing number of areas:

Salahin in 1970; the island of Masirah in 1976; and Nazwah, As Sahm, and Ibri in 1978. In 1990 in the sultanate, 4,503 million kilowatt-hours were produced in comparison with 787 million kilowatt-hours in 1980. The Muscat metropolitan area represents 67.4 percent of the sultanate's electricity consumption, followed by the Al Batinah area at 14.7 percent and Dhofar at 9.4 percent. The government's diversification program and its plans to develop infrastructure across the country to balance economic development and to correct the regional disparities between the less developed south and interior and the more developed north require greater attention to water and power. Several large infrastructure projects are being considered in the Fourth Five-Year Development Plan: a new power station and grid network for the interior; improvement in Muscat's sewerage network; and construction of another desalination plant, which was completed by 1992.

However, the water problem requires greater attention to the management of existing installations.

## Banking

The Omani banking sector is largely the product of a November 1974 banking law that established the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), effective April 1975. The law also facilitated the entry of foreign-owned banks and permitted an increase in the number of local banks in the sultanate. As of September 1992, there were twenty-one commercial banks in comparison with three registered in 1972. In addition, there were three specialized development banks: the Oman Development Bank (1977); the Oman Housing Bank (1977); and the Oman Bank for Agriculture and Fisheries (1981). However, the Omani banking market is the smallest in the GCC. Of the twenty-one commercial banks, eleven are foreign owned and concentrate primarily on financing trade. Ten are local banks operating in an increasingly competitive market. Because of competition, the government seeks to encourage consolidation. The expectation is that five or six local banks will emerge as the core, with those facing financial difficulties ceasing operations or merging with more profitable institutions. A similar pattern may apply to foreign banks, of which only five or six would continue to undertake significant business.

The CBO effectively replaces the Oman Currency Board, which was created in 1972 to issue currency, manage government accounts, and execute banking transactions with commercial banks and international institutions. A board of governors appointed by the sultan manages the CBO. The board's responsibilities include management of the government's foreign assets. The CBO is empowered to make advances to the government to cover temporary deficiencies in current revenues; to purchase government treasury notes and securities with a maximum maturity of ten years; to make advances to commercial banks; and to buy, sell, discount, and rediscount commercial paper. In 1991 the banking law was amended to empower the CBO to withdraw the license or suspend the activities of banks under its jurisdiction, allowing the CBO to liquidate, reorganize, or manage a bank directly.

The CBO exercised these expanded powers with regard to the takeover of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) branches in the sultanate. BCCI was incorporated in Luxembourg in 1972 and established a presence in Oman in July 1974. Since 1974 it expanded its local operations to include twelve branches having total assets of RO67 million (US\$174 million) as against total deposit liabilities of RO57 million (US\$148 million). Gross mismanagement of assets resulted in a decision by central banks of various countries to freeze BCCI operations on July 5, 1991. Accordingly, the CBO suspended BCCI operations in the sultanate on July 6, 1991, and its board of governors offered BCCI branches for sale to locally incorporated banks. An agreement was signed with Bank Dhofar al Omani al Fransi, effective February 15, 1992, to assume all assets and liabilities of BCCI Oman. Bank Dhofar al Omani al Fransi received a grant of RO15 million to cover BCCI's frozen assets abroad and a guarantee of RO4 million against future claims. The arrangement made Bank Dhofar al Omani al Fransi the second largest capitalized bank in the sultanate. The sale did not affect the National Bank of Oman, the largest bank in the sultanate, in which BCCI was a 40 percent shareholder.

In 1992 this sale was the most recent in a series of restructuring arrangements of the Omani banking market.

The Union Bank of Oman was restructured in June 1990 and thereafter was called the Omani European Bank.

Kuwaiti institutions lost their shares in the bank, the shares of France's Banque Indosuez increased, and several Omani groups held the remaining shares: Zubair Enterprises, Royal Oman Police Pension Trust, Oman International Development and Investment Company, Oman Aviation Services, and the Port Services Corporation. In January 1989, the Bank of Muscat purchased the assets and liabilities of the Oman Banking Corporation, which itself was a product of the restructuring of the Bank of Oman and the Gulf.

Consumer loans rose to 31.3 percent of total loans in 1990 from 18.8 percent in 1985. There was an accompanying decline in the share of construction and trade to 44.8 percent from 57.3 percent in the same period, reflecting the shift in commercial bank lending from commerce and real estate to personal loans. The decline also indicated the different development needs within the sultanate. During the early 1980s, large-scale infrastructural growth prompted banks to extend loan facilities for construction and real estate.

The 1986 oil price collapse and the subsequent economic retrenchment contributed to repayment difficulties, and nonperforming loans diminished the net profits of banks.

## Oman, a country study

In its declared interest in promoting mergers in the banking industry, in 1991 the government placed a ceiling on the amount banks could lend to their directors. Banks could lend up to 15 percent of their net capital to related individuals or their business interests, in comparison with the previous ceiling of 20 percent. An amendment to the 1974 banking law announced in May 1992, increasing the minimum required capitalization for banks to RO10 million for local banks and RO3 million for branches of foreign banks, was similarly designed to encourage mergers and rationalization of the banking sector.

The three specialized development banks serve as mechanisms to promote government policies of economic diversification, private–sector development, and indigenization of the work force. The Oman Housing Bank is a joint venture developed by the government, Kuwait's Ministry of Finance, and the Oman Development Bank. In 1991 the Oman Housing Bank recorded a net profit of RO4.1 million (US\$10.7 million), as compared with RO3.4 million (US\$8.8 million) the previous year.

The Oman Development Bank extends loans to industrial development projects. The government holds 40 percent of the shares, regional and foreign institutions 40 percent, and 20 percent is open for private Omani subscription. In March 1991, the bank offered five– to six–year interest–free loans of up to RO50,000 (US\$131,600) for establishing small businesses if all employees were Omanis. Businesses employing foreigners were to be levied 3 percent interest.

The government holds 98 percent of the capital of the Oman Bank for Agriculture and Fisheries, which, as its name implies, is authorized to extend loans to individuals or enterprises to finance activities in agriculture and fishing. By March 31, 1992, the bank had thirteen operating branches.

## Oman — Government and Politics

### Historical Patterns of Governance

Until 1970 the political title for the Al Said rulers was sultan of Muscat and Oman, implying two historically irreconcilable political cultures: the coastal tradition, the more cosmopolitan, secular, Muscat tradition of the coast ruled by the sultan; and the interior tradition of insularity, tribal in origin and ruled by an imam according to the ideological tenets of Ibadism (see Religion, this ch.). The more cosmopolitan has been the ascending political culture since the founding of the Al Said dynasty in 1744, although the imamate tradition has found intermittent expression.

Several millennia ago, Arab tribes migrated eastward to Oman, coinciding with the increasing presence in the region of peoples from present-day Iran. In the sixth century, Arabs succeeded in repelling encroachments of these ethnic groups; the conversion of Arab tribes to Islam in the seventh century resulted in the displacement of the settlers from Iran. The introduction of Ibadism vested power in the imam, the leader nominated by tribal shaykhs and then elected by public acclamation.

The Ibadis had five imamates before the founding of the Al Said dynasty. The first imamate in the ninth century became the example of the ideal Ibadite state. The fifth imamate, the Yarubid Imamate, recaptured Muscat from the Portuguese in 1650 after a colonial presence on the northeastern coast of Oman dating to 1508. The Yarubid dynasty expanded, acquiring former Portuguese colonies in East Africa and engaging in the slave trade. By 1719 dynastic succession led to the nomination of Saif ibn Sultan II, who had not yet reached puberty. His candidacy prompted a rivalry among the ulama and a civil war between the two major tribes, the Hinawi and the Ghafiri, with the Ghafiri supporting Saif ibn Sultan II. He assumed power in 1748 after the leaders of both factions had been killed in battle, but the rivalry continued, with the factionalization working in favor of the Iranians, who occupied Muscat and Suvar in 1743.

The Al Said dynasty was founded when Ahmad ibn Said Al Said was elected imam following the expulsion of the Iranians from Muscat in 1744. Like its predecessors, Al Said dynastic rule has been characterized by a history of internecine family struggle, fratricide, and usurpation. Apart from threats within the ruling family, there was the omnipresent challenge from the independent tribes of the interior who rejected the authority of the sultan, recognizing the imam as the sole legitimate leader and pressing, by resort to arms, for the restoration of the imamate.

Schisms within the ruling family were apparent before Ahmad ibn Said's death in 1783 and were later manifest with the division of the family into two main lines, the Sultan ibn Ahmad Al Said (r. 1792–1806)

line controlling the maritime state, with nominal control over the entire country; and the Qais branch, with authority over the Al Batinah and Ar Rustaq areas. During the period of Sultan Said ibn Sultan Al Said's rule (1806–56), Oman cultivated its East African colonies, profiting from the slave trade. As a regional commercial power in the nineteenth century, Oman held territories on the island of Zanzibar off the coast of East Africa, in Mombasa along the coast of East Africa, and until 1958 in Gwadar (in present-day Pakistan)

on the coast of the Arabian Sea. But when the British declared slavery illegal in the mid-1800s, the sultanate's fortunes reversed. The economy collapsed, and many Omani families migrated to Zanzibar. The population of Muscat fell from 55,000 to 8,000 between the 1850s and 1870s.

The death of Sultan Said ibn Sultan in 1856 prompted a further division: the descendants of the late sultan ruled Oman (Thuwaini ibn Said Al Said, r. 1856–66) and Zanzibar (Mayid ibn Said Al Said, r. 1856–70); the Qais branch intermittently allied itself with the ulama to restore imamate legitimacy. In 1868 Azzam ibn Qais Al Said (r. 1868–71) emerged as self-declared imam. Although a significant number of Hinawi tribes recognized him as imam, the public neither elected him nor acclaimed him as such.

Imam Azzam understood that to unify the country a strong, central authority had to be established with control over the interior tribes of Oman. His rule was jeopardized by the British, who interpreted his policy of bringing the interior tribes under the central government as a move against their established order. In resorting to military means to unify Oman, Imam Azzam alienated members of the Ghafiri tribes, who revolted in the 1870–71 period. The British gave Imam Azzam's rival, Turki ibn Said Al Said, financial and political support.



## Oman, a country study

Turki ibn Said succeeded in defeating the forces of Imam Azzam, who was killed in battle outside Matrah in January 1871.

The deteriorating economy resulting from the suppression of the slave trade rendered Sultan Turki ibn Said's rule susceptible to opposition from the interior. For a brief period, Turki ibn Said appeased his opposition with cash payments and British backing. His authority extended from the Al Batinah coast to Suhar, with the rest of the country operating autonomously. Sultan Turki ibn Said suffered a stroke in the early 1870s and was incapacitated. He was succeeded in 1888 by his son, Faisal ibn Turki Al Said, who was the first ruler of the Al Said family in the nineteenth century to assume power peacefully, without resort to arms or political subterfuge.

Four sultans of the Al Said family have ruled Oman in the twentieth century: Faisal ibn Turki Al Said (1888–1913), Taimur ibn Faisal Al Said (1913–32), Said ibn Taimur Al Said (1932–70), and the present sultan, Qabus ibn Said Al Said (1970– ). In large part, Omani political developments in the twentieth century followed the temperament and priorities of successive sultans. Each, to varying degrees, responded to threats to his authority from the interior; each had to balance independent action with an indirect role by Britain, with which Oman had treaties of friendship.

The process of state formation in Oman and the centralization of political power within the ruling family followed the same pattern found in other gulf shaykhdoms, particularly Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar. Oil revenues and income redistribution facilitated a pattern of continuity of political power within the ruling family and the traditional political elite as well as change with the modest creation of new institutions and expanded administration engaging an increasingly diverse segment of Omani society.

## **Faisal ibn Turki, 1888–1913**

On assuming power in 1888, Faisal ibn Turki gradually found his authority over the interior weakened as tribal leaders increasingly perceived his dependence on British advisers as an inherent weakness. In 1895 he was forced to seek refuge at Jalali fort after Muscat was captured. British political agents frustrated his efforts to recapture Muscat, compelling him to court the French. He granted the French coaling facilities for their fleet at Bandar Jissah near Muscat.

Determined to thwart any growth in French presence in what Britain considered its sphere of influence, Britain presented Faisal ibn Turki with an ultimatum in 1899 ordering the sultan to board the British flagship or Muscat would be bombarded. Having little recourse, Faisal ibn Turki capitulated. Publicly humiliated, his authority was irreversibly damaged. In 1903 he asked Lord George Nathaniel Curzon, viceroy of India, for permission to abdicate, but his request was denied. Responsibility for the capital was delegated to Said ibn Muhammad Al Said, while affairs of the interior fell to an ex-slave, Sulayman ibn Suwaylim. By 1913 control over the interior was completely lost, and a reconstituted imamate was again a threat to Muscat. In May 1913, Salim ibn Rashid al Harthi was elected imam at Tanuf and spearheaded a revolt against the sultan that combined both Hinawi and Ghafiri tribal groups.

## **Taimur ibn Faisal, 1913–32**

Taimur ibn Faisal succeeded his father as sultan in October 1913. When he assumed suzerainty over the country, he inherited an external public debt and widespread rebellion among the tribes. Between 1915 and 1920, the sultan's forces were aided by British financial and matériel support against the rebel tribes, ensuring adequate resistance but not total victory. An uneasy situation of no war, no peace, existed, with the sultan controlling Muscat and the coastal towns and the imam ruling the interior. This was tacitly codified in the Treaty of As Sib in 1920, brokered by the British political agent in Muscat. The treaty was between the sultan and the tribes, represented by Shaykh Isa ibn Salih al Harthi, leader of the Al Harth tribe.

In return for full autonomy, the tribes in the interior pledged to cease attacking the coast. The Treaty of As Sib was, de facto, a partition agreement between Muscat and Oman, serving Britain's interest in preserving its power through the office of the sultan without dispatching British troops to the region. The Treaty of As Sib ensured political quiescence between Muscat and Oman that lasted until the 1950s, when oil exploration in the interior reintroduced conflict. In return for accepting a truncation of his authority, the sultan received a loan from the government of British India with an amortization period of ten years, sufficient to repay his debts to merchants. When Sultan Taimur ibn Faisal abdicated for financial reasons in 1932, the twenty-two-year-old Said ibn Taimur inherited an administration that was in debt.

A United States Department of State bulletin on the sultan of Muscat and Oman in February 1938 describes the situation in which Sultan Said ibn Taimur found himself after assuming power: “The young Sultan found the country practically bankrupt and his troubles were further complicated by tribal unrest and conspiracy by certain of his uncles, one of whom immediately profited by the occasion to set up an independent regime. The Sultan tackled the situation with resolution and within a short time the traitorous uncle had been subdued, unrest quelled, and most important of all, state finances put on much more solid footing.”

## Said ibn Taimur, 1932–70

Between 1932 and 1970, Said ibn Taimur ruled Oman and impressed on it his own myopic vision. Said was an Anglophile who was compelled, in order to alleviate the country's debt, to integrate the interior with Oman and create an independent state. To create a financially independent state, he needed oil export revenues. But the acquiescence of the interior tribes was indispensable for exploration activities.

The dilemma materialized in 1954 when the PDO sent exploration teams to the interior. The move was interpreted by the tribal shaykhs as a violation of the 1920 Treaty of As Sib. This coincided with the death of Imam Muhammad ibn Abd Allah al Khalili, who had ruled the interior of the country, and the election in 1954 of a new imam, who led a breakaway movement seeking independence from coastal Oman. The new imam's brother solicited political and material support from Saudi Arabia and established a secessionist movement called the Omani Liberation Movement, with the goals of establishing an independent Omani state in the interior and forcing the withdrawal of foreign troops. The British intervened on behalf of the sultan and by 1959 reestablished the sultan's authority. The British abrogated the Treaty of As Sib and ended the office of imam.

After 1958 Said ibn Taimur established his residence at Al Hisn near Salalah, in Dhofar, where he remained permanently except for periodic visits to London. By retiring to the south from Muscat, Said ibn Taimur was not only more secure from assassination but was also no longer obligated to meet frequently with tribal shaykhs and distribute subsidies and thereby avoided depleting the treasury. He married Dhofari wives, one of whom bore him his only heir, Qabus ibn Said, and two daughters. Above all, Said ibn Taimur created his personal fiefdom and sought to arrest modernization by enforcing antiquated laws, public executions, and slavery of people of African descent. The isolation and xenophobia that he forced on the country and on Dhofar in particular left Oman grossly underdeveloped, despite increasing oil export revenues in the late 1960s.

Qabus ibn Said spent his early years isolated within the royal palace. At the instigation of his father's British advisers, Qabus ibn Said was permitted to go to Britain in 1958 for his education. He spent two years at a small private school, where he acquired mastery of the English language. In 1960 he was enrolled in the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, and, after graduating from a two-year course of study, served for several months with British units stationed in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). After a world tour and studies in London, he returned to Oman in December 1964. His father, however, refused to entrust him with a responsible role in the government or military and instead sequestered him in the palace in Salalah.

Qabus ibn Said's more cosmopolitan and progressive views were incompatible with his father's conservatism and isolationism, which Qabus ibn Said considered detrimental to the country's development. With the tacit endorsement of the British, who saw thirty-year-old Qabus ibn Said as an agreeable alternative, Qabus ibn Said and a number of alienated political elite overthrew Said ibn Taimur in a palace coup d'état on July 23, 1970. Said ibn Taimur withdrew to London, where he died in 1972.

## **Qabus ibn Said: The Emergence of a Modern State**

*Sultan Qabus ibn Said Al Said, ruler of Oman Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington (Photo Mohamed Mustafa)*

Muscat, capital of Oman, with Jilali and Mirani forts in the background Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington After assuming power in 1970, Qabus ibn Said concentrated on restoring control over southern Dhofar region, which had been in rebellion against his father's oppressive rule. He used economic and military means, believing that poor economic conditions had helped motivate the Dhofari rebellion. By 1975 he succeeded in suppressing militarily the Marxist–inspired rebellion, and the sultan could turn to development issues and the establishment of modern governmental and administrative institutions. By the mid1980s , virtually all regions of the country were linked by a transportation system and a telecommunications network. Ministerial government and the civil service were expanded, and limited participation in the political process was created in 1981 with the establishment of the State Consultative Council and in 1991, with the formation of the Consultative Council, an advisory body that superseded the State Consultative Council.

## The Dhofar Rebellion

The Dhofar rebellion combined economic grievances with political ideology. Placed in a regional context, Arab nationalism, the principal ideology of the 1950s and 1960s, indicted the conservative monarchs of the gulf and demanded their overthrow. Oman was susceptible to these populist stirrings, and, given Dhofar's economic backwardness, it was a tinderbox. Dhofaris resonated with the Marxist ideology of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY, also seen as South Yemen) during the late 1960s. The primary objective of the Omani liberation movement named the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (in 1972 renamed the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf and in 1974 further renamed the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman) was the removal of Sultan Said ibn Taimur.

The government's policies and strategy after Sultan Qabus ibn Said's ascent to power diffused much of this opposition. Pacification occurred through the dual strategy of carrot and stick—military pressure and economic rewards.

Qabus ibn Said engaged neighboring states, apprehensive of the growth of left-wing movements in the region, in dispatching economic and military assistance. In 1973 the shah of Iran, fulfilling his self-perceived role as guardian of the Persian Gulf following the departure of the British, dispatched ground forces (eventually numbering more than 3,000) and air units to Dhofar to assist the sultan. Oman received annual financial aid of about US\$200 million from Abu Dhabi to assist military and civil development projects and about US\$2.5 billion from Saudi Arabia, with which relations had improved. Britain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan provided training in military schools for armed forces personnel. The UAE and Jordan occasionally provided troop units for guard duty in the north, thereby releasing Omani units for service in Dhofar.

To erode the Dhofaris' political will, Qabus ibn Said directed a disproportionate percentage of government revenues to the southern region. The shift was designed in part to augment military capabilities in the event of a resumption of hostilities and in part as economic appeasement. The construction of schools, hospitals, roads, and other infrastructure ameliorated the underprivileged status of the south.

Almost 25 percent of the approximately RO600 million (US\$1.8 billion) allocated for development between 1971 and 1975 went to Dhofar to improve transportation, education, rural health, and religious facilities. This amount was spent on projects in Dhofar, although the population only numbered about 50,000, in comparison with the population of the rest of Oman of 400,000 in the mid-1970s.

The government also benefited from factionalization within the insurrectionary movement. The movement in the region had originally been organized in 1963 under the Dhofar Liberation Front, led largely by Arab nationalists and religious conservatives who could enlist support of tribal shaykhs in a common struggle against Sultan Said ibn Taimur. In 1968 the Marxists took over leadership, having the support of the PDRY, the Soviet Union, and China. Conservative Dhofaris broke with the movement, and when Qabus ibn Said seized power in 1970, many agreed to support him against the insurgency. By the mid-1970s, as many as 2,000 rebels had surrendered, been retrained, and incorporated into the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) as pledged under the terms of the amnesty declared shortly after the 1970 coup.

The government based its new administration and distribution networks on preexisting tribal structures. The government established centers headed by local representatives, usually minor tribal leaders elected by the population of their respective districts but who had to be endorsed by the governor of Dhofar before assuming office. In the larger coastal settlements, local deputy governors managed the district administration independent of the governor of Dhofar. Most of these were major tribal shaykhs, who received a monthly stipend from the government and additional allowances, usually on state or religious holidays. The government's financial allowances to the shaykhs, irrespective of whether or not the shaykh held an administrative position, served to ensure allegiance to authorities in Muscat. Two state institutions distributed these allowances: the finance section of the *wali* (governor) and the palace administration, popularly known as Diwan Affairs.

## **State Formation and Politically Influential Groups**

The process of state formation facilitated by Oman's commercial production and export of hydrocarbon resources transformed the relationship between the ruler and the traditional political elite comprising the ruling family, established merchant families, and tribal shaykhs. While reinforcing some linkages, such as the central role of the Al Said and the political influence of the merchant families, other linkages, particularly the tribes, have diminished in importance. Society outside the capital and urban centers remains tribal, with tribal leaders exercising political authority locally. But the power of tribes as regional pressure groups declined steadily as a result of the incorporation of rural areas into the government-administered sector.

Oil revenues facilitated the transfer of some of the income from the state to society, creating a broader base.

Pre-oil stratification of Omani society, wherein the ruler depended on the tribal shaykhs to ensure popular support, has partially been superseded by the establishment of a social welfare state through which the government fosters a direct relationship between the state and the individual. Government clinics, agricultural and industrial projects, schools, and employment in the public sector reinforce this new linkage.

## The Al Said Dynasty

*Figure 15. Oman: Government Structure, 1992* Members of the Al Said family have historically played a central role in the state apparatus, not only because of hereditary succession to the sultanate but also because much of the ruler's bureaucracy has consisted of his relatives. Before 1932 there was an implicit division between Muscat and Oman, with the ruler rarely able to extend his authority over the whole geographical area of Oman. Not only was the interior outside his sphere of influence, but frequently the ruler could not exercise authority over the Al Batinah coast. Relatives often controlled towns such as Suhar and Ar Rustaq autonomously, creating individual fiefdoms.

By the time Sultan Said ibn Taimur assumed power in 1932, these independent power centers had disappeared. This coincided with an increasing role of family members in the administration of the state. This nepotism has been practiced since the nineteenth century when members of the Al Said served in such positions as representative (*wakil*), deputy (*wazir*), governor (*wali*), field general, and council minister. Yet, the practice was not without its risks, and often rulers were sensitive to the potential for relatives to become contenders for power. Sultan Said ibn Taimur recognized the risk his half-brothers Tariq ibn Taimur Al Said and Fahar ibn Taimur Al Said and his son Qabus ibn Said presented, and he delegated only minor responsibilities, if any, to Qabus.

Sultan Qabus ibn Said has similarly incorporated members of the Al Said family into the state apparatus, particularly in sensitive ministerial positions. The sultan reserved major ministerial positions for himself—in 1993 he held the posts of prime minister, minister of defense, minister of finance, and minister of foreign affairs—although the functions of the prime minister were often entrusted to the minister of state for foreign affairs. In the 1993 cabinet, two members of the Al Said served as deputy prime ministers: Fahar ibn Taimur Al Said for security and defense and Fahd ibn Mahmud Al Said for legal affairs; Faisal ibn Ali Al Said served as minister of national heritage and culture. The Al Said also controlled the Ministry of Interior, the governorship of Muscat, and the governorship of Dhofar. Sultan Qabus ibn Said's cousin, Thuwaini ibn Shihab Al Said, was the sultan's special personal representative, and some considered him the most likely candidate to succeed Qabus ibn Said. Shabib ibn Taimur Al Said, Qabus ibn Said's uncle, assumed the role of special adviser to the sultan for environmental affairs (see fig. 15).

Despite his progressive rule on some fronts, Sultan Qabus ibn Said has been slow to delegate real political authority. One of his first acts as sultan was to return his father's half-brother, Tariq ibn Taimur, from exile in West Germany and appoint him prime minister. Tariq ibn Taimur was educated in West Germany, married a German national, and had extensive experience working in the Middle East as the representative of a construction firm. He had been an outspoken critic of Sultan Said ibn Taimur's rule, when forced into exile in 1958.

Tariq ibn Taimur formed his first cabinet on August 16, 1970, and brought the notion of political reform. He supported the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary system and as a result came into direct conflict with Sultan Qabus ibn Said, who preferred the status quo, with real power remaining in the office of the sultan. As of 1993, power remained centralized with the Al Said, and, although departing from his father's contention that to maintain the ruler's power the people must remain uneducated, real decision making remained the exclusive privilege of a narrow-based elite that the Al Said dominated.

The centralization of power with the sultan and the absence of a mechanism for succession left speculation open concerning Oman after Qabus ibn Said. Qabus ibn Said has no heir, although he was married briefly in 1976 to Tariq ibn Taimur's daughter. The Al Said family is small, numbering fewer than 100 male members.

Since the death in 1980 of Tariq ibn Taimur, no individual within the ruling family has distinguished himself or demonstrated any exceptional ability to rule. Likely candidates to succeed Qabus ibn Said include his two uncles, Fahar ibn Taimur and Shabib ibn Taimur; three cousins, Thuwaini ibn Shihab, Fahd ibn Mahmud, and Faisal ibn Ali; and, among the junior princes, Haitham ibn Tariq Al Said, son of Oman's former prime minister. The issue of succession is sensitive, and, in the absence of a designated crown prince, the door is open for political struggle.



## Oman, a country study

## Established Merchant Families

Among the most important groups, in terms of political influence, are a number of merchant families whose economic wealth is predicated on the old, established links with the ruling family. These are members of families who settled in Muscat and the coastal region and include both Hindus and Muslims from the Indian subcontinent and Shia from Iran. These families consolidated their power during the reign of Sultan Said ibn Taimur and continued to amass fortunes after 1970, largely through monopolistic or quasi-monopolistic franchises. None is directly involved in the oil business, but together they are the principal suppliers of goods to the government, local contractors, foreign firms, local consumers, and the oil industry. Valuable distributorships for consumer and capital services are under their aegis.

Close cooperation between the merchants and Sultan Said ibn Taimur evolved into a mutually protective relationship with civil servants in the Qabus ibn Said government. Included in this group are the Zawawis, whose roots are in Saudi Arabia. Qais ibn Abd al Munim az Zawawi, for example, as of 1991 served as deputy prime minister for economic and financial affairs. Apart from his ministerial position, Qais ibn Abd al Munim is a prominent Muscat businessman. He was educated in India, has no hereditary relationship with the ruling family, and is well connected in the Arab world. His brother, Omar ibn Abd al Munim az Zawawi, a Harvard-educated physician, is considered the second wealthiest man in Oman next to the sultan. Apart from being president of Omar Zawawi Establishment (the Omzest Group), which comprises about seventy companies and joint ventures, he is special adviser for external liaison to the sultan. The Omzest Group represents multinational companies, such as Daimler-Benz and Mitsui Engineering and Shipping Company, which is contracted to build the oil refinery near Muscat.

Another example of a merchant family drawn into the ministerial level is Said Ahmad ash Shanfari, the minister of petroleum and minerals, whose family origins are Dhofari and who has held the portfolio since 1974. The Shanfari family is related to Qabus ibn Said's mother and controls Shanfari and Partners, a contracting company involved in building infrastructure. Its bid was selected from among six contractors to build the new industrial estate at Raysut.

Khimji Ramdas, who heads the Khimji Ramdas Group, which holds international franchises ranging from consumer products and soft drinks to insurance and construction, is also in this circle. Yahya Muhammad Nasib, chairman of Yahya Enterprises, provides defense and communications equipment to the Ministry of Defense and other ministries. Other influential families include those of Muhsin Haidar Darwish and Suhail Bahwan, chairman of the Bahwan Group, Muscat.

## **Government Institutions**

Government institutions on the national level include the Council of Ministers and two other bodies: the National Defense Council and the National Development Council. In 1992 the Council of Ministers had twenty-seven members, including the prime minister and three deputy prime ministers—for security and defense, legal affairs, and financial and economic affairs. The sultan occupied the sensitive posts of prime minister, minister of defense, minister of foreign affairs, and minister of finance. Sultan Qabus ibn Said controls all ministerial appointments and cabinet reshuffles. Policy formulation remains largely the product of person-to-person negotiations between the sultan and individual ministers.

The National Defense Council, working in conjunction with the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior, coordinates the activities of the Royal Armed Forces (formerly called the Sultan's Armed Forces) and the Royal Oman Police. The National Development Council manages national development planning, and all projects involving more than a certain minimum expenditure require its review.

## Consultative Council

In 1991 Qabus established the Consultative Council (Majlis ash Shura), a sixty-member body. The Consultative Council superseded the fifty-five-member State Consultative Council (SCC; Majlis al Istishari lil Dawlah) created in 1981 with significant regional and popular as well as official representation.

Whereas the concept of consultation is an integral part of Ibadi Islam and the imamate, it was not a tradition incorporated into Oman's contemporary sultanate until Qabus ibn Said established the SCC by royal decree on October 18, 1981. Initially, the SCC consisted of forty-three members but was expanded to fifty-five in 1983 with representation of the seven geographic regions weighted according to population size and development needs. Nineteen members were government officials, and of the nineteen, eleven—undersecretaries of social service ministries—were the only permanent members of the SCC. The remaining seven government officials could serve a maximum of two terms (four years), as could other SCC members.

Like the SCC, the Consultative Council lacks legislative powers but plays a consultative role. Its representatives come from Oman's fifty-nine *wilayat* (governorates; sing., *wilayah*). Candidates are selected by the *wali* (Muscat-appointed governor) and can be nominated by friends or themselves. After the nomination process, names of three candidates are submitted to the deputy prime minister for legal affairs in Muscat, who selects the final candidates, who must then be endorsed by the sultan.

Unlike the SCC, members of the Consultative Council cannot include government officials or civil servants.

Although this condition automatically excludes a pool of politically experienced individuals, it is intended to circumvent potential allegations of conflict of interest. The inclusion of eleven undersecretaries in the SCC tended to strengthen it as a body codifying the status quo rather than offering legitimate criticism and alternative policies. The SCC's recommendations did not include defense, foreign affairs, or the petroleum sector. It convened three times annually, with each session lasting three days to a week. The restricted format, infrequent meetings, and lack of veto power or legislative role combined to tie the SCC's hands. Despite these shortcomings, the news reports and televised broadcasts of the SCC exposed the public to a limited part of the government structure. It also modestly introduced the concept of accountability, although the ultimate authority of the sultan remained unquestioned.

The role of the new Consultative Council can perhaps best be understood in the framework of Oman's graduated development process. In 1970 Qabus ibn Said rejected a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary system in favor of preservation of the status quo. Subsequently, the SCC evolved from an earlier advisory body, the Council on Agriculture, Fisheries, and Industries, established in April 1979. The council was largely successful in serving as an "outside" body offering policy recommendations to the sultan and the ministers, although the scope of its consultation was relatively narrow. It was abolished in October 1981, and seven of its twelve members were incorporated into the SCC. The Consultative Council has modestly opened the political system.

## **Judicial System**

Oman's legal system is based on the Ibadi interpretation of the sharia (Islamic law), which is similar to that of the four orthodox schools of Sunni Islam (see Sunni Islam , ch. 1). Jurisprudence is administered regionally by the *wali*, in conjunction with the qadi, a judge who has attained that position either by graduating from an Islamic law college or by taking advanced study with local religious experts. Although primarily guided by the sharia, the system aims at arriving at a fair decision or compromise acceptable to all parties. Invariably, tribal law has become mixed with religious law. Modern commercial law, borrowed from other parts of the Middle East and Europe, also operates in the business sphere.

## The Media

The media sector remained rudimentary in 1993. There are three Arabic language dailies: *Al Watan* (The Nation), *Khalij Times*, and *Oman Daily Newspaper*. The Muscat daily, *Times of Oman*, and the *Oman Daily Observer* are two English-language newspapers. Rather than a forum for open discourse, the media serve primarily as benign commentators on local and international news.

## Oman — Foreign Relations

Oman's foreign policy since the 1970s has been influenced by Qabus ibn Said's determination to reverse the isolationism of Sultan Said ibn Taimur's rule and guardedly to integrate Oman both regionally and internationally. The geostrategic position of the country on the southern shore of the Strait of Hormuz, the imperatives of an oil-dependent economy, and the threats posed by stronger, neighboring regimes, notably Saudi Arabia and Iran, have also shaped the sultan's foreign policy. Oman's foreign policy, as a result of the sultan's goals and the regime's ties to Britain and the United States, has been nonconfrontational and conciliatory to Western interests in the region.

Nonetheless, the regime has displayed an uncommon independence of action in comparison with other Arab gulf states. On several occasions, Oman has acted as a broker in regional disputes. During the Iran–Iraq War (1980–88), the two belligerents conducted cease–fire talks secretly in Muscat. Although no formal agreement resulted, the talks reduced mistrust between the parties. Similarly, after 1988 Oman acted as mediator in the restoration of diplomatic relations between Iran and Britain and Iran and Saudi Arabia.

## Regional Relations

Since 1970, when Qabus ibn Said assumed power, Oman's role in regional political dynamics has increased.

Although remaining outside the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), it has been a member of the GCC since its formation in May 1981. Relations between Oman and other gulf countries have improved since 1970 as long-standing territorial disputes have been resolved. Oman and the UAE resolved a border dispute in 1981; Oman and the PDRY normalized relations in 1982; and Oman and Saudi Arabia signed a treaty in 1991 ending a long-standing territorial dispute concerning the Al Buraymi Oasis.

The resolution of the Al Buraymi Oasis territorial dispute, concerning a cluster of nine villages claimed by Saudi Arabia and administered by Abu Dhabi and Oman, improved regional relations. With the discovery of oil reserves in the gulf, the revenue potential for the Al Buraymi Oasis prompted Saudi Arabia to press its claim on the disputed territory. Riyadh dispatched troops, which occupied the area in 1952. After failing to win their claim in international arbitration, the British, using the sultan's army and the Trucial Oman Scouts, reoccupied the oasis in 1955. Although the United States protested the British action, the United States was not prepared to extend military assistance to Saudi Arabia to reverse the situation. From the early 1950s onward, Saudi Arabia provided a base from which the Ibadi imam of the interior continued to challenge the authority of the Al Said dynasty.

After the 1970 coup d'état, Qabus ibn Said sought to improve and normalize relations with Saudi Arabia.

Formal relations were established following a state visit by the sultan to the kingdom in December 1971. An agreement on July 29, 1974, among Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE settled the Al Buraymi dispute. It stipulated that Oman would receive three villages in the region and Abu Dhabi six and that the two countries would share the oil field at Shaybah. The agreement provided Saudi Arabia with an outlet to the gulf through UAE territory.

In the course of the Dhofar rebellion, Oman received substantial financial support from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, countries that feared the growth of left-wing, antimonarchist movements in their own territories. In March 1990, Saudi Arabia and Oman formalized a border pact legitimating the existing declared line separating the two countries.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the fear of militant Islam among Arab gulf leaders, combined with the Iran-Iraq War and the potential interruption of tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, catalyzed the formation of the GCC (which also includes Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar) (see *Collective Security under the Gulf Cooperation Council*, ch. 7). The GCC is theoretically a means to ensure collective security of the member states. In practice, as Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait showed, it proved ineffectual in deterring and responding to aggression by neighboring states.

After the Persian Gulf War, Sultan Qabus ibn Said suggested the creation of a multilateral 100,000-strong collective defense force. However, Saudi Arabia scuttled the proposal, which was unpopular in Oman and in other gulf states. Objections ranged from the matter of costs and manpower needs of such a force, given the small populations of GCC member states, to the question of who would command such a force. The smaller gulf states feared a dominant Riyadh dictating terms and foreign policy.



## International Relations

Reciprocity has characterized Oman's relationship with foreign powers. Historically, Oman has relied on foreign powers to ensure political stability, domestically and regionally. In turn, Oman's geostrategic location at the entry point of the Strait of Hormuz and its long coastline have guided the interests of foreign powers.

Relations with the British date back to 1798 when the first treaty of friendship was concluded between the sultan of Muscat and the British government of India. British interests in Oman were predicated on Whitehall's concern with the defense of India and the imperative of maintaining secure trade routes and containing the expansion of other European powers in the Indian Ocean. Following the discovery of the potential for using oil as fuel, and later the conversion of the British naval fleet from coal-fired ships to oil-fired ships in 1911, the security of tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz gained increasing importance. Britain's Royal Air Force had staging and diplomatic telecommunications facilities on the island of Masirah from 1932 to 1977.

The British largely facilitated the extensive military buildup and modernization of Oman's armed forces during the course of the Dhofar rebellion in the 1960s and 1970s. Without British military assistance in suppressing the rebellion, the sultanate probably could not have contained the threat, even with troops from Iran and advisers from Jordan. This close military relationship continued after the suppression of the insurrection. The chief of the general staff and the commanders of the air force and navy were British officers through the mid-1980s.

United States influence in Oman has been felt more strongly since the 1970s. Britain's disengagement east of Suez in 1971 opened up the region to greater competition for influence, primarily from the United States.

When Sultan Qabus ibn Said assumed power, there was no United States diplomatic presence in Oman. A United States consular officer made at least an annual visit, with contacts managed by the British, who had full control of Oman's foreign relations and defense matters. A United States missionary medical doctor was prominent in the health program. In addition, a United States archaeologist, explorer, and oilman briefly extended his exploration from the PDRY into Dhofar in the 1970s.

United States interests in regional security and in maintaining local allies, particularly after the fall of the shah of Iran in 1979, called for the reinforcement of close security links to the sultanate. Since the 1970s, Sultan Qabus ibn Said has quietly asserted his independence and engaged United States petroleum professionals to advise the government. The selection of United States citizens to manage the development programs in the Musandam Peninsula and the Al Buraymi Oasis and to develop water resources in the sultanate was a dramatic departure from the sultanate's exclusive reliance on British advisers. Relations between Oman and the United States strengthened as Qabus supported United States peace initiatives in the Middle East, as manifest in Muscat's support of the Camp David Accords signed in 1979 by Egypt and Israel and mediated by the United States.

United States influence in Oman widened with the signing of a facilities access agreement in June 1980 (renewed in 1990) providing United States military access to Omani bases under specified conditions. This was part of a larger regional strategy that also included facilities in Somalia and Kenya. The air bases at As Sib and Thamarit and on Masirah (the latter abandoned by the British in 1977) were upgraded with United States assistance.

The Joint United States–Oman Commission was established in 1980 with the mandate to fund and administer economic assistance programs in the country. Activities funded through the commission reflect sectoral priorities and include a school construction project, a scholarship and training project, a fisheries development project, a management project, and a water resources project.

The activities funded reflect United States Agency for International Development (AID) priorities. In the 1990s, AID development assistance focused on the agency's interest in privatization and institution building.

The annual Omani budget proposal for fiscal year 1993 allocated US\$5 million (or 33 percent of the total program) to private-sector development, US\$9.5 million (or 63 percent) to institution building, and US\$8.8 million (or 58 percent) to develop education facilities.

Despite these programs promoting economic development and education, Oman faced significant problems in

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the early 1990s. A wealthier, better educated population will demand greater participation in the political process. As of early 1993, the sultan was unwilling to relinquish real power, and he carefully preserved his political autonomy. A new Consultative Council was established in late 1990 but was essentially an advisory body without legislative power. To serve as a mechanism for true political reform, the council must be empowered with a legislative role; as of early 1993, this had not occurred.

\* \* \* The literature on Oman is scarce and varies in quality. Most works were published in the late 1970s or 1980s and concentrate on contrasting the periods before and after Qabus ibn Said came to power. Although such comparative analysis is valid, it seems dated because more than twenty years have elapsed since the accession of the sultan. Government publications, such as the annual *Statistical Yearbook*, provide information on every sector of the society and economy and are helpful tools in determining economic and social trends.

Monographs offer a general framework for understanding Oman's contemporary scene and also provide a detailed history. Among the more useful is J E. Peterson's *Oman in the Twentieth Century*. Also valuable is a work by John Townsend, former adviser to sultans Said ibn Taimur and Qabus ibn Said, *Oman: The Making of the Modern State*, which focuses on institution building in the post-1970 period.

Various journal articles provide more up-to-date material. General economic information is reported weekly in *Middle East Economic Survey* and *Middle East Economic Digest* and periodically in London's *Financial Times* country surveys. Current information on the hydrocarbon sector is best found in industry journals, particularly the *Oil and Gas Journal*, *Petroleum Intelligence Weekly*, and *Petroleum Economist*. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

## Chapter 7. Regional and National Security Considerations

Unavailable *Crossed scimitars* ANY THREAT TO THE STABILITY of the Persian Gulf endangering the region's oil flow greatly concerns the rest of the world. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was the opening stage in more than a decade of upheaval. The outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq in 1980, the expansion of the war to nonbelligerent shipping, and the presence of foreign naval flotillas in the gulf followed. When general hostilities eventually broke out, they arose from an unexpected quarter—Iraq's sweep into Kuwait in August 1990 and the possibility of Iraqi forces continuing down the gulf coast to seize other oil-rich Arab states. The smaller Arab regimes volunteered use of their ports and airfields as bases for the coalition of forces in Operation Desert Storm to defeat Iraq.

The overwhelming concentration of military power that enabled Iraq to swallow up Kuwait underscored the vulnerability of the territory and oil facilities of the other gulf states. To the extent that their military resources permitted, each of the Arab states participated in the coalition that defeated Iraq and drove it out of Kuwait. It was clear, nonetheless, that they played a subordinate role in the vast operation in which the United States, Britain, and France predominated, accompanied by Egypt and Syria.

After its sharp setback, Iraq in early 1993 remained a major regional power and a littoral state of the Persian Gulf, along with Iran and Saudi Arabia. None of the five other Persian Gulf littoral states—Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, or Oman—is in a position to defend its borders or territorial waters alone. In the face of their fragility, these Persian Gulf states continue to take measures to reinforce their individual and collective security. Relative to size and population, they have been among the world's most lavish spenders on the needs of their armed forces. Nevertheless, their military potential is limited by small manpower pools, ethnic divisions, limited area, and little experience in the effective use of modern weaponry.

A few months after the start of the Iran–Iraq War in 1980, the six nonbelligerents—the five gulf states and Saudi Arabia—in 1981 banded together in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Although the GCC had economic, social, and political aims, its main purpose was the creation of a defensive military alliance. The GCC leaders feared that a decisive Iranian military victory would fuel the drive of the radical Shia (see Glossary) Muslims of Iran to spread their form of Islam. Concurrently, the GCC states accelerated their individual military efforts by purchasing modern aircraft, armored vehicles, air defense systems, and missile-armed naval vessels.

The GCC members are determined to construct a collective self-defense system without the direct involvement of foreign powers. For both political and practical reasons, however, the military goals of the GCC—standardization of equipment, coordination of training, integration of forces, and joint planning—have been achieved only to a limited degree. The gulf states have also been forced to restrain their military purchases as a result of declining oil revenues.

In the immediate aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, agreement was reached with the GCC to station Egyptian and Syrian troops in Kuwait to ensure the military stability of the northern gulf. By 1993, however, this plan seemed to have been abandoned. Instead, Kuwait and most other gulf states turned to cooperation with the West to develop a new security framework. The United States concluded agreements to permit pre-positioning of United States equipment for combat units, port access, and joint exercises and training.

Britain and France also negotiated military cooperation arrangements. The effect was to spread a Western strategic umbrella over the region without the permanent stationing of foreign forces, although a United States and British naval presence is expected to continue.

In early 1993, more than a year after the gulf war ended, the danger of renewed violence in the region had receded, although no reconciliation among the antagonists had occurred. Iraq had not fully recovered from its humiliating defeat; nevertheless, its reduced army and air force still overshadow the combined forces of the GCC. Iran's military strength was depleted during its eight-year struggle with Iraq, and recovery is proceeding slowly. Although it appears to have shifted to more moderate policies, Iran's ambition to be a factor in regional gulf security has been treated with suspicion.

Traditional rivalries and territorial disputes among the smaller gulf states still linger but have steadily

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diminished as sources of tension. Subversion and terrorist incidents, often linked to Iran, have abated, as has the potential for disruption by foreign workers manipulated by external forces. The police vigilantly control internal dissent that can threaten the stability of the existing regimes. Nevertheless, resistance to democratic reforms by some members of the conservative ruling families of the gulf increases the likelihood of future destabilization and upheaval.

## Historical Overview

*Figure 16. Strait of Hormuz* According to archaeologists, warfare was a common activity 5,000 years ago among the peoples of the area of the Middle East that in modern times became Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the smaller gulf states. Intermittent hostilities, often based on rivalries between the Persians of the eastern coast of the gulf and the Arabs of the western coast, have occurred ever since. Sargon, Hammurabi, Nebuchadnezzar II, and Alexander the Great were among the best known kings who led warring armies in the 2,500 years before the birth of Christ. During the centuries of Greek and Roman domination, the gulf region was of limited interest to the major powers, but the area's importance as a strategic and trading center rose with the emergence of Islam in the seventh century A.D. The caliphate's military strength was concentrated at Hormuz. Strategically sited at the mouth of the gulf, its authority extended over ports and islands of the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf (see fig. 16).

The strategic importance of Hormuz, however, did not survive the appearance of Western powers, initially the Portuguese who came to the gulf in the late fifteenth century after Vasco da Gama's discovery of the route to India via the Cape of Good Hope. The Ottomans and the Iranians also tried to dominate the gulf but faced opposition from local tribes in Bahrain and Muscat, reluctant to cede authority over their territories, which by then were the most important areas on the coast. Increasing British involvement in India beginning in the late eighteenth century quickened British interest in the gulf region as a means of protecting the sea routes to India. The principal challenge to Britain arose from the Qawasim tribal confederation originating in the area of the present-day United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Qawasim, who amassed a fleet of about 900 vessels, demanded tribute for the passage of merchant vessels and were regarded as pirates by the Europeans. Between 1809 and 1820, British sea power gradually brought about the destruction of the Qawasim fleet. This in turn led to the signing of agreements with Britain by the Qawasim and other shaykhs (see *Treaties with the British*, ch. 1). The amirates promised to have no direct dealings with other foreign states and to abstain from piracy.

Britain in turn assumed responsibility for the foreign relations of the amirates and promised to protect them from all aggression by sea and to lend its support against any land attacks. Before the end of the century, Britain extended protection to Bahrain and Kuwait; Qatar entered the system after it repudiated Ottoman sovereignty in 1916.

Although Muscat was traditionally a center of the slave trade, its sultan agreed to abandon this activity in return for British help in building a navy. In the early nineteenth century, the sultan's efficient fleet of sloops, corvettes, and frigates enabled him to support a maritime empire extending from East Africa to the coast of present-day Pakistan. With the eventual decline of this empire, owing in part to its division into two states—Zanzibar and Oman—Britain's influence grew, and it signed a treaty in 1891 similar to those with the gulf amirates.

The strategic importance of the Persian Gulf became increasingly apparent as the oil industry developed in the twentieth century. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran all claimed some of the territory of the gulf states during the years between World War I and World War II, but Britain's firm resistance to these claims enabled the amirates to maintain their territorial integrity without resort to arms. Except for a small force of the British Indian Navy to ensure observance of the treaty conditions and maintain maritime peace in the gulf, Britain abstained from direct military involvement. As the wealth of the gulf's oil resources became clear, the size of the British military establishment expanded. By the end of the 1960s, Britain had about 9,000 men in Oman, Sharjah (an emirate of the UAE), and Bahrain, where British military headquarters was located. The Trucial Oman Scouts, a mobile force of mixed nationality that Britain supported and British officers commanded, became a symbol of public order in the UAE until Britain's withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in 1971.

## Impact of the Iran–Iraq War, 1980–88

The first major threat to the security of the Persian Gulf states followed the outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq in 1980. The war began after a period of deteriorating relations between these two historic rivals, dating from the fall of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1979 and his replacement as Iranian leader by Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini. Full-scale warfare erupted in September 1980 as Iraqi military units swept across the Shatt al Arab waterway—which forms the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers—into the province of Khuzestan, Iran's richest oil-producing area. Iraqi president Saddam Husayn hoped to overthrow Khomeini, who had been overtly attempting to spread his Islamist (also seen as fundamentalist) revolution into Iraq, where the minority regime of Sunni (see Glossary) Muslims ruled over a majority population of Shia Muslims.

By November 1980, the Iraqi offensive had lost its momentum. Rejecting an Iraqi offer to negotiate, Khomeini launched a series of counteroffensives in 1982, in 1983, and in 1984 that resulted in the recapture of the Iranian cities of Khorramshahr and Abadan. The destruction of huge oil facilities caused both belligerents sharp declines in oil revenues. Iraq was able to obtain substantial financial aid from Saudi Arabia and other gulf states. In early 1986, an Iranian offensive across the Shatt al Arab resulted in the fall of the Iraqi oil-loading port of Faw and the occupation of much of the Faw Peninsula almost to the Kuwait border. But the Iranians could not break out of the peninsula to threaten Basra, and their last great offensive, which began in December 1986, was ultimately repelled with heavy losses. In the spring of 1988, the freshly equipped Iraqi ground and air forces succeeded in retaking the Faw Peninsula and, through a succession of frontal assaults, continued into Iran. Iranian battlefield losses, combined with Iraqi air and missile attacks on Iranian cities, forced Khomeini to accept a ceasefire, which took effect in August 1988.

Initially, the fighting between Iran and Iraq only peripherally affected the Persian Gulf states. In May 1981, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE banded together in the GCC to protect their interests and, if necessary, to defend themselves (see Collective Security under the Gulf Cooperation Council, this ch.). In 1984 Iran reacted to Iraqi air attacks on Iran's main oil terminal on the island of Khark by attacking ships destined for ports in gulf countries that assisted Iraq's war effort. Iranian links with a coup attempt in Bahrain in 1981, Shia terrorist activity in Kuwait, and Iranian-inspired violence in Mecca underscored the conviction of the Arab states of the gulf that Iran was the primary threat to their security.

Iran stepped up the tanker warfare in early 1987 by introducing high-speed small craft armed with Italian Sea Killer missiles. Kuwait had already sought the protection of United States naval escorts through the gulf for reflagged Kuwaiti vessels. Determined to protect the flow of oil, the United States approved and began tanker convoys in May 1987. Eleven Kuwaiti ships—one-half of the Kuwaiti tanker fleet—were placed under the United States flag. Other Kuwaiti tankers sailed under Soviet and British flags. Although United States escorts were involved in a number of clashes with Iranian forces and one tanker was damaged by a mine, Iran generally avoided interfering with Kuwaiti ships sailing under United States protection.

## Persian Gulf War, 1991

Despite its huge losses in the Iran–Iraq War, Iraq was unchallenged as the most powerful military presence in the gulf area. Reviving Iraq's old territorial claims against Kuwait, Saddam Husayn called for the annexation of Bubiyan and Warbah islands at the mouth of the Shatt al Arab to give Iraq a clear passage to the gulf. He also accused Kuwait of illegally siphoning off oil from Ar Rumaylah field, one of the world's largest oil pools, which the two countries shared. Saddam Husayn threatened to use force against Arab oil producers, including Kuwait and the UAE, that exceeded their oil quotas, charging them with colluding with the United States to strangle the Iraqi economy by flooding the market with low-priced oil.

Although Iraq had accompanied its threats by moving troops to the border area, the world was largely taken by surprise when, on August 2, 1990, the Iraqi army invaded and occupied Kuwait. A force of about 120,000 soldiers and approximately 2,000 tanks and other armored vehicles met little resistance. The Kuwaiti army was not on the alert, and those troops at their posts could not mount an effective defense. Some aircraft operating from southern Kuwait attacked Iraqi armored columns before their air base was overrun, and they sought refuge in Saudi Arabia. Of the 20,000 Kuwaiti troops, many were killed or captured, although up to 7,000 escaped into Saudi Arabia, along with about forty tanks.

Having completed the occupation of Kuwait, the Iraqi armored and mechanized divisions and the elite Republican Guard advanced south toward Kuwait's border with Saudi Arabia. Intelligence sources indicated that the Iraqis were positioning themselves for a subsequent drive toward the Saudi oil fields and shipping terminals, possibly continuing toward the other gulf states.

In the first of a series of resolutions condemning Iraq, the United Nations (UN) Security Council on August 2 called for Iraq's unconditional and immediate withdrawal from Kuwait. In the ensuing months, a coalition force of more than 600,000 ground, sea, and air force personnel deployed to defend Saudi Arabia and to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait. Command of the force was divided: commander in chief of the United States Central Command, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, headed United States, British, and French units; his Saudi counterpart, Lieutenant General Khalid ibn Sultan ibn Abd al Aziz Al Saud, commanded units from twentyfour non-Western countries, including troops from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Kuwait, and the other gulf states. In addition to 20,000 Saudi troops and 7,000 Kuwaiti troops, an estimated 3,000 personnel from the other GCC states took part in the land forces of the coalition offensive, known as Operation Desert Storm.

When the massive coalition ground assault of Operation Desert Storm got under way on February 24, 1991, troops of the Persian Gulf states formed part of two Arab task forces. The first, Joint Forces Command North, consisting of Egyptian, Saudi, Syrian, and Kuwaiti troops, deployed on Kuwait's western border. Joint Forces Command East deployed along the gulf immediately south of Kuwait and consisted of about five brigades (each well below the strength of a regular Western brigade) from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar.

The main attack was a sweeping movement by United States, British, and French forces in the west designed to cut the links between the Iraqi forces in Kuwait and their bases in Iraq. The Saudis and Kuwaitis on the western border of Kuwait, composed of about four brigades organized as the Khalid Division, together with an Egyptian regiment, breached Iraqi defenses after allied bombing and engineer operations blasted passages.

Iraqi troops, although in strong positions, surrendered or streamed to the north. Units of Joint Forces Command East advanced up the coastal road, capturing the city of Kuwait on the third day of the offensive after light fighting and the surrender of thousands of Iraqi soldiers.

## Territorial Disputes

Before the oil era, the gulf states made little effort to delineate their territories. Members of Arab tribes felt loyalty to their tribe or shaykh and tended to roam across the Arabian desert according to the needs of their flocks. Official boundaries meant little, and the concept of allegiance to a distinct political unit was absent.

Organized authority was confined to ports and oases. The delineation of borders began with the signing of the first oil concessions in the 1930s. The national boundaries had been defined by the British, but many of these borders were never properly demarcated, leaving opportunities for contention, especially in areas of the most valuable oil deposits. Until 1971 British-led forces maintained peace and order in the gulf, and British officials arbitrated local quarrels. After the withdrawal of these forces and officials, old territorial claims and suppressed tribal animosities rose to the surface. The concept of the modern state—introduced into the gulf region by the European powers—and the sudden importance of boundaries to define ownership of oil deposits kindled acute territorial disputes.

Iran has often laid claim to Bahrain, based on its seventeenth-century defeat of the Portuguese and its subsequent occupation of the Bahrain archipelago. The Arab clan of the Al Khalifa, which has been the ruling family of Bahrain since the eighteenth century, in turn pushed out the Iranians in 1780. The late shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, raised the Bahrain question when the British withdrew from areas east of Suez, but he dropped his demand after a 1970 UN-sponsored plebiscite showed that Bahrainis overwhelmingly preferred independence to Iranian hegemony. The religious leaders of the Iranian Revolution revived the claim to Bahrain primarily on the grounds that the majority of Bahrainis were Shia Muslims. Iranian secular leaders subsequently renounced the claim in an attempt to establish better relations with Bahrain.

In 1971 Iranian forces occupied the islands of Abu Musa, Tunb al Kubra (Greater Tumb), and Tunb as Sughra (Lesser Tumb), located at the mouth of the gulf between Iran and the UAE. The Iranians reasserted their historic claims to the islands, although the Iranians had been dislodged by the British in the late nineteenth century. Iran continued to occupy the islands in 1993, and its action remained a source of contention with the UAE, which claimed authority by virtue of Britain's transfer of the islands to the emirates of Sharjah and Ras al Khaymah. By late 1992, Sharjah and Iran had reached agreement with regard to Abu Musa, but Ras al Khaymah had not reached a settlement with Iran concerning Greater Tumb and Lesser Tumb.

Another point of contention in the gulf is the Bahraini claim to Az Zubarah on the northwest coast of Qatar and to Hawar and the adjacent islands forty kilometers south of Az Zubarah, claims that stem from former tribal areas and dynastic struggles. The Al Khalifa had settled at Az Zubarah before driving the Iranians out of Bahrain in the eighteenth century. The Al Thani ruling family of Qatar vigorously dispute the Al Khalifa claim to the old settlement area now in Qatari hands as well as laying claim to the Bahraini-occupied Hawar and adjacent islands, a stone's throw from the mainland of Qatar but more than twenty kilometers from Bahrain. The simmering quarrel reignited in the spring of 1986 when Qatari helicopters removed and "kidnapped" workmen constructing a Bahraini coast guard station on Fasht ad Dibal, a reef off the coast of Qatar. Through Saudi mediation, the parties reached a fragile truce, whereby the Bahrainis agreed to remove their installations. However, in 1991 the dispute flared up again after Qatar instituted proceedings to let the International Court of Justice in The Hague decide whether it had jurisdiction. (Bahrain refused the jurisdiction of the court, and as of early 1993 the dispute was unresolved.) The two countries exchanged complaints that their respective naval vessels had harassed the other's shipping in disputed waters.

As one pretext for his invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Saddam Husayn revived a long-standing Iraqi claim to the whole of Kuwait based on Ottoman boundaries. Ottoman Turkey exercised a tenuous sovereignty over Kuwait in the late nineteenth century, but the area passed under British protection in 1899. In 1932 Iraq informally confirmed its border with Kuwait, which had previously been demarcated by the British. In 1961, after Kuwait's independence and the withdrawal of British troops, Iraq reasserted its claim to the emirate based on the Ottomans' having attached it to Basra Province. British troops and aircraft were rushed back to Kuwait. A Saudi-led force of 3,000 from the League of Arab States (Arab League) that supported Kuwait against Iraqi pressure soon replaced



them.

The boundary issue again arose when the Baath (Arab Socialist Resurrection) Party came to power in Iraq after a 1963 revolution. The new government officially recognized the independence of Kuwait and the boundaries Iraq had accepted in 1932. Iraq nevertheless reinstated its claims to Bubiyan and Warbah in 1973, massing troops at the border. During the 1980–88 war with Iran, Iraq pressed for a long-term lease to the islands in order to improve its access to the gulf and its strategic position. Although Kuwait rebuffed Iraq, relations continued to be strained by boundary issues and inconclusive negotiations over the status of the islands.

In August 1991, Kuwait charged that a force of Iraqis, backed by gunboats, had attacked Bubiyan but had been repulsed and many of the invaders captured. UN investigators found that the Iraqis had come from fishing boats and had probably been scavenging for military supplies abandoned after the Persian Gulf War.

Kuwait was suspected of having exaggerated the incident to underscore its need for international support against ongoing Iraqi hostility.

A particularly long and acrimonious disagreement involved claims over the Al Buraymi Oasis, disputed since the nineteenth century among tribes from Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, and Oman. Although the tribes residing in the several settlements of the oasis were from Oman and Abu Dhabi, followers of the Wahhabi (see Glossary) religious movement that originated in Saudi Arabia had periodically occupied and exacted tribute from the area. Oil prospecting began on behalf of Saudi oil interests, and in 1952 the Saudis sent a small constabulary force to assert control of the oasis. When arbitration efforts broke down in 1955, the British dispatched the Trucial Oman Scouts to expel the Saudi contingent. After a new round of negotiations, a settlement was reached whereby Saudi Arabia recognized claims of Abu Dhabi and Oman to the oasis. In return, Abu Dhabi agreed to grant Saudi Arabia a land corridor to the gulf and a share of a disputed oil field.

Other disagreements over boundaries and water rights remained, however.

The border between Oman and Yemen remained only partially defined, and, as of early 1993, border clashes had not occurred since 1988. Improving relations between Oman and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY, also seen as South Yemen)—which was reunited with the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR, also seen as North Yemen) in 1990—offered some hope that the border would be demarcated. Earlier, the physical separation of the southern portion of Oman from its territory on the Musandam Peninsula (Ras Musandam)

was a source of friction between Oman and the various neighboring emirates that became the UAE in 1971.

Differences over the disputed territory appeared to have subsided after the onset of the Iran–Iraq War in 1980.

## Regional Security Problems

The Persian Gulf is a relatively constricted geographic area of great existing or potential volatility. The smaller states of the gulf are particularly vulnerable, having limited indigenous populations and, in most cases, armed forces with little more than symbolic value to defend their countries against aggression. All of them lack strategic depth, and their economies and oil industries depend on access to the sea. Conflicts involving the air forces and navies of the larger gulf powers inevitably endanger their critical transportation links. Closure of the Strait of Hormuz—which was threatened but which never actually occurred during the Iran–Iraq War—would have a catastrophic effect on regular ship movements.

The oil drilling, processing, and loading facilities of the gulf states, some of them on offshore platforms, are vital to their economies. In an era of highly accurate missiles and highperformance aircraft, the protection of these exposed resources against surprise attack presents enormous difficulties. Even those states that can afford the sophisticated weaponry to defend their installations can ensure their effectiveness only through proper training, manning, and maintenance.

Most of the Arab gulf states, although vulnerable by air and by sea, are relatively immune from ground attack.

Because of their geographic position on the Arabian Peninsula, they are exposed on their landward side only to vast desert tracts controlled by Saudi Arabia, with which they are linked by security treaties. Potential aggressors in the region, although heavily armed, lack the equipment or experience to project their forces over long distances. The only realistic possibility of overland attack seems to be in the north, where Kuwait has no natural line of defense and its oil facilities are near both Iran and Iraq. In early 1992, Kuwaiti officials disclosed plans to construct an electronic fence stretching more than 200 kilometers along the Kuwait–Iraq border. Although some obstacles might be emplaced to obstruct an Iraqi crossing, the main purpose of the fence is to prevent infiltration. Border guards of Kuwait's Ministry of Interior are to patrol the fence area.

In the south, reunited Yemen had inherited large stocks of military equipment from the Soviet Union's earlier support of the PDRY. The PDRY's political support of Iraq in the Kuwaiti crisis caused the GCC states to regard it as a potentially hostile neighbor. Although offensive operations against Oman or Saudi Arabia, with which it shared long, undefined borders, seem unlikely, the encouragement of border infiltration by all three countries cannot be ruled out.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 introduced a new threat to stability in the gulf. Shia form a majority of the population of Bahrain and an important part of the foreign labor force in Kuwait and are considered potential dissidents in any future hostilities. Numerous terrorist actions in Kuwait during the 1980s were attributed to domestic Shia instigated by Iran (see *Kuwait: Internal Security*, this ch.). Iran is one of the strongest military powers of the region and has historically sought to extend its influence to the Arab shore of the gulf.

Nevertheless, fears of military confrontation subsided after the Iran–Iraq War ended. The influence of the more extremist elements within the Iranian government appears to have declined; Iran also had opposed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

In spite of Iraq's defeat in 1991, Kuwait remains the most vulnerable of the gulf states. Despite the crippling of Iraq's offensive military capabilities, it continues to be a formidable military power in the region. Its postwar manpower strength is estimated at 380,000, including at least three intact divisions of the elite Republican Guard, as well as large stocks of armor, artillery, and combat aircraft. Only with the assurance of outside support can the GCC states be confident that they can successfully resist renewed Iraqi aggression.

The gulf Arabs believe that a settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict will enhance gulf security. Direct conflict with Israel was a remote contingency in early 1993, although Israel's doctrine of preemptive attack and its demonstrated ability to hit distant targets must be reckoned with in their strategic planning. Because the northwestern areas of Saudi Arabia are well within range of Israeli attack, air defense units that would otherwise be available to the GCC for gulf defense must be positioned there. Efforts of the Arab gulf states to upgrade their air defense systems have often been viewed by the United States Congress and by the public as hostile to Israeli interests.

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In early 1993, one year after Saddam Husayn's defeat in the Persian Gulf War, the region's security appeared more stable than in many years. The fear of a communist encroachment or of a superpower confrontation has evaporated. Iran seems to be seeking greater accommodation with its gulf neighbors, although the Tehran government is continuing its military buildup and insists that it has a role in regional mutual security. Iraq, although still hostile, does not present a significant military threat. The United States and other Western powers have indicated that they will act against any new instability in the gulf that endangers their interests.

## Collective Security under the Gulf Cooperation Council

*Rulers of the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council pose for a photograph.*

Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington The six Persian Gulf states of the Arabian Peninsula— Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—formed the GCC in May 1981 with the aim of “co-ordination, integration, and co-operation among the member-states in all fields.” Although none of the committees initially established dealt with security, the final communiqué of the first meeting affirmed the will and the intention of the signatories to defend their security and independence and to keep the region free of international conflicts. Four months later, the chiefs of staff of the armed forces of the six member states met to discuss regional military cooperation. The immediate objective was to protect themselves from the dangers posed by the Iran–Iraq War and the political violence associated with revolutionary Islamism. In a series of meetings over the years, the defense ministers and chiefs of staff devoted numerous sessions to the improvement of military cooperation and the creation of a joint command and joint air defense mechanisms. Managing their common security challenges collectively has made progress in some areas, but little in others. Creation of a fully integrated air defense system was far from a reality as of early 1993. The GCC states have not realized plans to develop an arms production capacity, although they have launched a new effort to revive an earlier arrangement with Egypt to create a pan–Arab weapons industry.

Political differences among GCC members have been the main obstacles to placing gulf defense on a collective rather than on a bilateral basis, even in such matters as achieving interoperability of equipment and cooperating in training, logistics, and infrastructure. The GCC experienced delays in reaching agreement to cooperate in internal security matters because Kuwait, the chief target of terrorism, feared that its relatively liberal domestic security regime might be impaired. Until Kuwait agreed to a GCC agreement in late 1987, Saudi Arabia and several other members of the GCC coordinated their efforts bilaterally, including the exchange of equipment, expertise, and training; the extradition of criminals; and the interception of border infiltrators. GCC members have adopted parallel policies on deportation and travel restrictions and share information on suspected terrorists and plots.

Ground and air units of the six member states have carried out small-scale combined training exercises.

Military assistance, provided mainly by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait under GCC auspices, has enabled Bahrain to modernize its stock of combat aircraft and Oman to improve its air and sea defenses around the Strait of Hormuz. In 1984 GCC defense ministers agreed to create the Peninsula Shield force and base it at Hafar al Batin in Saudi Arabia, about sixty kilometers south of the Kuwaiti border. Under the command of a Saudi general, the unit consists of one Saudi brigade and a composite brigade with token personnel from the other states.

The limited reaction of the GCC to the August 2 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait exposed its weakness when faced with direct aggression against a member of the alliance by a much stronger power. The GCC immediately condemned the Iraqi action, but when GCC defense ministers met three weeks later, they could only agree on strengthening the Peninsula Shield force. During the Persian Gulf War, national contingents deployed separately as units of Arab task forces.

At the conclusion of the war on March 3, 1991, the six members of the GCC, along with Syria and Egypt, met in Damascus to agree on the establishment of a permanent security force to protect Kuwait against future aggression. Syria and Egypt were to contribute troop contingents on a reimbursable basis. The Damascus Agreement soon unraveled when differences emerged over the desirability of a long-term Egyptian and Syrian presence in the gulf. However, Egypt and Syria remain committed under the agreement to send military aid to Kuwait and the other gulf states if a threat arises.

Kuwait subsequently negotiated defense cooperation agreements with the United States, Britain, and France as an additional form of security if its borders were again threatened (see Kuwait: Background, this ch.). At a GCC meeting in late 1991, Oman proposed that the six GCC members develop a 100,000-strong joint security force under a unified military command. The Omani plan was set aside after other defense ministers questioned whether the manpower target was attainable and whether administrative and procedural problems could be overcome. The

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consensus of the ministers was that the Peninsula Shield force should be the nucleus of a unified army, the realization of which might be many years in the future.

## Military Capabilities of the Persian Gulf States

During the decade after the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq War, all the gulf states set out to strengthen their armed forces by converting to the most modern weapons they could obtain and assimilate. By 1993 each state had at least a modest inventory of tanks and other armored equipment, air defense missiles, combat aircraft, armed helicopters, and missile–armed naval craft with which to deter an intruder. Kuwait is less prepared than the others, not having recovered from the losses it suffered in personnel and equipment during the Persian Gulf War. A fundamental constraint for all the gulf states has been the limited pool of qualified manpower and, in most countries, the problem of attracting recruits when better employment opportunities exist in the civilian sector. The emphasis on advanced weaponry is part of an effort to minimize the need for personnel. As stated by a senior Kuwaiti officer, the object is to obtain the best equipment technologically, “easy to maintain, understand, and operate . . . the greatest firepower for the smallest human effort.” But integrating modern weapons into the gulf armies and ensuring their effective operation create other problems. Such problems include the necessity of continued reliance on foreign officers and foreign maintenance and training staffs at a time when all gulf states are trying to achieve greater self–sufficiency. Dependence on foreign personnel, moreover, implies a degree of loyalty and trustworthiness that may not be forthcoming in times of crisis.

Although in every case the gulf armies are much larger than the air forces and navies, the ground forces have traditionally been oriented toward counterinsurgency actions and the protection of the ruling families. Most of the armies are organized into one or more combat brigades; actual fighting strengths are generally lower than the brigade structure implies. Except for the officers and men who were briefly exposed to modern military operations during the Persian Gulf War—and in the late 1960s and first half of the 1970s during Oman's war with Dhofari guerrillas and their supporters in the PDRY—most have not faced actual combat situations.

In recognition of the great strategic importance of their air and sea defenses, the gulf states have all introduced modern combat aircraft and air defense missile systems, such as the United States Hawk surface–to–air missile (SAM). Several of the states have in their inventories or on order attack helicopters to help protect their oil facilities and oil drilling platforms in the gulf. All the gulf states have communications, control, and warning systems for the effective use of their fighter aircraft and antiaircraft missiles. But each air force is small, and, unless integrated with others, the overall effectiveness of the GCC in air defense is marginal. In spite of the attention the problem has received, there is no common network linking all air defense squadrons and SAMs to the Saudi Arabian air defense system and to the Saudi airborne warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft. Technical difficulties, including the incompatibility of national communications systems and the reluctance to turn control of national air defense over to a unified command structure, account for this weakness.

Fast–missile attack craft acquired by all of the gulf navies with small but well–trained crews could inflict damaging blows to heavier fleets and discourage hostile amphibious operations. The sixty–two–meter corvettes belonging to Bahrain and the UAE are the largest vessels among the gulf navies. As the tanker war demonstrated, the navies lack minesweeping capability, and their shipboard defense weapons against air attack are also weak. Only Oman has available larger amphibious transports to convey troops and vehicles for defending islands or remote coastal areas.

Defense expenditures of the gulf states are among the highest in the world relative to population. According to an analysis covering 1989, prepared by the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Qatar recorded the highest per capita military expenditures of any country in the world, followed by Israel and the United States. Oman ranked fourth and Kuwait sixth. The UAE was eleventh highest; Bahrain, listed in twentyseventh place worldwide, had the lowest outlays relatively of the gulf states. Military spending as a percentage of central government expenditures also is high, amounting to more than 40 percent in Oman and the UAE, for example. In contrast, military spending in Bahrain is 13 percent of central government expenditure. Military expenditures as a percentage of the gross national product (GNP—see Glossary) are more moderate except for Oman, whose military outlays were more than 20 percent of GNP in 1989. Force ratios are also high in Oman and the UAE; both countries had about twenty men in uniform per 1,000 population in 1989. Their respective rankings were

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eleventh and twelfth highest in the world. Bahrain and Kuwait had manpower levels of about ten per 1,000 population, whereas the level for Qatar was fifteen per 1,000 in 1989.

In spite of the small personnel pools and the desire of all the gulf governments to train nationals to replace foreigners as quickly as possible, constraints found in traditional Islamic societies prevent the widespread recruitment of women to serve in the armed forces. Oman and Bahrain have allowed a few women to enlist.

They receive combat-style training and learn how to operate small arms. In Bahrain, however, almost all the women have been assigned to hospital staffs. In 1990 the UAE introduced a five-month training course for female recruits with the assistance of a team of female soldiers from the United States. About 1,200 women applied; only seventy-four were accepted. Two top members of the first class were selected to continue with officer training at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, in Britain. The other graduates of the first class were assigned as bodyguards of female members of the ruling families and as specialists in such fields as military intelligence.

Before the Persian Gulf War, some women served in support departments of the Kuwaiti armed forces, including engineering, military establishments, moral guidance, and public relations. In July 1991, noting that a large number of women had volunteered for service in the postwar military, the minister of defense said that some would be accepted for a training period of three to six months but would initially be unsalaried. A role would then be found for them. The minister cautioned that acceptance by Kuwaiti society was essential for the government to move ahead with this plan.

## Kuwait

### Background

*Kuwaiti soldiers in formation during a dignitary's visit to their outpost during Operation Desert Shield Courtesy United States Air Force Kuwaiti M-84 main battle tank lays a smoke screen in a demonstration during Operation Desert Shield.*

Courtesy United States Air Force From 1899 until 1961, Kuwait remained, in effect, a British protectorate. A succession of amirs of the Al Sabah ruled the country, but the handling of its foreign affairs was a British prerogative, and Britain guaranteed the security of the emirate. Kuwaiti forces consisted of the amir's royal guard plus a small domestic police force or constabulary under the British administration. During the 1920s and 1930s, British protection became particularly important in deterring Saudi encroachment and later in blocking Iraqi territorial claims. By independence on June 19, 1961, the British had converted the 600-man constabulary into a combined arms brigade of 2,500 men trained by a British military mission. Small air and naval forces were also established in 1961 under British tutelage.

With its small size and enormous oil wealth, Kuwait occupies an uneasy position at the head of the gulf. One of its powerful neighbors, Iran, only forty kilometers away, had proclaimed its aim of exporting its Islamic revolution; the other powerful neighbor, Iraq, had repeatedly challenged Kuwait's legitimacy (see *Territorial Disputes*, this ch.). Fearful of the radical leadership in Iran, Kuwait aided Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War by permitting the transshipment of goods across its territory and by loans of about US\$6 billion. Kuwait responded to terrorist bombings and other violence inspired by Iran by intensifying its military cooperation with the GCC and by building up its own forces. Although formally neutral and reluctant to become involved with the great powers except as a last resort, Kuwait turned to the United States, the Soviet Union, and Britain for naval protection of its tanker fleet after twenty-one ships were attacked in the gulf in the six months preceding April 1987.

Iraq's surprise attack and occupation of Kuwait caused the virtual disintegration of the Kuwaiti armed forces.

Large numbers of personnel were killed, captured, or dispersed, and most Kuwaiti equipment was destroyed or taken over by the Iraqi armed forces. The minister of defense said that 90 percent of military installations had suffered major damage. By early 1992, most army barracks were again usable, and the naval base was in operation but needed rebuilding. The air force flew temporarily from the civilian airport near the city of Kuwait while the air bases were being reconstructed in 1992. Kuwait expected to spend about US\$9 billion—six times the prewar defense budget—in 1992 to replace destroyed equipment and installations.

In a sharp departure from previous policy, Kuwait entered into a ten-year defense cooperation agreement with the United States in September 1991. The agreement included United States port access, military equipment storage, and joint training and exercises. The agreement did not provide for the stationing of United States service personnel in Kuwait; 1,500 personnel remaining after the gulf war were scheduled to leave within a few months. Similar but less extensive ten-year cooperation agreements were subsequently concluded with Britain and France.

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## Organization and Mission of the Forces

Under the constitution, the amir is the supreme commander of the armed forces. The minister of defense directs the armed forces through the chief of general staff. The National Guard has its own commander, who reports directly to the minister of defense. The public security forces are all under the minister of interior. The minister of defense in early 1993, Ali as Sabah as Salim Al Sabah, had been shifted from the Ministry of Interior as part of the military shakeup after the gulf war. The ruling family maintained a tight grip on the centers of power, including many senior posts in the security services.

Before the Iraqi invasion, the army's manpower strength was 16,000 officers and enlisted men. The principal combat formations were three armored brigades, one mechanized infantry brigade, and one artillery brigade with a regiment of self-propelled howitzers and a surface-to-surface missile (SSM) battalion. All the combat units were under strength; by one estimate, as of 1988 the army's entire fighting strength was the equivalent of only one Western brigade.

Its first-line main battle tanks are M-84s, Yugoslav versions of the Soviet T-72 tank. The army has various models of British armored cars and armored personnel carriers (APCs). Its artillery consists of 155mm self-propelled howitzers, mainly of French manufacture. It has a large inventory of antitank missile systems of British, French, and United States origin, including the improved TOW (tube-launched, optically sighted, wire-guided) missile from the United States. It has purchased the Soviet FROG7, a mobile battlefield missile with a range of sixty kilometers. In 1984, after the United States rejected a Kuwaiti order for Stinger shoulder-fired SAMs, Kuwait turned to Moscow for air defense weapons, purchasing SA-7 and SA-8 SAMs and ZSU-23-4 anti-aircraft guns.

An estimate of the postwar strength of the Kuwaiti army, published in *The Military Balance, 1992-1993*, revealed the devastating effect of the Persian Gulf War. The disparate ground forces, estimated to number about 8,000, were to be reconstituted into four understrength mechanized and armored brigades, a reserve brigade, and an artillery brigade. Little matériel survived the war: some tanks, APCs, and 155mm guns (see table 38, Appendix). Kuwait's postwar equipment orders include 200 M-84 tanks (from Yugoslavia to offset previous Yugoslav oil purchases) and eighteen self-propelled 155mm guns from France. Kuwait also has received United States, Russian, and Egyptian armored vehicles.

The air force complement in 1990 before the gulf war was estimated at 2,200, excluding foreign personnel. Its inventory included about eighty combat aircraft, mainly Mirage F1s from France and A-4 Skyhawks from the United States, and more than forty helicopters of French manufacture, some fitted for assault missions with antitank missiles. Ground-based air defense was structured around the United States improved Hawk (I-Hawk) missile system, tied into Saudi air defense to receive data transmitted by United States and Saudi AWACS aircraft that had been operating in the area since the start of the Iran-Iraq War.

*The Military Balance* estimated that the immediate postwar complement of the air force was 1,000, with thirty-four combat aircraft and twelve armed helicopters remaining. By early 1993, however, air force personnel numbered about 2,500, with seventy-four combat aircraft, including McDonnell Douglas A-4s and F-18s, and twenty armed helicopters. Its two air bases, at Ahmad al Jabir and Ali as Salim, badly damaged in the war, are being repaired. In addition to Iraq's capture of the four batteries of I-Hawk medium-range SAMs, most of the fleet of transport aircraft was lost to Iraq. Before the occupation of the emirate, the Kuwaiti air force had ordered forty United States F18 fighter aircraft plus air-to-air missiles and cluster bombs. Deliveries under this order began in the first half of 1992. Kuwait will acquire the strongest air defense network in the Persian Gulf region under a proposal announced by the United States in March 1992 to transfer six Patriot antiballistic missile SAM firing units (each consisting of up to four quadruple launchers, radar, and a control station) and six batteries of Hawk SAMs. The sale will include 450 Patriot missiles and 342 Hawk missiles.

The navy's strength had been estimated at 1,800 in 1990 before the Iraqi occupation. Previously a coastal defense force with police responsibilities, the navy's combat capabilities were significantly enhanced during 1984 with the delivery of eight fast-attack craft armed with Exocet antiship missiles from the West German Lürssen

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shipyard. The navy also operated a wide variety of smaller patrol craft. According to *The Military Balance*, the navy was reduced to about 500 personnel in 1992 as a result of the Persian Gulf War and the Kuwaiti policy of removing *bidun* (“without”—stateless persons without citizenship, many of whom had long-standing stays in Kuwait while others came in the 1960s and 1970s as oil field workers and construction workers) from the armed forces. With the exception of two missile boats, the entire fleet was captured and sunk or badly damaged by coalition forces while being operated by the Iraqis. Some ships are believed to be salvageable. Five Republic of Korea (South Korea) twenty-four-meter patrol craft were among the vessels lost. However, delivery is expected on an additional four craft under an order pending when the war broke out.

## **Role of Kuwaiti Armed Forces in the Persian Gulf War**

The Iraqi invasion in the early hours of August 2 was detected by a balloon-borne early warning radar, but the army had insufficient time to mount any organized resistance. Some contingents continued a small-unit defense, including those equipped with Chieftain tanks. About 7,000 soldiers escaped to Saudi Arabia; the remainder were killed or captured or participated in the internal resistance movement. Some Mirage and Skyhawk aircraft carried out attacks on the advancing Iraqi columns; when their air base in southern Kuwait was overrun, they flew to Saudi Arabian bases, as did some of the armed helicopters.

According to Norman Friedman, author of a study on the strategy and tactics of the Persian Gulf War, the Kuwaiti forces participating in Operation Desert Storm in February 1991 included the 35th Armored Brigade (renamed Martyr Brigade), the 15th Infantry Brigade, and the lightly equipped Liberation Brigade, which was armed with .50-caliber machine guns mounted on trucks. One source estimated that 7,000 Kuwaiti troops were involved. The Martyr Brigade was the first of the units of Joint Forces Command East in the drive paralleling the coast northward when the allied operation began on February 24, 1991. Along with Saudi, Qatari, and Bahraini forces, supported by United States marines on their left flank, their assignment of liberating the city of Kuwait incurred little Iraqi resistance.

Of twenty-four Kuwaiti aircraft participating in strikes against the Iraqi forces, one A-4 Skyhawk was lost to enemy fire. The two surviving Kuwaiti missile craft, carrying small marine contingents, were able to retake oil platforms and some of the gulf islands. Kuwait suffered only one combat death, according to an official British source.

Kuwait pledged contributions totaling more than US\$16 billion to support the United States role in the Persian Gulf War. An additional US\$6 billion was promised to Egypt and other member countries of the coalition to help offset the economic effects of the war.

## Personnel, Training, and Recruitment

Unlike other Persian Gulf states, Kuwait has a conscription system that obligates young men to serve for two years beginning at the age of eighteen. Educational deferments are granted, and university graduates serve for only one year. In practice, exemptions are liberally granted, and most young Kuwaitis are able to avoid military duty. Estimates are that only 20 to 30 percent of the prewar military ranks were filled by Kuwaiti nationals. Military and security forces had been purged of Shia personnel during the 1980s. At the outbreak of the Gulf War, Palestinians filled many technical positions, supported by thousands of Pakistanis, Indians, and Filipinos in maintenance and logistic functions. Officers on detail from Britain, Pakistan, Egypt, and Jordan provided military expertise. Lower ranks in the army and security forces were occupied predominantly by *bidun* who had taken reasonably well to military life but were poorly prepared to absorb training in operating and servicing modern equipment. In spite of reports that many *bidun* fought well against the Iraqis, many were expelled from the army in 1991 for alleged collaboration. Because of their removal and the removal of Palestinians and other non-Kuwaitis, the ranks of the services became seriously depleted. Few Kuwaitis volunteer for military service, and conscription is not regarded as an acceptable option. Under the circumstances, Kuwait will be hard pressed to meet its goal of a postwar armed strength of 30,000. A relaxation of the policy toward *bidun* was hinted at by the statement of the minister of defense that people of "unspecified nationality" may be retained after screening for loyalty and may even be given Kuwaiti citizenship. With respect to conscription, the minister of defense in July 1991 said that the system was being reviewed to make it more effective.

Most Kuwaiti officers are members of the ruling family or related tribal groups. Education standards are high—many are graduates of Sandhurst—and living conditions, pay, and benefits are excellent. The Kuwaiti Military College accepts secondary school graduates for eighteen months of cadet training in army, air force, and navy programs. The United States provides pilot training and assistance in developing a flight training facility within Kuwait. United States, British, and French military missions and civilian contractors provide training for more technologically advanced systems. A small Soviet advisory group provided training in the use of Soviet missile systems before the Persian Gulf War.

Traditionally, the officer corps—with its close links to the ruling family—was considered to be a loyal and trustworthy defender of the regime. In the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, however, there were displays of discontent among officers arising from the inadequate response of the armed forces to the Iraqi invasion and the failure to launch postwar reforms. Many of the 6,000 officers and men taken prisoner by the Iraqis were prevented from rejoining the armed forces and were angered at their treatment by senior officers who fled to Saudi Arabia. In June 1991, some officers of the resistance group known as the Second of August Movement petitioned the amir to dismiss the former ministers of defense and interior from their cabinet posts and to investigate the reason the Kuwaiti army was not mobilized or on the alert when the Iraqis attacked. The petition also called for removal of the army chief of staff and his immediate staff and as many as twenty generals and seventy-five colonels.

In July fourteen senior officers were forced into retirement. The amir reportedly met with disaffected officers to tell them that their calls for reform would be considered. Officers threatened with dismissal for signing the petition were reinstated, and other reform-minded officers were reportedly promoted.

## **Internal Security**

Many of the domestic strains in Kuwait arise from the disparities between the living standards of Kuwaiti nationals and the majority of Kuwait's foreign population. Palestinian workers presented problems for the Al Sabah rulers for several decades, but, during the 1980s, militants and terrorists advancing the Khomeini brand of Islamism overshadowed the Palestinians as troublemakers. Kuwait's support for Iraq in the Iran–Iraq War accounted for much of the violence that disturbed internal stability during the 1980s. A series of terrorist bombings in 1983 aimed at Kuwaiti installations and the United States and French embassies were ascribed to Iranian retaliation. A network of Hizballah terrorists was uncovered, and, in the spring of 1984, seventeen Shia were sentenced to long prison terms, and three were condemned to death. Airplane hijackings, explosions, car bombings, and an assassination attempt against the amir ensued. Kuwait steadfastly rejected demands for release of terrorists in its custody, most of whom were still in jail at the time of the Iraqi invasion and subsequently disappeared. A number of Kuwaiti Shia were sentenced for setting fires at oil installations in 1986 and 1987. The attacks declined in 1988, and no attack was recorded in 1989 or 1990 after Iran's decision to accept a cease–fire in the Iran–Iraq War, which was followed by an attempted reconciliation with its neighbors.

## Police and the Criminal Justice System

The Ministry of Interior has overall responsibility for public security and law and order. Under the ministry, the national police has primary responsibility for maintaining public order and preventing and investigating crimes. The National Guard—a semiautonomous body—has guard duties on the border and at oil fields, utilities, and other strategic locations. The guard acts as a reserve for the regular forces and reinforces the metropolitan police as needed.

Police selected for officer rank attend a three-year program at the Police Academy. National Guard officer candidates attend the Kuwaiti Military College, after which they receive specialized guard training. Women work in certain police departments, such as criminal investigation, inquiries, and airport security.

The principal police divisions are criminal investigation, traffic, emergency police, nationality and passports, immigration, prisons, civil defense, and trials and courtsmartial. The criminal investigation division is responsible for ordinary criminal cases; Kuwait State Security investigates security-related offenses. Both are involved in investigations of terrorism and those suspected of collaboration with Iraq.

The Kuwaiti judicial system generally provides fair public trials and an adequate appeals mechanism, according to the United States Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1991*.

Under Kuwaiti law, no detainee can be held for more than four days without charge; after being charged by a prosecutor, detention for up to an additional twenty-one days is possible. Persons held under the State Security Law can be detained. Bail is commonly set in all cases. The lowest level courts, aside from traffic courts, are the misdemeanor courts that judge offenses subject to imprisonment not exceeding three years.

Courts of first instance hear felony cases in which the punishment can exceed three years. All defendants in felony cases are required to be represented by attorneys, appointed by the court if necessary. Legal counsel is optional in misdemeanor cases, and the court is not obliged to provide an attorney.

Kuwaiti authorities contend that the rate of ordinary crime is low, and data available through 1986 tended to bear this out. Of more than 5,000 felonies committed in that year, only 5 percent were in the category of theft.

The number of misdemeanors was roughly equal to the number of felonies, but only 10 percent were thefts.

Offenses involving forgery, fraud, bribery, assaults and threats, and narcotics and alcohol violations were all more common than thefts.

Two separate State Security Court panels, each composed of three justices, hear crimes against state security or other cases referred to it by the Council of Ministers. Trials in the State Security Court initially are held in closed session but subsequently are opened to the press and others. They do not, in the judgment of the Department of State, meet international standards for fair trials. Military courts, which ordinarily have jurisdiction only over members of the armed services or security forces, can try offenses charged against civilians under conditions of martial law. Martial law was imposed for the first time after the liberation of the country from Iraqi occupation. About 300 persons suspected of collaboration with Iraq were tried by military courts in May and June 1991, and 115 were convicted. Twenty-nine received sentences of death, later commuted to life imprisonment after international criticism of the trials. Human rights groups drew attention to the failure to provide adequate legal safeguards to defendants and an unwillingness to accept the defense that collaboration with Iraqi forces had been coerced. Many of the accused alleged that their confessions had been extracted under torture.

## Human Rights Practices

Prior to the occupation of Kuwait in 1990, the principal human rights concerns, aside from widespread restriction on the exercise of political expression, were instances of arbitrary arrest and mistreatment of prisoners and lack of due process in security trials. A number of Kuwaitis were arrested between late 1989 and mid-1990 for political reasons and for participating in unlicensed gatherings. Noncitizens could be arbitrarily expelled if deemed security risks and were also subject to deportation if they were unable to find work after being released from their initial employment. Some foreigners reportedly were held in deportation centers for up to five years because they were unable to provide for their own travel out of the country.

According to the Department of State, there were plausible reports of occasional torture and violence in apprehending and interrogating criminal suspects.

The seven-month Iraqi occupation subjected Kuwaitis to a systematic terror campaign that included extrajudicial killings, torture and other inhuman treatment, kidnappings, and arbitrary arrest and detention.

There were many credible accounts of killings, not only of members of the Kuwaiti resistance but also of their families, other civilians, and young children. Attacks on Iraqi soldiers resulted in reprisal actions in neighborhoods where attacks had taken place and included summary and random execution of innocent civilians. Many Kuwaiti citizens also disappeared at the hands of the Iraqi occupation authorities. Large-scale executions of young men by gunfire or by hanging were reported. About 850 Kuwaitis remained unaccounted for in early 1993, many of them presumably killed while in Iraqi detention. Iraq insisted that it had no Kuwaiti prisoners.

After the restoration of the emirate government in 1991, there were many reports of beatings and torture to extract confessions from suspected collaborators. The Department of State estimated that forty-five to fifty Palestinian and other foreigners were tortured to death by police or military personnel. As many as 5,800 persons, mostly non-Kuwaitis, were detained on suspicion of collaboration during the four months of martial law that followed the country's liberation. Many arrests were arbitrary, and some detainees were held for months without being charged. As of early 1993, about 900 persons were still in detention; these included persons convicted in the State Security Court or martial law courts and those under deportation order but with no place to go. Of the prewar population of about 400,000 Palestinians resident in Kuwait, only about 30,000 remain. Most of the departures occurred during the Iraqi occupation: the remainder left because of less favorable living circumstances or Kuwaiti pressure.

## Bahrain

*A-4KU Skyhawk aircraft of the Kuwaiti air force being serviced in Saudi Arabia in preparation for an Operation Desert Storm mission Courtesy United States Air Force A UH-1W Iroquois helicopter of the Bahrain Defense Force takes part in a training mission following Operation Desert Storm.*

Courtesy United States Air Force After more than 150 years of British presence and protection, Bahrain gained full independence on August 15, 1971. The agreement granting independence contained no provision for British defense in an emergency, but it did provide for consultation. British authorities hoped that Bahrain, the most economically and socially advanced of the small gulf states, might take the lead in a federation similar to that of the UAE, but both Bahrain and Qatar opted instead for complete independence. Shaykh Isa ibn Salman Al Khalifa, leader of the Al Khalifa since the death of his father in 1961, became the newly independent country's first amir and continued as the hereditary ruler in 1993.

The constitution designates the amir supreme commander of the armed forces. In 1977 Isa ibn Salman chose his eldest son and heir apparent, Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa, to be minister of defense and commander in chief of the Bahrain Defense Force (BDF). In 1988 the former chief of staff, Major General Khalifa ibn Ahmad Al Khalifa, was named minister of defense, but Hamad ibn Isa retained the position of commander in chief in 1993. Other members of the Al Khalifa in prominent military positions include the new chief of staff, Brigadier General Abd Allah ibn Salman Al Khalifa, as well as the assistant chief of staff for operations, the chief of naval staff, and the commander of the air force. As in other gulf states, the ruling family keeps a tight hold on important positions in the national security structure.

The BDF is principally dedicated to the maintenance of internal security and the protection of the shores of the Bahrain archipelago. Nevertheless, with the rise of tensions in the Persian Gulf, the force has nearly tripled in size since 1984 and has added significantly to its inventory of modern armaments. Its total personnel strength in 1992 was about 6,150: army, 5,000; navy, 500; and air force, 650. The Bahraini army is organized into one brigade, consisting of two mechanized infantry battalions, one tank battalion, one special forces battalion, an armored car squadron, and two artillery and two mortar batteries. Its principal armored weapons are M-60A3 main battle tanks purchased from the United States in the late 1980s. Deliveries are awaited on an order for eighty United States M-113 APCs, supplementing a mixed accumulation of older armored vehicles. The army's artillery pieces consist of a few towed 105mm and 155mm howitzers. Its principal antitank weapon is the BGM-71 AT-TOW wire-guided missile (see table 39, Appendix).

Until 1979, when its first fast-attack craft were ordered from the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), Bahrain's maritime force was a coast guard under the supervision of the minister of interior. As of 1992, the navy was equipped with two Lürssen sixty-two-meter corvettes. One Dauphin helicopter armed with an antiship missile has been delivered for use with the corvettes. The navy also has in its inventory four forty-five-meter Lürssen fast-attack craft and two thirty-eight-meter craft. The coast guard operates a variety of patrol craft, as well as three landing craft and a Hovercraft.

The Bahraini air force began operations in 1977 with a gradually expanding fleet of helicopters. Its first combat aircraft—United States F-5s—were acquired in 1986, followed in 1990 by more advanced F-16s. As of 1992, it had twelve F-5s and twelve F-16s. Eight Apache attack helicopters were ordered from the United States in 1991 to defend the archipelago and offshore oil platforms against incursions or terrorist action.

I-Hawk SAMs are on order as the principal air defense weapon. After initially being denied shoulder-fired Stinger SAMs by congressional objections, Bahrain was allowed to purchase the weapons on a provisional basis and later to retain them permanently. The main air force base is adjacent to Bahrain International Airport on Al Muharraq. Another base developed for use in the Persian Gulf War is available near the southern tip of Bahrain; as of 1992, it was being used for servicing carrier-based United States aircraft.

Defense expenditures, which reached a peak of US\$281 million in 1982, fell off sharply before gradually rising again to US\$237 million in 1992. Because of its declining revenue from oil, the emirate has fewer resources available for defense than the more prosperous gulf states. The GCC had allotted Bahrain and Oman a special



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subsidy of US\$1.8 billion between 1984 and 1994. Bahrain's share enabled it to purchase new fighter aircraft and to construct its new air base.

At the time of the British withdrawal in 1971, the United States leased port and docking facilities from the government of Bahrain for the United States Middle East Force. This was, in fact, an extension of a United States–British agreement, in effect since the late 1940s, enabling United States naval vessels to use facilities at Al Jufayr, a port section of the capital, Manama. The agreement was a sensitive one because none of the Arab states of the gulf wanted to appear to be submitting to any new form of colonialism or to be too closely associated with the United States, the main supporter of Israel. In 1977 the amir's government terminated the lease. The headquarters of the United States Middle East Force was compelled to move aboard one of the three ships that constituted the force. Otherwise, little changed as a result of the termination of the lease.

United States ships—with the aid of a support unit manned by about sixty–five United States naval personnel—were still permitted to use Bahraini port facilities for naval operations in the gulf to ensure the availability of fuel, communications, and supplies. During the Iran–Iraq War, when attacks on gulf shipping threatened Bahrain's oil refining and tanker servicing operations, United States personnel and military cargoes were permitted to transit the region via Bahrain International Airport. Large barges in Bahraini waters were used as bases for United States attack helicopters, radar, and air defense weapons. In October 1991, Bahrain signed a defense cooperation agreement with the United States similar to that previously concluded between the United States and Kuwait. The agreement provided for port access, equipment storage, and joint exercises.

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## **Persian Gulf War**

Bahrain played a limited but active role in the gulf war. Bahraini ground forces were among the 3,000 Peninsula Shield force of the GCC (exclusive of Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti troops) that were assigned to a support role during Operation Desert Storm as part of Joint Forces Command East. Bahrain was the primary coalition naval base and was the point of origin for coalition air operations against Iraqi targets. Bahraini pilots joined other members of the coalition in flying strikes into Iraq. Three Scud missiles were aimed at Bahrain during the war. Only one landed in the country, and it did not hit a target area. There were no Bahraini combat deaths in the war.

## Internal Security

The Bahraini national police force was believed by most sources to number about 2,000 in 1992. In addition to the usual police functions, the mission of the force is to prevent sectarian violence and terrorist actions.

Bahrain has a high proportion of native Shia, possibly 65 to 70 percent of the population. Iran tried to fuel existing resentment over the inferior place of Shia in the social and economic structure. The government sought to moderate the socioreligious cleavage by appointing Shia to a number of cabinet posts and senior civil service posts, although generally not in security-related positions. A failed coup d'état against the Al Khalifa in 1981 resulted in the expulsion or trial of many Shia dissidents; Iran had armed and trained most of those convicted. A number of persons were arrested in 1987 in another plot linked to Iran. In 1989 twenty-two persons were sentenced to prison by the Supreme Court of Appeal, sitting as the Security Court, for plotting to overthrow the government; no claim was made of Iranian involvement.

Two clandestine political groups with ties to Iran are active in Bahrain. The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, which was responsible for the 1981 coup attempt, consists of militant Shia calling for violent revolution. The Islamic Call Party, which also has ties to Iran, is more moderate, calling for social and economic reforms. Two secular leftist groups with ties to Arab regimes and Arab nationalist organizations are the Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain and the National Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. Their influence appeared to be on the decline as of early 1993. The agencies of the Ministry of Interior, the police force, and the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS) maintain strict control over political activity. It is thought that their operations are extensive and highly effective. Detention and arrest can result from actions construed as antiregime activity, such as membership in illegal organizations, antigovernment demonstrations, possession or circulation of antiregime writings, or preaching sermons of a radical or extreme Islamist tone.

The Department of State reported some loosening of controls in 1991 over actions previously regarded as subversive, reflecting the government's assessment that domestic and foreign threats to its security had receded.

Under the State Security Act of 1974, persons can be detained for up to three years, with a right of appeal after a period of three months and thereafter every six months. Arrested persons tried in ordinary criminal courts are provided the usual guarantees, such as public trials, the right to counsel (including legal aid if needed), and the right of appeal. Prisoners charged with security offenses are tried directly by the Supreme Court of Appeal, sitting as the Security Court. The procedural guarantees of the penal code do not apply:

proceedings are in secret, and there is no right of judicial appeal, although cases can be referred to the amir for clemency.

According to Department of State human rights studies, there have been credible reports that the SIS engages in torture and mistreatment of detainees. Convictions in some cases have been based only on confessions that allegedly have been extracted by torture. There were, however, no confirmed cases of torture in 1991. The independent human rights group Amnesty International claimed that as of 1992 about seventy political prisoners, many with ties to banned Islamic groups, were serving sentences after unfair trials. Between 220 and 270 people were held in Bahraini jails in 1992. Of these, fewer than 100 were thought to be serving sentences for security offenses.

## Qatar

*Lieutenant General Charles Horner, commanding general, United States Central Air Force, congratulates Major Hamad ibn Abd Allah Al Khalifa, commander of Bahrain's Shaykh Isa Squadron, after awarding him the Legion of Merit for his support during Operation Desert Storm.*

Courtesy United States Air Force A Qatari air force pilot performs a preflight check on his Mirage F1 aircraft before a mission during Operation Desert Storm.

Courtesy United States Air Force In company with other gulf amirates, Qatar had long-standing ties with Britain but had remained under nominal Ottoman hegemony until 1916, when the British took over the foreign affairs and defense of Qatar.

During the next five decades, Britain also exercised considerable influence in the internal affairs of the amirate. When the announcement came that it would withdraw its military forces from the gulf by 1971, Qatari leaders were forced to consider how to survive without British protection. Unable to support a large military establishment, Qatar has placed its reliance on small but mobile forces that can deter border incursions. Nevertheless, the Iran–Iraq War brought attacks on shipping just beyond its territorial waters, underscoring its vulnerability to interference with oil shipments and vital imports. In addition to seeking collective security through the GCC, Qatar has turned to close ties with Saudi Arabia, entering into a bilateral defense agreement in 1982.

The ruler in 1992, Shaykh Khalifa ibn Hamad Al Thani, had taken control of the country twenty years earlier, when the leading members of the ruling family decided that Khalifa's cousin, Ahmad ibn Ali Al Thani, should be replaced because of his many shortcomings as amir. As supreme commander of the armed forces, Khalifa ibn Hamad issued a decree in 1977 appointing his son and heir apparent, Hamad ibn Khalifa Al Thani, to the post of commander in chief. The same decree created the Ministry of Defense and named Hamad ibn Khalifa as minister. Hamad ibn Khalifa was a graduate of Sandhurst and had attained the rank of major general.

At the time of independence on September 3, 1971, the armed forces consisted of little more than the Royal Guard Regiment and some scattered units equipped with a few armored cars and four aircraft. By 1992 it had grown to a force of 7,500, including an army of 6,000, a navy of 700, and an air force of 800. In addition to the Royal Guard Regiment, the army had expanded to include a tank battalion, three mechanized infantry battalions, a special forces company, a field artillery regiment, and a SAM battery. The combined combat strength of these units, however, is estimated to be no more than that of a reinforced regiment in a Western army.

Initially outfitted with British weaponry, Qatar shifted much of its procurement to France during the 1980s in response to French efforts to develop closer relations. The tank battalion is equipped with French-built AMX-30 main battle tanks. Other armored vehicles include French AMX-10P APCs and the French VAB, which has been adopted as the standard wheeled combat vehicle. The artillery unit has a few French 155mm self-propelled howitzers (see table 40, Appendix). The principal antitank weapons are French Milan and HOT wire-guided missiles. Qatar had also illicitly acquired a few Stinger shoulder-fired SAMs, possibly from Afghan rebel groups, at a time when the United States was trying to maintain tight controls on Stingers in the Middle East. When Qatar refused to turn over the missiles, the United States Senate in 1988 imposed a ban on the sale of all weapons to Qatar. The ban was repealed in late 1990 when Qatar satisfactorily accounted for its disposition of the Stingers.

Three French-built La Combattante III missile boats, which entered service in 1983, form the core of the navy. The boats supplement six older Vosper Thornycroft large patrol boats. A variety of smaller craft are operated by the marine police.

The air force is equipped with combat aircraft and armed helicopters. Its fighter aircraft include Alpha Jets with a fighter-ground attack capability and one air defense squadron of Mirage F1s, all purchased from France. All of the aircraft are based at Doha International Airport. The planned purchase from the United States of Hawk and Patriot missile systems will give Qatar a modern ground-based air defense. British pilots on detail in Oman remain on duty with the air force, and French specialists are employed in a maintenance capacity. Nevertheless, an increasing number of young Qataris have been trained as pilots and technicians.

## Oman, a country study

The lack of sufficient indigenous manpower to staff the armed forces is a continuing problem. By one estimate, Qatari citizens constitute only 30 percent of the army, in which more than twenty nationalities are represented. Many of the officers are of the royal family or members of leading tribes. Enlisted personnel are recruited from beduin tribes that move between Qatar and Saudi Arabia and from other Arab groups. Many Pakistanis serve in combat units. In 1992 there were still a number of British officers, as well as Britons, French, Jordanians, and Pakistanis in advisory or technical positions. More young Qataris are being recruited, and the number of trained and competent Qatari officers is steadily increasing.

Although official data on military expenditures are not published, the defense budget estimate of US\$500 million for 1989 was 8 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary). The estimate of US\$934 million for 1991, an increase of 80 percent over 1989, was presumably attributable to the costs of the Persian Gulf War. During the hostilities, the Qatari tank battalion was deployed to the Saudi–Iraqi border as part of Joint Forces Command East. Saudi and Qatari forces that had dug in to defend the road leading south from the border town of Ras al Khafji were forced to withdraw when the Iraqis made their only incursion onto Saudi territory on January 29, 1991. The three Saudi battalions and the one tank battalion from Qatar maintained contact with the Iraqi forces and participated in the coalition counterattack two days later that drove the Iraqis out of the town with considerable losses. The Qatari contingent, composed mostly of Pakistani recruits, acquitted itself well. The Qatari battalion also formed part of the Arab forces that advanced across Iraqi positions toward the city of Kuwait during the general coalition offensive on February 24, 1991. Beginning on January 22, 1991, Qatari aircraft joined other countries in carrying out strikes against Iraqi forces. United States, Canadian, and French fighter squadrons flew daily missions from Doha during the gulf war. One Qatari tank was lost in the engagement, and a number of Arab soldiers were killed or wounded. No Qatari combat deaths were reported during the war.

Although the emirate has experienced little internal unrest, the large number of foreigners—forming 80 percent of the work force—are regarded as possible sources of instability. Qatar is determined to maintain control over their activities and limit their influence. A significant number of resident Palestinians, some of whom included prominent businessmen and civil servants, were expelled after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Iranian Shia have not been the source of problems but are nevertheless looked on as potential subversives.

Foreigners are liable to face arbitrary police action and harassment and often complain of mistreatment after their arrest.

The Ministry of Interior has controlled the police force of about 2,500 members since 1990. The local police enforces laws and arrests violators. The General Administration of Public Security, which in 1991 replaced the Criminal Investigation Department, is a separate unit of the ministry charged with investigation of crimes.

The Mubahathat (secret police office), a nearly independent branch of the Ministry of Interior, deals with sedition and espionage. The army's mission does not include internal security, although the army can be called on in the event of serious civil disturbances. Nevertheless, a separate agency, the Mukhabarat (intelligence service), is under armed forces jurisdiction. Its function is to intercept and arrest terrorists and to keep surveillance over political dissidents.

Qatar has both civil and sharia courts, but only sharia courts have jurisdiction in criminal matters. Lacking permanent security courts, security cases are tried by specially established military courts, but such cases have been rare. In sharia criminal cases, the proceedings are closed, and lawyers play no formal role except to prepare the accused for trial. After the parties state their cases and after witnesses are examined by the judge, the verdict is usually delivered with little delay. No bail is set, but in minor cases, charged persons may be released to a Qatari sponsor. Most of the floggings prescribed by sharia law are administered, but physical mutilation is not allowed, and no executions have occurred since the 1980s.

The police routinely monitor the communications of suspects and security risks. Although warrants are usually required for searches, this does not apply in cases involving national security. The security forces reportedly have applied severe force and torture in investigating political and security-related cases. Suspects can be incarcerated without charge, although this is infrequent. The United States Department of State noted that standards of police conduct have improved in spite of a 1991 incident in which a group of Qataris were detained without charge for two months in connection with the unauthorized publication of tracts and letters critical of the government; at least one member of the group, which included several members of the ruling family, is said to have been beaten.

## Oman, a country study

## United Arab Emirates

### Background

*General Norman H. Schwarzkopf, commander in chief, United States Central Command, with Brigadier General Muhammad ibn Abd Allah Al Attiyah of Qatar, whom he presented with the Legion of Merit for his role in Operation Desert Storm Courtesy United States Air Force General Norman H. Schwarzkopf speaks with Lieutenant General Khamis ibn Humaid ibn Salim al Kilbani, chief of staff, Royal Oman Land Forces, while touring As Sib Air Base during Operation Desert Storm.*

Courtesy United States Air Force The numerous treaties that Britain concluded with the several gulf amirates in the nineteenth century provided, inter alia, that the British were responsible for foreign relations and protection from attack by sea.

Until the early 1950s, the principal military presence in the Trucial Coast states (sometimes referred to as Trucial Oman) consisted of British–led Arab security forces and the personal bodyguard units of the ruling shaykhs. In 1951 the British formed the Trucial Oman Levies (later called the Trucial Oman Scouts) under a British commander who reported to the British political agent of the gulf. By the time the United Arab Emirates (UAE) became independent on December 2, 1971, the scouts had become a mobile force of about 1,600 men, trained and led by about thirty British officers assisted by Jordanian noncommissioned officers (NCOs). Arabs from the Trucial Coast made up only about 40 percent of the strength; Omanis, Iranians, Pakistanis, and Indians made up the remainder. Organized as light armored cavalry, the scouts used British weapons, trucks, and armored cars in carrying out police functions and in keeping peace among the tribes of the various amirates. During its approximately two decades of existence, the unit was respected for its impartial role in maintaining public order on the coast.

At the time of independence and federation, the Trucial Oman Scouts became the nucleus of the Union Defense Force (UDF), responsible to the federal minister of defense, the Supreme Council of the Union, and—ultimately—to the president of the federation, Shaykh Zayid ibn Sultan Al Nuhayyan, ruler of Abu Dhabi, who continued to fill this office in 1993. Separate amirate forces are also authorized by the provisional constitution, and the separate entities of the union—especially Abu Dhabi—have made clear that they intend to maintain their own forces. Drawing on tremendous oil wealth accumulated in the early 1960s, the amir of Abu Dhabi gave high priority to the development of the Abu Dhabi Defense Force (ADDF) when the British withdrawal from the gulf was announced. The ADDF—with 15,000 men and primarily British and Jordanian officers—consisted of three army battalions, an artillery battery, twelve Hawker Hunter fighter–bombers, and a sea defense wing of four fast patrol boats. Dubayy had a much smaller force of 2,000, Ras al Khaymah had 900, and Sharjah had even fewer.

Personnel for the UDF and separate amirate forces were recruited from several countries of the region, but soon after independence enlistments from Dhofar region in Oman and from the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY, also seen as South Yemen) were curtailed out of fear that personnel from these areas might spread dangerous revolutionary doctrines. As the largest in territory, the most populous, and by far the richest of the amirates, Abu Dhabi has borne the brunt of funding the federation's military establishment. A major step toward unification of forces occurred in 1976 when Abu Dhabi, Dubayy, and Ras al Khaymah announced the merger of their separate armed forces with the UDF. Sharjah had previously merged its police and small military units into the UDF.

Despite the promises and pledges of 1976, true integration and unification of the UAE armed forces has not occurred. The UDF is seen by some, particularly the amir of Dubayy, as merely an extension of Abu Dhabi power. Individual amirs view their forces as symbols of sovereignty no matter the size or combat readiness of the units. The separate forces therefore continue as they had earlier, but they are called regional commands, only nominally part of the UDF. Shaykh Zayid ibn Sultan's attempt to install his eighteen–year–old son as commander in chief in 1978 shook the fragile unity of the UDF. Although the appointment was rescinded, Dubayy's resolve strengthened to maintain the autonomy of the Central Military Command, its own regional military command.

As of 1992, the commander in chief of the UDF was Zayid ibn Sultan. The crown prince, Lieutenant General

## Oman, a country study

Khalifa ibn Zayid Al Nuhayyan, held immediate command as deputy commander in chief. The chief of staff with operational responsibilities was Major General Muhammad Said al Badi, a UAE national who replaced a Jordanian general in the post in the early 1980s. His headquarters is in Abu Dhabi. The minister of defense is Shaykh Muhammad ibn Rashid Al Maktum, son of the ruler of Dubayy. The ministry, located in Dubayy, concerns itself primarily with administrative, personnel, and logistic matters and apparently has little influence on operational aspects of the UDF.

In data published by the Department of State in mid-1991, the total strength of the UDF with responsibility for defense of six of the seven emirates was estimated at 60,000. Dubayy forces of the Central Military Command with responsibility for the defense of Dubayy were given as 12,000. The Department of State estimated that there were 1,800 in the UDF air force and 1,000 in the navy. Estimates of ground forces given in *The Military Balance, 1992-1993* were significantly lower.

*The Military Balance* stated that perhaps 30 percent of the armed services consist of foreigners, although other sources claim that the forces had a much higher proportion of non-UAE nationals. Omanis predominate in the enlisted ranks, but there are also many Pakistanis among the more than twenty nationalities represented. Well into the 1980s, many mid-level officers were Britons under contract, as well as Pakistanis and Omanis. By 1991 the officer corps was composed almost exclusively of emirate nationals, according to the Department of State. The UAE lacks a conscription system and is unlikely to adopt one. It was announced in 1990 that all university students would undergo military training as a requirement for graduation. Although adopted as a reaction to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the UAE authorities reportedly are considering continuation of the requirement as a possible prelude to reservist training.



## Organization and Equipment

The principal units of the UDF in 1993 were one mechanized infantry brigade, one armored brigade, two infantry brigades, one artillery brigade, and the Royal Guard, organized along brigade lines. The Central Military Command of Dubayy supplies one infantry brigade. Major weapons include French AMX-30 main battle tanks, of which an additional twenty-five tanks are on order. The Central Military Command separately purchased Italian OF-40 Mk 2 Lion tanks. French armor predominates throughout the army; it includes reconnaissance vehicles, infantry fighting vehicles, APCs, and 155mm self-propelled howitzers (see table 41, Appendix). Negotiations were reportedly under way in 1992 for the purchase of 337 M1A1 tanks from the United States. The UAE also has a variety of older British armored vehicles, many of them in storage, as well as Brazilian APCs. The army's antitank guided wire missiles include twenty-five TOWs from the United States, some of them mounted on Urutu chassis, as well as French Milan and HOT and the older British Vigilant systems. Because of difficulties of coordination between air- and ground-based defenses, the operation of air defense missiles was shifted to the air force in 1988. The army's tactical air defense is limited to 20mm and 30mm guns.

The most powerful units of the UDF navy are two Lürssen corvettes delivered by Germany in 1991, similar to those of the Bahraini navy. The corvettes are supplemented by fast-attack craft and large patrol boats.

The air force is organized into two fighter-ground attack squadrons, one air defense squadron, and one counterinsurgency squadron. The fighter-ground attack squadrons are equipped with Mirage IIIs and British Hawks, the latter with a combined attack and training role. The fighter squadron is composed of Mirage 5s and Mirage 2000s. The counterinsurgency squadron is equipped with the Italian Aermacchi. In addition, the air force has four early warning aircraft. A number of French helicopters are armed with Exocet, HOT, and other air-to-ground missiles. In 1991 the United States agreed to the sale of twenty Apache attack helicopters after the administration overcame objections in Congress by pointing out that the helicopters were needed to defend the UAE's oil platforms in the gulf and to enable the UAE to contribute more effectively to the deterrence of aggression by Iraq.

The existing air defense system is based on one air defense brigade organized into thirteen batteries armed with Rapier, Crotale, and RBS-70 SAMs. Five batteries of improved Hawk missiles were being formed in 1992, with training provided by the United States.

## The Role of the United Arab Emirates in the Iran–Iraq War and the Persian

### Gulf War

*General Norman H. Schwarzkopf presents the Legion of Merit to Major General Muhammad Said al Badi, chief of staff, United Arab Emirates Union Defense Force, for his contribution to the coalition during Operation Desert Storm.*

Courtesy United States Air Force Lieutenant General Charles Horner presents Muhammad an Nahyan, a United Arab Emirates Union Defense Force air force officer, with a pistol in recognition of his performance during Operation Desert Storm.

Courtesy United States Air Force The attitude of the UAE during attacks on international shipping in the Iran–Iraq War was ambivalent. The amirates were profiting from a brisk reexport trade with Iran; furthermore, they felt vulnerable because their offshore oil facilities were exposed to the danger of Iranian attack. Dubayy and Ras al Khaymah in particular, with a substantial number of Iranians and native Shia, leaned toward Iran and were reluctant to abandon their neutrality. Abu Dhabi, however, as the richest oil state, adopted a pro–Arab stance in the war favoring Iraq.

An offshore oil platform belonging to Abu Dhabi was hit by Iranian missiles in 1987; although denying responsibility, Iran paid an indemnity. The Department of State credited the UAE with supporting the United States Navy during its convoy operations despite Iranian threats of retaliation.

Reversing its earlier policy of avoiding collaboration with foreign military powers, the UAE, according to the Department of State, was the first gulf state to propose combined military action to deter Iraq when it threatened war against Kuwait. An air refueling exercise between United States and UAE aircraft one week before the invasion of Kuwait was intended as a warning signal to Iraq. During the Persian Gulf War, UAE troops, reportedly numbering several hundred, participated in the conflict as part of the GCC Peninsula Shield force that advanced into the city of Kuwait. United States aircraft bombed Iraqi positions from the UAE, and United States ships, including aircraft carriers, operated out of UAE ports. The UAE air force also carried out strikes against Iraqi forces. A total of six UAE combat deaths were reported as a result of the fighting.

The UAE defense budget remained fairly stable at about US\$1.6 billion between 1988 and 1991. However, an additional US\$3.3 billion represented UAE contributions and pledges in 1991 to other countries in connection with the war. Total UAE support to other countries participating in the Persian Gulf War was reported to have reached US\$6 billion by mid–1991; payments of nearly US\$3.8 billion had been made to the United States, US\$500 million to Britain, and US\$1.4 billion to Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and seven other nations, combined, to offset their economic losses from the war. Oil prices and UAE oil production rose significantly after the outbreak of the gulf crisis; exports rose from US\$15.5 billion in 1989 to US\$21.0 billion in 1990. However, the balance of payments was negative for the first time as a result of UAE contributions to other countries affected by the crisis and large capital transfers out of the country during the period.

## Internal Security Problems

In the past, internal dynastic rivalries within individual amirates were often sources of tension and even bloodshed. In part, this resulted from the absence of clearly established rules of succession. More recently, however, heirs apparent have usually been designated, most often the eldest son of the amir. Intra-UAE rivalries no longer take a violent form, but the continued existence of independent military forces and competition in acquiring arms bring with them a costly proliferation of weapons that complicates training and logistics.

The threat of subversion from resident Iranians and native Shia seems to be less acute in the UAE than in other gulf states in spite of the large Shia population in Dubayy. Dubayy and Sharjah have traditionally maintained good relations with Iran and enjoyed profits from maritime trade, particularly the transshipment of items officially banned in Iran to conserve foreign exchange. The UAE is not a target of Iranian terrorist attacks.

The provisional constitution authorizes federal police and security guard forces, which are subordinate to the Ministry of Interior. The strength of the police force has not been reported but is estimated as relatively large and vigilant in exercising control over political activities. Individual shaykhs had their own police forces before independence and maintained those forces after unification. Both the federal government and the amirate of Dubayy retain independent internal security organizations. The police forces of the other amirates are also involved in antinarcotic and antiterrorist activities.

Criminal cases are tried either by sharia courts administered by each amirate or by civil courts of the federal system that exist in several amirates. Rights of due process are accorded under both systems. Defendants are entitled to legal counsel. No formal public defender system exists, but the judge has responsibility for looking after the interests of persons not represented by counsel. Under the Criminal Procedures Code adopted in 1992, the accused has the right to defense counsel, provided by the government, if necessary, in cases involving possible sentence of death or life imprisonment. There are no jury trials, but trials are open except in cases involving national security or morals offenses. No separate security courts exist, and military courts try only military personnel in a system based on Western military judicial principles. According to Department of State human rights reports, the criminal court system is generally regarded as fair. Despite the lack of a formal bail system, there are instances of release on deposit of money or passport.

Detentions must be reported to the attorney general within forty-eight hours; the attorney general must decide within twenty-four hours whether to charge, release, or allow further limited detention. Most persons receive expeditious trials, although Iraqis and Palestinians had been held incommunicado in detention for one or two months in 1991. Others were being held in jail because they were unwilling or unable to return to their countries of origin.

## Oman

### Background

*Gunboat of the Royal Oman Navy prepares to transfer a crew member injured while patrolling the Strait of Hormuz.*

Courtesy Aramco World Weapons training for women of the Royal Oman Police Courtesy Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, Washington As a regional commercial power in the nineteenth century, Oman held territories on the island of Zanzibar off the coast of East Africa, in Mombasa along the coast of East Africa, and until 1958 in Gwadar (in present-day Pakistan) on the coast of the Arabian Sea. When its East African possessions were lost, Oman withdrew into isolationism in the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Another of the gulf states with long-standing ties to the British, Oman became important in the British–French rivalry at the end of the eighteenth century, when Napoleonic France challenged the British Empire for control of the trade routes to the East. Although nominally a fully independent sultanate, Oman enjoyed the protection of the empire without being, *de jure*, in the category of a colony or a protected state. With its external defenses guaranteed and its overseas territories lost, the sultanate had no need for armed forces other than mercenaries to safeguard the personal position of the sultan.

In 1952, when the Saudis occupied Omani territory near the Al Buraymi Oasis, a British-led force from the Trucial Coast fought the incursion and retook the territory for the sultan. Later in the same decade, the sultan again called on British troops to aid in putting down a rebellion led by the former imam (see Glossary) of Oman, who attempted to establish a separate state free of rule from Muscat. British ground and air forces dispatched to aid the Muscat and Oman Field Force succeeded in overcoming the rebels in early 1959.

Nevertheless, instead of a minor intertribal affair in Oman's hinterland, the rebellion became an international incident, attracting wide sympathy and support among members of the League of Arab States (Arab League) and the UN.

An agreement between Sultan Said ibn Taimur Al Said and the British government in 1958 led to the creation of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the promise of British assistance in military development. The agreement included the detailing of British officers and confirmed the existing rights of Britain's Royal Air Force to use facilities at Salalah in Dhofar region and at Masirah, an island off the Omani coast in the Arabian Sea.

Sultan Said ibn Taimur was ultraconservative and opposed to change of any kind. Kindled by Arab nationalism, a rebellion broke out in 1964 in Dhofar, the most backward and exploited area of Oman.

Although begun as a tribal separatist movement against a reactionary ruler, the rebellion was backed by leftist elements in the PDRY. Its original aim was the overthrow of Said ibn Taimur, but, by 1967, under the name of the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf—which in 1974 was changed to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO)—it adopted much wider goals. Supported by the Soviet Union through the PDRY, it hoped to spread revolution throughout the conservative regimes of the Arabian Peninsula.

Said ibn Taimur's reprisals against the Dhofari people tended to drive them into the rebel camp. In 1970, as the Dhofari guerrilla attacks expanded, Said ibn Taimur's son, Qabus ibn Said Al Said, replaced his father in a coup carried out with the assistance of British officers. Qabus ibn Said, a Sandhurst graduate and veteran of British army service, began a program to modernize the country and to develop the armed forces. In addition to British troops and advisers, the new sultan was assisted by troops sent by the shah of Iran. Aid also came from India, Jordan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the Trucial Coast, all interested in ensuring that Oman did not become a “people's republic.” An Iranian brigade, along with artillery and helicopters, arrived in Dhofar in 1973. After the arrival of the Iranians, the combined forces consolidated their positions on the coastal plain and moved against the guerrillas' mountain stronghold. By stages, the Omanis and Iranians gradually subdued the guerrilla forces, pressing their remnants closer and closer to the PDRY border. In December 1975, having driven the PFLO from Omani territory, the sultan declared that the war had been won. Total Omani, British, and Iranian casualties during the final two-and-one-half years of the conflict were about 500.

## Mission of the Armed Forces

After 1970 the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF; later renamed the Royal Armed Forces) has become one of the more modern and better trained fighting forces among the Arab gulf states. Recognizing its strategic importance guarding the Strait of Hormuz (through which nearly one-fifth of the world's oil transited) and the Gulf of Oman, the sultanate has struggled to maintain a high degree of military preparedness in spite of its limited financial means. Its defense budget in 1992 was estimated at US\$1.7 billion, exclusive of the GCC subsidy shared with Bahrain. It has periodically tested the capabilities of its armed forces by engaging in joint exercises with Western powers, particularly in regular exercises with British forces. Oman has taken the initiative in efforts to strengthen regional collective security through the GCC. At the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War, it proposed the development of a GCC regional security force of 100,000 personnel.

For many years after the defeat of the Dhofar insurgents, Oman regarded its southern border with the PDRY as the most likely source of future conflict. The PDRY provided the Dhofari rebels with supplies, training camps, and refuge from attacks. Omani ground and air strength was concentrated at Salalah, Thamarit, and other towns near the PDRY border. The threat of PFLO dissident activity supported by the PDRY or border operations against Oman declined after reconciliation with the PDRY, marked by the exchange of ambassadors in 1987.

Apart from its military role, the SAF carried out a variety of civil action projects that, particularly in Dhofar, were an important means of gaining the allegiance of the people. Military engineers assisted road construction in mountain areas. The air force carried out supply operations and provided medical service to remote areas.

The navy performed similar duties along Oman's long coastline. The navy also patrolled the sultanate's territorial waters and the 370-kilometer Exclusive Economic Zone to deter smuggling and illegal fishing.

## Organization and Equipment of the Armed Forces

Sultan Qabus ibn Said retained for himself the positions of prime minister and minister of defense. The sultan's uncle, Fahar ibn Taimur Al Said, served as deputy prime minister for security and defense. Between 1970 and 1987, the armed forces commander, as well as the heads of the air force and navy, were British generals and admirals on loan. As of early 1993, the chief of staff and the three service commanders were Omanis. As of 1992, personnel strength of the Royal Armed Forces (as they were renamed—RAF) had reached about 35,700, including 6,000 royal household troops—a 4,500 Royal Guard of Oman (RGO)

brigade, two Special Forces regiments totaling 700 trained by British air commandos, and 800 miscellaneous other personnel—and foreign personnel, who are believed to number about 3,700. The army, known as the Royal Oman Land Forces (ROLF), is the largest of the service branches with a strength of 20,000. The ROLF is organized into regiments, although each regiment is of no more than battalion size. It includes two armored regiments composed of three tank squadrons; one armored reconnaissance regiment composed of three armored car squadrons; eight infantry regiments, three of which are staffed by Baluchis; four artillery regiments; one air defense regiment of two batteries; one infantry reconnaissance regiment composed of three reconnaissance companies; two independent reconnaissance companies; one airborne regiment; and one field engineering regiment of three squadrons. A small tribal militia of rifle company strength on the Musandam Peninsula is known as the Musandam Security Force.

One divisional headquarters and two brigade headquarters are maintained, within which the independent regiments can be combined into larger fighting units. The separate royal household troops consist of the RGO, the Special Forces elements, and personnel to staff the royal yacht and a number of transport aircraft and helicopters. The RGO, an elite corps with the primary function of protecting the sultan and performing ceremonial duties, has a separate identity within the ROLF but is trained to operate in the field alongside other army formations.

The two tank squadrons are equipped with United States M-60A1 and M-60A3 tanks and with British Chieftains. The armored car squadrons are outfitted with British Scorpion light tanks and French VBC-90s.

The ROLF lacks armored equipment for troop movement, depending on Austrian Steyr cross-country vehicles. In July 1991, Oman ordered US\$150 million worth of armored vehicles from the United States. The ROLF has a variety of towed artillery pieces; its principal antitank weapons are TOW and Milan guided missiles. Air defense is provided by a variety of guns and shoulder-fired SAMs (see table 42, Appendix).

Initially, nearly all the army officers and men were Baluchis from Pakistan, except for senior commanders, who were British. As of early 1993, most of the officers were Omanis, although British involvement continued, especially in the armored regiment. The training battalion of the RAF conducts recruit training for all services at the RAF training center near Muscat. Officer candidates—who must serve at least one year in the enlisted ranks—attend the Sultan Qabus Military College and the Officers' Training School. In 1988 the first class of twenty officers graduated from the Sultan's Armed Forces Command and Staff College near Muscat. This is a triservice school to prepare midranking officers for senior command and staff appointments.

Officers of other government security services and some civilian officials also attend.

The Royal Oman Navy (RON), with a strength of 3,000 in 1992, has its headquarters at As Sib, thirty-six kilometers west of Muscat. The principal naval establishment is the Said ibn Sultan Naval Base, completed in 1987, at Wudham Alwa near As Sib. One of the largest engineering projects ever undertaken in Oman, it provides a home port for the RON fleet, training facilities, and workshops for carrying out all maintenance and repair activities. The Naval Training Center, located at the base, offers entry-level courses for officers and enlisted personnel, as well as specialized branch training. Initially, the navy was staffed almost entirely by British officers and Pakistani NCOs. By the late 1980s, most ship commanders were Omanis, although many Pakistani and British technical personnel remained.

The navy's main combat vessels are four Province-class missile boats built by Vosper Thornycroft. Armed with Exocet antiship missiles and 76mm guns, the last ship was delivered in 1989. The navy also operates four Brook Marine fast-attack craft with 76mm guns and four inshore patrol craft. The navy is well equipped for

## Oman, a country study

amphibious operations and has one 2,500-ton landing ship capable of transporting sixty-ton tanks and three LCMs (landing craft-mechanized). Oman has ordered two corvettes with eight Exocet missiles, scheduled for delivery from Britain in 1995-96, and hopes to remedy its lack of minesweepers.

The Royal Oman Air Force (ROAF) had a strength of about 3,500 in 1992. Its forty-four combat aircraft of British manufacture consist of two fighter-ground attack squadrons of modern Jaguars, a ground attack and reconnaissance squadron of older Hunters, and a squadron of Strikemasters and Defenders for counterinsurgency, maritime reconnaissance, and training purposes. The air force is fairly well equipped with three transport squadrons and two squadrons of helicopters for troop transport and medical transport. Rapier SAMs are linked to an integrated air control and early warning network based on a Martello radar system.

Skyvan aircraft fitted with radar and special navigational gear conduct maritime reconnaissance and antipollution patrols. The principal air bases are at Thamarit in the south and on Masirah. Others are collocated with the international airport at As Sib, at Al Khasab on the Musandam Peninsula, at Nazwah, and at Salalah. Officer and pilot training takes place at the Sultan Qabus Air Academy on Masirah. Pilots of fighter aircraft receive advanced training in Britain.

## Omani Role in the Persian Gulf War, 1991

Oman's perceptions of the strategic problems in the gulf diverge somewhat from those of the other Arab gulf states. Geographically, it faces outward to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, and only a few kilometers of its territory—the western coast of the Musandam Peninsula—border the Persian Gulf. Nevertheless, sharing the guardianship of the Strait of Hormuz with Iran, Oman's position makes it of key importance to the security of the entire gulf. In its willingness to enter into strategic cooperation with the United States and Britain, Oman has always stood somewhat apart from the other gulf states. In 1980 Muscat and Washington concluded a ten-year “facilities access” agreement granting the United States limited access to the air bases on Masirah and at Thamarit and As Sib and to the naval bases at Muscat, Salalah, and Al Khasab. The agreement was renewed for a further ten-year period in December 1990. Although some Arab governments initially expressed their disapproval for granting the United States basing privileges, the agreement permitted use of these bases only on advance notice and for specified purposes. During the Iran–Iraq War, the United States flew maritime patrols from Omani airfields and based tanker aircraft to refuel United States carrier aircraft. The United States Army Corps of Engineers carried out considerable construction at the Masirah and As Sib air bases, making it possible to pre-position supplies, vehicles, and ammunition. Hardened aircraft shelters were built at As Sib and Thamarit for use of the ROAF.

Oman's traditionally good relations with Iran were strained by Iran's attacks on tanker movements in the gulf and Iran's emplacement of Chinese Silkworm antiship missile launchers near the Strait of Hormuz. The sultanate reinforced its military position on the Musandam Peninsula, which is only about sixty kilometers from Iranian territory.

After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Oman declared its support for the multinational coalition ranged against Iraq. The facilities on Masirah became an important staging area for the movement of coalition forces to the area of conflict. Oman also contributed troops to Operation Desert Storm as part of the Arab contingent of Joint Forces Command East. A reinforced Omani brigade, along with Saudi, UAE, Kuwaiti, and other forces, participated in the ground assault paralleling the gulf coast that converged on the city of Kuwait. No Omani combat deaths were reported.



## Internal Security

Oman has not been exposed to a significant internal threat since the defeat of the Dhofari insurgents in 1975.

Tribal dissension, a factor in the past, is considered unlikely to recur because most tribal chiefs and leading families share the advantages of rising oil income. The foreign labor force is large—estimated at 58 percent of the working population—and most foreign workers are Indians and Pakistanis who are not politically active. A few observers foresee an internal power struggle over the succession because Sultan Qabus ibn Said has no designated successor, but others believe that the country is stable enough to avoid strife over the selection of a new ruler.

The sultanate has not been the target of terrorist acts; it faces few problems from the narcotics trade and considers the level of general crime to be remarkably low. The security services are described as large and efficient but not overly intrusive.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP), commanded by the inspector general of police and customs, is under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior. The size of the force was estimated in 1992 at 7,000, but this number is believed to include customs, immigration, civil defense, firefighters, coast guard, and prison service. The principal crime fighting unit is the Directorate General of Criminal Investigation. An oil installation division has responsibility for security of the oil industry, patrolling pipelines, oil rigs, and oil terminals. The mounted division patrols border areas on horseback and camel and also provides security control at airports and border points. The coast guard contingent numbers 400; it is equipped with fifteen AT-105 APCs and eighteen inshore patrol craft.

The home guard (*firqat*) units had been raised and trained for irregular counterinsurgency operations by troops of the British army's Special Air Services. Armed with small arms, *firqat* units serve as tribal police and defense forces for the mountain people engaged in herding cattle in areas infiltrated by the Dhofari insurgents during the rebellion. After the insurgency, they remained as paramilitary tribal police, numbering about 3,500 in 1992.

Oman's criminal court system provides for fair trials within the framework of Islamic judicial practice. The defendant in criminal trials is presumed innocent and cannot be detained for longer than twenty-four hours without review of the case by a magistrate, who may then allow the police to hold a suspect up to fourteen days—extended if necessary up to seventy days—to carry out further investigation. Some suits have been filed against police officers for illegal arrest.

The accused can be represented by an attorney, but the government does not pay for a public defender. There are no jury trials and no right to a public trial. The judge can release the accused on payment of bail. Only the judge questions witnesses at the trial. The verdict and sentencing are frequently pronounced within a day.

Sentences of more than two months and more than US\$1,300 in fines are subject to appeal. No executions have been carried out since 1975 and are, in any event, subject to the sultan's ratification. A rarely used security court system handles internal security cases. The government can search private residences and monitor telephones and private correspondence without warrant but generally confines such actions to investigations of potential security threats and individuals suspected of criminal activity.

According to the Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1991*, torture, mistreatment, and cruel punishment are not systematically practiced, nor are they countenanced by Omani authorities. The traditional punishments authorized by Islamic law, such as amputation and stoning, are not imposed. The Department of State reported that some prisoners had complained of beatings by police in 1991, and other physical abuse had been reported in earlier years. Prison conditions are described as harsh, with extreme temperatures in cells without proper ventilation. However, a practice of punitive hard labor under grueling desert conditions was discontinued in 1991.

\* \* \* Much of the data concerning the size and equipment of the armed forces of the Persian Gulf states is based on *The Military Balance* and on *Jane's Fighting Ships*. Some of the discussion of internal security practices and judicial systems is drawn from *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1991* prepared by the United States Department of State.

Two general works, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States* by Rosemarie Said Zahlan and *The Turbulent Gulf* by Liesl Graz, provide background on security perceptions and problems facing the smaller states of the gulf.

## Oman, a country study

Anthony H. Cordesman's *The Gulf and the West* contributes details on the individual armed forces, the military strengths and shortcomings of each state, and each state's involvement in the naval confrontation in the gulf in the 1980s. *The Middle East*, published by the Congressional Quarterly, treats numerous topics dealing with Persian Gulf security, including local disputes, United States military sales, and the events leading up to the 1990–91 gulf crisis.

Studies of the military strategy employed in Operation Desert Storm in *Desert Victory* by Norman Friedman and *Thunder in the Desert* by James Blackwell give limited mention to the role played by the Persian Gulf states. Several analyses of the geostrategic environment in the region, although dating from the mid–1980s, still have relevance. They include *Arms and Oil* by Thomas L. McNaugher and *Saudi Arabia: The West and the Security of the Gulf* by Mazher A. Hameed. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)