Caught Between Great Powers: Oman's Neutrality in the Saudi-Iran Rivalry

Maulana Ammar Auliaur Rahman
Program Magister Ilmu Hubungan Internasional, Universitas Gadjah Mada
E-mail: maulanaammar@mail.ugm.ac.id

Abstract

This article aims to explain the reason for Oman's neutrality policy amid Saudi-Iran growing tension in the region. The neutral stance from Oman raised some questions about their position as a part of the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that, if following the logic of consequences, should take sides with Saudi, and put pressure on Iran due to Saudi presence in the group. Oman always promotes peace and tends to avoid confrontation when facing Saudi-Iran rivalry. By implementing explanative methods and a constructivism paradigm based on norms as a tool of analysis, and supported with secondary data, this article found out that Oman's neutrality decision in the Saudi-Iran rivalry is largely being influenced by their domestic norms, that is Ibadism, that made them capable to avoid conflict in the region, in this case, the Saudi-Iran rivalry. Ibadism also drives them to always promote peace in the region, because this teaching is based on four main ideas, namely tolerance, just rule, acceptance of the other, and peaceful compromises. In the end, this domestic norm influenced Oman's decision-maker's conception of the importance of preserving stability in the region. This then becomes an important explanation about why Oman breaks with their fellow GCC members that tend to support Saudi in the rivalry with Iran and decided to follow neutrality as their main policy.

Keywords: domestic norms, Ibadism, neutrality, Oman, Saudi-Iran rivalry

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan alasan netralitas yang dikedepankan Oman dalam menghadapi perseteruan antara Saudi dan Iran di kawasan. Pendirian Oman yang netral memunculkan pertanyaan tersendiri terlebih jika melihat posisi Oman sebagai bagian dari Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) yang, jika mengikuti logika konsekuensi, mestinya memberikan dukungan kepada Saudi, dan secara aktif memberikan tekanan kepada Iran karena keberadaan Saudi sebagai anggota kelompok tersebut. Namun, Oman justru selalu mempromosikan perdamaian serta cenderung untuk menghindari konfrontasi jika menyangkut isu perseteruan Saudi-Iran. Dengan menggunakan jenis penelitian eksplanatif dan pendekatan konstruktivis berbasis pada norma sebagai pisau analisis, dan didukung dengan data sekunder, artikel ini menemukan bahwa keputusan Oman yang memilih netral dalam perseteruan antara Saudi dan Iran didorong oleh konteks norma domestik yang dimiliki Oman, yakni Islam Ibadi, yang membuat mereka mampu menghindari konfrontasi yang muncul di kawasan. Islam Ibadi juga mendorong Oman untuk selalu mempromosikan perdamaian di kawasan sebagai orientasi yang utama, karena ajaran ini memiliki empat pilar utama, yakni toleransi, just rule, acceptance of the other, dan peaceful compromises. Pada akhirnya, norma domestik yang Oman miliki mempengaruhi pandangan para pembuat kebijakan mengenai pentingnya menjaga stabilitas di kawasan. Hal ini kemudian menjadi penjelasan penting dari alasan kebijakan Oman yang berbeda dari anggota GCC lain, yang cenderung mendukung Saudi dalam perseteruan dengan Iran, dan lebih memilih untuk menempatkan netralitas sebagai kebijakan utama mereka.

Kata kunci*: Islam Ibadi, netralitas, norma domestik, Oman, perseteruan Saudi-Iran*

INTRODUCTION

Unlike other regions in the world, the Middle East is arguably become the most unstable region in the world. This can be seen by looking at various actors that got involved in the region's conflict, either directly or indirectly, sometimes referred to as proxy wars. Saudi-Iran is one example of a proxy war in the Middle East that is actively being involved in various conflicts in the region, one of them in the Yemen civil war. This can be seen on September 14th, 2019, when Saudi oil processing facilities operated by Saudi Aramco at Abqaiq and Khurais located in eastern Saudi Arabia, got attacked by Iranian-backed Houthis that were involved in the Yemeni civil war. That attack cost Saudi 5,7 million barrels of oil loss per day and increased oil prices by 15% (Basundoro, 2020: 10). Besides Yemen, both countries are also involved in the Syrian civil war, the disputes in Bahrain, Lebanon, Qatar, Iraq, and many more.

The conflict between Saudi and Iran can be traced back to the Iranian Revolution when the US-backed monarchic Imperial State of Iran became the Islamic Republic, putting Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as the new Supreme Leader of Iran. Before the Iranian Revolution, Iran is an important ally of the U.S. in the Middle East to help stabilize the region. By replacing the monarchies system with the Islamic Republic, Iran set an alarm to another state in the region, especially from Sunni-run Arab monarchies Saudi Arabia. This can be seen in the 1987 Mecca incident during the Hajj pilgrimage that led to the deaths of over 400 people and resulted in the complete break of Tehran-Riyadh relations in 1988, which lasted for three years (Amiri et.al., 2011: 679).

Nowadays, Saudi and Iran's pursuit of regional hegemony takes a new approach in the form of a proxy war, or many experts say the new cold war. This new form of war between the two great power in the region started to increase significantly after Arab Spring that happened in several countries in the Middle East. Both countries use this momentum by providing support to the opposing sides in the conflict with some military equipment. They also exploited issues in the region such as sectarianism, economic struggle, and religious differences during the Arab Spring to spread their influence and claim the position as a hegemon power in the region. Similar to the Cold War era, other parties in the region or the one that got interested in there also involved by taking the sides with either Saudi or Iran, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, United States, and the others that support Saudi Arabia, and Syria, Houthis, Hezbollah, and other parties in the Iranian side. This policy is not followed by Oman, which become one of the states in the region that decided to stay neutral and maintain good relations with both states in dealing with region turmoil after the Arab Spring.

Even though Oman is a member of GCC, they are not afraid to head in a different direction from the organization when it tried to undermine Iran. This can be seen in 2011 when GCC led by Saudi Arabia proposed the idea of the political union of GCC states. The political union is meant to unite every GCC state to address the internal and external challenges, but many experts believe it is meant to undermine Iran after the progress made in Iran nuclear deal.

Oman, represented by their Ministry of Foreign Affairs Youssef bin Alawi, strongly disagree with the proposal and threatened to withdraw from the new body if it sees the light (Baabood, 2016: 119).

Another example is when Oman distanced itself from the Saudi-led military intervention in the Yemen war, the war that was named a proxy war between Saudi and Iran. Instead of joining the war, Oman decided to take an unusual role as a third party and mediator between the disputing parties that focus on promoting peace and humanitarian assistance. Jamal Amer, a journalist who is close to one of the parties in the Yemen war, said that Oman is refusing to become enmeshed with one party against another and trying to find a solution for the end of the war, by saying, *"Muscat has been the only gateway for Houthis and their ally Saleh to the outside world, whether for official convoys affiliated with them or through welcoming many of the wounded in its hospitals. It has also offered humanitarian aid following the maritime and air blockade imposed by the Arab coalition"* (Al-Falahi, 2016).

Previous studies on Oman's neutrality in Saudi-Iran rivalry tend to focus on the rationalist assumption, that is an attempt to fulfill their economy and security sectors, as well as a diplomacy maneuver, that the goal is to promote their image as a peaceful state in the region. In maximizing their economy and security gain, O'Reilly (1998) in his work used the *Omanibalancing* terms to explain Oman's pursuit of economy and security needs by conducting alignment behavior with another country to counter all possible threats to Oman. This term is based on *Omnibalancing*, a term that is similar to the balance of power in international relations, and usually, *Omnibalancing* is used to explain Third World states alignment behavior to counter both internal and external threats (O'Reilly, 1998: 71). In short, *Omanibalancing* argues that Oman's good relations with Iran, as well as Saudi Arabia, is based on their strategic calculation to guarantee and fulfilling their economy and security need as well as tried to avoid such uncertainties from security and economy that might come from external and internal threat in the region.

Meanwhile, Yoel Guzansky (2015) and Mohammed Binhuwaidin (2019) propose hedging as a political maneuver used by small states like Oman to make sure they can survive and reap as many benefits as they can when they're being sandwiched by a great power in the region, that is Saudi Arabia and Iran. Hedging itself is a strategy aimed at avoiding a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing or bandwagoning (Binhuwaidin, 2019:3). Instead, they cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side at the obvious expense of another. Consequently, the goal of hedging is to obtain as many returns as possible from relatively strong states when relations are positive while offsetting as much of the worst-case scenario risk and uncertainty as possible.

On the other hand, Hani Albasoos & Musallam Maashani (2020) outline how Oman is tried to introduce itself as a peaceful state in the region. This is important for Oman as one of the small states that are caught between Saudi Arabia and Iran as a great power in the

region. By acquiring an image as a peaceful state, it will help Oman to minimize the incoming threats from other actors that can cause instability. There are various diplomacy methods that Oman implemented such as official diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, economic diplomacy, water diplomacy, poet diplomacy, aviation diplomacy, and non-governmental diplomacy. These tools then manifest in the form of cultural, mediation, and non-interference policies to help resolve regional crises, including neutrality in the Saudi-Iran rivalry (Albasoos & Maashani, 2020: 162).

The current study departs from previous research that focused on investigating Oman's neutrality in the Saudi-Iran rivalry based on rational explanations such as economy and security. This study also departs from a technical explanation based on how Omani diplomacy works. Rather than implementing rational calculation to explain Oman's neutrality that already proven inadequate, indicated by Oman's decision to be a third party in the great power contestation instead of taking sides with one of them, this research focuses on non-material elements like norms, ideas, identity, and concepts that constitute national identity and dictating state behavior. By using the constructivist approach, this study takes a bold step moving from the rational calculation that previously dominated this issue and attempts to fill the gap about the reason why Oman prefers neutrality policy in the Saudi and Iran hegemonic clash in the region using non-material reason, that is norm-based constructivism perspectives.

Theoretical Framework: Norm-based Constructivism

Constructivist perspectives provide a precious analytical framework for understanding the national security of the state. Constructivism challenges the core assumption of realism perspectives that put anarchy as a system that dictates a state's behavior. By moving from that kind of explanation, constructivism treats domestic factors as an important aspect to explain how the state must act in international politics. Ontologically, constructivism believes that norms, rules, meanings, languages, cultures, and ideologies are social phenomena that create identities and guide actions (Klotz & Lynch, 2007: 7). National security then, from a constructivist perspective dependent on social context based on the normative framework on every actor.

Martha Finnemore (1996: 22), defines norm as shared expectations about appropriate behavior held by the community of actors that is intersubjective. Similarly to that, Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter Katzenstein (1996: 54) define norm as a collective expectation for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity. It is a necessary condition for state behavior because norms provide a set of frameworks about what policy should a state choose. From these definitions, it is clear that state behavior is not simply based on fulfilling their national interest and minimizing material loss but using the norms that they followed to dictate which policy that appropriate for them to do and don't. On the other way, the decision-makers are taking the logic of appropriateness into matters rather than the logic of consequences. The risk a state must handle when deciding which policy should choose is not about the material loss risk, but it's about the trust

loss risk because such policies are considered inappropriate or not by

norms and values lived within the state's society.
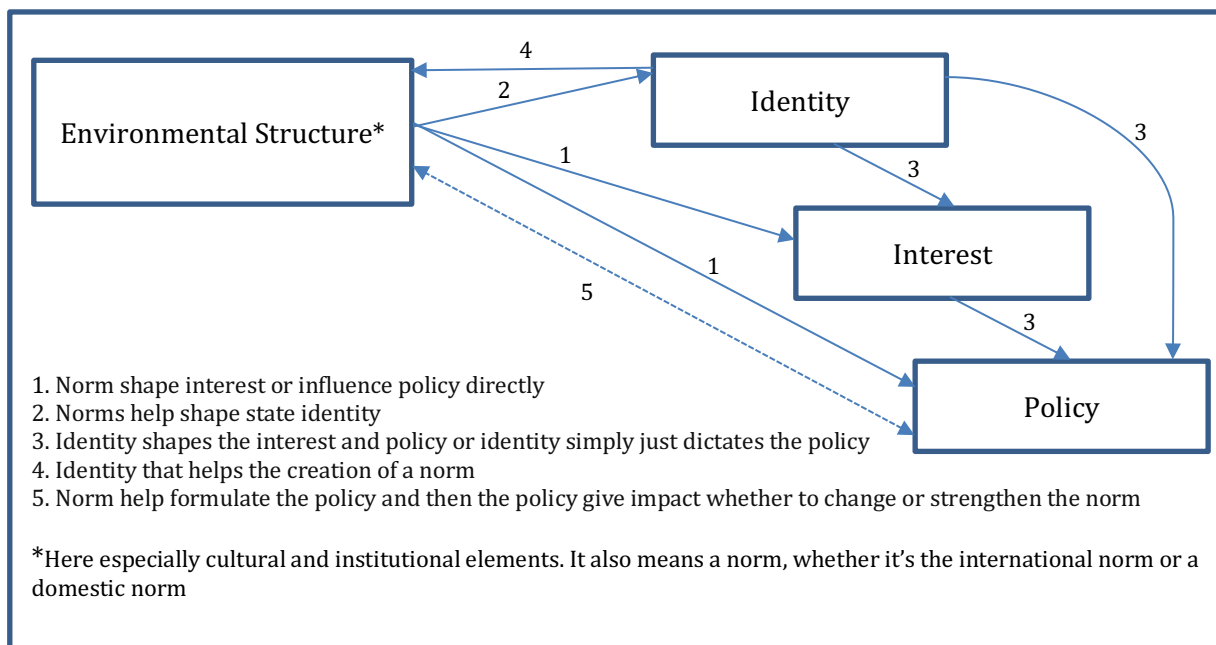
Figure 1.
Logic of Constructivist

As a rule that justified the state's action, norms have two functions, regulative and constitutive (Jepperson et.al., 1996: 53-54). Regulative means norms become guidance for state behavior. Norm gives reference to what should do and don't according to their already defined identity. However, because norms by definition embody a quality of "oughtness" and shared moral assessment, norms prompt justifications for action and leave an extensive trail of communication among actors that we can study (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998: 892). For example, the United States' explanations about why it feels compelled to continue using land mines in South Korea reveal that it recognizes the emerging norm against the use of such mines. If not for the norm, there would be no need to mention, explain, or justify, the use of mines in Korea at all. Whereas norm also got the constitutive function when it can contribute to constructing identity and interest. This function specifies the actions that will cause relevant others to recognize and validate a particular identity and respond to it appropriately.

In Oman's neutrality case, a domestic norm that plays important role in shaping Oman's preferences is Ibadism, which is rooted deeply in Omani society. Ibadism is a sect in Islam that is similar to Sunni and Shia which become the majority in Oman. While the previous two were used as a political tool in the Saudi-Iran quest for

hegemony, Ibadism distanced itself from the conflict thanks to their lot of teaching about peace and tolerance. This is then reflected in Oman's interest and policy about peace in the region, especially in the Saudi-Iran rivalry.

Research Methods

This study used explanative qualitative research to accomplish research objectives to unravel why Oman prefers neutrality to face regional contestation in the form of Saudi-Iran rivalry. Data were constituted from secondary sources that included journal articles, relevant reports, and online media as well as social media. This study also analyzed primary data in the form of speeches delivered by Omani officials to view the impact of Ibadism as Oman's domestic norm in influencing their interest and decision-making regarding the Saudi-Iran rivalry. To do that, the data will be analyzed descriptively to see causality links between the data used. Furthermore, the author's interpretation will follow the standards of qualitative analysis in the form of a presentation of study findings, a comparison of study results with existing literature, and the author's personal view on the discussion results (Creswell, 2018).
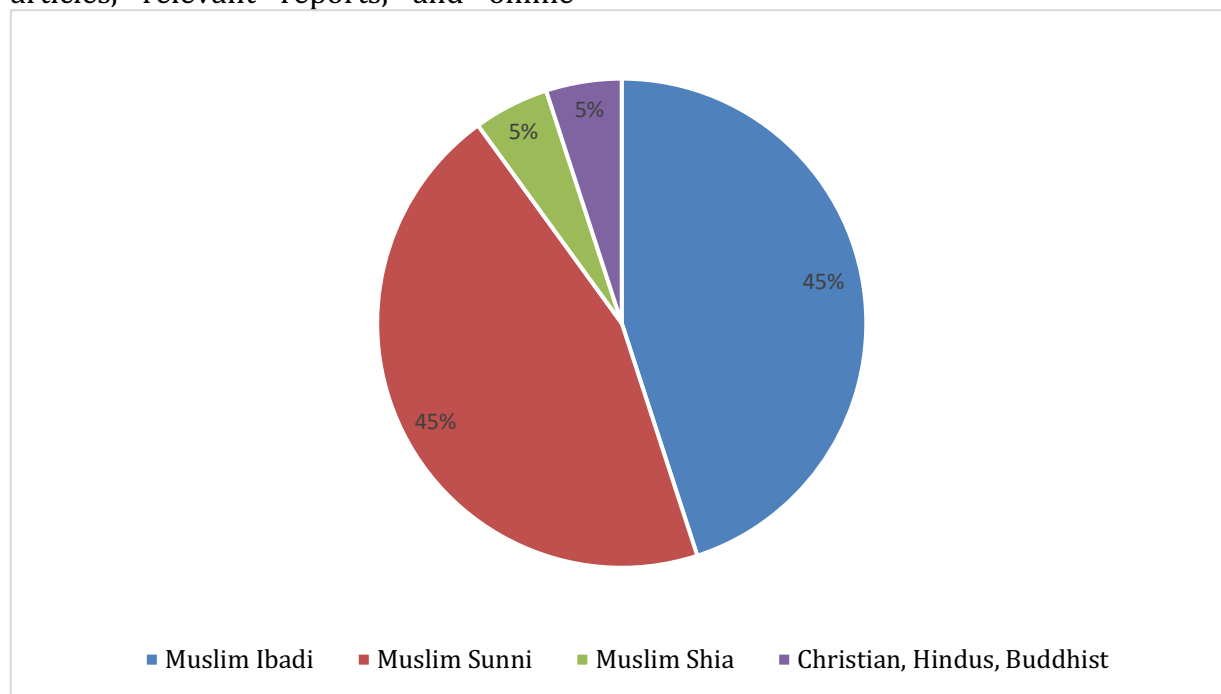
Source: Central Intelligence Agency, 2023 (edited by Author, 2023).

Figure 2.
Omani Demography 2020

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Oman's Domestic Norm: A Tradition

To understand Oman's foreign policy, it's important to notice the tradition that exists in the Omani community. John Wilkinson (1977 in Bierschenk, 1988: 107) perhaps became one of the authors who tried to recapture the relationship between traditional Oman's religious doctrine, social structure, and political constitution. Wilkinson argues that until the recent

6

development of oil production in Oman, the segmentary tribal and acephalous character of Omani society had been preserved by Ibadism that already dominated in Oman. For Wilkinson, the key variable in this context is the unification of social structure that took place in Oman in the first centuries after the Islamic conquest. The integration of the Persian village population into the tribal system of the Arab immigrants which was facilitated by egalitarian notions inherent in Ibadism led to the preservation of the original settlement pattern with its concomitant decentralization of economic and administrative functions. Thus, the development of a central state, a general feature in Muslim history, was prevented until the last decades because of religious thinking. In short, Wilkinson's research shows how Ibadism was rooted in the Omani community for a long time.

Ibadism itself has been called by both Muslims and non-Muslim scholars of Islam "moderate *Khawarij*", although contemporary Ibadis regard it as an insult to be considered *Khawarij*, though this was not always the case (Hoffman, 2012: 3). This branch of Islam is mainly found in Omani society a long time ago and followed by the majority of Omani people nowadays, even Oman become the largest Ibadis population in the world. Figure 2 above shows that in 2020, Ibadism, alongside Islam Sunni represent approximately 90% or 45% each in Omani society, while there are approximately 2.72 million Ibadis worldwide, of which only 250.000 live outside Oman. Oman also has uniqueness in terms of Ibadi influence on their society, that is the existence of an Imamate that implemented Ibadism and focused on religious matters alongside the Sultan as the head of the State. This lasted until 1971 when Sultan Qaboos claimed the throne and decided to unite them under the name of the Sultanate of Oman. The significant amount of Ibadi people in Oman combined with its long history and influence played important role in shaping Omani society.

Elliott (2018), who works on the development of Omani-Ibadi society from pre-Islam to the present day, provides some insight into this issue. For instance, Ibadis has already lived side-by-side with non-Ibadis for centuries, but their form of tolerance towards other religions adheres to the literal definition of the word itself. In another word, while they are willing to tolerate the existence of foreigners in their land, they do not accept the legitimacy of their faiths. This is best exemplified by the non-Muslim groups that may only build places of worship on land that is donated to them by the Sultan of Oman (Elliott, 2018: 148). Even though there is some distance between non-Muslim citizens, they always put their livelihood and safety first. This was also epitomized by Ibadi theologian Nasir al-Rawahi that wrote,

> *"Natural love does not harm you unless it becomes religious affiliation. There is nothing wrong with being polite to someone while inwardly retaining religious dissociation from him. The Prophet only asked his Lord not to give any infidel who lived near him something that would make him love him because of the Prophet's perfect devotion and desire to be affected by God alone, in worship and love"* (Elliott, 2018: 162).

Abdullah Baabood (2016) examines the main principles of Ibadism that are reflected in Omani society. In

short, Baabood argues that Ibadism has a history of tolerance and conservatism, and is based on just rule and tolerance, as well as acceptance of other and peaceful compromises with opponents (Baabood, 2016: 111). All of them are constructed based on Ibadism thought that exists in Omani society. This is supported by the study of Bierschenk (1988) that view Ibadism in the past tend to avoid the use of arms as a maneuver to spread their doctrines. Instead, they sought to reach an understanding with the orthodox caliphs in peaceful negotiations. Ideologically, this was expressed by them in the notion of the "hidden" Imam, indicating a period when the Ibadis, living under the rule of "tyrants", preferred to remain without a political organization, until the Ibadi council decide that circumstances were favorable enough to open themselves and organize an Ibadi state (Bierschenk, 1988: 110).

Similar to Baabood, Goshey (2019) examines the four points in Ibadism that reflect in Omani society, in the form of pluralism, coexistence, mutual understanding, and tolerance. "Pluralism" or *ta 'addudiyya* refers to the attempts to manage the presence of multiple religious and sectarian identities in society. "Coexistence" or *ta 'āyush* indicates the peaceful mixing of diverse individuals in their daily lives. The reality of diverse neighborhoods in Oman in which Sunnis, Shia, and Ibadis all live on the same street and even within the same homes evinces a coexistence that has long characterized Omani society. "Mutual understanding" or *tafāhum* indicates the attempt of two or more sides to understand the other's religious perspective. And "tolerance" or *tasāmuḥ* indicates the presence of some objectionable quality that the dominant group must somehow reconcile, overlook, or forgive.

Table 1.
Timeline of Oman's Diplomatic and International Activity

Agenda	Years of Entry
Admission into United Nations	1971
Admission into Arab League	1971
Joins the Islamic Conference Organization	1972
Establish Diplomatic Relations with the United States, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, France, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Bahrain	1972
Establish Diplomatic Relations with Qatar, North Yemen, and Others	1974
Initiate the Creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council	1981
Diplomatic Ties with South Yemen	1983
Diplomatic Relations with the Soviet Union	1986
Establish Relations with Russia	1991

Source: Kechichian, 1995 (edited by Author, 2023).

Not only in Omani society but Ibadism influence can also be seen in the Omani government. It can be seen when Sultan Qaboos, as the Oman leader at that time, decide to co-opt and collaborated with the Imamate and welcome them to his reign. The Sultan grants the famous families on the Imamate side, such as al-Sālimi, al-Khalīlī, and al-Kharūṣī families, important positions such as the Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, Grand Mufti, and Deputy Grand Mufti respectively (Goshey, 2019: 119).

This decision is important to recognizing Ibadism at the heart of Omani officials. Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamad Al Khalili, Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman since 1975, is perhaps the most influential Ibadi figure in spreading the teaching not only to Omani officials but to the international stage. One of the most consistent themes throughout al-Khalīlī's ample corpus of publications is the importance of unity or *waḥda*, but the important thing is he never tried to convert non-Ibadi or non-muslim into Ibadis, by saying,

> *"We do not say that rapprochement between the Islamic schools means that individuals must leave their school, neither do we call for that. We do not ask anyone to leave his school whether with respect to its thought or to its jurisprudence... As we have said with regards to the non-essential issues of jurisprudence, there is a wide arena for the 'ulamā' to undertake ijtihād. Perhaps the differences between the numerous schools in these issues are like the differences between different leaders within one school...It is necessary for Muslims to grasp the fact that the unity required within the umma does not require that they all melt into*

> *one madhhab. On the contrary, to each his independence of opinion and perspective and his reliance upon what he sees to be best"* (Goshey, 2019: 124).

Omani government also holds an Islamic faith dialogue conference every year wherein scholars from Sunnism, Shi'ism, and Ibadism meet to discuss similarities and differences of their faiths, as well as published scholarly journals called *al-Tasamuh* (tolerance) and *al-Tafahum* (understanding) that pride themselves on publishing writings from the scholar of all faiths since 2004 (Elliott, 2018: 170). Learning about different ways of thinking beyond theology is the most important aspect of these journals. They give the Ibadis the ability to cooperate with foreigners who work in the same field as them increasing their own, and Oman's productivity and prosperity. This increased and shared success leads to even greater ties between Ibadis and foreigners, amplifying Ibadi openness and diminishing the likelihood of radicalism by defeating sectarianism.

Ibadism and Oman's Foreign Policies in the Region

To analyze the Ibadism role in Omani foreign policies, it's important to examine it from Sultan Qaboos' reign since the Sultanate is the one who revert Omani isolationism policy and opened Oman to the international stage. When Qaboos claimed the throne in 1970, he faced a tough challenge in the form of the Dhofar rebellion because of the spreading of communism in the region. By adopting different approaches from the former leader that happened to be his father, Sultan Qaboos launched the

five-point program of social and military reform that addressed many of the inadequacies of the former leader's regime and combating the Dhofar rebellion. One of the points is starting a diplomatic initiative to enable Oman to be recognized as an Arab state with a legal form of government and to isolate South Yemen by ending the support it was receiving from other Arab states (Paul, et.al., 2013: 280).

The diplomatic initiative proved to be fruitful as Oman started to gain international recognition. Table 1 shows how determined Oman under Sultan Qaboos to introduce themselves to other actors, particularly the ones that exist or had an interest in the region. One of the activities that might be important to highlight is when Oman decided to establish relations with South Yemen and the Soviet Union even though both of them are responsible for Oman's instability by giving support to the Dhofar rebellion. Oman's presence on the international stage helped Sultan Qaboos as Omani leader to promote peace and tolerance as their main idea, one of them can be seen on the occasion of the 24th national day in 1994 to remind Omani people and underline Oman's position in the eyes of neighboring states about their value of peace regarding the risk of extremist and fanaticism idea that already spread in the region and might endanger Oman,

> *"... It is also their duty not to allow alien ideas, masquerading as beneficial promises, to jeopardise the security and stability of this country. They must hold fast to the principles of Islam that call upon us to have a spirit of tolerance, intimacy and love. Extremism, under whatever guise, fanaticism of whatever kind, factionalism of whatever persuasion*

> *would be hateful poisonous plants in the soil of our country which will not be allowed to flourish... It is really sad that this stagnation resulted in a weakness of the Muslim nation, which, in recent years, has brought about fanaticism based on a lack of knowledge among the Muslim youth about the correct facts of their religion. This was exploited by some to perpetrate violence and propagate cases of difference that led to discord and hatred... Obstinacy in religious understanding leads to backwardness in Muslims, prevalence of violence and intolerance. This, as a matter of fact, is far removed from Islam which rejects exaggeration and bigotry, because it is the religion of liberality"* (Oman Ministry of Information, 2015: 312-313).

Sultan Qaboos warning about extremism and fanaticism movement is relevant to Ibadism teaching that mainly points out tolerance and mutual understanding with others as their main ideas. It was also consistently implemented when facing Middle East conditions nowadays, especially with the Saudi-Iran rivalry that uses such kind of propaganda, which Oman decided to distance themselves from that confrontation and established friendly relations with both of them at the same time. Relations between them were already established even after the Iranian revolution in 1979 which marks the turnaround in the region. Before the revolution, Iran is well known as a close friend of the United States in terms of combating communism in the area. After that, Iran become the number one enemy in the region not only by the United States but also by the majority of states in the region, including Saudi Arabia. The

establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981 is claimed to be an attempt by Saudi to undermine the Iranian threat in the Middle East. A different position shown by Oman, which can be seen in Sultan Qaboos' remarks on the occasion of the opening of the 16th summit of the Arab GCC states in 1995 to remind fellow GCC counterparts to avoid violence and promote peace in the region,

> *"... In expressing our hopes that the peace process will continue and expand on all tracks, we affirm that the peace we seek, the peace which we believe will provide stability and prosperity for the region as well as security and confidence for all its peoples, is a just, comprehensive peace which eradicates the causes of violence and extremism and replaces them with tolerance, peaceful co-existence and civilized dealing between peoples. We appeal to all States to endeavour to achieve this goal and take all the necessary measures to eliminate the difficulties and obstacles that may stand in its way"* (Oman Ministry of Information, 2015: 361).

From this statement, it can be inferred that Oman priority was always to preserve peace and to prevent extremism and violence that might endanger the region, in contrast with Saudi intention before. This position is once again shown in terms of the United States' desire to put pressure on Iranian power. Fear of the rising power of Iran under Khomeini that overthrew Reza Pahlavi as their strategic ally and former Shah of Iran, the United States then launched a dual containment policy to undermine and isolate Iran from the rest. This policy later proved to be ineffective to prevent Iranian development and made the United States begin to revert that policy and replace it with open dialogue with Tehran. The fact is, it's not surprising that Oman under Sultan Qaboos already warns the West to avoid the isolationism policy. They also support that idea by remaining neutral, trying to promote peace, and always encouraging an open dialogue with Iran, as consistently shown before by saying,

> *"Nations should be talking to one another. Iran is the largest country in the Gulf, with 65 million people. You cannot isolate it... I tell them that the whole world is beginning to work together, that they can't sit apart and go on without the rest of the world... I know that dealing with Tehran can be very difficult. Iran has different factions in its leadership... My view is: if the government can bring itself to take a different approach to the West, one that produces benefits, then the third faction might support greater pragmatism. But there is no easy solution. Time will tell"* (Miller, 1997: 14).

Not only promoting peace in the context of rising Iran, but Sultan Qaboos also showed the Arab world the importance of neutrality in the Camp David Accord in 1979 when Egypt under Anwar Sadat signed a peace treaty with Israel under Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Following peace as their main guidance, Oman was the only member of the Arab League besides Sudan and Somalia to maintain uninterrupted diplomatic relations with Cairo, even when other members condemned Sadat's actions. Oman's position was then proven to be vindicated when other Arab States in the mid-1980s was

reverting their policy by seeking to bring Egypt back into the Arab fold, even though they want to create a united front against Iran because of their fear of Iranian military victory in Iran-Iraq war (Funsch, 2015: 169).

Peace also became the main purpose of Oman even when faced with Israel in the region. Instead of framing Israel as a dangerous villain, Oman favored the moderate approach and seeks to engage with Tel Aviv, and it can be seen for example when Muscat give support to the Madrid peace talks in 1991 and Oslo in 1993. Another example is when Oman hosted the April 1994 Middle East multilateral group on water resources, a forum that occasioned the first-ever official Israeli visit to a Gulf State at that time, with an Israeli delegation led by the deputy foreign minister, Yossi Beilin (Rabi, 2006: 542). Although limited, relations between Oman-Israel is said to be close, with many unofficial meetings between them discussing various agenda.

Even though Oman quietly trying to embrace Israel in the region, they're not showing any compromises when it comes to the Palestinian independence cause. When Israel is blatantly violating the UN resolution in 2002 by making an aggressive move toward the Palestinian people, Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamad Al Khalili as Oman's Grand Mufti, strongly condemn and criticized those acts. He also urged Muslims in the world to unite together against Israel's aggression. Al Khalili's strong words were then followed by a demonstration led by thousands of Omani people that took place in Nizwa, Sur, Sohar, Salalah, and other main towns. They start shouting slogans against Israel and the United States for backing and encouraging the massacre, calling for United States boycotts and slamming Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that ordered the aggression (Gulf News, 2002). In other cases shown when Israel is criticized for not implementing the Oslo Accords, Oman via their Information Minister, Abd al-Aziz al-Rawwas, express their disappointment even though they had several contacts before, by saying,

> *"We [Oman] have said from the beginning that we are ready to turn a new page. That is why we have welcomed Israeli officials here in the early stages of post-Oslo peace talks. We are now ready to forget the hostility of yesterday, but Israel must be willing to take some daring steps, too. Israel must be prepared to show Arabs the peace dividends as well. So far, they have not, and this has bred mistrust"* (Rabi, 2006: 546).

Oman also does not tolerate any extremist movement that occurs in the area, especially after the terrorism issues in the Middle East emerged. Surrounded by many extremist organizations such as al-Qaeda, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and other branches of that group like al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), made Oman is very vulnerable and highly likely to become a base for that organization to spread. Surprisingly, Oman manages to keep their soil free of such extremist agenda even though AQAP and ISIL are active in both Yemen and Saudi Arabia, with no Omanis known to have joined (or have been caught in) any radical religious-based terrorist group, and also Al-Qaeda has not established an organizational presence in Oman (Lefebvre 2010: 111).

Oman's decision in the context of rising Iran, the Israel-Egypt Camp David Accord, Israel's presence in the region,

and extremist movement cannot be separated from Ibadism values. It shaped Omani decision-maker's conception of how to deal with those issues appropriately. By sticking to Ibadism as their guidance that spread in Omani society a long time ago, it is not surprising to see how Oman decided to deal with those issues peacefully rather than following the pattern demonstrated by other states.

Oman's Foreign Policy in the Saudi-Iran Rivalry

Oman's long tradition of peace rooted in Ibadism teaching become important to create and preserve stability in the region, especially in the context of a proxy war that involved Saudi Arabia and Iran as two great powers in the Middle East. While other actors tend to include themselves in this proxy war, Oman is arguably become one of the actors that consistently maintain their neutral policy regarding this issue, thanks to Ibadism as their domestic norm. To analyze that, we will focus on how Ibadism helped shaped Omani interest, that is regarding the importance of crafting peace between parties as one of Ibadism's main ideas. Those interests, then, play important role in influencing them regarding what policy they should take in the context of the Saudi-Iran rivalry. For this research, we will analyze it by focusing on Oman's policy regarding the Yemeni and Syrian civil war and Qatar diplomatic crisis, since these three conflicts were caused or used by Saudi and Iran to pursue their agenda in the region.

In the Syrian civil war, Oman manages to take a firm stand by positioning itself in the middle and trying to resolve the conflict despite what happened between involved parties. The conflict itself made the region into turmoil because a lot of actors involved there had their interests which made the peace process likely to happen. This reflects how every actor in the region, such as Iran represents the regional Shia majority giving support to the Bashar al-Assad regime or Saudi and fellow GCC counterparts that represent Sunni give support to an opposite group of the government, each trying to maximize their interest by making things worse, such as using the sectarian issue that divides peoples or by using military equipment that harms innocent civilians. Even though Saudi and Iran already sat at the same table in Vienna in 2015 to discuss peace talks for the future of the Syrian war, there isn't any significant progress made after that talks.

As usual, Oman distanced itself from the provocative policy implemented by other GCC members. It can be seen when Oman become one of the Arab countries that kept their embassy open and maintain diplomatic relations with the Syrian government after the 2011 uprising to verify its neutrality, despite other GCC members opted not to. Oman also encouraged exploring all available avenues to resolve the conflict peacefully through diplomacy and without the intervention of parties from outside of Syria, on the basis that the crisis was internal (Abdulkareem, 2017: 11).

OPERATION "DECISIVE STORM"

A coalition of countries led by Saudi Arabia have launched airstrikes against the Iranian-allied Houthi rebels in Yemen. The nations are predominantly Sunni Muslim and are working to rescue Yemen's deposed government, which has strong Sunni support.

MOROCCO 15 jets
JORDAN 15 jets
KUWAIT 15 jets
BAHRAIN 15 jets
QATAR 10 jets
EGYPT Air / Naval
SAUDI ARABIA 100 jets
150,000 troops
UAE 30 jets
U.S. providing logistical support
SUDAN 15 jets
YEMEN
SOURCE: CNN

Source: Thompson & Torre, 2015.

Figure 3.
Countries Involved in the Decisive Storm Operation in Yemen

Oman also explored a diplomatic path through their foreign minister, Yusuf bin Alawi, who paid a visit to Damascus to meet with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in 2015, affirmed their commitment to Syria's unity and sovereignty, and always exert every possible effort to help find a solution that would end the crisis in Syria. This meeting continued in 2019 in Damascus following the previous meeting in 2018 when Syrian foreign minister Walid al-Moallem visited Oman to discuss about restoring stability and security in the region. In addition, Sultan Qaboos also gives bold comments regarding the Syrian situation by saying, *"We have no aggressive designs against anyone. We reject the friendship of no one"* (The New Arab, 2015). Oman's effort to solve the Syrian war peacefully shows that they're still in line with Ibadism values that are mainly about peace with others and preventing any act of violence.

Sultan Qaboos's statement about the disagreement to aggressive acts strongly implied that Oman wants to embrace every actor in the region and to eliminate any indication of sectarianism by making friends with everyone, in line with their Ibadism values. It is also strengthened by his Ministry of Foreign Affair which shared a similar idea about finding a proper solution to end the Syrian war. This interest shown by Omani officials then led them to take a bold step in their policy to part ways with their fellow GCC and kept their embassy open and maintain diplomatic relations with the Syrian government to avoid further tension.

Similar to the Syrian case, the Yemeni civil war also draws attention from neighboring states, particularly from GCC members. Initially, each member contributed to the conflict by deploying military arms under a Saudi-led operation called Decisive Storm. Figure 3 above shows how many military personnel each country deployed, and by highlighting the contribution by GCC members as Sunni representatives,

especially confirming their support to Mansour Hadi's Presidency in the war against Houthi rebels backed by Shia majority Iran. The data above also showed how Oman as the only member of GCC opted against that operation. The decision is not surprising, considering that Sultan Qaboos and his senior advisers already warned the most senior member of the House of Saud that ruling Saudi Arabia about the danger involved in such an intervention in Yemen, but unfortunately, neither Saudi Arabia nor UAE as the other pioneer of military operation heeded this warning (Horton, 2020: 4).

After Saudi launched the military operation, the Omani government consistently rejected the idea. According to Yusuf bin Alawi as Oman's foreign minister, Oman simply cannot participate in the Saudi coalition because it's misguided and dangerous for the region while adding, *"Oman is not part of that campaign for simple reasons – Oman is a nation of peace. We cannot work on peace efforts at the same time we would be part of a military campaign"* (Baabood & Baabood, 2020: 169). The foreign minister's statement strongly implied that it's the peace that guides them in every act and automatically diminished every chance to do the opposite policy.
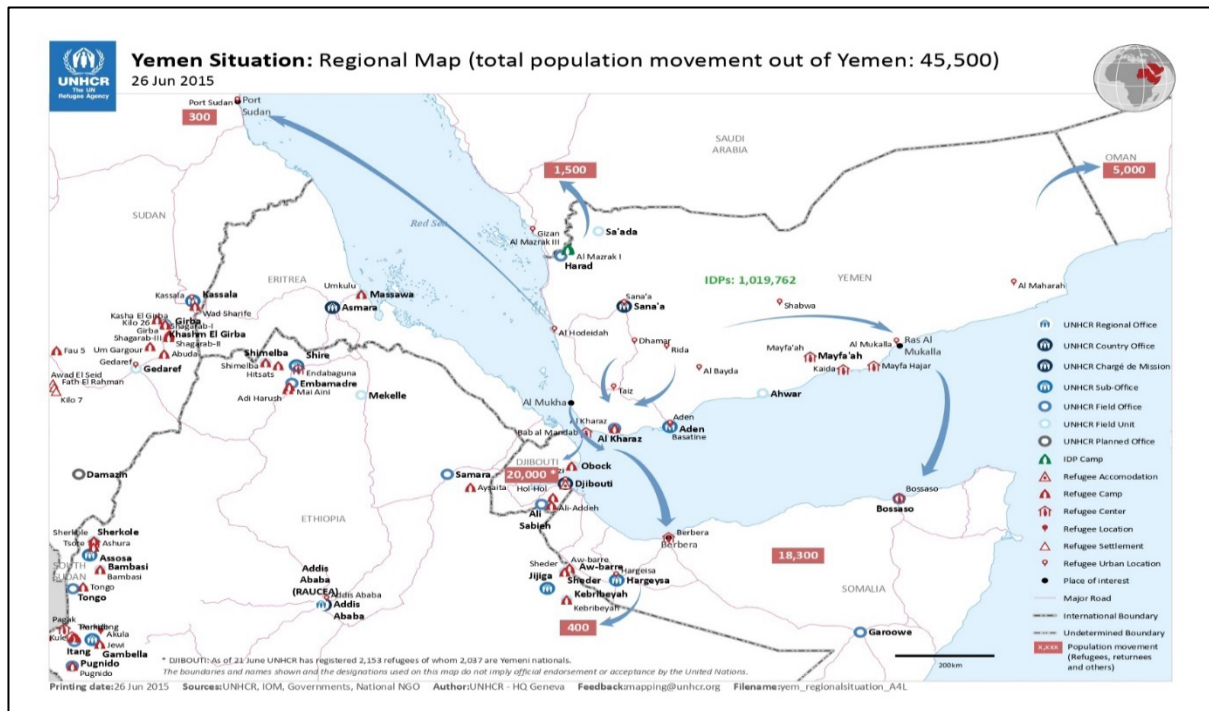
Source: UNHCR, 2015

Figure 4.
Distribution of Yemeni Refugees into the Neighboring States After the Involvement of Saudi Military Operation 2015

The decisive storm campaign from Saudi is also not popular in the eyes of Omani people. According to a senior member of the Shura council, the lower house of the Council of Oman, their constitution simply prevents them to participate in the coalition, while adding that Oman wouldn't send their troops or artillery anywhere, including to Yemen, unless requested by the United Nations (Umar, 2016). In the end, Muscat's decision was proven to be accurate when Yemen's civil war becomes worsened after intervention from a Saudi-led military operation, with United Nations considering the conflict as the worst humanitarian disaster. Like the Syrian war, foreign intervention, mainly from Saudi intervention to deal with Iranian-backed Houthis, becomes the main contributor to Yemen's worst condition because it's fueled by their pursuit of interest.

By choosing to remain outside the coalition, Oman able to focus on ending the war using a peaceful way. At least there are two main attempts that Muscat put forward, promoting peace talks between parties and providing humanitarian assistance for those who needed it. Geneva peace talks that invited Houthi and Hadi representatives and were held in 2015 and 2018 are examples of Oman's work, even though both of the meetings failed to produce an agreement between them. Another success can be seen in 2019 when Saudi and Houthi agree on a ceasefire after the Houthis attack on a Saudi refinery under Oman mediation. Even if it's only temporary, Oman manages to position itself as a peace facilitator in the eyes of parties in the Yemen conflict. Whenever they're tried to make contact with the opposite party, whether it's Saudi to

Houthi or vice versa, or even United States, United Nations, and other actors that got interested in the conflict, they prefer to use Muscat as a discreet place for initial contact (Baabood & Baabood, 2020: 175). So, although formal negotiations mostly took place elsewhere, they usually followed initial contacts in Muscat.

Another effort to resolve the Yemen conflict is by optimizing humanitarian aid. It is important in the Yemeni case because UNHCR reported 2.3 million people are forced to leave their country and moved to neighboring countries. As seen in figure 4 above, some of the refugees chose the closest country from Yemen, like Egypt, Eritrea, Djibouti, Oman, and others. Oman become the GCC member that open its border to the most refugee from Yemen by estimated 5000 people, compared to Saudi which only had 1500 people. Surprisingly, Oman didn't ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol in 1967, the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Person, and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Not only providing shelter for them, but Oman through Oman Charitable Organization (OCO) worked under the government of Oman also support their basic needs and other things. This can be seen when OCO in 2015 provided humanitarian aid such as food, health assistance, and others to 4500 families, which consist of 25000 Yemeni in al-Mahara, Hadramout, and Soqarta districts (Coppi, 2018: 24).

Prisoners exchange and effort to release hostages also draw attention from every actor in Yemen, including Oman. Whether they're from Houthis, a military coalition, or foreigners who got trapped in the middle of the fight, every

party usually relies on Oman as the mediator to find the best solution. Many prisoners exchange and negotiations for hostages are being done by Oman, one of the examples can be seen in 2020 when Muscat successfully reach an agreement with relevant parties to release two United States nationals held by Houthis in exchange for 200 Yemenis from the Gulf state and abroad who had been receiving treatment (Reuters, 2020).

The Yemeni civil war has become a platform for Oman to implement peace efforts that are rooted in Ibadism teaching. Remarks from Omani officials combined with their Council members strongly indicated that peaceful compromises and mutual understanding become an important key in dealing with the Yemeni problem. This then becomes a set of guidelines for Omani decision-makers to develop several policies related to that value. Oman's success in hosting multiple peace efforts and becoming a trusted actor in Yemen, while at the same time being able to maintain relations with every actor, demonstrate how peace becomes an effective tool to solve the Yemeni problem, rather than a military approach.

Yemen conflict worsened by Saudi-Iran involvement also create turmoil within GCC members in the case of the 2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis, when several Sunni-majority Gulf Countries, namely Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Republic, and a few other countries outside the organization, officially decided to sever their diplomatic relations with Qatar. That action was also followed by the blockade imposed on Qatar on their land, sea, and air border and automatically halted their economic activity. The decision to isolate

Qatar is largely influenced by their accusation pointed to Qatar that allegedly provide political and financial support to Iran and violent Islamic group that associates with terrorism, including Houthis (Wahyuni & Baharuddin, 2018:82). This seems to be confirmed by a statement made by Salem Thabet al-Aulaqi, spokesman of Southern Transitional Council (STC), one of a prominent group in Yemen war, saying that, *"Qatar has played a very negative role in destabilizing the situation in Yemen by offering the Houthis and other terrorist groups all the support needed to remain alive to serve Iranian agendas, which aim to destabilize the Arab world"* (Feierstein, 2018:112). Such risky moves by Qatar then led them to get expelled from the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen war.

The Qatari crisis itself finally reach its conclusion when Saudi moved toward ending the blockade by signing the al-'Ula declaration on January 5th, 2021. The agreement is brokered by some important actors, including the United States, that find it important of uniting Gulf countries to undermine Iran in the region. Besides the United States, Oman also played an important role that contribute to creating peace between Qatar and the Saudi bloc. This has been affirmed by António Guterres as a United Nations Secretary-General that said,

> *"The Secretary-General expresses his gratitude to those from the region and beyond, including the late Emir of Kuwait and late Sultan of Oman, who worked tirelessly towards resolving the Gulf rift"* (United Nations, 2021).

Not only promoting peace between them but Oman is also eager to keep

their border open, especially their sea access and air space. Understanding the ban that is being given to Qatar Airways to enter Saudi-bloc airspace and soil, Oman then decides to deploy Oman Air to help Qatari people stranded in Saudi-bloc soil and vice versa. Some reports said that Qatar Airways chartered three planes from Oman Air to ferry stranded passengers from Saudi Arabia to Doha, via Muscat (Dudley, 2017). The same is true of Saudi, Emirati, and Bahraini nationals in Doha, that had to travel via Oman as a 'neutral' third country. Oman also welcomes Qatari counterparts to conduct shipping cargo from their Sohar and Salalah ports to bypass restrictions to fulfill their logistic needs.

Based on the three proxy wars between Saudi and Iran above, it can be concluded that Oman's neutral stance, in this case, cannot be separated from Ibadism's influence as their domestic norm. Ibadism, which put several ideas such as peace, tolerance, and acceptance of others as their main idea, constraints Oman decision makers into always considering it whenever they're facing potential instability in the region. Oman might be choosing an easy way by following their GCC counterparts to counter Iran in the Gulf, instead of trying hard to create good relations with both of them. Nevertheless, Oman decided to maintain their policy based on the Ibadism teaching that already exist in their society a long time ago.

CONCLUSION

Based on the elaboration above, this article has found that Ibadism as Oman's domestic norm followed by Omani society played crucial factors to lay the foundation of Oman's neutrality in the Saudi-Iran rivalry. Culture in Ibadism like conservatism, peaceful compromises, and tolerance of each other already rooted for a long time shaped Oman's interest, and in turn, guided Oman's policy based on how to behave with each other in a specific situation. In sum, Oman's policies is following the logic of appropriateness based on the basic question "how should I act in this situation?". This became a basic thought that differs from the rational calculation that relies heavily on how to gain profit and avoid some losses.

Ibadism as a domestic norm become a source for Oman to formulate their interest. As we can see from the example above, Oman considers that every regional dispute can resolve not by hard means but based on a peaceful way, especially in the context of Saudi-Iran. Ibadism which identified itself as Muslim but is neither Sunni nor Shia undoubtedly plays an important factor not only to differentiate itself and avoid clashes with both of them but also to offer itself as a mediator thanks to their thought of peace. This construction of interest based on the domestic norm is important to determine which policy is appropriate and should they used. The way Oman positions itself in the Saudi-Iran rivalry is the reflection of its interest that putting peace as a basis for regional stability based on Ibadism. By choosing to remain neutral and always promoting peace between parties, it's also reflecting the appropriate decision should Oman decide.

Norm-based constructivism has enabled the author to explore the non-material aspects to explain Oman's behavior in international politics. The non-material explanation that is emphasized by constructivism has given

a vast opportunity for the author to make further meaning of the aspects or issues being investigated. But, like other research, this research had a lot of limitations that needed to be filled. Further research suggestions should then explore the idiosyncratic factor from Oman decision makers, especially

from Sultan Qaboos, in Oman's foreign policy. As the leader who opened Oman to the international stage, it's important to understand how Sultan Qaboos' perception of Oman's foreign policy based on idiosyncratic analysis to get the whole picture of Oman's foreign policy.

REFERENCES
Book
Coppi, G. (2018). *The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Beyond the Man-Made Disaster*. Vienna: International Peace Institute.

Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publication.

Finnemore, M. (1996). *National Interest in International Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Funsch, L.P. (2015). *Oman Reborn: Balancing Tradition and Modernization*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Goshey, E. (2019). *Omani Ibadism: Transitions in Modernity, Encounters with Salafism*. New Jersey: Princeton University.

Hoffman, V.J. (2012). *The Essentials of Ibadi Islam*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Kechichian, J.A. (1995). *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

Klotz, A. & Lynch, C. (2007). *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Oman Ministry of Information (2015). The Royal Speeches of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said. Muscat: Oman Ministry of Information.

Paul, C., Clarke, C. P., Grill, B. & Dunigan, M. (2013). *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

Chapter in Book
Baabood, A. (2016). Oman's Independent Foreign Policy. In Khalid S. Almezaini & Jean-Marc Rickli, *The Small Gulf States: Foreign and Security Policies Before and After the Arab Spring* (pp. 107-122). London: Taylor & Francis.

Baabood, A. & Baabood, A. (2020). Omani and Qatari Roles in the Yemen Crisis. In Stephen W. Day & Noel Brehony, *Global, Regional, and Local Dynamics in the Yemen Crisis* (pp. 165-178). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jepperson, R., Wendt, A. & Katzenstein, P.J. (1996). Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security. In Peter J. Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (33-75). New York: Columbia University Press.

Feierstein, G. M. (2018). Yemen and the GCC Crisis. In Khalid Al-Jaber & Sigurd Neubauer, *The Gulf Crisis: Reshaping the Alliances in the Middle East* (pp. 109-134). Washington DC: Gulf International

Forum.

Journal

Abdulkareem, A. (2017). Oman Positions on the Regional Crisis. *Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies*, 1-15.

Albasoos, H. & Maashani, M. (2020). Oman's Diplomacy Strategy: Maneuvering Tools to Face Regional Challenges. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 9(2), 152-163.

Amiri, R.E., Samsu, K.H.B.K. & Gholipour, H.F. (2011). The Hajj and Iran's Foreign Policy towards Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 46(6), 678-690.

Basundoro, A.F. (2020). Perang Proksi Kontemporer Arab Saudi-Iran Sebagai Bentuk Turbulensi Timur Tengah: Sebuah Analisis Geopolitik. *Jurnal Penelitian Politik*, 17(1), 1-16.

Bierschenk, T. (1988). Religion and Political Structure: Remarks on Ibadism in Oman and the Mzab (Algeria). *Studia Islamica*, 68, 107-127.

Binhuwaidin, M. (2019). Oman's Response to a Rising Iran: A Case of Strategic Hedging. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 9(1), 1-12.

Elliott, C.D. (2018). Developing Tolerance and Conservatism: A Study of Ibadi Oman. *UCLA Journal of Religion*, 2, 146-179.

Finnemore, M. & Sikkink, K. (1998). International Norm Dynamics and Political Change. *International Organization*, 52(4), 887-917.

Guzansky, Y. (2015). The Foreign-Policy Tools of Small Powers: Strategic Hedging in the Persian Gulf. *Middle East Policy*, 22(1), 112-122.

Horton, M. (2020). Yemen's War Test Oman's Neutrality: Focusing on the Saudi Footprint in al-Mahra. *Terrorism Monitor*, 18(20), 3-5.

Lefebvre, J.A. (2010). Oman's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century. *Middle East Policy*, 17(1), 99-114.

Miller, J. (1997). Creating Modern Oman: An Interview with Sultan Qabus. *Foreign Affairs*, 76(3), 13-18.

O'Reilly, M. J. (1998). Omanibalancing: Oman Confronts an Uncertain Future. *Middle East Journal*, 52(1), 70-84.

Rabi, U. (2006). Oman and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Reflection of a Pragmatic Foreign Policy. *Israel Affairs*, 11(3), 535-551.

Wahyuni, S. & Baharuddin, S. S. B. (2018). The Impact of the GCC Boycott on Qatar Foreign Policy. *Jurnal Transformasi Global*, 4(2), 80-89.

Newspaper Article: Online

Al-Falahi, A. (2016, 11 October). "Just how neutral is Oman in Yemen war?" *Al-monitor*. Accessed from https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/10/oman-neutral-saudi-war-iran-houthis.html.

Central Intelligence Agency. (2023). "The World Factbook: Oman." Accessed from https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/oman/.

Dudley, D. (2017, 8 June). "A Winner Emerges From The Qatar Crisis: Oman's National Airline." *Forbes*. Accessed from https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2017/06/08/oman-air-takes-advantage-of-qatar-crisis/?sh=10d3407525b4.

Gulf News. (2002, 09 April). "Oman's Grand Mufti tells Muslims to unite to defeat the enemy." Accessed from https://gulfnews.com/uae/omans-grand-mufti-tells-muslims-to-unite-to-defeat-the-enemy-1.384208.

Reuters. (2020, 15 October). "Two U.S. nationals released by Houthi rebels in possible prisoner swap." Accessed from https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-yemen-security-idUKKBN270091.

The New Arab. (2015, 26 October). "Oman's foreign minister meets Syria's Bashar al-Assad in Damascus." Accessed from https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/omans-foreign-minister-meets-syrias-bashar-al-assad-damascus.

Umar, B. (2016, 16 December). "Yemen's war wounded find comfort in 'brotherly' Oman." *Al-Jazeera*. Accessed from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/16/yemens-war-wounded-find-comfort-in-brotherly-oman/.

UNHCR. (2015). "Yemen Situation." Accessed from https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/32397.

United Nations (2021, 6 January). "UN chief welcomes declaration on resolving the 'Gulf rift'." Accessed from https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/01/1081452.