POLITICAL LIBERALISATION IN GULF CO-OPERATION COUNCIL (GCC) STATES: A CASE STUDY OF OMAN (1991-2009)

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Ajay Kumar Upadhyay

CENTRE FOR WEST ASIAN STUDIES

SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

NEW DELHI-110067

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Centre for West Asian Studies
School of International Studies
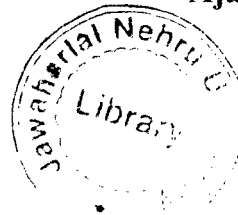# JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
New Delhi - 110067

Phone : +91-11-2670 4379
Mobile : +91 98 18 77 83 15
Email   : cwas.jnu@gmail.com

Date: 09.12.2011

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled **"Political Liberalisation in Gulf Co-Operation Council (GCC) States: A Case Study of Oman (1991-2009)"** submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

Ajay Kumar Upadhyay

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof. P.R. Kumaraswamy

Chairperson

CHAIRPERSON
Centre for West Asian Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067, INDIA

Dr. Aswini K. Mohapatra

Supervisor

Centre for West Asian Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067

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Lastly, this is my own work and I bear the responsibility for all the unintended errors.

New Delhi

Date: -

Ajay Kumar Upadhyay

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Abbreviations

GCC	Gulf Co-operation Council
NAM	Nonaligned Movement
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
GDP	Gross Domestic Products
OPEC	Organisation of Oil Exporting Countries
UAE	United Arab Emirates
FSC	Federal Supreme Council
US	United States
GMEI	Greater Middle East Initiative
WTO	World Trade Organisation
MP	Member of Parliament
SNC	Supreme National Committees
BCHR	Bahrain Centre for Human Rights
GOYS	General Organization for Youth and Sports
AC	Advisory Council
SCR	Supreme Council of Rulers
COM	Council of Ministers
FNC	Federal National Council
AD	After Decades

NDFLOAG	National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf
ROP	Royal Oman Police
SCC	State Consultative Council
HDI	Human Development Index
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN	United Nations
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
NGO	Non Government Organisation
OCC	Oman Consultative Council
SC	Shura Council
RFC	Royal Family Council
OWA	Omani Women's Association
OAPEC	Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries
MoU	Memorandum of Understating
ILO	International Labour Organization
OCIPED	Omani Centre for Investment Promotion and Export Development
Bcf	Billion Cubic Feet
PDO	Petroleum Development Oman
FTA	Free Trade Area
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies

NATO   North Atlantic Treaty Organization

BMENA   Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative

MEPI   Middle East Partnership Initiative

OR   Omani Rial

Preface

The ethno-religious divisions and their manipulation have hindered democratization in the GCC States, but they have not excluded political liberalisation. The striking thing about the Arab world and GCC in particular, is that despite the mix of socio-economic, political, cultural, and ideological forces that have encouraged rulers to hold on to power, many have promoted a measure of political liberalization while maintaining the essential instruments of autocracy. The trick, of course, is to ensure that such political openings never get out of hand. Liberalization without popular sovereignty or political accountability is thus the essence of liberalized autocracy—a form of hybrid regime that produces "elections without democracy." The key challenge facing the Arab world is not political liberalization per se, but rather how to transform liberalization into a vehicle for genuine and lasting democratization.

The first chapter presents an analytical framework drawn on theoretical literature dealing with democratic transition and political liberalization. With the end of the Cold War and collapse of the monolithic Soviet Empire, scholarly attention was increasingly focus on issues related to democratization, democratic transition and political liberalization. Much of the transition literature holds that the democratic transition is the outcome of a domestic political process in which the international influences and pressures are marginal in their impact. Democratization is an irregular process of replacing authoritarian regimes with rule-bound competitive systems. The pace of democratization has picked up dramatically since the end of the Cold War, with many additional countries undergoing political renaissance that opens them up to greater involvement by citizens and civil society. Democratization is not a universal historical sequence ending in the same types of political systems, even though more and more nation-states are adopting similar-looking political institutions and practices based on a common set of Western models. _The emergent configurations of Islamist politics have posed a challenge to secular ideologies and regimes. Thus the question of the relation of secularism to democracy has moved to the fore of the discussion. The chapter's examination of the Islamist articulations is thus limited to the elements

that bear directly on the Arab intellectuals' discussion of democracy. There has tended to be a feeling that the GCC States is something of a "lost cause" a view which largely rests on the assumption that "tremendous barriers" exist to the establishment of fully- functioning democratic political systems" in the region.

The second chapter is a brief introduction, which discusses, the political structure in GCC countries and critically examines the reform process since the Gulf crisis of 1990-91. Understanding the potential for reform in the Arab Gulf region requires a clear appreciation not only of the nature of change, but also of how such change fits in with the socio-political structure of these countries and the external contextual issues influencing reform process. The power structure within the oil monarchies determines the origins of reform and influences its potential for the future. This part of thesis also looks at the numbers of issues, which have the potential to motivate the political liberalization. They can be broadly divided into two categories- internal and external. At present demographic explosion, increasing unemployment, role of civil society, nature of rentier state, increasing participation of women's are major internal factors. One of the more complex contextual factors concerns the indirect geopolitical effects of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. With the end of Cold War, a wave of political reforms swept over much of the Arab world, including the member countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). While some of these reforms were cosmetic and intended to cover up regime failure to perform the distributive functions, they opened up the outlets for free expression of opinion and democratic representation.

The third chapter deals with the structures and processes of Omani politics and society as the country moves from a period of elation while spending its recently discovered oil revenues to the imminence of a more austere future. This chapter will also examines the evolution of Omani polity, looking especially at participation, the role of women, and proactive efforts to manage economic change. While Oman's rich culture and identity is more than 2,000 years old, it is only since Sultan Qaboos' ascension to power that the country has witnessed a "renaissance," guided by the Sultan himself and propelled by oil and natural gas revenues. The political changes in Oman are not being brought about by regional conflicts, political grassroots movements, or by broad-based popular dissatisfaction. The personal involvement and leadership of Sultan Qaboos has placed Oman's political liberalisation within an overall framework of national development, and as such, falls within the responsibility of the government to fashion and

implement. One important result of this approach is the long-term, incremental nature of the process. Elections and comprehensive legislative authority are viewed as mid- to long-term objectives, rather than as a facade to convince the world of Oman's democratic progress. This vision has driven the political and economic liberalization process in Oman

The fourth chapter examines the incremental changes through a variety of political and economic adjustments and their implications for the stability of the sultanate. Oman under Sultan Qaboos adopted a path of careful and gradual development and modernization since his accession to power in July 1970. He inherited an old, autocratic-patriarchal Arabic system of power in which the sultan holds all the power. This section of chapter examines the position of Oman in GCC states on the parameter of liberalization. In the case of Oman, there was no great public demand for political reforms, akin to that appeared in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. Nor did the economic downturn in the early 1990s spark off urban protests or popular unrest what other Arab countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan and Egypt) had experienced during the 1980s. Oman is not an electoral democracy but a liberalized autocracy ruled by the sultan and his appointed government. Liberalized autocracies not only tolerate but depend on a limited, state-managed pluralism of ideas and organization as a strategy for legitimation and hence survival. However, the sultan has allowed a steady and incremental diversification of political personnel through the bicameral Council of Oman, which acts as an advisory body. In the field of political participation, Omani women are given the right to vote and stand for the election on an equal footing with men. Oman became the first GCC state to grant women voting rights in 1994.

The fifth chapter covers the saliency of the external factors as compared to the domestic structural ones in explaining the imperatives for the political liberalisation in Oman. It will discuss the factors that account for the resilience of the Omani monarchy. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the Omani experience in the advance of political liberalisation cannot be attributable to domestic factors, such as the civic pressure, street politics (strikes/demonstrations or riots) and division in the regime. Alternatively, it is argued that the impact of external forces and developments needs to be addressed in accounting for the transition in Oman. However, Oman's experience is unique in the sense that the process, is not the product of internal development, rather due to change in the external arena. This chapter is partly devoted

to the debate as regards the significance of external context (global and regional) followed by unleashed a brief discussion of the democratic campaign by the US in the aftermath of 9/11 terror attack. In the backdrop of dramatic changes in the post cold war international arena, Omani experience in political liberalization is explained.

The last chapter sum up the discussion on the political liberalisation in the Gulf and make a comparison with that of Oman in an attempt to judge the efficacy of the reform process on the Omani polity and identify the challenges to the democratic transition. It also covers the point whether, outside the strict framework of modern political theory, there exists a democracy of a different order, a democracy that differs from the western model. If the criterion of a democracy is the transfer of power by peaceful means, that is, by elections considered free, fair, perfectly transparent, and indisputably and irrefutably incontestable—in a word, honest—then not a single GCC States is democratic today. In the end, the path to democracy in the Gulf is far more tortuous and uncertain than is often considered. Political liberalization and the wheels of democratization have started moving ahead but still there is a long way to go.

Chapter-1

Introduction

With the end of the Cold War and collapse of the monolithic Soviet Empire, scholarly attention was increasingly focus on issues related to democratization, democratic transition and political liberalization. Much of the transition literature holds that the democratic transition is the outcome of a domestic political process in which the international influences and pressures are marginal in their impact. It is attributed either to schism between the hardliners and soft liners within the regime or mass pressure caused by internal structural problems, such as state failure, financial crisis and the globalisation-induced economic reforms.[1] In other words, democratisation is seen first and foremost as an endogenous process involving social dynamics and the success of the process is linked to a specific set of structural pre-conditions. This argument has been advanced by such eminent scholars as Seymour Martin Lipset, Gabriel Almond and Sideny Verba, Robert Dahl and Barrington Moore.[2] The recent scholarship has, however, tended to focus on the role that political leader or strategic elites can play in effecting democratic transition.[3] In short, "democracy is no longer treated as a particularly rare and delicate plant that cannot be transplanted in alien soil; it is treated as a product that can be manufactured wherever there is democratic craftsmanship and the proper zeitgeist".[4]

Equally significant is the counter-argument provided by the international scholars who have highlighted the variety of ways in which external forces shape the incentives and opportunities for the adoption of democratic forms of governance. In explaining the significance and relevance of the international environment on democratic transition in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, Pridham has strongly argued for "basic reconsideration of theories of regime transition, which have

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[1] Gerado L. Munck (1994), "Democratic Transition in Comparative Perspective", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 26, No.3, p 362. (355-375); Guillermo O'donell and Philippe Schmitter (1986), *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: tentative Conclusion about Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, p. 5.

[2] Seymour Martin Lipset (1959), "Some Social Requisites of Democracy," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, pp. 145-179; Z. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963), *The Civic Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press; Robert A. Dahl (1998), *On Democracy*, New Haven London: Yale University Press, p 145-179; Jr. Barrington Moore (1966), *Social Origins of Democracy and Dictators/tip.' Lord and Peasant in Modern World*, Boston: Beacon Press;

[3] S. Huntington (1991), *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman Okla: Oklahoma University Press, p. 210.

[4] Doh Chull Shin (1994), "On the third wave of democratization: a synthesis and evaluation of recent theory and research", *World Politics*, Vol. 47, No 1, p 141.

conventionally assumed that international factors are at best a secondary consideration."[5] In fact, several Arab states have in the past decade embarked on the so-called democratization process largely due to external pressures unleashed by the pro-democracy campaign of the US in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks.[6] Likewise, significance of post-Cold War global changes, notably the ideological hegemony of the West in the initiation of political reforms in Africa during the early 1990s is difficult to ignore. After all, democratization for them meant some form of identification with the West.[7] In the case of Africa, for example, the significance of changes in international environment for the process of democratization is difficult to ignore.[8]

Reconsidering the importance of the impact of international context upon regime change, Philippe Schmitter has provided interesting four types of international sources of domestic transition. They include control, contagion, conditionality and consent, and can be differentiated by reference to coercive or voluntary nature of the action. While control and conditionality are of coercive nature backed by external actors, contagion and consent are supported by private agencies.[9] Of the four categories, conditionality has proved to be more effective depending, however, on the credibility of external incentives and how they are received internally. The latter implies the overall compatibility of policies priorities of the domestic political elite with tphose advocated by external actors. In other words the extent to which the external pressures bear on democratization and democratic consolidation is ultimately determined by the domestic political context, particularly political calculations of the

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[5] Geoffrey Pridham (1997), "The international Dimension of Democratisation: Theory, Practice and International Comparisons" in Geoffery Pridham, Eric Herring and George Sanford, eds., *Building Democracy: International Dimension of Democratization in Eastern Europe,* London: Leicester University Press, p 28. Also, see Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Michael D Ward (2006), " Diffusion and the International Context of Democratisation", *International Organisation,* Vol. 60, falll, pp 911-933.

[6] Amy Hawthome (2004), "Political Reform in the Arab World: A New Ferment?", *Carnegie Papers: Middle East Series,* Vol 52.

[7] Aswini K. Mohapatra (2011), "Tureky's Transition to Liberal Democracy: The EU Membership Issue", *India Quarterly,* Vol.67, No.2, p.2-3.

[8] Karen L Remmer (1995), "New Theoretical Perspectives on Democratization", *Comparative Politics,* Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 105.

[9] O'donell and Schmitter (1986), *Transition from Authoritarian Rules,* p.85.

elite and public reactions.[10] This aspect related to democratisation would help to build an analytical framework based on the hypothesis that *the reform process in Oman is the result of the Sultan's conscious actions in response to the emerging realities in external arena rather than the challenges emanating from within.*

According to an often cited definition coined by Larry Diamond and many others, democracy refers to a specific type of political system which is characterised by at least three features: competition over power positions, indiscriminate political participation among adults through regular elections, and a basic level of civil and political rights.[11] The ancient Greeks' definition of democracy as government by the people is still more an ideal than a reality, even among the majority of well-established democracies. As Giovanni Sartori rightly says, "a considerable literature currently recalls the Greek experiment as if it were a lost and somewhat recuperable paradise."[12] In theory, the Greek frame of reference is still an important empirical standard to judge the different experiences of democracies on the ground: how near or far they are from the ideal. However, the label –democracy- is no longer enough on its own to cover the myriad cases and practices. Democracy has to be qualified with adjectives in order to capture its varieties.[13] In the "third wave" spread of democracy in all directions from its original birthplace, adjectives and qualifications are even more expected.[14]

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[10] Alex Pravda, (2001), "Introduction" in Jan Zielonka and Alex Pravda, eds., *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe: International and Transnational Factors,* New York: Oxford University Press, p 27.

[11] Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset (1995), "Introduction: Comparing Experiences with Democracy," in Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset (eds.) (1995), *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy;* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, pp. 6-7. See also Robert A. Dahl (1971), *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

[12] Giovanni Sartori (1987), *The Theory of Democracy Revisited,* Chatham: Chatham House Publishers, p. 279.

[13] David Collier and Steven Levitsky (1997), "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics,* Vol. 49, No. 3, pp. 442.

[14] Samuel Huntington (1993), "Democracy's third Wave", in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp 11.

Democratic Theories in Developing Nations

Democratization is an irregular process of replacing authoritarian regimes with rule-bound competitive systems. The pace of democratization has picked up dramatically since the end of the Cold War, with many additional countries undergoing political renaissance that opens them up to greater involvement by citizens and civil society. Democratization is not a universal historical sequence ending in the same types of political systems, even though more and more nation-states are adopting similar-looking political institutions and practices based on a common set of Western models. Public-opinion surveys in Muslim countries show broad support for democracy as a system that can work in those societies.[15] What local respondents actually have in mind when they respond to questions about democracy, however, may not be quite the same as in the United States or Europe.[16]

Democracy means different things to different people. Since the 1950s there have been various theories and interpretations as to the political direction. They largely fall into three distinctive categories: -

(I)   The Modernization School,

(II)   The Dependency School and

(III)   The Statist School,

Process of modernization is identified against which a country's progression could be charted. This model assumes many guises but tends to coalesce around certain characteristics, which have been factors in Western political development namely: rationalization, national integration and nation building, democratization and participation. Whilst Dankwart Rustow defined political development as *"Increasing national political unity plus a broadening base of political participation."*[17] Karl Deutsch viewed modernization as a complex process of social change, which was

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[15] Pew Research Center (February 3, 2005), "Iraqi Vote Mirrors Desire for Democracy in Muslim World" (A Pew Global Attitudes Project Commentary), Accessed on 12 December 2010 <http://peoplepress.org/ commentary/ display.php3? AnalysisID=107>.

[16] Salwa Ismail (1995), "Democracy in contemporary Arab intellectual discourse", in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Nobel (eds.) *Political Liberalisation and Democratisation in the Arab World,* Vol. 1, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, p.32.

[17] R. Ward and D. Rustow (eds.) (1960), *Political Modernisation in Japan and Turkey,* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

'significantly correlated with major changes in political.'[18] Urbanization, improved literacy rates, expanding economies, exposure to mass communication were all factors which would combine to mobilize the population and increase demands for governmental services. "Political participation was to be the key which opened the door to modern political development and thus distinguished the traditional society, Which was non- participatory, separating people 'by kinship into communities isolated from each other and from a centre', from an advancing modernizing state."[19] A 'new world political culture', announced Almond and Verba in 1963,[20] would be one of 'participation', and Frederick Frey suggested that the 'most common notion of political development is that of a movement towards democracy'.[21]

Lucien Pye, writing in 1964 raised a note of caution: "The new states of the underdeveloped areas present us with a major challenge, for in a very fundamental sense the model that has emerged out of the tradition of empirical study of the American political process has been misleading when applied to most of the new states."[22] Theories and models appropriate to the American government are of 'little relevance to the new countries'. There is clearly a need for a different approach, which examined the elements at play in less, developed countries and broached certain basic questions. To what extent is there a link between economic growth and national development? Is liberal–democracy too divisive for new nations and strong leadership under a single party more suitable? How is it possible to understand and interpret the drift towards authoritarian practice? In short, as Pye put it: "What should be taken as the criteria of political development?" [23]

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[18] Karl Deutsch (1961), "Social Mobilization and Political Development", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. LV, No 3, p 493-514.

[19] Daniel Lerner (1968), *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East,* New York: Free Press, p 49.

[20] Almond and Verba (1963), *The Civic Culture.*

[21] Frederick W. Frey (1963) 'Political development, Power and Communications in Turkey', in L. Pye (ed.), *Communications and Political Development,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.301.

[22] Lucian Pye (1964), "Democracy, Modernisation and Nation Building", in J.R. Pennock (ed.), *Self Government in Modernising Nations,* New Jersei, p. 7.

[23] ibid, p.10

These questions are, of course, yet to be resolved, two decades before, Samuel Huntington was critical of the presumed association between political advancement and socio–economic conditions. He maintained that such a linkage drastically constrained 'the applicability of the concept in both time and space', as the term political development became synonymous with a modern nation–state. It, therefore, became impossible to speak of a 'politically developed tribal authority, city –state, feudal monarchy or bureaucratic empire'.[24] Development was wrongly identified with one type of political system, and although obviously affected by the process of modernization, should essentially remain independent of it. Huntington defined the term as '*the institutionalization of political organisations and procedures,*' and in so doing attempted to '*liberate development from modernization.*'[25]

The central difficulty with developing nations was the problems experienced as a result of a lack of integration. As societies progressed and conflicts were sometimes arbitrary and inappropriate. Consequently, such a system did little to address the hostility of regions, tribes and religious groups who found themselves competing in a common political system. In the absence of integration, societies would be driven by parochial loyalties, which would undermine the political structure. Huntington seized on this view arguing that "national disintegration" and "national integration" was two sides of the same coin. If there was to be such a concept as political development, and it must be remembered that by 1971 Huntington had himself rejected the term in favour of "political change", it had to embrace the notion of 'political decay' and the circumstances, which brought it about.[26]

Political decay was a dispiriting notion but one, which was becoming increasingly relevant as coups and violence beset newly developing countries. Huntington argued that in its early stages, economic development–precisely that factor which had been hailed as the harbinger of political potential and advancement-created dislocation in new nations with fragile political institutions. If government

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[24] S. Hungtington (1967), "Political Development and Political Decay", in Welch (ed.) (1967) *Political Modernisation*, Belmont, p. 241.

[25] ibid, p. 245

[26] Myron Weiner (1967), "Political Integration and Political Development", in C. Welch (ed.) *Political Modernisation*, Belmont, p.188.

failed to govern, "political degeneration" would occur and any attempts to democratize would vanish in a haze of tyranny. Huntington looked to the writings of Kornhauser, published in 1957 for a depressing prognosis: 'Where the pre-established political authority is highly autocratic', stated Kornhauser in his study of mass society, rapid and violent displacement of that authority by a democratic regime is highly favourable to the emergence of extremist mass movements that tend to transform the new democracy in anti-democratic directions.[27] Political stability and political order then, had to maintain irrespective of the possible authoritarian implications.

The modernization/political development argument became overshadowed by the dependency and underdevelopment approach: capitalist exploitation and imperialist ambition had largely stymied economic and political room for manoeuvre in the developing world. In many post- colonial societies; a one- party or quasi-party system appeard was considered to be more appropriate than the competitive party model.[28] This justification included an acceptance of Marxist–Leninist 'democratic centralist' ideas in that it assumed that in one-party states there existed a measure of democracy in the form of intra-party debate and inputs from interest groups within the organization. Also, as parties were judged to represent class interests, a one-party state could be accepted on the grounds of the existence of only one class in newly independent nations. A multi-party system was seen to be sectional and sterile with no true interest in the nation at heart. Therefore, under-developed countries needed to build up their political infrastructure and unite within a strongly centralized state, which controlled both political institutions and economic activity. Although these regimes were regarded as being in a transition to democracy there existed no expectation that there would be any move towards a liberal democratic model in the foreseeable future. Indeed, it might even be considered presumptuous to consider there should be such a move.[29]

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[27] W. Kornhauser (1957), *The Politics of Mass Society*, New York, p125.

[28] C. B Macpherson (1973), *Democratic Theory-Essays in Retrieval*, London: Oxford University Press, p 190.

[29] ibid, p.191

A decade later other analysts found the linkage important: 'The process by which democracy was "liberalized" is a key one, for it ties together notions of capitalist development, class formation and class conflict, as well as such essentials of liberal democracy as competitive parties and majority rule'.[30] In a broad sense, democratic societies are defined by the adoption of political practices such as public debate, freedom of speech, elections, representation, transparency and accountability, as well as consensus building and active decision making. However, a broader definition of democracy also encompasses attributes of economic democracy such as economic justice, property rights, freedom of contract, broad access to information and education, and poverty reduction.[31] This view is strengthened by the correlation among political democracy, economic freedom, governance and the private sphere. In fact, it is said that the institutionalization of economic reform and corporate governance around the world is one of the fundamental challenges of promoting democracy and economic stability. As Lipset pointed out in 1963 at the height of the modernization debate. 'Men may question whether any aspect of this interrelated cluster of economic development....gradual political change, legitimacy and democracy are primary, but the fact remains that the cluster does hang together.'[32] Liberal democracy, then, not only requires a supportive economic climate but also, it needs as a prerequisite some degree of social cohesion and political consensus. Robert Dahl sees democracy not just as something fixed or given, but as a process that needs to be extended into every area of society, the economic as well as the political.[33]

The above discussion of theories, revisions and reappraisals of models and methods of political change in the developing world raises two main questions. Firstly, why consider democracy at this precise time, and secondly, where exactly does the GCC States fit in the wider picture of developing nations? In answer to the first question, the renewed interest is obviously partly to do with what has been actually happening in the developing nations in the context of moves towards

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[30] Richard Joseph (1987), *Democracy and Prebendal Democracy in Nigeria. The Rise and Fall of The Second Republic,* U K: Cambridge, p. 20

[31] Pippa Norris (1999), *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government,* London: Oxford University Press.

[32] S. M. Lipset (1966), *Political Man,* London: Oxford University Press, p.71.

[33] Robert Alan Dahl (1991), Dem*ocracy and Its Critics,* New Haven: Yale University Press.

democratization, in the form of the reintroduction of muiti-party politics and a tentative shift towards pluralism. In the last few years there has been an obvious shift in the political climate of a number of developing states, indeed to such an extent that the recent developments indicates a new "wind of change" blowing through Africa and other developing nations. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) has underlined the need to democratize the societies of member states and at a meeting of the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) in 1991 reference was made to the need to take seriously "the expansion of liberalism" and the adoption of multi-party democracy.[34] This new trend in political pluralism at the expense of the one-party state began with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and with the endorsement of the west and aid agencies. Inevitably, these political changes have aroused academic enquiry on the efficacy of pluralist, multi– party systems of government in the developing nations and have in the process renewed the debate about the essential conditions of democracy and its suitability and sustainability.[35]

The first decade of the 21st century brought the issue of democratic reforms in the GCC back to the forefront. On the one hand, as an optimist could argue that the Arab Gulf authoritarian regimes could no longer avoid basic change in the backdrop of dramatic global developments, notably the winding down of the cold war, the disintegration of the monolithic Soviet Empire and the democratic transition in the former communist states of Eastern Europe. From a pessimistic perspective, one could claim that the world is witnessing another round of democratic rhetoric without any substantial or fundamental structural change towards democratization. The potential contribution of theories to the research on internal political developments in general and democratization in the GCC States in particular are manifold.[36]

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[34] *Financial Times,* 13 August 1990; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (11 September 1991);(issued by BBC Monitoring) Middle East (SWB ME)? 1174 A/5.

[35] L. Linz Diamond and S. M Lipset (1989), *Democracy in Developing Countries,* London: Oxford University Press.

[36] Martin Beck (2007), "Paving the way for democracies or strengthening authoritarianism? Reforms in the Middle East" in Henner Furtig ed, *The Arab Authoritarian Regime between Reform and Persistence,* Newcastle U.K : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.1

Arab Democratic Discourses

The emergent configurations of Islamist politics have posed a challenge to secular ideologies and regimes. Thus the question of the relation of secularism to democracy has moved to the fore of the discussion. Given the dialogic nature of the intellectual discourse-that is, its development in relation to a discourse that articulates notions of the polity and society in Islamist terms- attention is given to the formulation of democracy within Islamist discourse. The chapter's examination of the Islamist articulations is thus limited to the elements that bear directly on the Arab intellectuals' discussion of democracy.

The construction of the problematic of *nahda* (Renaissance) is conventionally situated at the time of the encounter between the West and the countries where Islam constituted an intellectual force.[37] The problematic is grounded in the search for the elements behind the progress of the West ("Other") and the retardation of the Arab world ("Self"), and how to create the conditions for a new Arab civilization. Muhammad 'Abduh was to prove that Islam was compatible with progress, a state of being identified with the west.[38]

The opposition side was conceived of as a form of government, among other things, and democracy was one of its defining features. Hence Islam, as a religion and "state", had to be proven compatible with that form of government-that is, it had to be shown to have the necessary qualifications for progress. The negation in 'Abduh's statement that "Islam" will never stand as an obstacle on the road to civilization". Proof of the civilization between Islam and democracy (understood as an element of a civilization) was sought through the establishment of equivalence in conceptual terms. The field of meaning that defined democracy was found to have its counterpart in Islamic terminology. The constellation of equivalent terms included *shura* (consultation), *ijma'* (consensus), and *bay'a* (oath of allegiance). The concern with the form of government constitute an aspect of the discourse devoted to discovering

[37] Albert Hourani (1976), *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939*, London: Oxford University Press.

[38] Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble and Paul Noble (1995), "Introduction: Theoretical Perspectives on Arab Liberalisation and Democratisation" in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Nobel (eds.) *Political Liberalisation and Democratisation in the Arab World*, Vol. 1, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, p 94.

the means for achieving progress and, more precisely, of creating the conditions required for the Arab and Islamic *nahda*.[39] As noted by Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, in the 1950's the problematic of *nadha* gave way to the discourse of revolution. The 1967 Arab defeat and the subsequent assessment of the revolution as a failure sat the stage for the rise of the *new nahda* discourse. The analysis begins with a diagnosis: Democracy is in crisis, or there is a crisis of democracy in the Arab world. The notion of crisis, or there notes a threat to something that is already there but, as used in this context, it evokes another meaning, that of shortage, lack, or absence. One point on which Arab intellectuals agree is the diagnosis; namely, that there is a shortage of democracy in the Arab world.

The immediate context for the rise of the discourse of *azmat al-dimuqratiyya* (the crisis of democracy) is woven by critical events that unleashed a flood of self-criticism, debates, and conference devoted to the study of the general crisis. A multitude of causes including dependency, unequal social relations, social and cultural retardation, illiteracy and the relation between contemporaneity and authenticity constitute the background of the *azma,* whose main features are limited participation and repressive practices by the state.

The question of democracy thus far appears to emerge out of the real conditions of Arab society. It has posed itself, as an element of the general crisis and in this respect must be dealt with. However, as an absence or a lack, it remains in search of a presence; hence the call for a model. Thus, while the debates on democracy in Arab societies focus on present empirical conditions, their analytical framework is developed with reference to experience somewhere else or at some other time. One model emerges out of the Western experience; another is grounded in the Arab-Islamic past. According to Esposito and Piscatori, essential three main positions can be found concerning the subject of democracy within Islamic literature today. The first is a full acceptance of democracy: Islam and democracy are compatible because of the "need of rulers to consult widely and to govern on the basis of consensus."[40] The second wholly rejects democracy as being incompatible with

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[39] Salwa Ismail (1995), "Democracy in contemporary Arab intellectual discourse", p 94.

[40] John Esposito and James Piscatori (1991), "Democratization and Islam," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3, p. 434.

Islam. Popular sovereignty usurps God's sovereignty; the recognition of the primacy of the people's will amounts to substituting the human-made law for divine law. In addition, some Muslim radicals reject any form of parliamentary democracy as a form of Westernization, incompatible with local traditions. The third position, the mainstream opinion, argues in favor of what can be termed a limited democracy, one with a limited form of popular sovereignty that is restricted and directed by God's law.[41]

Islamic thought

Another model for democracy is constructed out of Arab-Islamic history, particularly the early period of the prophet and the four Rightly Guided Caliphs, and is supported by a reading of Islamic tradition. For instance, in his analysis of that period of Islamic history Muhammad 'Imara attempted to show the importance of various Islamic institutions. In particular, *shura* is understood as participation in the management of the affairs of state and society, and is underlined in quranic verses.

Similarly, Khalid Muhhamad Khalid has founded democracy to be synonymous with *shura*. Khalid's reading of Islamic history advances the claim that the political liberties associated with democracy had their antecedents in the Islamic society from the time of its leader is evidenced in the event of Saqifa and the *bay'a* given to 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali. As proof that just rule is a principle governing the polity in Islam, Khalid invokes certain quranic verses and the example of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. In his account of that period, 'Umar, the third caliph, emerges as of justice and as a democrat. The argumentative orientation of Khalid's recall of early Isalmic history is that: "Islam is democratic and that democracy is Islam." Underlying the articulations of democracy within the Arab-Islamic model is the desire to prove its compatibility with the ideas of government associated with Western civilization. The task of Khalid and 'Imara, in this regard, responds to some imperative that guided turn-of-the –century Arab-Muslim reformers such as Muhammad 'Abduh.

In treating the subject of democracy in Gulf countries, Arab intellectuals have attempted to begin from an analysis of objective social conditions rather than from a

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[41] ibid, p. 436-437.

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theoretical outline of what defines democracy. Grounding the discussion in an empirical approach while deriving the theoretical basis of the conception of democracy from the Western experience underlies much of the tension that characterised the discourse. In adopting the Western model as a frame of reference, the theoretical and philosophical principles that undergrid that experience have to be dealt with not only in their context of emergence but also in relation to the sociohistorical conditions of the Arab world today. In other words, underlying parliamentary democracy, electoral systems, and divisions of power are vision of the polity and the citizen's position in it, notions of freedom, and definitions of the social that cannot be isolated from the institutions and forms that embody them.[42]

In defining the essence of democracy as "respect for the humanity of the individual," it becomes necessary to address the institutional side of the equation. This gives rise to debates on forms of government, political participation, and legitimacy. Thus, we find competing notions of freedom and equity (political vs. social) seeping into the examination of questions such as the merits of a multiparty system with Western-style democracy as opposed to a socialist system based on single-party rule.

In his 1983 conference presentation on the evolution of the concept of democracy in political thought, 'Ali al-Din Hilal traced the rise of tensions between freedom and equality with the articulation of democracy and liberalism. Hilal identifies equality as the essence of the concept of democracy as it developed historically. He also proposes to effect a separation between democracy as a historical concept and liberal democracy, which arose with bourgeois capitalism. It is not clear how Hilal conceives of political democracy since the political liberties it implies are part of the concept of liberal democracy he is proposing to cast aside. Indeed, in the Arab context, the debate over the nature of democracy crystallizes the tension between individual liberty and political rights on the one hand, and equality on the other. In a 1979 seminar, Hussain 'Isa presented a view of democracy emphasizing its social aspects and pointed to the limitation placed on equality by two of the fundamentals ideas of equal liberty: the rule of law and equality before the law. Drawing from President Nasser's discourse, 'Isa used the example of the equality of

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[42] Ismail (1995), "Democracy in contemporary Arab intellectual discourse", p. 97

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the landlord and that would result in real inequalities. 'Isa also presented an associational version of participatory democracy in which syndicates and unions, not political parties, are the organs of representation. The underlying vision here is that in a setting characterized by socioeconomic inequalities, and because of the limitations imposed on the exercise of liberty by poverty and the lack of education, some would be at a disadvantage in relation to others in their exercise of civil and political liberty. Equalities in this context require interventionist policies and trade-offs between liberty and primary social goods. Some intellectuals do not accept the need for such trade-offs.

While the concern for human and civil rights focuses on the demands for individual freedoms, the discourse of democracy develops within the wider problematic of *nahda* or of development. In this regard, the rights and freedoms that come under the rubric of liberal democracy must be situated in relation to the social democratic development. In this regard, the rights and freedoms that come under the rubric of liberal democracy must be situated in relation to the social needs and wants of the people at this particular juncture in Arab history.[43]

Progressivism philosophy of history Vs Organic perspective of history

The various articulations of the discourse of *nahda* are guided by two different philosophical traditions, one searching for universality of civilization and the other emphasizing the historical specificity of culture. One espouses a progressive philosophy of history; the other expresses an organic perspective on history. The first position advances a view of history as the accumulation of human development. In some cases it bears resemblance to the Western experience of development and the West's production of that experience as best represented in the developmentalist paradigm.[44]

Organic perspective of history holds that there exists in history a structure inherent to a certain culture and that carries within it the continuity of the "Self". It follows that any project for social transformation must be authentic, in so far as it is

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[43] ibid, p.99.

[44] ibid, p.100.

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derived or based on this defining a model for democracy in the Arab world.[45] He defines it as guided policy and as a feature of all civilizations. Democracy here is understood as good government or the government capable of doing this is one shaped by the historical specificity of a country and that carries with it the inherited elements of its past.

The democratic nature of politics is associated with an elite group composed of intellectuals, technocrats, and so on, who act as an advisory body to the ruler and who represent the national good. But commentators on Hussein's model have criticized its elitist vision, which excludes meaningful popular participation. Hussien's reductionist view of history and essentialist conception of politics presents an additional problem.

Secular Vs Islamic State

Today's confrontation between the supporters of the secular state and the proponents of the Islamic state is not without its links to the protagonists' hopes and fears regarding democracy. The secularism view the religious state as an absolutist repressive institution that, in principle as well as in practice, offers no guarantees for the protection of civil and human rights. Proceeding from a reading of the historical record of the caliphate, Farag Fawadh has argued for the comparative merit of the secular state. In *al-Haqiqa al-aha' iba,* secularism is pronounced synonymous with democracy, while the religious state is associated with absolutism.

According to Fu'ad Zakariyya, the religious state, by virtue of its metaphysical foundation (that is, upholding divine sovereignty) cannot guarantee the protection of civil rights, while the secular state can, since it posits the human being at the center of the organization of human society. The primary of human sovereignty permits the establishment of a system of checks and limitations on abuses of power.[46] It should be noted that the idea of secularism is articulated here within the problematic of *nahda,*

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[45] Adil Hussein (1983), "al-Muhaddidat al-tarikhiyya wa al-ijtima 'iyya lil-dimuqratiyya fi al-watan al-'arabi" (The Historical and Social Determiannts of Democracy in the Arab Nation), in *al-Dimuqratiyya wa huqua al-insan fi al-watan al' arabi* (Democracy and Human Rights in the Arab Nation), Beirut: Markaz dirasat al-wihda al-'arabiyya, pp. 202.

[46] Fu'ad Zakariyya (1987), "al-Falsafa wo al-din fi al-'arabi" (Philosophy and Religion in the Contemporary Arab World), in *al-Sahwa al-islamiyya wa al-tahdith* (The Islamic Resurgence on the scale of Reason), Cairo: Dar al-fikr al-mu'asir, pp. 151-183.

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itself framed by the Western experience. Democracy, secularism, and the rule of reason are understood as interrelated elements of a higher stage of civilization development. With the progress of science and the separation of knowledge from the field of belief, a secular rational approach to nature and society emerge. Zakariyya associates democracy with the rule of reason and the decline of absolutist authority characteristic of religion.[47] A degree of rationality thus appears as a prerequisite for freedom of choice and thought.

The positions taken by the various Islamist movements' vis-à-vis liberalization in the political field represent different strategies for bringing about change, that is the establishment of the Islamic state. While jihad's ideology conceives of change as a result of the war waged against state and society by the "few believers." It must also be noted that the adoption of one position does not exclude the use of means associated with the other. The association between secularism and democracy is challenged by a number of Arab intellectuals. Thinkers like Hasan Hanafi, Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, and Burhan Ghalyum content that secularism is a nonissue. In Ghalyun's terms secularism has been transcended as a problematic and has been replaced by democracy. For Jabiri, it is a false issue and should be substituted by the demand for rationalism and democracy. The term is alien to Arab culture and civilization and represents no real need; what is at stake, rather, are the values of freedom and equality.

The debates and discussions among Arab intellectuals about the nature of democracy reflect a paramount concern with the principles that ought to be constitutive of the political community. In this sense, the definition of democracy in terms of equality and freedom expresses normative principles guiding association and action in the polity. The different interpretations of these interpretations are not merely an echo of the ongoing debates between Western neoliberalism and social democrats. Rather, it points to the need for thinking about the relevance, for the Arab context, of the underlying philosophical and social principles of democratic institutions and the values they embody. In other words, questions of liberty and equality acquire a special importance within the discourse of *nahda*. Arab intellectuals must content with the next to institute mechanisms for safeguarding

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[47] ibid, pp. 171.

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individual freedoms in the face of state practices that betray a disregard for human rights. At the same time, the merits of formal equality found in liberal democracies are put into question in reference to the Arab social order, which is marked by vast economic and social inequalities. In this context, egalitarian politics are viewed as essential for addressing the inequalities of the social order.[48]

In the approach to *nahda* as a societal project that involves the Arab citizen as a member of a democratic community, the role of the state is undergoing revision. The limitation of state power through the expansion of societal involvement in politics is put forward in proposals for reforming the polity. This connects with current discussions about civil association and the rising interest in what is seen as a budding civil society in Arab countries.

Several issues that arise in thinking about the principles of the political community are dictated by the present conjuncture of Arab history. The challenge posed by the Islamists, and the climate of violence in which the state and the militant Islamist groups are engaged, have highlighted the need for the protection of civil and political liberties and the necessity of the separation of religious authority from politics. Thus, while the relation between secularism and democracy remains a contentious issue, the opposition to the idea of the religious state forms a common ground for the proponents of the secular state as well as for those intellectuals who wish to displace secularism from the debate. At the same time, the Islamist movement is acknowledged as a political force, thereby underlining the importance of reaching consensus on the mode of relations in the political community. Essential to this consensus are rules of action that safeguard the plurality of positions against the threats of absolutism.

Islam and Democracy

In this context, it is worth mentioning the hotly debated issue of the relationship between Islam and democracy. In explaining the democracy deficit in the Arab world, some scholars hold that the majority religion of the region, Islam is incompatible with democracy. For Islam, according to Martin Kramer, Islam fosters an essentially illiberal political culture either because of its more uncompromising dogmatic normative presence

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[48] Ismail (1995), "Democracy in Contemporary Arab Intellectual Discourse", p.108.

or because it prevents the emergence of fully functional civil society.[49] Terming such views as cultural reductionist explanation, others attribute this phenomenon to such factors as colonialism, international economic and trading systems.[50] As argued by Khaled Abou El Fadl, Islam and democracy are not singularly defined concepts, and the quest for reconciling the two must entail exploring the plurality of understandings of both. Anti and as well as pro-democratic versions of Islam exist and compete with each other and the task before the concerned believer today is to promote socially engaged visions of the faith that are grounded in the quest for human rights and social justice.[51] He assert that democracy is being increasingly recognised as a universal value. The third wave of democratisation is the illustrative example of this trend.[52]

Some would also argue that the Arabo-Islamic tradition is not conventionally familiar with the concept of 'liberty', nor did it develop a concept of individualism. The word *ahzab*, currently used for political parties, certainly has pejorative connotations in Islam. On the contrary, the Arabo- Islamic culture has remained communal, collectivist and 'organic'.[53] There are indeed those who argue that democracy is culturally specific to a certain geographic zone encompassing the English Channel and the North Sea, with some extension in central Europe (and with offshoots of this zone in the New World). These are the regions that historically had experienced feudalism, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and liberalism/individualism, whereas the rest of Europe had been subject to the Czarist or Ottoman empires and to the influences of Islam or Orthodox

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[49] Gudrun Kramer (1992) "Liberalisation and Democracy in the Arab World", *Middle East Report*, No.174, p 83.

[50] John L. Esposito and John O. Voll (1996), *Islam and Democracy*, New York: Oxford University Press; Salame, Ghassan. ed. (1994), *Democracy without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, London: I.B. Tauris Publishers; Hunter, Shireen, Huma Malik (ed.), (2005), *Modernization, democracy, and Islam, Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Washington, D.C: Greenwood Publishing Group.

[51] El Fadl, Khaled Abou, Joshua Cohen, Deborah Chasman (2004), *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy: A Boston Review Book*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[52] ibid.

[53] Louis Dumont (1986), *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective*, Chicago and London; Chicago University Press.

Christianity.[54] Others maintain that democracy is potentially Universalist, but with some cultures being especially averse to it.

Samuel Huntington, has concluded that "among Islamic countries, particularly those in the Middle East, the prospects for democratic development seem low."[55] Huntington later argued that each region of the globe has its own individual religio-cultural essence that plays a large part in determining receptivity to democratic systems.[56] He isolated two examples, Islam and Confucianism, and labeled them "profoundly anti-democratic," claiming that they would "impede the spread of democratic norms in society, deny legitimacy to democratic institutions, and thus greatly complicate if not prevent the emergence and effectiveness of those institutions."[57] Huntington's argument has certainly garnered wide support from neoconservative foreign-policy pundits and neo-Orientalist academics alike. Kamrava stated that "it is the forces of primordialism, informality and autocracy that have shaped and continue to shape the parameters of life in Middle Eastern societies."[58] It is this fundamental lack of a democratic history, Kamrava argues, that has left West Asia without the necessary social and cultural dynamics to foster various democratic movements, institutions and classes that make up a thriving civil society and give rise to democratic governance.[59] Bernard Lewis has, for example, argued that Islam is inclined towards totalitarianism/authoritarianism, which, he maintains, is why several Muslim countries were attracted to the Communist model in the 1950s and 1960s.[60]

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[54] Bhikhu Parekh (1992), ' The Cultural Particularity of Liberal Democracy', *Political Studies,* Vol 40, special issue on *Prospects for Democracy,* p. 102

[55] Samuel P Hungtington (1984), "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" *Political Science Quarterly,* Vol. 99, No. 2, p. 216.

[56] Samuel P. Hungtington (1987), "The Goals of Development," in M. Weiner and S. R Huntington, *Understanding Political Development,* Harper Collins.

[57] Samuel P. Hungtington (1991), *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century,* pp. 298-307.

[58] Mehran Kamrava (1998), *Democracy in the Balance. Culture and Society in the Middle East,* Seven Bridges Press, p. 32.

[59] ibid, pp. 31-32.

[60] Bernard Lewis (1958), 'Communism and Islam", in Walter Z. Laqueur, ed., *The Middle East in Transition,* New York:Frederick Praeger

Several Muslim authors have contributed to the debate and some of them agree that the dominant tradition of the Islamic heritage as it has reached us today is not liberal or 'democratic' even though many contemporary writers would like to see it in this light for their own contemporary purposes. The contemporary Islamic philosopher Hasan Hanafi has argued along similar lines in some of his writings, and so has the Tunisian sociologist Al-Tahir Labib, who asks rhetorically: "Is democracy really a social demand in the Arab World?" The Moroccan historian 'Ali Umil (1991) has argued that although difference and disagreement were known in the historical Arabo-Islamic state, they were never accepted on the ideological level by the jurists and the thinkers who always believed that it was only one idea and one group holding to that idea who were right.

As a result of the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979 and the consequent resurgence of Islam as a political movement much attention has been focused on the nature of a theocratic state.[61] Although Islamic "fundamentalism" was a term coined in the West, it was quite clear that the sh'ia Islamic directives of Iran were both radical and formidable. Indeed, according to James Piscatori, a new dynamism embraced Islam since the late 1960s, a time when Muslims began to reaffirm the importance of their faith to their social and political lives.[62] Inevitably, the renewed importance of religion in the polities of numerous states in the GCC and elsewhere has led to an examination of the relationship between Islam and democracy. Whilst some writers point to a basic incompatibility between what might be regarded as secular democracy and the rule of God, others suggest that in traditional Islamic discourse "tolerance, justice, fair play and universal brotherhood" were prominent features. If Islam is regarded as opposed to the main elements of Western democratic tradition and is based on "violence and intolerance" it is a view founded on misunderstanding and misinterpretation. It is possible to be both a Muslim and a democrat.[63] In this interpretation the institution of the "Shura" is a central component of the Islamic political system. A "Shura" is a consultative council, elected by the people. As Choudhury elaborates:

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[61] J. Piscatori (1986), *Islam in a World of Nation States,* Cambridge, p. 114,

[62] ibid, p. 24

[63] G.M Choudhury (1990), *Islam and the Contemporary World*, London, p-iii- vi.

The "Shura" will assist and guide the Amir [leader]. It is obligatory for the Amir to administer the country with the advice of his Shura. The Amir can retain office only so long as he enjoys the confidence of the people, and must resign when he loses this confidence. Every citizen has the right to criticize the Amir and his government, and all reasonable means expression of public opinion should be available.[64]

If Islamic states appear not to construct their political structures in precisely this manner, Choudhury maintains that this is not the fault of Islam and its ideals in much the same way that the limitations and shortcomings which may be found in some democratic states 'should not be attributed to democracy and its ideals.'[65] Esposito and Voll have asserted that Islam and democracy are incompatible "only if 'democracy' is defined in a highly restricted way, or if important Islamic principles are defined in a rigid and traditional manner."[66]

The notion of consultation, then, is an important component within islam, but Ami Ayalon cautions against distinguishing a "Shura" within a "Majlis" [Council] as a parliament. He argues that it would be misleading to mistake fully sovereign western parliaments for councils with limited advisory power. Whilst the term "*Majlis*" is used in the West Asia to denote a national assembly, Ayalon asserts it is a word with no traditional political connotations' and must be qualified, as in *almajlis al-ali* a cabinet or senate; '*Majlis al- umma*' a national assembly; *majlis shura al- madaris*, council of education; and so on.[67]

Yet it is as well to remember that Majlis has bacame "talking shop" with little authority but to deliberate and advise recalcitrant leaders. The central issue here is accountability and the extent to which deputies in the *Majlis al-umma* represent the interests of a particular constituency or the extent to which Islam instructs their role. According to Akbar Ahmed, the central difference between the West and Islam is

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[64] ibid, p. 45.

[65] ibid, p –ii.

[66] Esposito and O. Voll (1996), *Islam and Democracy*, p. 21.

[67] Ami Ayalon (1987), *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East,* New York: Oxford University Press, p 212.

rooted in their two "opposed philosophies: one based in secular materialism, the other in faith."[68] Also, Norton has pointed out that there is no reason Western models of democracy should be adaptable to other regions and that the Middle East is more likely to "evolve its own characteristic style of democracy, no doubt with an Islamic idiom in some instances."[69]

The debate is a complex one and if the question of democratization in the GCC Countries is not considered to be so important it might not have begun. In other words, if 'democracy' was considered to be so trivial a concept, associated with western imperialism and holding little meaning in Islamic society, there would exist no imperative to attempt to connect the two "opposing philosophies". It is precisely because democracy is attractive to the peoples of the GCC Countries, peoples who wish to form political parties, vote in elections for a variety of different candidates, hold their representatives accountable, in short to avail themselves of political rights and responsibilities, that democracy is being discussed at this time.

Relationship between Political Liberalization and Democratization

Conceptually, political liberalisation is distinct from democratisation. While the former encompasses the more modest goal of loosening restrictions and increasing civil liberties within an authoritarian regime, democratisation goes beyond such controlled opening of political space. It entails an expansion of political participation for real and meaningful collective control over public policy.[70] Democratisation is a complex historical process consisting of several stages and political liberalisation marks the first stage of transition during which a state moves away from the authoritarian rule towards democracy. A democratic transition is complete, when institutional structure has been established, when sufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government, and when a

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[68] Akbar S. Ahmed (1992), *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise,* London, 1992, p. 264.

[69] Augustus Richard Norton (1995), *Civil Society in the Middle East,* E. J. Brill, p. 5.

[70] Brynen, Korany and Noble and Paul Noble (1995), ""Introduction: Theoretical Perspectives on Arab Liberalisation and Democratisation" in Brynen, Korany and Nobel (eds.) *Political Liberalisation and Democratisation in the Arab World,* Vol. 1, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, p 3, in Mohapatra, Aswini K (2007), "The Sultanate of Oman- Liberalised Autocracy", *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies,* Vol. 15, No. 1.

government comes to power through a free and popular vote. However, not all those undergoing transition reach the stage of becoming a consolidated democracy. While some relapse into authoritarianism, others enter the "political gray zone" in which regimes are neither dictatorial nor clearly headed toward democracy.[71] In the absence of suitable appellation, such regimes are designated as "liberalised autocracies."[72]

The analysis of the Political liberalization and democratization issue is to be approached as part of a whole, linking it to the country's historical evolution, social structure, and contextual factors. Rather than being limited to purely political or "super structural" aspects, there seems to be a consensus that the analysis of democratization requires the penetration of the "political core: and a deeper understanding of history, culture, society, and of course, the economy.[73]

Democratic transition takes place either through a "reform" or "rupture" with the old authoritarian system. The former is likely to be more stable and less violent because the outgoing regime retains high degree of control over the transition process. By contrast, the collapse of the old regime in the latter type may lead to an unrestrained competition among democratic actors, making the transition less consensual and more violent. It is thus argued that if the Gulf rulers have chosen to pursue reformist path to transition, this primarily reflects their concerns for the country's stability and social cohesion. Incremental changes, rather than sudden openness in the system, will minimise such risks while facilitating the gradual evolution of democratic politics in accordance with their cultural heritage and valued traditions.

There is a fundamental conceptual difference between political liberalisation and democratisation. The former refers to the opening up of public space through the recognition and protection of civil and political liberties[74], whereas the latter "entails

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[71] Thomas Carothers (2002), "The End of Transition Paradigm", *Journal of Democracy,* Vol, 13, No. 1, p 9.

[72] Daniel Brumberg (2002), "Democratization in the Arab World?: The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy", *Journal of Democracy,* Vol.10, No. 4, pp 55-66.

[73] James A. Bill (1994), "Comparative Middle East Politics: Still in Search of Theory," *Political Science and Politics,* Vol. 27, No. 3, pp 518-519; Tim Niblock and Emma Murphy eds. (1992), *Economic and Political Liberalisation in the Middle East,* London:British Academic Press.

[74] Adam Przeworski (1991), *Democracy and the Market; Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America,* New York: Cambridge University Press, p.57

an expansion of political participation in such a way as to provide citizens with a degree of real and meaningful collective control over public policy".[75] Political liberalisation constitutes the first stage of democratic transition, which is complete when institutional structure has been established, when sufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government, and when a government comes to power through a free and popular vote. What follows next is democratic consolidation, a slow but purposeful process during which behavioural, attitudinal and institutional dimensions indicate that democracy is accepted by all forces in society as the "only game in town"[76]. However, not all those undergoing transition become eventually a consolidated democracy. While some relapse into authoritarianism, others emerge as 'liberalised autocracies" at best[77]. The proposed study would explain how *Political liberalization in Oman has so far created a liberalsied autocracy rather than a liberal democracy.* Political liberalisation is seen by critics as a mechanism for system maintenance or regime survival than collective empowerment.[78]

The disaggregation of democracy into different types is important both for the discussion of the process (democratisation) and for the presumed correlation of liberalization and democratization. As the analysis of the process in the following cases will indicate, liberalization does not always result in the application of democracy-that is to say, the practice of norms and rules guaranteeing participatory politics with its concomitants such as leadership accountability, transparency of political transactions, and regular elite turnover. Rather, we have a polity that is increasingly liberalized but not fully democratized: The formal characteristics of a democratic polity are there (election, parties and legislative institution), but the actual democratic substance is not yet a reality. This is what is implied by the Arabic term *ta'addudiyya (multipartyism),* which aims to attract attention to he absence if an

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[75] Brynen, Korany, Noble (1995), *Political Liberalization and Democracy in the Arab World,* Boulders: Lynne Rienner Publishes, p.3

[76] Juan J Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996), *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: South Europe, South America and Post- Communist Europe,* Johns Hopkins University Press, p.5

[77] Thomas Carothers (2002), "Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror", *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 82, No.1: p 88.

[78] Brumberg (2002), "Democratization in the Arab World?", p 57.

automatic or inevitable correlation between liberalization and democratization- at least in the short and medium terms (three to five years).[79]

It is important not to confuse the appearance of elections with the substance of democratic politics. Elections conducted under a limited franchise, under highly distortional systems of electoral representation, or amidst widespread electoral fraud may not in fact provide citizens with any effective say in political decision-making. Similarly, elections held amidst repression may be meaningless as an indicator of public preference. Here, the important linkage between liberty and democracy (and between liberalization and democratization) becomes clear: Without a context of political freedom, citizens are unable to effectively participate, organize, or freely choose among political alternatives. It is important not to presume that all democracy must necessarily follow a Western *liberal democratic* model. Whenever and wherever it operates, democracy is fundamentally shaped by the historical and cultural context out of which it emerges.[80]

It must be taken into consideration that liberalisation processes in authoritarian regimes rarely occur by accident. Rather, they are usually the result of a decision deliberately taken by an authoritarian elite. As will be shown in more detail below, authoritarian regimes are notoriously subject to crisis. In such a situation, a rational authoritarian elite disposes over two basic means of crisis management: It can either react by repression or by liberalisation.[81] Liberalisation may help to strengthen an authoritarian rule since it can diminish pressure from below, thereby increasing legitimacy for the ruling elite. Thus, despite the surplus of freedom, a liberalisation policy in an authoritarian regime is normally a strategy of the ruling elite to strengthen its non-democratic rule. Consequently, liberalization is a process opposed to democratisation insofar as an authoritarian elite with the aim of avoiding democratisation. However, in a complex world even rational elites sometimes overestimate their control over outcomes. Although it should be pointed out that

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[79] Bahgat Korany (1994), "Arab Democratisation: A Poor Cousin?" *Political Science and Politics,* Vol. 27, No. 3, pp 511-513; Niveen Mosa'ed (ed). (1993), *Democratization in the Arab World World,* Cairo: Centre for Political Research and Studies, Cairo University.

[80] Brynen, Korany and Nobel (1995), *Political Liberalization,* p.4

[81] Adam (1991), *Democracy and the Market,* p 134.

democratization processes might have very different causes, occasionally they are the result of liberalisation policies that go beyond control. To sum it up, although the intention of liberalisation policies is precisely to avoid democratisation, by accident democratisation may be the result of liberalisation policies.[82]

Without using the term *ta'addudiyya*, (pluralism, albeit in constrained form, or multi-partyism) other analysists have drawn attention to this incompleteness in the transition process between liberalization and democratization, how the demise of the public sector and the drive toward privatization did not result, according to Nazih Ayubi, in the transition from "plan to (political) market," but from "plan to caln."[83] As a result, the so called liberalization has been characterized by the presence of favoritism toward one's kith and kin and a certain degree of enclosure and exclusion in the political market. Similarly, Robert Bianchi talks about the "corporatist-associative" model, in which political exchange take place between political and economic groups at the top without really tricking down to involve the base,[84] a characteristic of "cosmetic democratization."[85]

After World War II the socio-economic growth has been phenomenal despite the authoritarian nature of governance in many Arab Gulf countries. But the growth was erratic or sluggish-resulting, among other things, in a distorted stratification. The 1950s and 1960s, many of the newly independent Arab states embarked on ambitious educational and industrial expansions. As a result, two sprouting classes grew steadily: the new middle class and the modern working class. The initial oil boom of the 1970s tempted many of the poorer and larger countries to introduce what came to

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[82] Martin Beck (2007) "Paving the way for democracies or strengthening authoritarianism? Reforms in the Middle East" in Henner Furtig ed, *The Arab Authoritarian Regime between Reform and Persistence*, Newcastle U.K : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.5-6.

[83] Nazih N. Ayubi (1995), *Over-Stating the Arab State: Political and Society in the Middle East*, London: I.B. Tauris, p 403; Terry L. Karl (1990), "Dilemma of Democratisation in Latin America," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 23, No.1, p 6.

[84] Robert Bianchi (March 1988), "The Strengthening of Association Life and Its Potential Contribution to Political Reform," presentation to the conference of the Social Science Research Council/Joint Committee on the Middle East on "Retreating States and Expanding Societies," Aix-en-Provrnce, Frnace.

[85] Ayubi (1995), *Over-Stating the Arab State: Political and Society in the Middle East*, p. 411.

be known as liberal "open-door" policies, without successfully phasing out the command socio-economic policies of the previous decades.[86]

The upper rungs of the new middle class engaged regime in nonviolent battles over basic freedoms, human rights organizations and more autonomous professional associations, thus revitalizing stunted civil societies. There were varying levels of popular demands vis-à-vis Arab regimes. On one level, the demands were for greater "liberalization," such as freedom of the press and association, as well as the right to travel abroad. Nearly all regimes made some concessions in response to these demands. On a more elevated level, the demand was for serious and explicit democratization, such as legalized political parties, equal access to the mass media, and free and honest elections. None of the regimes fully responded to these demands in the 1980s.[87] During the 1980s and into the 1990s, this phenomenon occurred across the region: in Algeria in 1988; Egypt in 1981 and 1986; Jordon in 1989; Kuwait in 1989 and 1990; Mauritania in 1986 and 1988; Morocco in 1984, 1988 and 1990; South Yemen between 1986 and 1990; Sudan in 1985; and Tunisia in 1984and 1988. Some countries are proceeding faster than others can be ascribed to numerous domestic and external factors. Among the former is the relative size and degree of maturation of civil society in each country. It was among civil society organization that rumblings were first heard, and these were followed by advances in democratization. In some countries, the march toward democracy was set back; in others it proved stillborn.

At present, most of the Arab world seems to suffer indeed under a system in which economic liberalization has not led yet to democracy. They do not have yet what early[88] and modern[89]analysts codified as the government's responsiveness to the preferences of its citizens, considered political equals,[90] a polity in which "rulers are

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[86] Saad Eddin Ibrahim (1995), "Liberalization and Democratisation in the Arab world: an overview", " in Brynen, Korany and Nobel (eds.) *Political Liberalisation and Democratisation in the Arab World,* Vol. 1, p.33.

[87] ibid, p.42

[88] Pierre Mahent (1987), *Historical intellectuelle du liberalism,* Paris: Calma-Levy , p 78.

[89] Dahl (1991), Dem*ocracy and Its Critics.*

[90] Greg Sorensen (1992), *Democracy and Democratization,* Boulder: Westview Press, p 19.

held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens acting directly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives."[91]

Relevance of Democratic Theory in the GCC

It could be argued that the prerequisites for a democratic transformation are not available in most GCC countries because these are not advanced capitalist societies. Traditionally, most of these countries had possessed control-based modes of production. Currently, the articulated nature of their modes of production has not allowed for the emergence of a hegemonic class or ideology that can ensure political order in the society. In consequence the state in such societies is 'fierce' rather than strong precisely because it is structurally and ideologically weak. In such a situation the expression of interests is bound to be direct, not mediated and relations between state and society are contradictory, not complementary.[92]

Transition to democracy is not easy or fast, and the road chosen to introduce and implement democratic and political reform varies across countries. However, certain prerequisites, such as a strong will at the authority level and awareness of the importance of such reforms at both the ruling and public levels, remain the common ground for any move in this direction anywhere in the world. In fact, a closer look at the Arab countries suggests that many of their ruling elite show a will to forego some of their power over economic interests and to encourage the participation of the private sector and ordinary citizens in the process of wealth creation.[93] The countries of the region also seem eager to liberalize and expand their economies and markets and attract international capital flows. As much as these markets appeal to international investors, the achievement of these ends and the ability to sustain them place regulators under pressure to establish well-governed financial markets. Consequently, a culture of sound corporate governance, will gradually emerge among

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[91] Philippe Schmitter and Terry L. Karl (1993), "What Democracy Is...And Is Not, " in Larry Diamond and Mare F. Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Universiyt Press, p. 40.

[92] B.R Pridham, ed.(1987), *Oman: Economic, Social and Strategic Developments*, London: Croom Helm, for the University of Exeter Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, p.398

[93] Assem Safieddine; Atwi, Leila (March,2009), "Is governance a prerequisite for democracy? Insights from the Middle East", Accessed on 2 March 2010, http://www.thefreelibrary.com/ Middle+ East+Policy/2009/March/22-p52119

all market participants. Thus, citizens will learn to adopt an active, rather than a passive, role in their countries. Consequently, an awareness of democratic practices will become prevalent among the communities of the Arab countries.[94]

The idea is that processes of economic development involving significant industrialization lead to a more diverse and a more complex class structure, which becomes increasingly difficult for authoritarian regimes to control, especially with regard to new sources of wealth and power outside the state. Involvement of a country in the world economy creates non-governmental sources of wealth and influence and opens the society to the impact of the democratic ideas prevailing in the industrialized world.[95] Richards agrees that a "democracy deficit" is a prevailing fact in the region, he does not agree that the Arab countries are "not ready" for democratic reform, and he identifies grounds for a potential shift towards more accountable and democratic governance.[96] These include the current level of development, literacy, education and urbanization. For instance, the World Bank indicators of 2007 reveal that enrollment at secondary schools in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region increased from 67.7 percent in 2000 to 73.5 percent in 2005. In Morocco, the rate increased from 38.1 percent in 2000 to 52.4 percent in 2006. Qatar recorded a 100 percent enrollment in secondary schools in 2006, up from 87.6 percent in 2000. In 2003, 97.5 percent of males and 94.5 percent of females were enrolled in primary schools in Saudi Arabia, as compared to 61 percent and 57 percent, respectively, in the period 1994-2000. Richards concludes that democracy is attainable if some political obstacles are overcome.[97]

However, the connection between economic crisis and political liberalization is not inevitable. In other historical circumstances economic crisis led either to Fascism or to bureaucratic-authoritarianism. Even recently, instances of economic crisis leading to authoritarianism rather than democratization as observed, in turkey,

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[94] ibid.

[95] Hungtington (1991), *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century*, pp 65- 67.

[96] Alan Richards (2005), "Democracy in the Arab Region: Getting There from Here," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 28.

[97] Assem Safieddine; Atwi, Leila (March,2009), "Is governance a prerequisite for democracy?"

Nigeria, Ghana and Korea.[98] What has tilted the balance more towards in recent years has been the growing globalization and the undisputed ideological hegemony of the 'West' following the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. In GCC there is the type of superficial, formalistic democratization to which regimes may resort to 'cosmetic democracy' (*shakliyya* in Arabic) or, probably more to the point, 'defensive democracy'.[99] Sometimes this is resorted to because of the (usually mistaken) belief that super-and big power will be impressed and that they would subsequently increase the flow of trade, investment and aid.[100]

The GCC States has been generally left out of the debate. The question, where exactly does the GCC States fit in the wider picture of these above mention theories *then*, demands more attention chiefly because there has been very little discussion of democratization in the developing nations, which actually includes the GCC States. In the study by Diamond, of 26 countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia, the states of the West Asia, Islamic and otherwise were omitted on the grounds that "they generally lack much previous democratic experience, and most appear to have little prospect of transition even to semi-democracy.[101] Similarly, though from a Marxist perspective, Giacomo Luciani writing in the 1980s of the notion of the *'rentier state'* also implied that democratization in the GCC States was unviable.

The "rentier state" analysis rests on the hypothesis that external sources of income resulting from the export of oil, in other words, oil revenue, is in fact a form of rent. Income is raised by the state, not through the more traditional route of domestic taxation and economic strategy, which are often seen to be associated with popular demands for political reform and legitimacy, but externally through the commodity of oil. In a sense, the economic development argument is turned on its head because although many West Asian states are vastly wealthy in terms of gross national product which might present a prima facie case for political development, the nature of the wealth is not the result of industrialization and

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[98] Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman (July1991), ' Economic Adjustment and the Prospects for Democracy', paper presented at the International Political Science Association's 15th World Congress, Buenos Aires.

[99] Ayubi (1995), *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East.*

[100] Pridham ed. (1987), *Oman: Economic, Social and Strategic Developments.*

[101] Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995), "Introduction: Comparing Experiences with Democracy."

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societal differentiation, factors once seen as necessary to political change, but simply the result of enormous oil revenues. As Luciani has pointed: The need to raise revenue is the basic reason why the state has an interest in the prosperity and economic well-being of its country. Without such an interest, it is inevitable that rentier states will display little tendency to evolve towards democratic institutions".[102]

The GCC States are thus something of a "lost cause" a view which largely rests on the assumption that "tremendous barriers" exist to the establishment of fully-functioning democratic political systems" in the region. Curiously, all those politically debilitating features delineated so comprehensively in the early literature on political development are still judged to be characteristic of the region: weak institutionally; divided ethnically; tethered to authoritarian structures of government; lacking in unity; political legitimacy and tolerance of opposition; external factor of the cold war and recently, in thrall to fundamentalist religion. The countries of the GCC States have been regarded as possessing elements inimical to any form of democratization. Countries within the region are believed to be reform resistant and to have little hope of moving toward democracy because they lacked the required democratic experience. Kedourie states that constitutional rule in the region is hindered by the fact that the people are accustomed to "autocracy and passive obedience."[103] To Cantori, the region is characterized by narrow political and economic power interests and lacks means of political transition.[104] Deegan considers that the countries of the West Asia are "weak institutionally; divided ethnically; tethered to authoritarian structures of government; and lacking in unity, political legitimacy and tolerance of opposition."[105] Furthermore, Richards claims that the low dependence of these countries on their communities and the sufficient resources available to the authoritarian governments have undermined incentives for reform and hindered the transition to democracy.[106]

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[102] Luciani (1990), *The Arab State,* London, p. xxiv.

[103] Elie Kedourie (1994), Democracy and Arab Political Culture, Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

[104] Louis Cantori (2002), "Political Succession in the Middle East," *Middle East Policy,* Vol. 9, No.3, p. 105.

[105] Heather Deegan (1993), *The Middle East and Problems of Democracy,* Open University Press, p. 9.

[106] Richards (2005), "Democracy in the Arab Region: Getting There from Here," p. 28.

Although the above arguments have varying degree of validity to araised that the Arab world in general and the GCC states in particular are resistant to democracy structurally and culturally, would be sweeping and in many cases do not tally with empirical realities. This study represents an attempt to examine the prospects of democratic deepening in the GCC states in the light of the recent political and economic reforms that Gulf rulers have undertaken more due to the externally generated pressures than domestic political upheavals. Even the recent Arab uprising that started in Tunisia through Egypt spreading to the Gulf states may be attributed to the social networking and interconnectedness across sovereign state borders, which is after all the product of globalisation, the post cold war global structural transformation. Internally, the situation in the GCC States is changing, particularly after the 1991 Gulf War, and the implication of these changes for democracy should be discussed. Second, in this discussion the notion of democracy should not solely be confined to liberal democracy. Third, some of the new developments, in terms of re-introduction of elections, the removal of bans on political parties and more generally in the sphere of participation may be viewed as steps paving the way for political liberalisation in a liberal democratic sense.

Whereas democracy is an end product, liberalisation is the process leading to it. Yet it would be unwise to view the region as politically homogeneous. Distinct differences exist between the nation-states to the extent that a move towards democratization in one country may be symbolized by the remove of the ban on the formation of political parties, whilst in another, it might be characterized by the establishment of a more equitable parliamentary system. This aspect broaches the hypothesis that *the political liberalization in the GCC countries has not been uniform,* of the proposed study. In discussing democracy in the GCC States, then, one needs to recognize the significance of a number of particular constraints: population mobility, the question of refugees, immigration and their implication for citizenship, communal division and the possibilities and limitations of the consociational model of political organization, the role of Islam and until the Cold War.

Chapter – 2

Political Liberalization in the GCC States

ARMENIA AZERBAIJAN TURKMENISTAN

TURKEY

CASPIAN SEA

CYPRUS
Tripoli
SYRIA
Hims
LEBANON
Beirut
Damascus
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Haifa
Tel Aviv
Jerusalem
ISRAEL
JORDAN
Elat
Al Jawf
Sakakah

Tabriz
Daryachech-ye Urumiyeh
Rasht
Babol
Mashhad

Mosul
Kirkuk
Tehran
Hamadan
Dash-e-kavir
Kashan
IRAN
AFGHANISTAN

Mel
Tharthar
Baghdad
IRAQ
Karbala
Esfahan
Yazd

Badiyat ash Sham

An Nasiriyah
Hawr al Hammar
Abadan
Shiraz
Kerman
Zahidan

KUWAIT
Kuwait
Busheher

An Nafud
Al Dahna
Bandar e Lengeh
Bandar Abbas

EGYPT
RED SEA
Buraydah
Shaqra
Al Madinah
Riyadh
BAHRAIN
Al Manamah
QATAR
Doha
Abu Dhabi
Dubai
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Jask
Gulf of Oman
Muscat
Sur

SAUDI ARABIA
OMAN
Masirah

SUDAN
Jiddah
Mecca
Rub al Khali

Salalah

ERITREA
Jaza'o Farasan
San'a
Al Hudaydah
YEMEN
Tarim
Ra's Fartak
ARABIAN SEA

Hadramawt
Al Mukalla

ETHIOPIA
Aden
Gulf of Aden
Socotra

DJIBOUTI

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Established on 25 May 1981 in Riyadh, the Gulf Cooperation Council popularly known as the GCC is a political and economic union comprising the six Arab Gulf States- Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Apart from geographic proximity, shared language, and culture, similar political system based on Islamic beliefs encouraged these countries to establish a regional multi-lateral forum with a twin objectives of maintaining peace and stability in the area. But these countries were not economically equal.[1] Although the economic profile of the GCC states varies, all of them have achieved impressive social and economic progress in the 1970s, based on the revenue derived from energy resources. Their economies are highly driven by oil exports and oil price. GCC produces about 20 million barrels of oil daily out of the world's total daily consumption of 65 million barrels. Meeting 25-30 percent of the world's consumption of energy.[2] Oil proceeds have been used to modernize infrastructure, create employment, and improve social indicators, while the countries have been able to accumulate official reserves, maintain relatively low external debt, and remain important donors to poor countries.[3]

Despite oil led economic growth, the Gulf region continue to face serious political, economic and social challenges. Across the GCC countries, unemployment, for instance, remains one of the biggest challenges. Official figures give unemployment in the region at over 20 percent, and estimates of youth unemployment are far higher, some over 35 percent – just as high as it was at the beginning of the century.[4] Most GCC countries have segmented labor markets with limited labor mobility. This reflects wage rigidities, skills mismatch, and institutional and cultural factors. Better-educated new entrants to the national labor market have been traditionally attracted to the public sector because of higher wages and benefits, job

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[1] Shawkat Hammoudeh and Won Joong Kim (22 December, 2010), "GCC Countries Are Not Created Equal: Disproportion in GDP Weights, Economic Growth and Inflation", *Middle East Economic Survey*, Accessed on 12 January 2011 at http://www.mees.com/en/articles/16

[2] Fred Rhodes (2005), The Gulf: Challenges of the Future, Abu Dhabi, UAE: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, p.99.

[3] Ugo Fasano and Zubair Iqbal, (2003), GCC Countries: From Oil Dependence to Diversification, International Monetary Fund, Washington, DC. Accessed at http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/med/2003/eng/fasano/index.htm on 12.3. 2011.

[4] Nicholas Davis and Chiemi Hayashi (2007), World Economic Forum, *The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries and the World: Scenarios to 2025: Implications for Competitiveness*, Geneva, p.30

security, and social status associated with government employment. At the other extreme, private sector activities have relied heavily on imported labor that is readily available on the basis of fixed-term contracts, and at wages in many cases lower than those in the public sector.[5]

Understanding the potential for reform in the Arab Gulf region requires a clear appreciation not only of the nature of change, but also of how such change fits in with the socio-political structure of these countries and the external contextual issues influencing reform process.[6] The power structure within the oil monarchies determines the origins of reform and influences its potential for the future. The ruling elites enjoy a monopoly of power and are supported by strong loyal armed forces. The supremacy of a regime depends on the degree of legitimacy it holds. The ruling elites consider themselves as the 'owner' and they have strong desire to maintain the status quo. Because change in any part, may result in the total destruction of monarchial power structure.[7] The tendency is therefore, to liberalize rather than implement substantive reforms challenging the power structure, which may result in the over throw of the autocratic monarchial regime in the Gulf.[8]

In all countries of the GCC State is ruled by a 'traditional', tribal leadership. The titles may vary-kingdom or sultanate, but the essence is always hereditary and patriarchal. Not only the ruling families and their entourages hold the headship of states but also most sensitive ministerial portfolios in these countries. There are also significant variations in the level of social and political control. Bahrain is usually regarded as the most socially liberal (with a number of women working, relatively open entertainment, etc.), while Kuwait is (or was) usually regarded, comparatively speaking, as the most open politically (with the parliament- admittedly covering only a small proportion of the people of Kuwait- reconvening, and with a reasonably

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[5] Cyrus Sassanpour, (1996), *Policy Challenges in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries,* International Monetary Fund, Washington, DC. Accessed at http://www.imf.org/external/ pubs/ft/policy/5adjust.htm#note14callout

[6] Larbi Sadiki (2000) "Popular uprisings and Arab democratization", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, pp. 88–91.

[7] Sean L. Yom (2005), "Civil society and democratization in the Arab world", *Middle East Review of International Affairs,* Vol 9, No 4, p. 16.

[8] Giacomo Luciani (2005), "From private sector to national bourgeoisie: Saudi business", in Paul Arts and Gerd Nonneman, eds, *Saudi Arabia in the balance: political economy, society, foreign affairs,* London: Hurst, p.162.

liberal press, etc.). On the other hand, Oman has the reputation for being the most oppressive politically, while Saudi Arabia is said to be the most repressive socially. However, it would be reasonable to say that all these countries are generally conservative, in both their political and social outlooks.[9]

Nature of State

In comparison with the wider West Asia, the oil monarchies of the Gulf constitute a distinct subgroup.[10] The countries of the GCC, with the exception of Bahrain, all enjoy a disproportionately high level of public and private sector wealth from their oil and, increasingly, gas revenues. Within these unusual political economies, political activism is more subdued than in their regional neighbours, as high levels of wealth and standards of living have historically served to stifle widespread demands for change.[11] Qatar is a prime example, with a negligible appetite for political change among the small population.

Since the early 1970s, increased oil production and regional instability have dominated the events in the 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 developmentprojects that brought rapid material and social change. The Gulf States have adopted policies leading to the creation of welfare state, in which citizens rely completely on the state and the services it provides in all fields. The objective was to reinforce the degree of legitimacy of political regimes and to gain the allegiance of citizens so as to achieve political stability and continuity of governance. The distribution of petroleum revenue entails the creation of state machinery and institutions to distribute it among the inhabitants in the form of government expenditures. However, the first step always was the consolidation of the ruling families and their transformation into political institution of the family was the entrenchment of central decision-making at the highest bureaucratic level in the ruling elite. These states were created around the ruling families as central political institutions, and that the other state institutions were

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[9] Nazih N. Ayubi (1995), *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, London: I. B. Tauris, p. 230.

[10] Michael Herb (2004), "Princes and parliaments in the Arab world", *Middle East Journal,* Vol 58, No 3, pp. 370.

[11] Sadiki (2000), "Popular uprisings and Arab democratization", pp 88-91.

functional extensions of the ruling families to the point that loyalty to the state was in the final analysis translated as personal loyalty to the ruling family.[12]

Despite intensive economic modernization, wealth, education, and social mobility since independence, the oil-rich Gulf States remain autocratic. During World War I and the inter-war period, as these states emerged through a process of state-building and the strengthening of state leaders, an unwritten code seemed to prevail that maintained this common social framework intact. It is true that the states' rulers reinforced their military, administrative and economic capabilities, but their governments, as they developed in the 1920s and 1930s, had an enveloping or encapsulating effect on society, rather than statically changing it. Interestingly, the Arab World has two type of regime, expressed by two similar-sounding Arabic words: one relying for its survival mostly on political capital revolving around categories such as nationalism, populism, radicalism and thawra (*revolution*); the other relying for its survival on kin-based relations, but above all else on financial capital, or tharwa (*wealth*).[13]

The 'wealthy' (*tharwi*) regime of the GCC Countries is excessively vulnerable and structurally dependent on the outside world. Being overwhelmingly allocative or distributive states,[14] they have lost most of their extractive powers, due to the fact that they do not need to appropriate revenue from the local population but rather disburse revenue that is directly accruing to the state from the outside world. Their ideology, blending tribalism and Islam with a concept of the welfare state, has not been as severely challenged as that of the radical, populist regimes. Apart from Saudi Arabia, it is difficult to test the real hegemonic nature of that ideology if stripped of its 'oil' lubrication. Furthermore, although the state is fairly autonomous from the prospective taxpayer due to the abundance hitherto of oil rents, it is familiarly and tribally entwined with the business-type prospective taxpayer in so many ways that the state is

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[12] Khaldoun Hasan Al- Naqeeb (1990), *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula,* London and New York and Centre for Arab Unity Studies: Routledge, p-103

[13] Ayubi (1995), *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, p. 7.

[14] The distributive state which is also termed as allocative state refers to the states relied on its allocative functions as major sources of legitimacy. Unlike in the production states, the resources are meant for consumption rather than further regeneration of capital through industrialization and economic diversification. For details see Giacomo Luciani (1990), "Allocation versus production states: A theoretical framework", in G Luciani, ed., *The Arab States,* London: Routlegde, p 65-84.

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deprived of any ability to adjust its 'generous' allocative and distributive policies in times of depression.[15]

A new echelon of officials emerged to head these governments. The military power of tribes and their raiding habits were contained. Rulers' supremacy had to be maintained, at least passively, through citizens' compliance with the governing bodies.[16] However, the rulers did not cut deeper into social frameworks. They did not destroy the common kin-structures. Several factors may account for the rulers' motives in maintaining this system. This kin-based group constituted the common nuclei of Gulf societies. The rulers themselves belonged to clans, and each of them maintained his personal loyalty to his clan and cultivated its power. Hence, uprooting other clans and tribes could have led to tremendous opposition, possibly to bloody wars and to the destruction of the very fabric of their societies. Moreover, by forming coalitions with existing clans and tribes, including political alliances and intermarriage, rulers facilitated political stability and/or extended their social-territorial control over more tribes and clans.[17]

The efforts of the ruling families extended, through the monopolization of government and wealth, to the prevention of the rise of social and political forces independent of the state, expressing the interest and ambitions of various groups of the population. Thus, they prevented the rise of political parties, proscribed the establishment of social and political movements which were not loyal to them, suppressed trade unions and similar organisations and imposed direct supervision over professional organisations, recognizing them only as public services associations. These efforts extended to the penetration of all the institutions of civil society: an iron grip was imposed upon school curricula, a suffocating censorship was imposed upon the information media and mass communications, especially upon newspapers, along with the penetration of the religious institution.[18] These 'states' are

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[15] Ayubi (1995), *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, p.448.

[16] J. Kostiner (1991), *The Making of Saudi Arabia*, London and New York: Oxford University Press, p.67

[17] J. Kostiner (2009), "Liberalization and its limits in the Gulf States", in Joshua Teitelabaum, *Political Liberalisaion in the Persian Gulf*, London: Hurst $ Company, p.28.

[18] Al- Naqeeb (1990), *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula*, p. 103.

formed around a nucleus of a ruling family that controls the political leadership and the military forces and the major ministerial portfolios. Complementing the family elite is a second elite composed of the shakily clans from other major tribes in the state. Their allegiance is secured through subsidies, intermarriages and government posts. In several states representatives form the major tribes and merchant families have been allocated seats in consultative assemblies. The semi-corporatist, semi-consociationalist aspects of such formulae should be quite recognizable.[19]

This peculiar nature of Gulf States explains why the ruling families in the Gulf have resisted consistently to the ideas of sharing authority with any other groups or social force. With the exception of Kuwait, which has a National Assembly, two-thirds of which are elected (but which is prorogued every ten years for varying periods), there are two other states which possess appointed Advisory Councils without having any legislative or supervisory prerogatives, namely Qatar since 1964 and United Arab Emirates with a United National Assembly since 1971.[20] Bahrain experimented with a concept similar to the Kuwaiti National Assembly (that is, partially elected assembly, but lasted no more than two years, from 1973 to 1975 and was buried in its infancy, without any repetition of the experiment since that time). As for Saudi Arabia, the idea of creating a Consultative Assembly was broached in the wake of an unsuccessful campaign led by Juhayman al-Utaybi in 1979.

Historical Background

Occupying four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia is the largest country on the peninsula. Located in the southwestern corner of Asia, Saudi Arabia covers an area of about 2,240,000 square kilometres of which more than half is desert. Oil is the most important industry in Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom has the world's largest proven reserves and is the largest producer in OPEC, totalling one-third of output. Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by the Al Saud family. The Al Saud dynasty dates back to the mid-18th century with Mohammed bin Saud, who was the ruler of Diriyah in central Arabia. The late King Abdul'Aziz Al Saud founded the modern

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[19] E. R Peterson (1997), "Tribal Components in the Development of Modern States", *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 31, No.3, pp. 306-7.

[20] Husay M. Al- Baharna (1975), *The Arabian Gulf States: their Legal and Political Status and their International Problems,* Beirut: Libraririe du Liban, p.78

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Saudi state on 23 September 1932. The written constitution and bill of rights were introduced during the 1982-2005 reign of King Fahd bin Abdul'Aziz Al Saud. Since August 2005, Saudi Arabia has been ruled by King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud.[21]

The pattern of *Saudi* rule from the eighteenth century to the oil exports in 1948, did not change greatly. It rested throughout on the Al Su'ud managing such territory as they controlled through alliance with religious leaders and cooperation with tribal leaders. Religion is used in Saudi Arabia as a main tool for social control and political legitimization through institutions like the *shar'i* (religious) courts, the Organisation for the Enforcement of Good and the prevention of Evil (established in 1929), and the moral police *(mutawwi)* system.[22] The political system is quite centralized, with the influential members of the Royal Family, and to a lesser extent the Council of Ministers, being the main policy-making force. A decree signed by 'Abd al- Aziz shortly before his death brought a Council of Ministers into being in 1953, and a full range of ministries was created in the course of that decade.[23] The composition of the Council of Ministers formed by King Faisal in November 1962 was largely unchanged when he died (July 1975). The gradual transformation of the Saudi Arabian state was thus, closely associated with Faisal. This stage in the transformation of the Saudi Arabian state, however, effectively continued beyond his death, the dynamics of the Saudi state remained much as before. Decision- making became more collegial (among the senior members of the Al Sa'ud) when Khalid bin 'Abd al- Aziz acceded to the throne in July 1975, but the problems facing the country and the manner in which the government dealt with them initially underwent little change. Over the period between 1962 and 1979 the Saudi Arabian state underwent an important transformation. The threat to the political survival of the Al Su'ud, the steadily rising oil revenues, had created conditions in which the state's political leadership could set the agenda for the country's development. Administrative reforms and developments reinforced and enhanced the power of the state. The central

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[21] Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (2005), *GCC Countries profile*, http://www .sheikhmohammed.co.ae/vgn-ext templating/v/index.

[22] James P. Piscatori (1980), *Dismantling the Stats: the Theory and Practice of Privatization,* Dallas, TX: National Center for Policy Analysis, p.92

[23] Timothy Niblock (2006), *Saudi Arabia: power, legitimacy and survival,* London: Ruotledge, p.38

government administration grew, both in the number of personnel and in the institutional divisions. The Ministry of Information (formerly the General Directorate of Broadcasting. Printing and Publishing) was established in 1973; the Ministry of Justice in 1970 and Ministries of Higher Education, Municipal and Rural Affairs, Planning (formerly the Central Planning Office), Public Works and Housing, Commerce (formerly part of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry), Industry and Electricity, and Posts, Telegraphs and Telecommunications in 1975.[24]

The country has no written constitution or legal political parties, and though there have been recurring promises for a *majlis shura* (consultative council) since the early 1960s, no such council has been created until 1993. Local administration was reorganized by royal decree in 1963, giving more authority at local levels to government officials and reducing the scope of responsibility of tribal sheikhs.[25] The key element in the 1963 decree, however, was not put into practice until some three decades later: the creation of provincial councils carrying significant responsibilities over their local affairs.[26] Legal reform phased out some outmoded aspects of social practice and established a more unified system of law. In November 1962 slavery was abolished (there had up to this point, been some 30,000 slaves in the kingdom). Labour legislation was introduced in 1969, revising and improving working regulations and establishing a system of arbitration committees.[27] The establishment of the Ministry of Justice in 1970 brought all courts in the country under a single administrative system, and the Supreme Judicial Council (created in 1975) was made responsible for reconciling modern legislative requirements with the made responsible for reconciling modern legislative requirements with the *Shari'ah* law.[28]

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[24] Othman Al- Rawaf (1980), *The Concept of Five Crises in Political Development: Relevance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, New York: Duke University, pp.420

[25] Khashoggi, Hani (1979), *Local Administration in Saudi Arabia.* Ph.D dissertation, Claremint Graduate School, p.93.

[26] Othman Al- Rawaf (1980), *The Concept of Five Crises in Political Development: Relevance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, pp.426-468

[27] David Holden and Richard Johns (1981), *Saudi Arabia and Its Royal Family*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, p.258.

[28] Niblock (2006), *Saudi Arabia: power, legitimacy and survival*, p.49.

The oil boom and the benefits that almost every Saudi derived from it was indeed a pacifying factor.[29] The emergence of a new middle class reinforced the mood of political quiescence. This new middle class as constituting the social basis for political change: an educated and technically- proficient grouping would demand the right to participate in political decision- making and would become increasingly restive at the restrictions which traditionalist authority imposed. Yet, the political experience suggests the opposite. Dependence on the state for employment discouraged political activity. When state employees sought to raise political or social demands, and and to pursue them outside of the framework of their public sector employment, they could be (and were) dismissed from their positions. Public sector employment, then, constituted an instrument through which potential opposition could be countered.[30]

Unlike Saudi Arabia, which is based on the Wahabi ideology, the Shaikhdom of *Kuwait*, a small state located in the North- eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula was artificially created with boundary vis-à-vis Iraq on the North. Bordered by Saudi Arabia on the south, southwest, it fronts the Arabian Gulf to the east. Kuwait is a geographically small (17,818 square kilometres) but wealthy country with a relatively open economy and self-reported crude oil reserves of nearly 105 billion barrels--about 9 percent of world reserves. Crude oil and refined products account for most of the country's exports. Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy governed by the Al Sabah family, the ruling family since 1756. The constitution, which was approved on 11 November 1962, authorizes the Al Sabah family council to select the emir, traditionally from the Al Sabah line. Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah is the current Emir of Kuwait.[31]

Sheikh Ahmed al-Jabir Al Sabah ruled Kuwait from 1921 until his death in 1950, a period in which oil was discovered and in which the government attempted to establish the first internationally recognized boundaries; On June 19, 1961, Kuwait became fully independent following an exchange of notes with the United Kingdom.

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[29] Ayubi (1995), *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, p. 232.

[30] Niblock (2006), *Saudi Arabia: power, legitimacy and survival*, p. 56.

[31] *GCC Countries*, Accessed on 28 Feb, 2011, http://www.sheikhmohammed.co.ae/vgn-ext templating/v/index

Kuwait is a constitutional, hereditary emirate ruled by princes (Amirs) who have been drawn from the Al Sabah family since the middle of the 18th century. The 1962 constitution provides for an elected National Assembly and details the powers of the branches of government and the rights of citizens. Since the Iraqi invasion of 1990, the consensus in favor of *Kuwait's* pro-democratic institutions has deepened. This consensus has historical roots. The first effort to constrain the aim's power came in an appointed Consultative Council in 1921. The first sustained effort to formalize and institutionalize the historical constraints of merchants and other elites on the power of the ruling family occurred during the rule of Amir Ahmad in an uprising called the Majlis Movement in 1938. A recently signed oil concession agreement with the Kuwait Oil Company offered brighter economic prospects but also the fear that this new income would be monopolized by the ruling family. These concerns prompted a group of leading merchants to petition the ruler for a series of reforms and then to hold elections for a Legislative Assembly to implement them. This assembly ruled for half a year until finally closed down by the ruler and tribal backers. [32]

The short- lived assembly had an important legacy. Its popularity gave the idea of formal representation a privileged place in Kuwaiti popular history. The fact that the assembly was an indigenous, not colonial, creation (indeed, Britain opposed the assembly) gave the body legitimacy that the essentially colonial interwar parliamentary institutions of other states (Egypt, Iraq, Syria) lacked. In Kuwait, the Majlis Movement unified the pro-democratic and nationalist strands of thought, elsewhere sundered by colonialism. Abdallah Salim al-Sabah (1950-1965), oversaw Kuwait's transformation into a wealthy oil-producing state and also established the National Assembly that exists today. He played a foundational role in institutionalizing the participatory nature of Kuwait politics.

In dealing with the new oil revenues that expanded rapidly after World War II, Abdallah Salimal-Sabah made two critical decisions. The first was to distribute these revenues broadly throughout the population by expanding state employment and dramatically increasing expenditures on social services, notably in education and

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[32] Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble and Paul Noble (1995), "Introduction: Theoretical Perspectives on Arab Liberalisation and Democratisation" in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Nobel (eds.) *Political Liberalisation and Democratisation in the Arab World,* Vol. II, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, pp.101-102

health care. The second was to introduce a greater degree of political participation to Kuwait in the form of a National Assembly.[33] The latter was partly in response to domestic pressure and partly to external pressure. Following World War II, merchants and progressive elements of the intelligentsia revived the pro-democracy impulse. In response, in the 1950s the Amir allowed elections to key government committees administering some of the new social services such as health and education, as well as to the department committee on religious endowments and to the Kuwait Municipality. Throughout the 1950s, the opposition put forward petitions and circulated pamphlets for a broader, elected National Assembly. In 1961, following independence and with an Iraqi territorial threat looming, the Amir responded to these demands, announcing that he would introduce a constitution and hold elections for a National Assembly.

Accordingly, four elections for the National Assembly in 1963, 1967, 1971 and 1975 were held before being suspended in 1976. The assembly reopened following elections in 1981. Elections were again held in 1985, but then the body was dissolved in July 1986. When in session, the assembly played an important role in mobilizing and articulating opposition to Kuwait's rulers. Its power was always limited. After the assembly was suspended in 1986, a cross-section of opposition leaders, including old parliamentarians, Islamists, merchants, and members of the intelligentsia, came together to form the Constitutionalist Movement of 1989-1990, a pro-democracy movement calling for the restoration of the assembly and the constitution.[34] In an effort to evade a state ban on public gatherings, in December 1989 a group of former assembly members began holding regular Monday night *diwaniyyas* (men's social gatherings)[35] with an explicitly political agenda. Another round of elections was held in June 1990 after negotiations with the opposition group and partly in response to the pro-democracy street rallies in December 1989 and January 1990. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq took place in August 1990 and lasted

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[33] Abdallah Al-Shayeji (1988), *Democratization in Kuwait: The National Assembly as a Strategy for Survival*, Austin: University of Texas, p. 54.

[34] Jill Crystal (1990), *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State*, Boulder: Westview, p.77.

[35] *Diwaniya* is a place separate from the main house that is usually used by men for socializing. The general atmosphere of the diwaniya is like that of social clubs, cultural and literary forums and political salons. In other words, diwaniya has become one of the institutions of the civilized society that plays a prominent role in democratic and parliamentary life.

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until February 1991. Since the Iraqi invasion of 1990, the consensus in favor of Kuwait's pro-democratic institutions has deepened. Specially, the opposition became more critical of the royal family because the way emir of Kuwait had fled the country without any show of defiance, their poor management of the crisis, and their excessive reliance on Western might.[36]

Long before they joined the UAE as a state, the seven federation members were under the influence of three major foreign powers: the Portuguese, the Ottomans and the British. The seven Emirates, prior to their independence and federation, had undergone a long history of British occupation dating back to 1820.[37] It was only after the 1820 agreements that the British began referring to the area as the Trucial Coast, a name that was still in use in 1971.[38] On 2 December 1971, the UAE was declared independent following three years of extensive negotiations among the nine Emirates of the Gulf: the seven Trucial shaykhdoms, along with Qatar and Bahrain. As the latter two opted for separate independence, a federation of the remaining seven was declared after considerable discussions.[39] First meeting of the Supreme Council of the federation of the UAE was then convened. During the meeting, Shaykh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, ruler of Abu Dhabi, was elected president. Equally important, the Supreme Council declared that a provisional constitution would be drafted without delay.[40] The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is at an exciting crossroads in its short development. Thirty years since its establishment as a federation, its leaders have spent considerable energy to foster a unified and stable political system, support

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[36] Ayubi (1995), *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, p. 429.

[37] Ali Mohammed Khalifa (1979), *The United Arab Emirates: Unity in Fragmentation*, London: Coroom Helm, p.9.

[38] Joseph A. Kechichian (1999), "Socio-Political Origins of Emirati Leaders", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 6, No 4.

[39] Ras al- Khaimah did not join the union until 10 February 1972. There were several reasons for Ras al- Khaimah's early decision, including Iran's occupation of the Tunb islands, the question of representation within the federal National Council, as well as the role played by Saudi Arabia. A few months after the UAE was created, Shaykh Saqr Al Qasimi was persuaded by his own subjects to join the nascent federal entity. See Frauke Heard-Bye (1997), *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates: A Society in Transition*, 2nd edition, London: Longman, 1996; and Fatma Al- Sayegh, *Al-Imarat al- Muttahidat: Min al- Qabilat ila-dawlat*, The United Emirates: From Tribalism to Statehood], Dubai: Markaz al- Khalij lil-Kutub.

[40] Ibrahim Al- Abed, Paula Vine, and Abdullah Al Jabali (eds.) (1996), *Chronicale of Progress, 25 Years of Development in the United Arab Emirates*, London: Trident Press for the Ministry of Information, p.14.

traditional yet modernizing social and economic structures- capable of adapting to fast changes with a diversified economy that is less dependent on fluctuating oil prices.[41]

In the UAE, no important political changes were to follow from the Gulf War. The country continues to have an advisory federal assembly (set up first in 1972) with forty members proportionately selected by the rulers of the various emirates, and political change continues to be to a large extent a function of balancing acts between the various emirates and the various key personalities. Abu Dhabi also has its own fifty-members consultative council based on a largely tribal membership.[42] Each Emirate has its own leadership, and all seven leaders sit on the Federal Supreme Council (FSC), which officially meets four times per years to establish general policy guidelines.[43] According to the Constitution, the FSC is the highest, legislative, executive, and constitutional authority of the UAE. Its presidency always rests with Abu Dhabi, given its vice presidency rests with Dubai, given its secondary role in federal contributions.[44] Based on their relative power, the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai have veto power on FSC decisions. Significantly, while the constitution calls for an FSC presidential election every five years, there has only been one such formal occasion, following the end of Shaykh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nuhayan's thirty-three-year presidency in late 2004. President appoints the prime minister and cabinet. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayid Al Nahyan, Emir of Abu Dhabi, has held this position since November 2004. He succeeded his late father, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who had been president since independence in December 1971. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktum, Emir of Dubai, has held the positions of Vice-President and Prime Minister since January 2006, and that of Minister of Defence since 1971. The

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[41] Joseph A. Kechichian (ed.) (2001), *Iran, Iraq and the Arab Gulf States*, United States of America: Palgrave, 2001, p. 162.

[42] Peterson (1997), "Tribal Components in the Development of Modern States", pp. 91-102.

[43] The leaders of the seven emirates nonetheless consult frequently with each other's.

[44] Abu Dhabi contributes about 70 percent of the federal budget, with Dubai contributing only about 15 per cent, the remainder coming from various federal parastatals such as Etisalat. Personal interviews, Abu Dhabi, March 2007.

Council of Ministers is appointed by the President and headed by the Prime minister. It can draft decrees and laws but cannot approve them.[45]

Qatar occupies a peninsula, which extends northward for about 180 kilometres into the Arabian Gulf from the Arabian Peninsula. The country is bordered to the south by Saudi Arabia for a stretch of 56 kilometres. The total area of Qatar is 11,437 square kilometres. The State of Qatar produces less than 1 percent of the world's oil output. Crude oil and liquefied natural gas account for about 80 percent of the country's exports. Islam is the State's religion and the Islamic Shariah is the main source of its legislations. People of Qatar are part of the Arab nation (ummah).[46] Qatar has a small population (about), and almost all have tribal roots. Most belong to the same tribal lineage and have coexisted for many years, forging social bonds and intermarrying, creating clans such as the al-Qubaisi, al-Hawajir, al-Qawari and al-Mani, which are interrelated and coexist peacefully.[47] A traditional monarchy, the State of Qatar is ruled by the Al Thani family and by the male successors of Hamad bin Khalifa bin Hamad bin Abdullah bin Jassim. The inheritance of the Rule shall go to the son to be named by the Emir as Heir Apparent.[48]

The Al Thani family arrived in Qatar in the early part of the 18th century, originally settling in the northern region of the country, and moving to Doha (Capital of Qatar) in the mid-19th century. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani has been emir since early 1995. Qatar is an unlikely candidate for political change. Nevertheless, following the 1995 succession by Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the emirate has embarked on a number of sweeping changes.[49] Assuming that Shaykh Hamad's policies indicate democratization, or at least the appearance of democratization, it

[45] Sheikh Khalifa approved a new cabinet in February 2006. The top ministers – Defence, Interior, Finance, Economy and Energy – retained their posts and eight new ministers were introduced to the 21-member cabinet. Two women have been appointed to the cabinet: Shaykha Lubna al-Qassimi, Minister of Economy and Planning, and Mariam al-Roumy, Minister of Social Affairs.

[46] *Constitution of Qatar*, Article 1, Accessed on 23 February 2011, http://www.albab.com/arab/docs/ qatar/ constitution2003.htm,

[47] Interview with H.E. Saad Muhammad al-Qubaisi, ambassador of Qatar to the United States, Washington, DC, November 23, 1998 cited in Louay Bahry (Jun 1, 1999), "Elections in Qatar: A Window of Democracy Opens in the Gulf", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 6, No. 4.

[48] *Constitution of Qatar, Article 8*. Accessed on 23 February 2011.

[49] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Steven Wright (2007), "Political change in the Arab oil monarchies: from liberalization to enfranchisement", *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5, p. 921.

seems that he has accepted a broader definition of democracy, measured by the existence of free and equal political participation and representation; fair; honest and periodic elections; and freedom of expression and association.[50]

Located in the Arabian Gulf, *Bahrain* (from the Arabic word for "two seas"), an archipelago of thirty-three islands are about twenty-four kilometres from the east coast of Saudi Arabia and twenty-eight kilometres from Qatar with a territory of 717 square kilometers. Bahrain was the first Gulf state to discover oil in June 1932 but Bahrain's oil reserves are quite small. To decrease its reliance on oil revenues, the government has attempted to diversify its economy towards banking, tourism and services.[51] It is an independent state with a traditional monarchy. In Bahrain, which had a brief experience with an elected assembly between 1973 and 1975, many liberals were disappointed when it was announced in December 1992 that a promised new consultative council would be exclusively appointed by the Amir.

Bahrainis formed trade unions in the 1920s and 1930s, when the shaikhdom was under British colonial rule, and enjoyed a brief parliamentary experiment between 1972 and 1975.[52] Bahrain's previous experiment with parliament foundered not on the sectarian issue but because the ruling family grew exasperated at the legislature's refusal to agree to a restrictive law on public security. On 14 February 2002, a new constitution was announced and Bahrain declared itself a kingdom. The ruling family of Bahrain, the Al Khalifa, arrived in the islands in the mid-18th century after they first established a settlement in the peninsula of present-day Qatar. Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa is the King, and has ruled Bahrain since 6 March 1999. Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa is the prime minister. In February 2001, proposals for political reform put forward by the ruling family received almost unanimous support in a national referendum. The proposals are due to come into effect in 2004, and will mean that Bahrain becomes a constitutional monarchy with an

[50] Samuel P. Huntington (1991), *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, pp 5-10.

[51] Aljazeera (18 Feb 2011), *Country profile: Bahrain*, Accessed on 12 March 2011, http://english. aljazeera.net/news/2011/02/201121672113476490.html

[52] Fuad I. Khuri (1980), *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. also in Talal Toufic Farah (1985), *Protection and Politics in Bahrain: 1869-1915*, Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut.

elected lower chamber of parliament and an independent judiciary. Known as one of the most socially liberal states in the Gulf, the small island nation of Bahrain has faced political unrest in recent years.

Oman is a sparsely populated country, but within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) it ranks second, behind Saudi Arabia, in extent of territory. The majority of Omanis are members of the Ibadhi sect of Islam[53]. The key formative event for Omanis was the coup of July 23, 1970, in which Sultan Qabuis bin Sa'id replaced his father, Sa'id bin Taymur (1932-1970). From the first days of his rule, Sultan Qabus bin Sa'ld sought to establish a new image of the monarchy. The first modest effort to broaden consultation was the short-lived Council on Agriculture, Fisheries and Industry, which was established in April 1979.[54] The express purpose of this appointed 12-member Council was to "discuss the economic future of the nation and to get citizens to participate "in the process of promoting growth.[55] Meetings were held monthly. Oman's State Consultative Council [SCC] (al-majlis al-istishari lil-dawla), created in November 1981, provides a singular opportunity to discern how a late 20th century Islamic monarchy, one that has undergone especially rapid economic and social change since 1970, has sought to maintain popular legitimacy.[56] The establishment of majlis al-shura in 1991 was itself an evolutionary move, in that the new majlis, with its indirect elections in which the Sultan had the power of appointment over the three candidates elected for his consideration in each constituency, replaced the State Consultative Council, a wholly appointed body.[57]

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[53] Abdullah Juma Al-Haj (1996), "The Politics of Participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council States: The Omani Consultative Council," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 4, p. 560.

[54] Established by decree79/19, April 12, 1979, published in the Official Bulletin, May 1, 1979, pp. 81-83. It was dissolved by decree 81/84, October 18, 1981, which also created the SCC, (Ruwi: World Press, 1981)].

[55] ibid, p. 81.

[56] Dale F. Eickelman (1984), "Kings and People: Oman's State Consultative Council", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Winter, 1984), pp. 52.

[57] Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout (2005), "Democratic Development in Oman", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 3, p.385.

Rentier Economy

GCC States did not depend on domestic productive base for revenues due to the 'rentier' nature of the national economy.[58] A rentier state is a state that gains most of its revenues from natural resources ("rent")- in the case of the Gulf States, oil. Instead, the primary economic function of the state was allocation and distribution of revenues accruing from oil exports. This can theoretically make the state autonomous over a long period of time, since such a state does not need to rely on society for revenue, usually in the form of taxation.

As a result, the ruling elites enjoyed, and still continues to enjoy considerable freedom in choosing its allies and changing their political allegiance through a policy of co-option, which operates principally along kinship, tribal and ethnic lines. It is through this practice of 'inclusionary corporatism'[59] that the Gulf rulers have managed to win over potential opponents and neutralize popular discontent. Since the discovery of oil, particularly the rise in oil process after 1973, the Arab Gulf states have adopted policies leading to the creation of welfare states, in which citizens rely completely on the state and the services it provides in all fields. The objective was to reinforce the degree of legitimacy of political regimes and to gain the allegiance of citizens so as to achieve political stability and continuity of governance. Much of the administrative structure of the Gulf States, however, originally grew from the imperative to expend, rather than extract, wealth. Hence, they turned into 'backshish states'.[60]

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[58] The concept of 'rentier state' was first suggested with reference to Iran by Mahdavi. He considers the oil revenue and external proceeds as 'rent' derived from leasing lands to oil companies. Beblawi later refined the term to mean a state in which large amounts of rent accrue directly to the government from 'foreign actors' and creation of wealth is concentrated in a small fraction of the society, since the rest is only engaged in distribution and utilization of this wealth. See H. Beblawi (1990), "The Rentier State in the Arab World", in Luciani, *the Arab State*, London : Rutledge, p. 39.

[59] This refers to a method of ensuring the domination of the state over society and economy by controlling corporate social forces such as the tribal corps (the Shaikhs), the merchant families, leaders of religious sects (i.e., Ibadites, Shias or Zaidis) and religious movements.

[60] Bahgat Korany(1994), 'Arab Democratisation: A Poor Cousin', *Political Science and Politics*, vol. 27, no. 3, September, p.511.

Rentier theory has come in for its fair share of criticism. The "rentier" mode of production is directly responsible for perpetuating authoritarian governance.[61] Taxation, especially modern direct taxation of the individual citizens, is not simply reflective of the extractive capacity of the state; it involves public demand for accountability from, and representation in, the government.[62] 'No taxation without representation' was a political demand; but 'no representation without taxation' is a political reality in the Gulf State.[63] John Waterbury argues that taxation in the West Asia has traditionally produced revolts, not representation.[64] Oil revenues accrue to the State: they therefore increase the power of the State bureaucracy and, because they reduce or eliminate the need for taxation, they also reduce the need for the government to seek the acquiescence of its subjects to taxation. The lower the level of taxation, the less reason for publics to demand representation. Accordingly, little taxation in the Arab Gulf accounts for little representation. But, recently in the case of Kuwait and Bahrain opposition has been effective, and had led to more representation.[65]

Before the discovery of oil, ruling coalition between the ruler or shaikh and the trading families dominated these countries. These merchants constituted the link connecting the monarch to the money he needed. Their political power grew from their economic strength. The merchants generated a well organized and articulate political opposition, which produced the first –although short, lived parliamentary experience in Kuwait in 1938, before spillover to the neighborhood countries.[66] However, the transition to oil gave the rulers the financial leverage to modify this tacit arrangement between them and the trading families: in exchange for receiving a

[61] UN (2005), *Arab Human Development Report 2004: Towards Freedom in the Arab World*, New York: United Nations, pp. 151-53.

[62] Aswini K. Mohapatra (2008), "Democratization in the Arab World: Relevance of the Turkish Model," *International Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 4, p. 287.

[63] Hungtington (1991), *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century*, p. 65.

[64] John Waterbury (1994), "Democracy without Democrats?" The Potential for Political Liberalization in the Middle East," in Ghassan Salame (ed.), *Democracy without Democrats: The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, London: I.B. Tauris, p.98.

[65] Joshua Teitelbaum (ed.) (2009), *Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf*, Hurst & Company: London, p. 14.

[66] Rosemarie Said Zahlan (1978), *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates: A Political and Social History of the trucial states*, London: Mac Millen, p.87.

sizable portion of oil revenues, the latter renounced their historical claim to participate in decision-making. As a result, after oil, emerged what Jill Crystal termed it as a "rentier social contract"[67] that achieved political quiescence through distributions of oil and gas revenues among the population. The withdrawal from formal political life of historically influential economic elites, therefore affected negatively the independent power of social groups weakening the links between state and society.[68]

In order to maintain control over the state, the rulers turned increasingly to the ruling family, whose political functions have steadily grown.[69] This way, ruling Gulf families progressively and successfully seized control of the unitary state when oil made its construction possible.[70] However, the rentier social contract began to fissure in the 1990s. Many reasons have been put forward to explain the steadily disintegration of the social rentier pact during the 1990s: the increasing unemployment, drop of oil prices, the considerable economic burden that the Gulf War has placed on the oil-rich monarchies, all of these contributed in varying degrees to a new spirit of political activism represented civil society groups across the region.

The more recent impositions of structural adjustment regimens on varied Arab states quickened trends that were set in motion in 1973, the year the oil revenues started to rise. More specifically, structural adjustment and economic reforms have had a differential impact on varied social classes and sectors of Arab societies increasing social inequality while generating volatile political dynamics. Contrary to the assumptions of many liberal theorists, therefore, economic liberalization is undercutting the prospects of political democratization.[71] The success or failure of

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[67] "Rentier social contract" in which "the state provides goods and services to society, while society provides state officials with a degree of autonomy in decision-making.

[68] Beblawi (1990), "The Rentier State in the Arab World", in Luciani, *the Arab State,* p. 41.

[69] As noted by Jill Crystal, Rulers chose their family, a group with a vested interest in monarchical rule, not only because it offered the most reliable set of allies, but also because it formed a ready-made protoinstitution– an institution in the making, a group with structured relationships and rudimentary organization. Jill Crystal, Kuwait: *The Transformation of an Oil State*, p.12

[70] Michael Herb (1999), *All in the Family, Absolutism, Evolution and Democratic Prospects in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, Albany : State University of New York Press, p.2.

[71] Samih K. Farsoun and Christina Zacharia (1995), "Class, Economic Change, and Political in the Arab World," in Brynen, Korany, Noble (eds), *Political Liberalisation and Democratisation in the Arab World,* p. 261.

political liberalization depends on the resolution of the conflict between the Arab elites promoting free market economies, their regimes, and the authoritarian states they control, and subaltern and other social groups seeking democratic alternatives to, or nationalists and Islamists resisting, privatization free markets, client regimes, authoritarian states, and external intervention.[72] A privatized free market economy under a regime of structural adjustment, integrated into the global market system, and undergirded by external political intervention is shaping the contemporary political dynamics of the Arab world.[73]

The challenge before the state in GCC thus is to negotiate a new social contract with its people on the recognition of the premise that political opening and accommodation compensates a cut in subsidies and state welfare support. In a sense it is a trade off between the social expenditure and political participation. State in GCC over the year has become 'over-developed' in terms of the beaurocratic structure enjoying near monopoly control over the resources and their allocation. Oil wealth provided it with enormous financial power to break the prevailing social contract and devise and implement the new ones unilaterally. It even used the power to reduce the societal autonomy and destroy some social forces while creating and co-opting others. GCC States have thus emerged as a highly centralized society where the terms of exchange-economic, political and cultural-are determined by the state.[74]

In the course of the last two decades, the regimes of the Arab Gulf states slowly but persistently reordered their economic priorities away from state-controlled national development towards private capital. During that period several important social developments took place in the Arab Gulf in general: the decline, or perhaps near elimination, of surplus rural labor to urban conglomerations and oil-exporting countries; the transformation of rural social relations toward wage labor; the marginalization of Arab women from agricultural production; and the

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[72] Foreign policy stands are also important for the opposition. Arab states' foreign policies are part of the mix of issue in the struggle between regimes and the opposition.

[73] Samih K. Farsoun (1988), "Class Structure and Social Change in the Arab World: 1995," in Sharabi, Husham ed. (1988), *The Next Arab Decade: Alternative Futures,* Boulder: Westview Press, pp. 221-238; also (1988), "Oil, State and Social Structure in the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 162.

[74] Girijesh Pant (1994), *Demography, Democracy & Economic Reforms,* Delhi: Naman Publication, p.2

proletarianization of the young, poor, and unskilled migrant. Of great significance to Arab social structure in oil-poor Arab states is the reproduction and expansion of the petty commodity producers and distributors. As significant as the expansion of petty commodity producers and distributors does the rise of new Arab bourgeoisie comprise contractors, middlemen, brokers, agents of foreign corporations, and wheeler-dealers. In oil-rich countries this class is, however composed of members of the ruling dynasties, their relatives, associates, advisors, and agents.[75]

Associated with these structural changes are several other noteworthy social features. The first is that transformation of interlocked capitalist and pre-capitalist forms of production, labor processes, and distribution has not brought about an irrevocable rupture of the social relations, ideology, and culture associated with the previous order. To the contrary, they helped reproduce those traditional social relations of economic activity, social values, kinship, and religious and political behavior. Second, the structural changes resulted in differentiated and fragmented class structures and heterogeneous social forms of organizing, social view, and action. "Less energized by nationalist issues than the previous generation, this fragmented urban mass is also less likely to engage in class organization. It is more likely to engage in social and political action based on kinship or on neighborhood, street, ethnic, sectarian, or religious organization."[76]

Third, these structural developments continue to take place at an important social conjuncture: a growing numbers of youth are coming of age for employment. Demography has been an important determining factor in the political economy of GCC. It acquires critical proportions in the 1990s, in view of the limited capacity of the productive sector of the economy to generate employment for a workforce and the inability of the state to expand the service sector, which has been the mainstay of employment so far. Furthermore, the fiscal crisis faced by the West Asian states, was eroded their capacity to continue with the regime of high subsidies, thus enhancing their vulnerability to popular protest. In addition to size, it is the character of the

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[75] Samih K. Farsoun and Christina Zacharia (1995), "Class, Economic Change, and Political in the Arab World," in Brynen, Korany, Noble (eds), *Political Liberalisation and Democratisation in the Arab World,* p. 273.

[76] Samih K. Farsoun (1998), "Oil, State and Social Structure in the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 10, No. 2, p. A3.

swelling human stock, young in age, deprived of any meaningful participation in the nation building process that makes the demography a factor to reckon with. It is ironic that the economy grows without its contribution, and the polity does not allow it to exercise preferences and the social rigidities inhibit to interact with modernization process. No wonder, the behavioral pattern of such a human stock is conditioned and guided more by impulses than reason and their governance is becoming difficult for the regimes.[77]

The pressure of demography is recognized by the ruling regimes but not comprehended in its totality. So the remedial measures undertaken are spatial in nature: to enlarge the habitat, to clear the urban ghettos and to build new cities. The nature of economic reforms based on the market and the limited opening of the polity underline the narrow perspective of efforts initiated by the ruling regimes to come to terms with emerging demographic realities. Yet, the consequences are going to be wide ranging because "markets are as much as political and cultural institutions as they are economic." Once initiated even if in a limited way reforms would impinge upon the political institutions and processes. It is not possible to carry on with the economic liberalization by freezing political processes.[78]

Finally, during the last two decades, the Arab world experienced a period of rising standards of living, of consumerism, and of social mobility for some segments of the population even though large sectors did not benefit. As a consequence, the political culture of the region transformed dramatically: from an ideology of national liberation and economic and social development to one of possessive individualism, cynicism, and personal enrichment, and from secular Arab nationalism to Islamic fundamentalism.[79]

A process of rapid social polarization developed not only between states of the region, oil exporting versus labor exporting, but also within each country as well.[80] In

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[77] Pant (1994), *Demography, Democracy & Economic Reforms*, p.2

[78] Ibid, p.2.

[79] Samih K. Farsoun and Christina Zacharia (1995), "Class, Economic Change, and Political in the Arab World," in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, Paul Noble (ed), *Political Liberalisation and Democratisation in the Arab World*, p. 274.

[80] Saad Eddin Ibrahim (1982), *The New Arab Social Order*, Boulder: Westview Press, p.67.

addition to the *nouveaux riches,* export-oriented industrialists, commercial agriculturalists, merchants, agents, managers, professionals, lawyers, researchers, public relations specialists, technicians, and even skilled workers tied to multinational corporations and banks became increasingly affluent. This social polarization means, among other things, an increased income gap between those few affluent sectors of the population and the vast majority, and hence increasing inequalities among the social classes. Such structured and deepening social inequalities are not conducive to building a national consensus to sustain elite-instituted economic and political liberalization. To the contrary, these socially divisive and fragmenting processes seem likely to undermine the social basis of regime legitimacy in the Arab world.[81] Ruling elites from above imposes economic and political liberalization, while the repressive state agencies that heretofore remain intact in the new electoral regimes and are used to suppress all opposition. Thus, the externally conditioned democracy of the elites and the free marketeers is both suspect and illegitimate in the yes of the disadvantaged and prone to challenge from below.[82] The upshot of all these developments suggests that the citizens of the Gulf states, with their continuing high expectations, will be hurt economically on three fronts: (i) as a result of the decline on public expenditure, in particular on the infrastructure, subsidies and concessionary credits; (ii) as a result of possible growing levels of taxation; and (iii) as a result of a reduction in the availability of cheap expatriate labour.[83]

Civil Society-State Relations

Structurally civil Society[84], refers to a myriad of voluntary social, political religious groups and institutions that are not part of state, occupies an intermediary space between state and society at large, civil society plays an important role in

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[81] Brynen, Korany, Noble (1995), *Political Liberalization and Democracy in the Arab World,* p-275.

[82] ibid, p. 277

[83] Ayubi (1995), *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East,* p-240.

[84] The term civil society to refer to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. See in World Bank (2010), *Defining Civil Society,* Accessed on 12 November 2010 at http://go.worldbank.org /4CE7W046K0

restricting the state encouragement and facilitating positive political change.[85] But the civil society approach has its limitations in GCC States. First, it is difficult to assert that civil society actually existed in GCC States, and in many cases the strongest "civil society" organisations were actually Islamic ones, which seemed committed to democracy and liberalization not as a value, but simply as the best way to seize power:[86] Secondly, scholars have also begin to question the efficacy of the theory. It could actually undermine democracy, particularly if surrounded by failed or illegitimate institutions. Contrary to popular opinion, "a vibrant and robust civil society is not a requirement or precondition for a successful democracy."[87] And the opposite could also be true: Rex Brynen notes that Romania was a country without civil society, but which did develop into a democratic country.[88]

Arab Gulf society is being afflicted by "neopatriarch," whereby modernization has been harnessed to strengthen rather than change traditional patriachical society. This kind of society is dominated by a patriarch, who is the center around which the nation as well as the family is organized. There exists only a vertical relationship between the ruler and the ruled, the father and the child, and the paternal will is the absolute will. Thus in social practice ordinary citizens are not only arbitrarily deprived of some of their basic rights, but are the virtual prisoners of the state, the objects of its capricious and ever-present violence, much as citizens were under the classical or Ottoman sultanate. The neopatriarchical state is no more than a modernized version of the traditional patriarchical sultanate.[89] As for civil society where one would hope to find shelter from the state or from family, clan or religious sect, authority and violence too similarly affect this. Thus, whatever the outward (modern) forms- material, legal, aesthetic-of the contemporary neopatriarchical

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[85] Omar Encarnacion (2003), "Beyond Civil Society: Promoting Democracy after September 11," *Orbit*, Vol. 47, No. 4, p 128.

[86] Sheri Berman (2003), "Islamism, Revolution, and Civil Society," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1, No.2, pp 21.

[87] Encarnacion (2003), "Beyond Civil Society: Promoting Democracy after September 11", p. 706

[88] Rex Brynen (May 17, 2005), "Democratic Dominoes?," lecture and presentation delivered at the Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University, Accessed on 12 June 2010, www.dayan.org/commentary/dominoes-brynen.pdf.

[89] Hisham Sharabi (1988), *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, New York: Oxford University Press, p.7.

family and society, their internal structures remain rooted in the patriarchical values and social relations of kinship, clan, and religious and ethnic groups.[90]

Bernard Lewis notes that since Islam is not just a religion but a civilization, adopting extra-civilizational world-views is more difficult, particularly with respect to political theory, where Islam has a long and venerated tradition. This tradition is not necessarily incompatible with liberal democracy, as it contains within it liberal ideas, such as disapproval of arbitrary rule and an emphasis on dignity and humility.[91] In practice, however, Muslim leaders often do not adhere to these ideas, which is, of course, the reason for their formulation by Islamic jurists. Islam is interpenetrated by cult and power, religion and the state. In some parts of the Arab world, democracy simply doesn't exist— because, in the eyes of Islamic radicalism, it is incompatible with Islam. This is clear and unambiguous. Saudi Arabia's constitution is the Koran. Elsewhere in the Arab world, democracy is indeed in the constitution. In such cases, things are much less clear and very ambiguous. There is a huge gap between theory and practice. In virtually all Arab States, democracy in practice is no more than a theatrical production.[92]

The Arab countries lack certain dispositional prerequisites for democracy, including the notion that society itself is the source of state authority, and the concept of majority rule. In Western style democracies, legitimacy stems from the people, while in Islam it stems from God. Agreed with Huntington's general observation on culture, Garfinkle concludes that, like other societies, Arab societies can change as well.[93] Like Garfinkle, Ali Ahmed Sa'id conflates Islam and Arab society, stressing that the two together prevent the emergence of democracy: "If we want to be democratic, we must be so by ourselves. But the *preconditions for democracy do not exist in Arab society,* and cannot exist unless religion is reexamined in a new and

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[90] ibid, p. 8

[91] Bernard Lewis (1996), "Islam and Liberal Democracy: A Historical Overview", *Journal of Democracy,* Vol.7, No.2, pp. 52-63.

[92] Mohamed Talbi (2003), "A Record Of Failure" in Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg (eds), *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East,* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 4.

[93] Adam Garfinkle (2002), "The Impossible Imperative ? Conjuring Arab Democracy," *The National Interest,* Accessed on 12 March 2010, http://nationalinterest.org/article/the-impossible-imperative-conjuring-arab-democracy- an-excerpt-2194, p.159.

accurate way, and unless religion becomes a personal and spiritual experience, which must be respected."[94] On another occasion, Adonis has stressed, like Lewis, that in the case of the Arabs, political rule was based on religion. And like Sharabi, he argues culturally and socially that the "Arab individual does not elect from among people of different opinions who represent different currents. The Arab is accustomed to voting according to pre-determined concepts.[95]

It is also argued that democratic governance in the GCC states is hard to attain because the necessary social and cultural dynamics do not exist.[96] Yet, several events have occurred and many circumstances have been transformed, gradually shaping a picture of the region as open to reform and democratic change. While Richards agrees that a "democracy deficit" is a prevailing fact in the region, he does not agree that the Arab countries are "not ready" for democratic reform, and he identifies grounds for a potential shift towards more accountable and democratic governance.[97] These include the current level of development, literacy, education and urbanization. Market expansion enhances the prospects of democratization because it encourage exchange process at deferent levels among the people, draws them into decision making system and creates conditions where different socio-economic groups spring around their social, economic and professional interest. Thus, with the growth of civil society pressure of pluralism is built towards a change in political institutions in favour of democracy as a necessary though not sufficient conditions for the development of democracy. Though the growth of the market creates ground for civil society, it is the functioning of the latter that promotes the former. This relationship needs to be recognized particularly in the context of West Asia. Observers of the region point out two specific points that merit attention. One, the West Asian society has a feable yearning for civil society. So the prospects of a vibrant civil society emerging under market regime is not so certain. Secondly, some of the societal actors have shown intolerance for the exercise of the freedom of speech, worship and even actions for

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[94] Joshua Teitelbaum (ed.) (2009), *Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf*, p.12.

[95] ibid, p.12

[96] Mehran Kamrava (1998), *Democracy in the Balance. Culture and Society in the Middle East*, Seven Bridges Press.

[97] Alan Richards (2005), "Democracy in the Arab Region: Getting There from Here," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 28.

others. This apparently sets the limits on the market-civil society interaction for promotion of competitive environment, which is the crux of economic liberalization process.

In the absence of corresponding growth of civil society, market based reforms would further distort and disarticulate and add to market imperfection. It will not enable the economy to provide space for the emerging workforce to get engaged in the production process. Like the statist external rent, market will also encourage, rent seeking economy, which in the absence of legitimizing process, will reinforce the authoritarian tendencies. The prospects of democracy and authoritarianism are dependent upon market-civil society linkages. It may be argued that since the economy reforms exogenously induce the international pressure for democratization will have its bearing on markets-civil society relations.[98]

Political Liberalization since 1991

There are number of issues which have the potential to motivate the political liberalization. They can be broadly divided into two categories- internal and external. At present demographic explosion, increasing unemployment, role of civil society, nature of rentier state, increasing participation of women's are major internal factors. One of the more complex contextual factors concerns the indirect geopolitical effects of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. The resulting highly charged political climate is fostering political activism and awareness among both pro- reformers and traditionalist. The pressures of globalisation have also an impact on the domestic environment of GCC countries and the opinions held by their populations. Moreover, globalization, and particularly economic globalization, intensifies pressures on rulers to be more transparent and accountable in the administration of state resources.

Since the beginning of state formation in the Arab Gulf region, national and social organization appeared in Bahrain and Kuwait at the start of the last century. These were effective institutions that registered achievements in the fields of education, literary development, and public culture. However, after the discovery of oil, these institutions became subject to state control and became tools of political authority. Over the last three decades, the number of these organisations has increased

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[98] Pant (1994), *Demography, Democracy & Economic Reforms*, p.4

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in most Gulf States. However, their role has diminished and their efficiency has declined. More space has been made in the Gulf for political activity, beginning in the period following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. That war was a catalyst for liberalization most notably in Kuwait, but also throughout the Gulf. While these countries are usually perceived as more "traditional" despite the region's long history of monarchy and other forms of autocracy, Kuwait and Bahrain have received the designation "partly free".[99] The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 created "new realities" such as demand for change and the huge expenses of the war.[100]

Gulf populations began openly to question both the large regional footprint of the United States and the inability of the leaders to protect them from invaders, both Western and Iraqi. The "demonstration effect"[101] of the fall of the Soviet Union added its influence as well, adding to a series of liberalization measures that were defensive in nature, ways for the regimes to cope with some popular demands and to the West.[102] Leaders of Gulf States became aware of the necessity to adapt the political institutions to the evolving economic and social dynamics. This growing awareness among Gulf states leaders has found its more caricatural expression when Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, ruler of Dubai and vice-president of the UAE, told the Arab Strategy Forum in Dubai in December 2004: "I tell you my fellow Arab leaders: if you don't change you will be changed". One way to achieve this was through the process of institutional openings.

With the end of Cold War, a wave of political reforms swept over much of the Arab world, including the member countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). While some of these reforms were cosmetic and intended to cover up regime failure

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[99] *Freedom House,* (2008) "Freedom in the World 2007", Accessed on10 Sep. 2010, URL: http://www.freedomhouse.org.

[100] Anoushitavan Ehteshami (2003), "Reform from Above: The Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," *International Affairs,* Vol. 79, No. 1, p. 54.

[101] Demonstration effects (developments in one place will often act as a catalyst in another place) are effects on the behavior of individuals caused by observation of the actions of others and their consequences. Ex- Part of the rationale behind the 2003 invasion of Iraq was that the democratization of Iraq would demonstrate to other countries that Arab oil states could attain democracy, and also demonstrate benefits from such democratization. It has been theorized that such demonstration effects will speed the development of democracy throughout the West Asia. See Teitelbaum (ed.) (2009), *Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf,* p.4.

[102] Teitelbaum (2009), *Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf,* p. 4.

to perform the distributive functions, they opened up the outlets for free expression of opinion and democratic representation. Several public attempts have been made in the Gulf to effect political participation. These attempts differ in terms of magnitude and quality from one state to the other. For instance, Bahrain witnessed demonstrations and calls for a return to democracy and the constitution of 1973 and this set in motion a process of political reform. Thus the National Action Charter was approved in a public referendum in February 2001, followed by approval of the amended constitution in February 2002.[103] Therefore, municipal council elections (cancelled since 1956) were held with the participation of all political forces including women, who were given the right to vote and to be elected, in May 2002. Finally, general parliamentary elections were held in October 2002.[104] As for Qatar, its political leadership has decided to speed up political participation. The passing of a permanent constitution and approving it by a public referendum in April 2003, in preparation for free elections to the Consultative Assembly, evidence this.[105] Even Saudi Arabia, the country often seen as the most conservative of the GCC states did not escape the winds of change in the 1990s.[106] While Saudi Arabia has undergone massive social change since the mid-1960s, the most dramatic political developments since the 1960 political challenge of the 'Liberal Princes' occurred only after the outbreak of the Kuwait crisis in 1990.[107] Under pressure from both liberals and Islamist opposition in the immediate aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the Saudi King announced a number of reforms, notably the foundation of Basic System of Government and the creation of the Kingdom's first national consultative council, the

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[103] Fred Rhodes (2005), *The Gulf: Challenges of the Future*, Abu Dhabi, UAE: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, p. 109.

[104] Andrzej Kapiszewski (2006), "Elections and parliamentary activity in the GCC states: broadening political participation in the Gulf monarchies", in Abdulhadi Khalaf (2006) and Giacomo Luciani, eds, *Constitutional reform and political participation in the Gulf*, Dubai: Gulf Research Center.

[105] Rhodes (2005), *The Gulf: Challenges of the Future*, Abu Dhabi, p. 109.

[106] Steffen Hertog (2005), "Segmented clientelism: the political economy of Saudi economic reform efforts", in Paul A arts and Gerd Nonneman, eds (2005), *Saudi Arabia in the balance: political economy, society, foreign affairs*, London: Hurst, pp. 111–43.

[107] R. Hrair Dekmejian (2003), "The liberal impulse in Saudi Arabia", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 57, No 3, pp. 400–13; Rahshe Aba Namay (1993), 'Constitutional reform: a systemization of Saudi politics', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 43-88.

Majlis al-Shura, which was inaugurated in August 1993.[108] Together with the evolution of the Shura as an inclusive and complex body, the introduction of a new press and publication law in 2001 underlines the Saudi experience in the political liberalization.

The Arab world, including the Arab Gulf states, is experiencing several pressures to embark on universal political reform. The most important of these are external pressures that come in the form of initiatives and recipes for desired change. The most recent is the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI), which is a new US initiative for the West Asian region. It is the culmination of Bush's endeavor to spread democracy and freedom in the Middle East, and Colin Powell's call for an American-Middle Eastern partnership. The US initiative has adopted the three main objectives mentioned in the reports. These are: a) Promoting democracy and good governance, b) Building a knowledge- based society and c) Expanding economic opportunities.[109] In the field of democracy the initiative calls for supporting and promoting free elections in the countries of the region via technological assistance training in the field of parliamentary practices, activating women's role and participation, developing independent private media, encouraging the states of civil society.[110]

The political liberalization in the Gulf since the first Gulf War is the process of institution building such as setting up of formal political institutions and/or institutionalized mechanism for political participation. This process of institutionalization creates favorable conditions for the establishment of a political pact, which, in turn, encourages the emergence of a process of democratic opening. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness among important members of the Gulf ruling families that the survival of their regimes requires the introduction of some real –and sometimes painful- reform. Indeed, as the Gulf ruling family's remarkable ability to mobilize external and internal sources of power seems to have reached its limits, further steps towards political participation are supposedly needed. As a result, the six Gulf Cooperation Council member-states –Bahrain, Oman, Saudi

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[108] Ehteshami, Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*, p.926.

[109] Rhodes (2005), *The Gulf: Challenges of the Future*, p. 114.

[110] ibid, p.115.

Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, and Kuwait- have embarked on some level of reforms, offering increased electoral participation, albeit within tight limits.

Kuwait

The liberation of Kuwait from the subjugation of Iraq was followed by the greater demand for political liberalization. Yet, following liberation, the Kuwaiti regime managed to reinstate itself virtually intact. It spurned overtures from the secular opposition to cooperate on liberalizing the economy, worked to defeat liberal candidates for parliament, and maintained alliance with Islamist and tribalist forces. Politics as usual seemed to be the order of the day, but beneath the façade of normality, long-term forces continued to press toward further political, economic, and social opening. Economics, civil society, gender politics and the media are worthy of attention as harbingers of politics liberalization in Kuwait.[111]

These factors have facilitated (and others hindered) the emergence of a pro-democratic impulse in Kuwait. The first is the *nature and level of economic development.* Here the political inheritance is decidedly mixed. On the one hand, oil revenues, by promoting growth and raising the income of the population, have certainly facilitated the emergence of a democratic movement by creating a population with both the leisure and the education to engage in polite political activity. Indeed, the civil natures of political opposition, its nonviolent history, and its moderate, patient, and reformist tendencies are all partly a result oil-led prosperity. Because the rulers did not have to tax the population, they did not have to worry about taxpayers pressuring them for accountability, demanding to know how their tax dinars were spent, or demanding something in return for their contribution to the state. Other factors have contributed to greater openness. Kuwait is a signatory to treaties and conventions underpinning the global trade and investment regime, but economic liberalization is still very much in process. The domestic debate over bringing Kuwait into conformity with WTO-mediated norms is one attempt to use international institutions to democratize the economy and, through it, the regime.[112]

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[111] Mary Ann Tetreault (2009), "Kuwait: Slouching Towards Democracy?" in Teitelbaum (ed.) (2009), *Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf,* p. 107.

[112] ibid, p.108

A relatively diverse *civil society*, one revitalized by the Iraqi occupation, has been an element. A fairly pro-democratic political culture predating oil has played a role. Rooted in the marriage of the nationalist and pro-democratic impulses in the interwar period, this culture has deepened as a result of events (notably the Iraqi occupation), the practical experience in democratic institutions (e.g., the cooperatives), and the astute adaptation of traditional institutions (whether in the form of tribal primaries or *diwaniyya* (demonstrations) to pro-democratic ends.[113] Tribes are cohesive political factions and the larger ones, like the ruling family itself,[114] are relatively autonomous corporations with formidable negotiating power. Flouting the law on tribal primaries with impunity is one way in which the tribes show their power. The other is to apply that power to demanding material rewards in exchange for political support. The never-ending list of tribalist demands has heightened concern at top levels of the regime that structural impediments (such as salary and retirement payment commitments) will constrain its ability to rationalize the domestic economy.[115]

Newspapers and *diwaniyyas* are interdependent modes of political communication spreading information and opinion and creating precisely the kind of "imagined" national community that Benedict Anderson argues is the product of a literate population and a commercial print press.[116] Even more important for democratization, these uniquely Kuwaiti venues together form a "space of appearance" in which activists mobilize support, issues and personalities are nationalized and normalized, and coherent- though far from unitary-perspectives on social and political life are formed, criticized, adjusted, and propagated.[117]

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[113] Brynen, Korany and Noble (1995), *Political Liberalization and Democracy in the Arab World*, p.108

[114] The corporate organization and power of the Al Sabah and other "dynastic monarchies" are traced in Herb, Michael (1999), "Princes and parliaments in the Arab world".

[115] Tetreault (2009), "Kuwait: Slouching Towards Democracy?", p. 113.

[116] Benedict Anderson (1999), *Imagined Communities, (rev. ed).,* London: Verso; Ardents, Hannah (1959), *The Human Condition,* Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1959) cited in Teitelbaum (ed.) (2009), *Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf,* p. 125.

[117] ibid, p. 125.

Enhancing fledgling political institutions is not new in the Gulf as the Kuwait experiment clearly illustrates. The Kuwaiti parliament experienced several jolts after the shaikhdom adopted its constitution in 1962. Parliamentary crises followed, especially in 1975-76 (directly tied to the Lebanese civil war as well as the presence of a significant Palestinian population in the country), in 1986 (with the rise of an Islamist tendency) and, of course, in the aftermath of the 1990 Iraqi invasion.[118] The core elements of political liberalization in Kuwait, the institutions around which there appears to be at least some consensus, consist of the constitution and a National Assembly. The consensus on the utility of these institutions is not complete- the assembly has been closed twice, and articles of the constitution likewise suspended-but it is substantial. National Council was primarily a consultative body, with fewer powers. But the constitutionality of this body was highly contested, and when, in June 1990, elections were held for the elected portion of the body, the opposition boycotted in protest, producing one of Kuwait's lowest turnouts. The new council nonetheless was formed and had just begun meeting when Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

With the wheel in motion, election for the assembly duly took place in 1992, 1996, 1999, 2006[119] and 2010. Kuwait may not be the most progressive of Arab states, but the powers of its parliament are far-reaching. It has the ability to interrogate cabinet members, including the prime minister, on all administrative and financial affairs. Moreover, it is able to pass motions of no confidence in the government—a right it has frequently employed.[120] A cornerstone was established after the death of emir, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed (December 2005) in Kuwait's political history when the parliament by voting (unanimously) ousts the new emir on the ground of poor health. This was the first time within any of the GCC states that an elected body had overruled a ruling tribe's candidate for emir.[121]

[118] Joseph A. Kéchichian (2004), "Democratization in Gulf Monarchies: A New Challenge to the GCC", *Middle East Policy*, Volume XI, No. 4, p.15.

[119] Ehteshami, Steven Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*, p. 923.

[120] Fride (2006), "Political change in the Gulf states: beyond cosmetic reform?", *Democracy Backgrounder 05*, Madrid: Fride, pp. 5–7.

[121] Ehteshami, Steven Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*, p. 923.

In Kuwait, parliamentary life was resumed with a heated and spirited campaign during the summer and fall of 1992. Several new faces won seats in the National Assembly, where the opposition forces won a clear majority and Sunni and Shi'i Islamic forces won at least one third of the 50 seats.[122] The significance of the Kuwaiti elections is that they were the first to be held after the experience of the Iraqi invasion and occupation, and the first since the 1986 suspension of parliament. The assembly continued its work, and second term elections after Gulf crisis were held in 1996. Observers considered the elections free and open, indicating again the government's continuing acquiescence in this element of the democratization process. Obviously, Kuwait is far from any democratic ideal. The selection of the ruler by popular mandate is not on the political agenda, and even those issues subject to popular discourse are lodged in an assembly vulnerable to closure by the emir and elected by a minority even of adult citizens. Nonetheless, the participatory impulse is both strong and deeply rooted in elections and institutions that embody commitments to, if not quite guarantees of, respect for participatory processes and civil and political rights that underlie processes.[123]

The 1999 elections are worthy of note as they resulted in a direct and dramatic stand-off between Kuwait's vocal and politically powerful national assembly and the government, controlled by the Al Sabah family. The assembly had been building up to this new muscle-flexing, in 1998 taking the bold step of quizzing the interior minister for allowing the publication of material considered by the Islamists in the assembly as contrary to Kuwaiti and Islamic cultural values. This caused a serious constitutional crisis in the country, in which the assembly was said to be testing the frontiers of its powers while the cabinet, chaired by Crown Prince Saad al-Abdullah (the prime minister), was hanging on to its powers and status.[124] Sheikh Jaber had little option but to try to defuse the crisis by dissolving the parliament and immediately announcing elections for a new assembly. As crown prince, the elderly Sheikh Saad

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[122] S. Huntington (1984), "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" p 208. He cites Daniel Pipes (1983), *In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power,* New York: Basic Books.

[123] Brynen, Korany and Noble and Paul Noble (1995), *Political Liberalization and Democracy in the Arab World,* pp.121-122

[124] Ghanim Al-Najjar (2000), "The challenges facing Kuwaiti democracy", *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 54, No. 2, p.247.

al- Abdullah initially became emir upon the death of Sheikh Jaber in December 2005; however, his advanced age and poor state of health led to public rifts emerging in the parliament over his suitability. Here the parliament asserted itself by voting (unanimously) to oust the new emir on the grounds of poor health. Moreover, the new candidate (the dead emir's half brother, Sheikh Sabah) broke with the Kuwaiti tradition of power alternating between the two rival branches of the Sabah dynasty. This was highly symbolic and underlined the point that power now resided in the elected parliament—an assertion not lost on many of its members. Succession was no longer an internal family matter.

In this new political climate, the 'reformist' government pledged to seek a reduction of the number of electoral constituencies. A number of youthful activists gathered and protested outside the parliament, demanding that the government reduce the number of constituencies to five. Faced with this new wave of public protest, which was steadily intensifying, the government opted to submit a motion calling for a reduction of the number of constituencies to ten.[125] In the context of this unprecedented political activism, 29 MPs opted to withdraw from the session in protest while three others submitted a motion proposing that the prime minister be summoned before parliament for questioning. In light of this challenge, the emir opted to dissolve parliament on the grounds of national security. Fresh elections were scheduled under the original 25 constituencies for the end of June 2006. The results of the June 2006 elections caused another major shift in Kuwaiti politics, heralding a move towards the reformist camp. This election saw a loose alliance of reformists and Islamists gain almost two thirds of the seats.[126] Interestingly, women played a major part in the elections, accounting for 57 per cent of the vote. 27 of the 275 candidates were women. None of the female candidates won.[127] Nevertheless, the new parliament was quick to pass legislation, proposed by the council of ministers, reducing the number of constituencies to five, as had been demanded by the reformists.

[125] Ehteshami, Steven Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*, p. 924

[126] "Kuwait emir calls fresh elections", *BBC News*, Middle East, Wednesday, 19 March 2008. Accessed on 28 February 2011 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7305262.stm.

[127] Poll snub for Kuwait women, *Gulf Daily News*, Monday, May 19, 2008. Accessed on 28 February 2011 http://www.gulf-daily news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=217873.

An early parliamentary election was held in Kuwait on 17 May 2008 after the Emir Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah dissolved the National Assembly of Kuwait on 19 March 2008 over constant clashes between the government and the elected MPs. New rules introduced for this election have changed the 25 constituencies electing two to five electing 10. This was a demand of the reformist Kuwaiti Orange Movement, which led mass demonstrations in 2006, who believed the change would impede vote buying electoral frauds.[128] Many candidates in the election proposed increased governmental subsidies to be funded by oil profits.[129]

Summary of the 17 May 2008 National Assembly of Kuwait election results

	2006	2008	change
Islamic Bloc (Sunni) (incl. Hadas)	17	21	+4
Shia + Popular Action Bloc (opposition)	9	9	0
Liberals and allies	8	7	−1
Independents (pro-government strong families and tribal members)	16	13	-3
Total (turnout 80%)	50	50	—

Source: BBC Arabic.com, *Al Jazeera English,* 2008.

Kuwaitis have ambivalent feeling about democracy and about the role of their ruling family in political life. The opposition has recently won clear majorities in parliamentary elections, but the central opposition demands are not for a transition to democracy but instead for limitation on the power of the ruling family. The two are related, but they are not the same thing. And the opposition also wants to keep the ruling family in its place. At the same time, there is virtually no support in Kuwait for a republic. As a consequence the parliament, which enjoys substantial power under the constitution, does not fully use the full measure of its power to press the ruling family to democratize.[130] Young people are playing a greater role in political life, and

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[128] "Kuwaitis elect new parliament", *Associated Press*, May 17, 2008.

[129] Ulf Laessing, "Price debate dominates Kuwait election campaign", Reuters India, May 15, 2008. Accessed on March 1, 2011 http://in.reuters.com/article/2008/05/15/kuwait-elections-inflation idINL0887648720080515.

[130] Michel Herb (2009), "Kuwait: The Obstacle of Parliamentary Politics" in Teitelbaum (ed.), *Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf,* Hurst & Company: London, p.145.

there is good reason to conclude that Kuwait has begun to enter a new political era in which the concentration of power has moved to civil society away from the ruling elite. This is a key point that distinguishes Kuwait from the other oil monarchies.[131]

Bahrain

Bahrain witnessed some changes at the political level during the 1990s. A consultative council was established in 1993, although a shadow of its forerunner, the directly elected 30-member national assembly that was suspended in 1975,[132] two years after its creation. For a full quarter century after the country's fledgling National Assembly was suspended, Bahrainis experienced widespread and serious discontent, which culminated in the outbreak of the 1994 uprising. It took Manama until late 1998 to decisively quell the rioting, although the popular concerns that sustained it were seldom tackled.[133] But real political changes in Bahrain only took place after the sudden death of Amir Isa bin Salman A Khalifa on March 6, 1999. Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, who came to power in 1999, implemented a number of political, legal and social reforms and made political gestures to bolster support for the new political agenda. These reforms, presented as a series of royal concessions, *makramas*, include abrogation of state security laws that had been in force in the country for 25 years and a general amnesty for more than 900 political prisoners and exiles. These were followed by more substantial moves including granting political rights to women and easing restrictions to create associations.

The most important measures have centred on the constitutional reform which began in late November 2000 with the formulation of a political reform strategy (the national charter), which specified a framework for establishing a clear, constitutionally grounded political system.[134] The new King commissioned a 46-member "Supreme National Committees" (SNC), to draw up a "National Action

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[131] Mary Ann Tétreault (7 September, 2006), "Kuwait's annus mirabilis", *Middle East Research and Information project,* Accessed on 23 September 2010 http://www.merip.org/mero/mero090706.

[132] Ehteshami, Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies,* p. 918.

[133] Joe Stork (997), *Routine Abuse, Routine Denial: Civil Rights and the Political Crisis in Bahrain* Human Rights Watch.

[134] Katja Niethammer (2006), *Voices in parliament, debates in Majlis, and banners on streets: avenues of political participation in Bahrain,* EUI Working Papers no. 2006/27, Florence: European University Institute.

Charter" (*Mithaq al-Amal al-Watani*) on 23 November 2000.[135] Within three weeks, the SNC presented to the Amir its final draft, a vaguely worded document that held out promise of progressive changes to the political system or the centerpiece of Sheikh Hamad's political liberalization program, which was overwhelmingly approved, through a referendum, held on 14-15 February 2001.[136] In February 2002, Sheikh Hamad pronounced Bahrain a constitutional monarchy and changed his status from *emir* to *king*. The composition of the new national assembly, the *Majlis Al Watani* (a bicameral legislature), was announced with the release of the new constitution, approximately one year after the referendum.[137] More importantly, the 2002 constitution stipulated in article 120 that no constitutional amendment was permissible by the parliament on the provision for a bicameral system under hereditary rule. Therefore, the 2002 constitution safeguarded the traditional rule of the Al Khalifa and prevented the parliament from making any change towards fulfilling the opposition's demand that the *Majlis Al Shura* have no legislative capacity if comprised of appointed officials.[138]

Despite the king being engaged in dialogue with the interested parties and undertaking that the elected *Majlis Al Nuwab* (chamber of deputies) would act as the sole legislature, the new framework provided for a bicameral system where the appointed *Majlis Al Shura* would also have a legislative capacity.[139] Only the lower house votes on interpellations and motions of confidence, but the vote succeeds only if two-thirds of the deputies vote against the minister. The opposition is unhappy about these unilateral changes to the constitution.[140] The opposition has uniformly

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[135] Falah Al-Mdaires (2002), "Shi'ism and Political Protest in Bahrain", *Digest of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 11, No.1, p. 28.

[136] Voting is based on universal suffrage for Bahraini citizens aged over 20 years.

[137] The king has the right under the constitution to dissolve parliament, but although he retains the power of veto on legislation, the national assembly may overturn this by a two-thirds majority vote. Given that this would require a number of the appointed Majlis Al Shura to vote against the king, such an eventuality is unlikely.

[138] The constitutional court, provided for in article 106 of the 2002 constitution, gives it only the right to rule on the constitutionality of legislation, not the authority to change the constitution.

[139] Both houses of parliament comprise 40 members each, who serve for four-year renewable terms of office.

[140] Herb (1999), *All in the Family*, p. 89

criticized the constitution as a unilateral measure that safeguarded the traditional rule of the Khalifa family, who belongs to the minority Sunni Muslim (25 per cent) which has ruled Bahrain since 1782 over its Shia Muslim majority (70 per cent). Subsequently, the main opposition party, *Shi'i Al Wefaq National Islamic society*, along with several other prominent political parties,[141] boycotted the first parliamentary elections held under the new constitution in October 2002, two years ahead of the schedule. This situation is consistent with the interpretation that Bahrain is experiencing a gradualist, elite-driven and controlled reform process.

Following the adoption of the constitution, municipal elections were held in May 2002—the first since 1957[142] and in October 2002, Bahrainis elected 40-member parliament, along with a 40-member appointed *Majlis al-Shura* members of the lower house of Bahrain's reconstituted bicameral legislature, the National Assembly. The turnout for the first round of voting was 53 percent, and for the second 43 per cent. Al Wefaq National Islamic Society and other prominent societies can mainly ascribe the fall in electoral participation compared to the vote on the national charter to the call for a boycott.[143] A parliament was elected in due course, with Islamist groups dominating it.[144] But its deliberations have concentrated on social issues rather than political affairs. Leaders of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), officials of the General Organization for Youth and Sports (GOYS), Al-Uruba Club administrators and other responsible intellectuals were all barred from public gatherings. Dismissed on flimsy excuses- that such clubs were cultural establishments and, consequently, barred from political activities.[145] Bahrain held next parliamentary elections on 25 November 2006 for the 40-seat lower house of parliament, the

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[141] Political parties are illegal in Bahrain, but political societies, which operate as de facto parties, have been sanctioned and licensed by the government since 2001. Political societies are allowed to select election candidates, act as parliamentary blocs, hold internal elections, and campaign for public support and host political gatherings. Among others, the Islamic Action Society, the Arab Nationalist Democratic society, the Secular National Democratic Action Society.

[142] The municipalities have no political role and are merely geared towards the provision of social services.

[143] The other key political societies which called for a boycott are the Arab Nationalist Democratic Society; the Secular National Democratic Action Society; and the Islamic Action Society.

[144] Sunni Islamists won 20 seats; with most leading Shia societies boycotting the election, the Shi'i societies that did take part won only four seats.

[145] Kéchichian (2004), "Democratization of Gulf monarchies", p. 65

Chamber of Deputies, as well as municipal elections. There was a 72% turnout in the first round of polling. As expected by most observers, Shi'a and Sunni Islamists dominated the poll, winning a clean sweep in the first round of voting, while liberal and ex-communist MPs lost all their seats.[146] The election was preceded by a major political realignment that saw the four opposition parties that boycotted 2002's election agrees to take part in the political process. The Leading Shia authority, Grand Ayatollah Al Sistani advised Bahraini Shi'a to participate in the poll, in a move similar to the edict received in 2002 by Salafist leader, Adel Al Mouawda, from Sunni religious authorities in Saudi Arabia that allowed him and other Sunnis to vote and run in the elections.[147]

Recent parliamentary election was held in Bahrain with the first-round on 23 October 2010,[148] and the second round on 30 October 2010.[149] 127 candidates stood in the election for forty seats.[150] More than 318,000 were eligible to vote.[151] Head of the electoral commission and Justice Minister, Sheikh Khaled bin Ali al-Khalifa, gave an estimate of turnout of "at least 67 percent," less than the 72% in 2006 and 53.4% in 2002. The victor in Bahrain's 23 October first round of elections for the 40-seat lower house of parliament was the Shi'a opposition group Wifaq, which won all 18 seats it contested one more than it won in the previous election in 2006.[152] The election followed controversy amidst boycotts and arrests. The credibility of the election was threatened by allegations of voting problems. Al Wefaq's Sheikh Ali Salman claimed

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[146] "Bahrain Shiites ahead in election", *CNN*, 26 Nov. 2006. Accessed on 23 January 2011 http://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/11/26/bahrain.elections.reut/

[147] Bahrain: Shi'ites lose bid to control parliament, *Jerusalem Post*, Dec 3, 2006. Accessed on 2 march, 2011 http://fr.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1164881803720&pagename=JPost /JPArticle/ShowFull

[148] Maximiliano Herrera (21 August, 2010), "Electoral Calendar- world elections, US elections, presidential election, world parties", Accessed on 2 march, 2011 http://www.angelfire.com/ma/maxcrc/ elections.html

[149] "Bahrain's Opposition INAA Wins 18 Seats in Parliament," Al-Manar TV (24 October 2010), Accessed on 23 December 2010 http://www.almanar.com.lb/

[150] Presstvir (Oct. 31, 2010), "Sunnis lose Bahrain parliament majority," Accessed Dec. 23, 2010, www.presstv.ir/detail/148974.html

[151] "Parliament polls close in Bahrain," *Aljazeera* (October 2010), Accessed on 23 December 2010 http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/10/2010102371445380323.html

[152] "Opposition Makes Gains In Bahrain Election," *MEES* (Monday, 1 November-2010), Accessed on 27 December 2010. http://www.mees.com/en/articles/63-political-coment-1-november-2010)

at least 890 voters were not allowed to vote in mostly Shia districts because their names were absent from electoral lists. The party tallied up the voters who said there were not allowed to vote, in order to use these numbers to challenge to the official results.[153]

Summary of the October, 2010 elections results

Party	Ideology	Seats
Al Wefaq	Shia Islamist	18
Al Asalah	Sunni Salafist	3
Al-Menbar Islamic Society	Sunni Islamist	2
Independents	Various (all Sunni)	17
Total		40

Source: "Independents the biggest winners". *Gulf Daily News*, 1 November, 2010.

Qatar

Qatar does not need to worry about its economic future and the country is, relatively, ethnically and religiously homogenous, with virtually no opposition to the ruling family.[154] This places Qatar in a situation where internal pressures are not as great as those in other countries in the vicinity. Not having to deal with internal pressure and problems most probably allows the Amir more freedom in the initiating and implementing of reforms. The Amir has also taken steps towards privatization and minor economic reform.[155] Since the Gulf monarchies seem to follow the "no taxation without representation" rule, the drop in oil reserves tends to upset the

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[153] "Poll success for Bahrain Shia bloc," Aljazeera. 12 Dec. 2010. Accessed on 27 December 2010 http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/10/2010102475648379231.html

[154] Anthony Cordesman (1997), *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and UAE: Challenges of Security*, Boulder, CO: Westview, pp 213-89.

[155] Andrew Rathmell and Kirsten Schultze (2000), "Political Reform in the Gulf: The Case of Qatar," *Middle East Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp 53-55.

informal social contract in these countries.[156] However, compared to its neighbors, Qatar has not suffered economically.[157]

Its oil reserve remains relatively high and its natural gas reserve (the North Field) provides it with another source of income. As a highly wealthy country by virtue of its immense gas reserves, Qatar displays a similar picture of elite-led, gradualist and controlled reform process. Qatar is an unlikely candidate for political change, its citizens being notoriously politically apathetic given the comfortable economic position they enjoy, though even here high rents and the rapid pace of economic and structural change are causing perceptible discomfort.[158] Although Qataris constitution were drafted in 1970 and an'advisory council' to the emir was constituted, the country continued to be run by Emir and a small group of advisers and family members.[159] Despite general contentment among the population with the benevolent rule they enjoyed, by 1992 there were indications that an appetite for greater political freedoms was rising along with economic prosperity.

Qatar's Emir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who ousted his father in a bloodless coup in June 1995, likes to present himself as the leader among the Gulf rulers in instituting political reform and a public role for women. Assuming that Shaykh Hamad's policies indicate democratization, or at least the appearance of democratization, it seems that he has accepted a wider definition of democracy, measured by the existence of free and equal political participation and representation; fair; honest and periodic elections; and freedom of expression and association.[160] Under Hamad's leadership, Qatar has embarked on a limited reform program designed to gradually make Qatar's government more participatory and accountable.. Shaikh Hamad abolished the Ministry of Information, called for general elections at

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[156] Teitelbaum (2000), "Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE: Traditional in the Service of the Present and the Future," in Kostiner (ed.), *The Gulf States: Politics, Society, Economics,* Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, pp 37-39, in Hebrew.

[157] Joshua Teitelbaum (2001), "Qatar," in Bruce Maddy-Weitzman (ed.), *Middle East Contemporary Survey (MECS),* Vol. 22, Boulder: Westview Press, pp 518-519.

[158] Ehteshami, Steven Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies,* p. 921

[159] Emile A. Nakhleh (1980), "Political participation and the constitutional experiments in the Arab Gulf: Bahrain and Qatar", in Timothy Niblock, ed., (1980), *Social and economic development in the Arab Gulf,* London: Croom Helm, pp. 161–76.

[160] Huntington (1991), *The Third Wave,* pp 5-10.

the Central Municipal Council (allowing women to vote for and run as candidates), and established a committee to draft a new constitution. When such change is put in the social and historical context of the Gulf oil monarchies, the leadership itself recognizes that these are indeed revolutionary changes being proposed.[161]

Qatar's first ever-national poll, for the 29-member Central Municipal Council, took place in March 1999. Female candidates were allowed to stand;[162] although six women did so, none was elected. Voter turnout was 80 percent.[163] All adult Qatari citizens, with the exception of members of the police and armed forces, were allowed to vote and run for office. Qatar's first ever national poll marked the first time a Gulf country had enfranchised all of its male and female citizens in an nation-wide election. Nevertheless, the precedent was set, as the shaikhdom's rapidly evolving political institutions cleared -existing social hurdles. While it may be too early to assess the long-term viability of modernization in Qatar, Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifah Al Thani seems to be decisive in promoting change.[164]

A draft of Qatar's new constitution was presented to the emir in July 2002. A committee appointed by the emir, which took a very deliberate three years to complete its task, drafted the constitution.[165] In 2003 the delayed draft constitution was unveiled and put to a referendum in which it was approved by a convincing 96 per cent of votes.[166] The Amir finally promulgated the constitution in June 2004, and it came into effect in June 2005.[167] Qatari citizens, including women, voted and

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[161] The emir's opening remarks at the Qatar conference on 'Democracy and free trade', 26–7 March 2002.

[162] Andrew Rathmell and Kirsten Schulze (2000), "Political reform in the Gulf: the case of Qatar", *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol 36, No. 4, pp. 47–62.

[163] Andrzej Kapiszewski (2006), "Elections and parliamentary activity in the GCC states: broadening political participation in the Gulf monarchies", in Abdulhadi Khalaf and Giacomo Luciani, eds, *Constitutional reform and political participation in the Gulf*, Dubai: Gulf Research Center.

[164] Kéchichian (2004), "Democratization of Gulf monarchies: a new challenge to the GCC", p.69

[165] Herb (1999), *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, p.90

[166] *Qatar News Agency (QNA-Arabic)*, April 30, 2003. Accessed on 3 March, 2011 http://www.qnaol. net/QNADocumentsLibrary/Constitution_En.pdf.

[167] Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2005), *Arab Political Systems: Baseline information and Reforms- Qatar*, p 2. Accessed on 16 April 2009, http://www.carnegieendowment. org/files/ Qatar _APS.doc#_Toc106983994).

approved a new constitution for the sheikhdoms that called for the establishment of a 45-member parliament. According to its by-laws, the new Parliament will be composed of 30 elected and 15 appointed representatives.[168] Crucially, it has the ability to propose constitutional amendments and legislation as well as oversee ministerial conduct. The constitution announced the establishment of a parliament (*Shura,* Advisory Council- AC), comprising forty-five members, two-thirds of whom would be elected by popular vote. The Amir may dissolve the AC at will, although he must state a reason for his decision and "it is not permissible for the council to be dissolved for the same reasons twice"[169] Elections for a new council must be held within six months of the dissolution. Since 1999, Qatar has held three successful municipal elections, the latest of which was in April 2007.

As in Bahrain, the constitution has formalized the hereditary rule of the incumbent Emir. The Emir is head of the executive branch of the Qatari government and appoints members of the Al Thani family and other notables to a governing Council of Ministers. Under the new constitution, any proposed legislation becomes law only after the vote of a two-thirds majority and the emir's endorsement. The Amir's powers are described in detail in Articles 67-75. In dealing with separation of powers, the constitution states that the executive wing is to be headed by the Amir, the legislative authority will be given to an Advisory Council and the judiciary is to be independent, although "all verdicts shall be issued in the name of the Amir."[170] The draft also upheld freedom of speech (including the press) (article 47-48), freedom of economic activity (article 28), freedom of worship (article 50) and freedom of assembly and association (article 44-45), although political parties are still prohibited.[171]

In another important move, the Amir issued a new labor law allowing the creation of workers' associations *(tanzimat).* Although these associations are

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[168] Jackson Diehl (2 June 2003), "Sheikdom Democracy," *The Washington Post,* Accessed on 10 October 2009, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/24/AR2011022405239.html

[169] *Constitution of Qatar,* Article 63. Accessed on 23 February 2011.

[170] ibid

[171] *Arab News* (Saudi Arabia), April 30, 2003.

prohibited from "any activity related to religion or politics"[172]. However, only Qataris are allowed to join such associations and only a workplace with at least 100 Qatari workers is allowed to create an association.[173] Since most of the workforce is composed of expatriates. In any case, the majority of workers will still be unprotected by the associations.

Although move towards change is homegrown, it is likely that the Al Thanis will have an eye on the experience of Bahrain next door in formulating their continuing strategy. Its rulers are under little if any internal pressure to introduce such reforms, so their introduction is a clear example of pragmatism on the part of the elite. The remarks of Qatar's foreign minister (and by April 2007 also its prime minister), Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, are instructive: 'Democracy has started. Either the leaders like or they don't like it. Either you open the door, or they break the door. It's a matter of time, in my opinion.'[174] While external factors may encourage them, it is likely they see change conducted in the absence of tangible internal pressure as more manageable and controllable. In essence, what the ruling elite is doing is increasing its legitimacy without jeopardizing its traditional position. This is in great contrast to Bahrain, where civil society's appetite for reform is already strong and makes additional reform that much more of a thorny issue.[175]

Saudi Arabia

Even in Saudi Arabia, the country often seen as the most conservative of the GCC states, the winds of change can be felt. While Saudi Arabia has undergone massive social change since the mid-1960s, the most dramatic political developments since the 1960 political challenge of the 'Liberal Princes' occurred only after the outbreak of the Kuwait crisis in 1990.[176] Opposition critiques of the Saudi regime remained muted through the 1980s. With the arrival of foreign non- Muslim troops on

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[172] *Constitution of Qatar*, Article, 119, Accessed on 23 February 2011.

[173] ibid, Article 63.

[174] Kechichian (2004) "Democratization in the Gulf monarchies: a new challenge to the GCC", p. 44.

[175] Ehteshami, Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*, p. 922.

[176] R. Hrair Dekmejian (2003), "The liberal impulse in Saudi Arabia", *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 57, No. 3:. 400–13; also see Rahshe Aba Namay (1993), "Constitutional reform: a systemization of Saudi politics", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 16, No. 3: 43–88.

Saudi Arabian territory in 1990, however, a new dynamic entered the relationship between the population and the state. This initially took the form of attempts by liberal middle class elements to press for a widening of civil and human rights. In the later part of 1990, the Saudi Arabian press became rather more open than it had been before. King Fahd announced his intention to reform the system of provincial administration, establish a National Consultative Assembly and broaden the roles, which women could play in employment. Even before Desert Storm, sever signs of social restlessness and demands for freedom were starting to emerge, as manifested, for example, in the controversy and eventual confrontation over women's right to drive cars, and the need to curtail the growing power of the moral police (*Mutawwi's*). The anxiety of the '*ulama*' was manifested not only in critical sermons delivered by the '*ulama*, the female demonstrators were described as 'the worst of women' but even more openly in a 'memorandum of advice' signed and circulated by about one hundred of them in 1992, and calling for a greater role for the *sharia's*. This was also partly motivated by the fear that increased reliance by the regime on 'positive' laws and techno-political organisations might erode the traditional influence of the '*ulama*' on policy-making.[177] To counteract the challenge of the clerics' pressure group, a cabinet reshuffle in August, 1993 saw the Ministry of Waqf and Hajj Affairs split to form two distinct ministries headed by a 'non-cleric'. At the same time the strict and rather inflexible cleric, Shaikh 'Abd al-Aziz Ibn Baz, was made the country's *Mufti* (religious authority) and the 'moral police' functions taken away from him and given to the new minister of *Awqaf*.

The differences, which the Islamist reformists had with the government over the presence of US troops in the country broadened out after the Gulf War into a general, call for political reform. Their demands were put forward in petitions submitted to the government, the first of which was presented in May 1991. It petition, known as the Letter of Demands, encompassed many demands. The Letter called for the establishment of a *Majlis al-Shura* (Consultative Assembly) to handle the state's domestic and foreign policies according to Islamic law; the revision of all state regulations and laws in the political, economic and administrative sectors, to make them consistent with Islamic law; the choosing of 'qualified and ethical' people

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[177] Roger Hardy (1992), *Arabia After the Storm: Internal Stability of the Gulf Arab States,* London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, p.134

for state office; the establishment of justice and equality, where people have clearly defined rights and duties; the acceptance of the principle of accountability for all state officials especially those in influential position; the establishment of just policies for the distribution of public funds and the adoption of measures to prevent the waste and exploitation of resources, with the adoption of an Islamic economic system; the implementation of reforms in the military; ensuring that media reflects the Islamic identity of the state, building a foreign policy reflective of the interests of the nation and avoiding alliance which contradict Islam; developing and supporting the religious and *da'wah* institutions; integrating all judiciary and ensuring the rights of the individual and society in accordance with the *shari'ah*. King Fahd made a promise of substantive political reforms in November 1990, at a time when Saudi Arabia was convulsed by the effects of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait.

Since 1992, Saudi Arabia's rulers have allowed for more consultation with those whom they rule, more inclusiveness in institutions, a limited liberalization of the press, and less repression of the Shi'ite Muslims who make up an estimated 3 to 5 percent of the kingdom's total population of approximately 22 million. It has been a custom of the king and the major princes to open their doors to petitioners once a week in well-publicized—and now televised— meetings called majlis.[178] The promise of political reforms, when the Kingdom was faced with threats to its stability, was by no means new. The Basic Law (under Royal Decree A/90) identifies Saudi Arabia as an described as a monarchy with the rulers being drawn from among the sons and descedants of King 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Su'ud. The law, in any case, describes the Quran as Saudi Arabia's constitution. [179]

Promises of a 'basic law' of government and of a consultative council (*majlis shura*) are almost as old as the kingdom itself, and they are renewed from time to time- especially at critical moments such as the seizer of the great mosque in Mecca in 1979. The Gulf War of 1990/1991 seems, however, to have given embarrassing impetus to the process, and in March 1992 the king announced the foundation of a 'basic system of government' and the creation of the kingdom's first modern national

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[178] Jean-François Seznec (2002), "Stirrings in Saudi Arabia", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 38.

[179] Niblock (2006), *Saudi Arabia: power, legitimacy and survival*, p.105

consultative body, the advisory Majlis Al Shura, which was inaugurated in August 1993.[180] Although the members of this *majlis* would be chosen by the king and would only be able to propose laws but not to pass them, the formation of such an entirely appointed and purely advisory council was still pending well over a year after it had been promised. Although every attempt was made to emphasis that the Council would have a basically technocratic character, the delay in its formation was perhaps due to the inevitable significance that would be attached to its regional and tribal composition. The Council was at last formed in August 1993 in a manner seeking to 'represent' and balance the various social forces, however symbolically. The King is always anxious to underline the strict limits of political liberalization in Saudi Arabia: "The prevailing democratic system in he world is not suitable for us in this region", he asserted, further remarking "elections do not fall within the sphere of the Muslim religion".[181]

The Shura is only a consultative body—it has no power to pass laws and can offer advice only when the government asks. Institutionally and procedurally the Shura has evolved quickly, increasingly resembling a complex organization that is acquiring a life of its own. As Al Saud explains, 'in practice, members of the [Shura] are allowed to initiate legislation and review domestic and foreign policies of the government'.[182] Yet in the course of the decade the Shura has become more and more active. First, the Shura's membership was increased by a third, from 60 to 90, between 1993 and 1997,[183] and again in 2005 to150. It now includes a broader cross-section of Saudi society and is better able to articulate its many interests and voices. The new members are mostly technocrats, businessmen, and academics (no royals belong), and their ranks include—remarkably— two Shi'ites.

In 1993, two other measures were adopted: first, new administrative laws were passed for the running of regional governments, which included the introduction of

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[180] Ehteshami and Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*, p.926.

[181] Roger Hardy (1992), *Arabia After the Storm: Internal Stability of the Gulf Arab States*, pp.12-13.

[182] Faisal Bin Misha'al Al-Saud (2000), *Political development in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: an assessment of the Majlis Ash-Shura*, Durham: University of Durham, p. 175.

[183] R. Hrair Dekmejian (1998), "Saudi Arabia's consultative council", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 2, pp. 202–18.

regional government and Shura councils; and, second, procedures and customs pertaining to the succession to the throne were codified into a set of regulations. These measures have been followed up by other changes. In spring 2001, a press and publication law was introduced which guarantees freedom of expression ('within the framework of existing rules'), the printing of foreign newspapers in the kingdom, publication of newspapers by individuals or private interests, and 'constructive criticism'. Taken together, these measures sent out the message that the state was becoming more tolerant of alternative views and welcomed wider discussion of issues affecting the kingdom.[184] The introduction of the *Majlis* and the provincial council was the first step towards representative local and central government. On a municipal level, too, there have been interesting developments reflecting this move towards liberalization and enfranchisement. The elections held for half of the nearly 12,000 seats in the kingdom's 178 municipal councils in February and April 2005 attracted a great deal of international attention.[185] One cannot doubt Seznec's observation that quite a bit of pressure for political and social reforms, including in democratic directions, has taken place recently in Saudi Arabia. The completion of elections for half the members of municipal councils in 2005 appears to be the government's response to such pressure, as well as to the increasing criticism of the Saudi regime.[186]

The kingdom is under tremendous social pressure to change rapidly, and it is not clear that a transition on the political level will happen soon enough to cope with the needs of the entire population, as opposed to those of a few senior princes. Yet elements remain in place that can only raise doubts for democrats: The Saudi state, in order to maintain the country's relatively low levels of social tension, has become heavily bureaucratic, and there are no elected officials to control it. Finally, the lack of an independent judiciary means that the royal family stays above the law. Until this changes, and the Al Saud is placed strictly on the same legal footing as commoners, the state will remain imperious. It is clear that as far as Saudi Arabia is concerned, reforms in general, and democratization of the Saudi political system in particular, cannot take place without the support, or al least the consent, of the royal family as a

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[184] Ehteshami and Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*, p.926.

[185] ibid, p. 928

[186] Joshua Teitelbaum (15 March 2005), "Between the International Hammer and the Local Anvil: Municipal Elections in Saudi Arabia," *Tel Aviv Notes*.

major power center in the authoritarian Saudi state.[187]

Yet, efforts at political liberalization in Saudi Arabia are made more complex because of the string fusion of religion and state in the kingdom.[188] It is prominent even among West Asia countries in this respect, with its judicial and constitutional system that operates on traditional Islamic legal principles: the Qur'an and Sunna form its constitution, Islamic *fiqh* is the basis of the laws of the state, and there is no comprehensive system of "man-made" legislation. The religious establishment plays a vital role in the state judicial system, and religious scholars, or '*ulama,* are responsible for legislation and judicial procedures, perhaps more than in any other West Asian country. Moreover, the '*ulama* maintain a strong influence over politics. They provide legitimacy for political measures, thereby contributing to the political stability of the Saudi dynasty for over two centuries.[189] Democracy in its Western forms is far from being achievable in contemporary Saudi Arabia. The problem is further complicated because democratization of the Saudi state would jeopardize the traditional Saudi-Wahhabi political system based on the '*ulama-umara* alliance. Reforming the system means that both these traditional elites would lose power in favor of other segments of society. Therefore, the '*ulama,* as well as the royal family, are quite content with the current situation, which allows them to preserve their power. While "democratization" of the Saudi state in a Western style seems to be impossible, some measures of political liberalization are possible. Such political liberalization based on the consent of the '*ulama,* as a critical group in advancing or blocking reforms in democratic directions.[190]

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[187] Muhammad al-Atawneh (2009), "Saudi Arabia: Why The '*Ulama Are Stalling Liberalisation",* in Joshua Teitelbaum (ed.), *Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf,* p. 87

[188] William Zartman (2001), "Islam, the State, and Democracy: The Contradictions," in Charles E. Butterworth and William Zartman (eds), *Between the State and Islam,* Cambridge, UK and Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center and Cambridge University Press, pp 231-244.

[189] Frank Vogel (2000), *Islamic Law and Legal System: Studies of Saudi Arabia,* Leiden: E. J Brill, pp 169-221.

[190] Muhammad Al-Atawneh (2009), "Saudi Arabia: Why The '*Ulama Are Stalling Liberalisation",* in Teitelbaum (ed.), *Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf,* p.105.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

There has been little evidence of real democratic opening, at least in the Western sense, and far less tangible political reforms has taken place in the UAE than in neighboring Gulf states, including even Saudi Arabia.[191] Indeed, international non-governmental organisations regularly rank the UAE as being one of the least free political systems in the world, and consistently place it behind Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.[192] While the main power clearly rests with established families and prominent individuals, the ruling families and prominent individuals, the ruling families have voluntarily transformed the polity[193] by building up various emirate-level councils and departments, most of which are run along seemingly legal- rational lines with codified regulations and procedures. Modern governmental functions are ostensibly carried out by the Dubai Executive Council which is presided over by Shaykh Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktum who became ruler in 2006, and is now chaired by his second son and the new Crown Prince, Shaykh Hamdan bin Muhammad Al Maktum.[194]

The UAE's highest authority is the Supreme Council of Rulers (SCR), which has the power to initiate policy and to reject laws that have previously been passed. The SCR is simply a forum consisting of the seven hereditary rulers. Its presidency always rests with Abu Dhabi, given its vast presidency rests with Dubai, given its secondary role in federal contributions.[195] Significantly, while the constitution called for an SCR presidential election every five years, there has only been one such formal occasion, following the end of Shaykh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nuhayan's thirty-three-year presidency in late 2004. Subordinate to the SCR is the federal Council of Ministers (COM). However, since the SCR meets infrequently and often only

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[191] In 2005, Saudi Arabia held elections for half the seats in municipal councils. Males over the age of 21 were eligible to vote. *Washington Post,* April 24, 2007.

[192] *Freedom House* (2007), "The Worst of the Worst: The World's Most Repressive Societies", Washington, DC.

[193] Manfred Happern (1965), *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa,* Princeton University Press, 1965, p 42.

[194] Davidson (2009), "The United Arab Emirates", p.236.

[195] Abu Dhabi contributes about 70 percent of the federal budget, with Dubai contributing only about 15 per cent, the remainder coming from various federal parastatals such as Etisalat. Personal interviews, Abu Dhabi, March 2007.

informally, the COM and its various ministers formulate the bulk of the UAE's policies and it is responsible for much of the day-to-day running of the federation. The COM is dominated by traditional elites and like the SCR, is structured in favour of the wealthiest emirates. Originally, the portfolios in the COM were distributed in such a way that Abu Dhabi controlled six important positions.[196]

The UAE has been the least active on political reform, but movement is now visible. A 40-member national federal council was established soon after the creation of the UAE in 1971. The council has played an active part in the evolution of the UAE as an integrated state, but has never acted as a vehicle for the expansion of the political base of the country.[197] Recommencing its meetings in 1993, after a two-year break following the Kuwait crisis, it has remained throughout its existence a technical organization.[198] The most significant reform was announced in November 2005 by Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who unveiled a plan for half of the Federal National Council (FNC- *Majlis al Ittihad al Watani)* to be elected by the relevant council of each Emirate. Moreover, its powers were to be enhanced.[199] The FNC serves as the UAE's parliament, although it only serves in an advisory role. It reviews legislation and proposes amendments but cannot enact or revise legislation. The FNC also makes policy recommendations to the cabinet, can summon and question any minister regarding ministry performance and discusses the annual budget. Federal laws are drafted by the Council of Ministers and then submitted to the appropriate FNC committee. The committee suggests amendments to the proposed draft, the amended draft goes to the Legislative Committee for debate and consultation and the draft is then presented to the president.

Previously, members of the FNC were appointed by all Emirates" leaders, weighted in favor of Abu Dhabi and Dubai (eight seats each). In the three rounds of voting held in December 2006, a 6,690-person electorate (100 people, appointed by

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[196] Davidson (2009), "The United Arab Emirates", p. 237.

[197] Frauke Heard-Bey (2005), "The United Arab Emirates: statehood and nation-building in a traditional society", *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 364–5.

[198] Davidson (2009), "The United Arab Emirates", pp.14–21.

[199] Mohamed Salem Al-Mazroui (2007), "Legislative elections in the UAE", *Gulf yearbook 2006–2007* Dubai: Gulf Research Center, pp. 87–98.

Emirate leadership, for each FNC seats each Emirate has) chose among 438 candidates for the 20 FNC elected seats. 65 women standed for the election, but only one was elected. Given the highly controlled process, all those elected are considered unlikely to challenge established UAE leaders on major issues. Moreover, it is noteworthy that most of those elected or appointed to he FNC belong to the young technocrats group whose power lies on patronage links with the political authority, which increases their dependency upon the monarchs.[200]

The UAE faces unique obstacles to reform when compared with the other Gulf monarchies. Its composition of seven emirates makes national change harder to achieve. Therefore political activity in the UAE tends to take shape more at the local (emirate) level than at the national level, the members of the federation are so closely tied to each other that little room for each to experiment with new political structures exists. For that reason, evidence of major changes is hard to come by.[201] The UAE's combination of traditional, tribally informed monarchy and rapid oil-fuelled economic development represents an important experiment in economically-driven liberalization, which already has had some impact on political structure. Ironically, however the current rentier system treats Emirate citizens so well that doing without these rights might be a small price to pay for a life of luxury.[202]

Problems and prospects

The diversity of the GCC polities underlines the complex challenge in analyzing the internal mechanisms of this sub-region; however, key similarities can be identified. An overarching theme is that change has consistently been initiated by the elites themselves and has taken the character of controlled liberalization rather than a substantive shift in power relationships. A process of democratization, therefore, has not been established.[203] There is a substantial lag between Arab countries and other regions in term of participatory governance. The Arab states have

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[200] Al-Mazroui (2007), "Legislative elections in the UAE", pp. 87-98.

[201] Ehteshami and Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*, p. 929.

[202] Davidson (2009), "The United Arab Emirates: Economy First, Politics Second", p.247.

[203] Ehteshami and Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*, p. 930.

the lowest freedom score out of the world's seven regions.[204] The *Arab Human Development Report 2004* has noted that despite variations from country to country, rights and freedoms enjoyed in the Arab world remain poor. It gives on to stress that while most Arab countries have elected parliaments, their election is little more than a ritual, representing a purely formal application of a constitutional entitlement. The modern Arab state, notes the report, is a "black hole" state "which nothing moves and from which nothing escape."[205] In some parts of the Arab world, democracy simply doesn't exist— because, in the eyes of Islamic radicalism, it is incompatible with Islam. This is clear and unambiguous. Elsewhere in the Arab world, democracy is indeed in the constitution. In such cases, things are much less clear and very ambiguous. There is a huge gap between theory and practice in this regard. In virtually all-Arab states, democracy in practice is no more than a theatrical production.[206]

The process of political reform in the Arab Gulf States faces a number of obstacles. Some leaders do not want to bring about the necessary political transformations for fear of being accused of doing so as a result of foreign pressures. Also, the ruling elites tend to reject political pluralism because it will affect the way they rule and control affairs. Currently, the GCC ruling elites are the firm masters of the political domain and are able to control the pace and direction of reform, although Kuwait seems to have entered into a new and uncharted phase.[207] The absence of an organized and efficient political opposition and the lack of party leaderships that enjoy the support of popular and sustainable constituencies have led instead to the appearance of sectarian, tribal and familial leadership. This has meant the absence of effective public pressure on the political authority that will make it responsive reform measures.[208]

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[204] United Nations (2002), The *Arab Human Development Report for 2002: Creating Opportunities for future Generations*, New York: United Nations, pp 2, 27.

[205] United Nations (2005), The *Arab Human Development Report for 2004: Creating Opportunities for future Generations*, New York: United Nations, pp. 8,9,15.

[206] Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg, eds. (2003), Islam *and Democracy in the Middle East*, Baltimore and London :The Johns Hopkins University Press, p.75.

[207] Ehteshami and Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies* p. 930.

[208] Rhodes (2005), The Gulf: Challenges of the Future, p. 111.

The weakness of institutionalism in the political structure is one of the main obstacles to the process of political reform in the GCC States. In these states personality cults and unilateral political decisions supersede the working of political structures. Ruling authorities dominate the mechanism of political decision- making. Despite the existence of parliamentary institutions, which are supposed to have the main role in passing different legislative laws, these institutions are weak, since most bills come as proposals from the government. The governments apply pressure on parliamentary groups to make them pass the desired bills. Moreover, the monarchial regimes have the ability to dissolve parliaments at will. Thus, the principle of separation of power has become a mere formality.[209]

It has become axiomatic in comparative politics that with an increase in economic freedom and the rise in the level of socio-economic status, a middle class will develop and demand accountability, paving the way for democratic opening.[210] Yet, the GCC States appear resistant to that paradigm. The West Asia, writes John Waterbury, has "an environment singularity inhospitable to legal pluralism and democracy." Armed conflict (which enable the state to oppress its citizens) and an oppressive and pervasive military and intelligence apparatus (sometimes called the *mukhabarat* state) are certainly factors that impede democratization. Waterbury also adds another critical factor, what he terms "the ambivalent middle class." Whereas in many countries the middle class supports democratization as it develops its own priorities that are not always in line with those of the state, in the West Asia in general, and the Gulf in particular, a huge portion of the middle class is often made up of bureaucrats who are employed by and are dependent on the state. Even members of the private sector are often beholden to the state for contracts and access, in what has been termed an "alliance for profits." The presence of disenfranchised foreign workers is also obstacle to real democracy and liberalization in many of the Gulf countries.[211] Non- nationals have no role in any of the current liberalization policies

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[209] ibid, p. 113.

[210] Seymour Lipset (1981), *Political Man: On the Social Bases of Politics*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press; Posusney, Marsha Pripstein (2004), "Enduring Authoritarianism: Middle East Lessons for Comparative Theory," *Comparative Politics*, Vol.36, No.2, pp.127-38.

[211] Andrzej Kapiszewski (2002), 'Political Reforms in the GCC Countries: Are Monarchies if the Gulf Democratiizing?', *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia*, No. 15, p.45

in the GCC. They cannot vote, and their voices are nearly invisible in the liberalized political space created in the past few years. If the GCC countries do not address this issue, which they are unlikely to do, any talk by Gulf leaders of liberalization may be, as they say in the West Asian region, *kalam fadi*- emplty words.

Democratization can never take place without enfranchising this population, and certainly liberalization can never take place without opening up political space for it. There are a number of stumbling blocks on the way that will hinder the process of change like the absence of a reformist, national effective political opposition, the fragility of democratic culture, the lack of concern over human right and the absence of an effective role for women. Besides, there is also the continuing strength of traditional structure and tribal, sectarian and familiar allegiances, all of which may be major obstacles to any major structural change. [212]

While most of the factors discussed above generally account for the democracy deficit in Sultanate of Oman, the recent pace of political and economic reforms points towards its, transition to a 'liberlised autocracy', though not a full-fledged liberal democracy. The following chapter will present a historical account of the evolution Oman polity in an attempt to explain why the Omani ruler has opted for a gradualist course through progressive reforms and incremental changes than sudden openness in the political system, which entails the risk of chaos and instability.

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[212] Rhodes (2005), The Gulf: Challenges of the Future, p. 116

Chapter-3

Evolution of Oman Polity

Oman

	International Boundary	
	Road	
	Minor Road	
	River	
★	National Capital	
•	City or Town	

0   50   100 KM
0   50   100 MI

The Sultanate of Oman lies at the extreme southeast of the Arabian Peninsula and occupies a land area of 212,460 square kilometers, more than the size of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and United Arab Emirates (UAE) together. Oman is a seeming anomaly in the Arab world. It rarely features in Western media and civil strife has been virtually unknown for several decades. In terms of political and economic development, generally speaking, Oman has accomplished as much or more than its fellow Gulf monarchies, despite starting from the scratch with less oil income to utilize, dealing with a larger and more rugged geography, and resolving a bitter civil war along the way.[1]

Modern Omani history began with the defeat of Portugal in 1650 and the subsequent independence of the country. The Said Dynasty was established in 1749, when Ahmad bin Said was elected Imam and became the Sultan of Muscat and Oman. After ascending to power in 1932, Sultan Said bin Taimur, Sultan Qaboos' father, kept Oman tightly closed and did not initiate any effort to explore possible oil reserves in the country. Despite Taimur's intent to protect the Sultanate from the dramatic changes in the Arabian Gulf, which had helped neighboring Kuwait achieve the world's highest per capita income ratio at that time, the Sultan's policy of isolationism was brought to an end with the forced deposition of Sultan Sa'id bin Taimur in July 1970, one of the least known and most isolated countries in the world.[2] Within five years, Oman shook off most of its medieval remnants and began to develop some of the institutions of government demanded by a modern state.

The early history of Oman is shrouded in mystery. The first waves of Arab settlers, coming from what are now the Yemen Arab Republic, reached Oman about 2,000 year ago. Legend suggests that one such wave was led by Nasr, the son of al-Azd, and another by the sons of Malik bin Fahm, another descendant of al-Azd. These names live on in current everyday tradition in Oman. Omani legends speak of two different migrations of Arab peoples to Oman. The first came from Yemen. The people of this migration were of southern Arab, or Qahtani stock, and even today the tribes who claims Yemeni origin are known as 'Yemeni'. The

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[1] J. E. Peterson (2004), "Oman: Three and a half decades of Change and Development", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XI, No. 2, p-126.

[2] Kenneth Katzman & Mark Katz (1995), (IRS), *Oman: Political Development and the Majlis Ash'Shura*, Washington, D. C.: International Republican Institute.

second major migration, again according to legend, was of northern Arab or Adnani stock entered Oman from the north. Tribes claiming this descent are known as 'Nizari'.[3]

The history of Oman has always been one of conflict. The fragmented nature of the pattern of settlement, the poor internal communications, the resultant self-sufficiency of village communities sharpened already deeply felt tribal rivalries. The Ibadhi creed itself, though well rooted in the habits of the people it, was not the element to forge a natural national cohesion. Oman was so cut off from the outside world and no one even noticed, that it was isolated until 1970. Society was organized along the tribal lines found elsewhere but, in Oman, the ideological expression of tribal difference was often more fierce than elsewhere. Within each tribe there was some social differentiation and in the towns of the interior, such as Nizwa, poorer tribesmen worked on the plots of richer ones. The country was ruled by the sheikhs, who maintained an oscillating relationship with the central power, the Sultan of Muscat. The Sultan when strong was able to appoint governors to rule the areas of the interior, but when weak he was content to allow these tribal areas to rule themselves on condition that did not actually challenge his position as Sultan.[4]

Contrasting to the fragmentary and nuclear nature of the Omani society imposed by the facts of physical geography, the greatest unifying force has been Islam. Oman was one of the first countries to embrace Islam during the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad. In the seventh century, when the Islamic empire was established, Oman became a part of it, and fell under the domination of the imperial capitals, Damascus and Baghdad. This imperial rule was never strong and Oman quickly regained its independence was expressed in Ibadhish, one of the most militant versions of unorthodox Islam. The Omanis, as Ibadhis, do not regard themselves as a breakaway sect, but as true Muslims. Others are the deviationists. Their leader was styled 'Imam of the Muslim', the word 'Imam' meaning 'one who sets an example.' The Imam was elected by a small council of tribal elders, the 'Ulama', and then had to submit himself to the people for the approval of his

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[3] John Townsend (1977), *Oman: The making of a State*, London: Croom Helm, pp. 24-28.

[4] Fred Halliday (2002), *Arabia without sultans*, London: Saqi Books, Penguin, p. 265.

candidature by the acclamation of the crowd.[5] Ibadhism was fiercely loyal to the specific injunctions of the Koran, and was intensely hostile to non-Moslems; the only leader they acknowledge was the Imam, the religious and political head chosen by the elders of the tribes. This anti-centralizing ideology and the institution of Imam corresponded to the needs of a tribal society, hostile to rule from an imperial capital, where power was exercised by a coalition of powerful tribal leaders.[6]

Apart from his spiritual obligations, the main responsibilities of the Imam to his people were to lead them in battle against their enemies and to punish criminals. In such a loosely knit polity, all other matters would be in the hands of the village sheikhs. Oman at that time, and indeed for many centuries afterwards, had no need for a more formal government structure. Later rulers, abandoning the elective principle, needed soldiers, taxes and regional governors, thus changing fundamentally the original structure of the Omani state. The first Imam of Oman elected in this way was Julanda bin Mas'ud who took office in c. 750 AD as 'the first of the rightful Imams of Oman.[7] From the ninth century until the sixteenth this arrangement prevailed: several invading forces tried to win over Omani tribes or to occupy the ports, but the Omani Imamate remained in control and was able to reassert itself.[8]

Ibadhism and Omani Politics

Ibadhism appeared "as a doctrine that evolved entirely apart from" Sunni and Shia dogma. Ibadhi theologians developed a council of the ulama as well as a Majlis al-Am (akin to a senate) and a *Majlis Hamalat al-Ilm* (bearers of knowledge). These erudite men quickly adopted the basic principles of tolerance and the authority of a just ruler. Yet, because Ibadhi theologians concluded that the office of the Imam was temporal and not divine, they allowed believers to oppose

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[5] Townsend (1977), *Oman: The making of a State*, p. 29.

[6] J.C. Wilkinson (1972), "The Origins of the Omani State", in Derek Hopwood, ed., *The Arabian Peninsula*, London, p. 68.

[7] Townsend (1977), *Oman: The making of a State*, p.30

[8] Halliday (2002), *Arabia without sultans*, p. 266.

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him and even to overthrow an Imam if he was not pious or if he was unjust. The principles of consultation and free elections for leaders - which would be akin to consensus and contract in contemporary practices of democracy, positing that the Ibadhi Imamate may be held to be the longest democratic experience in the history of mankind. The underlying difference between Ibadhism and democracy was that the latter was "moderate, constitutional, capable through the constitution of ensuring the continuation of democracy."[9] Ibadhi norms united the many tribal fiefdoms scattered throughout the southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula under the Yarubis (1624-1741), a truly "exceptional example for the Islamic State". Indeed, depending on his qualifications, an Imam could not rule without regular and open consultations, certainly a harbinger of future institution building. Still, by the end of the third century, the Imamate was gone, followed by tribal decay, anarchy and occupation. Sadly, these conditions lasted for over 500 years, the result of internecine conflicts.

The legacy of the Yarubi dynasty was the restoration of the Imamate under a "climate of freedom". Ironically, if freedoms, consultations and elections of successive imams stood as sources of strength, nepotism and avarice became their weaknesses. The country is covered in a veil from about the end of the tenth century AD until the early seventeenth century. This seems to have been a 'dark age' of tyranny, despotism and internal strife. The veil began to lift when the Portuguese, followed by English, Dutch and French traders and adventurers arrived off the coasts of Oman. From the little that is known of Oman during the period from the tenth century to the arrival of the Portuguese, it can be gleaned that for part of this period the interior of the country was tyrannically ruled by a family which styled its members 'king' and which came from the al-Nabhani tribe.

By that time, in addition to the anarchy of the interior of the country, the Portuguese had occupied Muscat and the coastal towns for well over a century. The 'sun of salvation' which scattered the enemies of Oman and replaced chaos with order was Nasir bin Murshid bin Sultan al-Ya'arubah, who was elected Imam at Rostaq in 1624. Nasr was a remarkable man and an outstanding military and

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[9] Hussein Ghubash (2006), Oman: *Islamic Democratic Tradition*, New York: Routledge, p. 9.

political leader.[10] At the time of Nasr's election, there were at least five petty rulers who styled themselves 'king' in Oman, based at Rostaq, Nakhl, Sumail, Samad and Ibra, with other forts and towns in the hands of other tribal leaders and the whole country was beset by internal strife. He was succeeded by his cousin Sultan bin Saif al-Ya'arubi. Imam Sultan completes the capture of Muscat and the complete expulsion of the Portuguese in January 1650.[11]

In the seventeenth century, when the British displaced the Portuguese and the Dutch as the dominant sea power in the area, the Omanis were able to reassert themselves. This time the weight of the Omani state lay on the coast, and for two centuries Muscat was the capital of a flourishing commercial empire. The Yaruba family, who led the capture of Muscat from the Portuguese, founded a new dynasty with Muscat as the capital and by 1700 they had built the largest fleet of any non-European state active in the Indian Ocean.[12] The previous decentralized nature of the government was replaced by a strong and dominant central power, the *walis* and *qadhis* (governors and judges) were appointed to rule and a minister justice in his name in all major towns. Equally significant, the community's wealth now permitted, for the first time in the history of the Arab occupation of Oman, large sums of money to be spent on renovation and repair of the *falaj* system[13], with consequent encouragement to agriculture and a resultant movement away from a subsistence economy. As commented by Omani historian:

......Oman revived during his government and prospered; the people rested from their troubles, prices were low, and roads were safe, the merchants made large profits, and the crops were abundant. The Imam himself was humble. He used to traverse the streets without an escort, would sit and talk familiarity with the people. Thus he persevered in ordaining what was lawful and forbidding what was unlawful.[14]

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[10] Townsend (1977), *Oman: The making of a State*, p. 34

[11] ibid, p.35

[12] Halliday (2002), *Arabia without sultans*, p.267.

[13] The *Falaj* is a system of tapping underground water which is led by man-made subterranean channels to villages where it is used for irrigation and domestic purposes.

[14] Sir A.T Wilson (1928), *The Persian Gulf*, London: Oxford University Press, p.104.

The Imam Sultan died in 1679. Nothing revealed the changed and centralized nature of the government more than his succession, which was not by an Imam elected democratically and acclaimed by the people *en masse*, but by his son Bil'arab. The hereditary principle thus established persists to this day, and with it a denial of a nine-hundred-year-old principle of the right of the Omani people to choose their own leader. In fact, this right had not so much been denied as sold: Imam Sultan realized, as did the more effective of his successors, that filling the pockets of a few key tribal leaders made both their religious fervour and their democratic principles seem less important. It was only when pockets became empty that the cry for an elected Imam and a return to true religion became heard. For much of the period of his Imamate, he was fighting with his brother Saif for control of Oman.

After the death of Bil'arab his brother Saif assumed the title of Imam, and continued with his father's policy of making money for himself through trade and hence making money for many of his subjects through his active encouragement of their business endeavours. The country's prosperity continued, and the Imam Saif continued also the work of water-supply and *falaj* renovation and repair and the consequent encouragement of agriculture. 'Oman was strong under his administration and became the best of countries.'[15] The hereditary principle was now established, and his son as Imam succeeded Saif. This Imam's claim to fame is modest. But the Imam Sultan bin Saif died in 1718 and was succeeded by his twelve-year-old son, Saif bin Sultan II. No boy of twelve could hope to have the necessary statecraft to maintain stability, particularly when his easy-going father had tended to let matter slip. The absence of the strong central control encouraged rivals, kingmakers and adventurers. The battles and alliances which occurred during the ensuing long period of bloody internal strife are too numerous and too complex to be followed here. It is sufficient to say that the rival sides in this civil war were divided broadly on Yamani-Nizari lines. The Yamani tribes were led initially by Khalf bin Mubarak, of the Bani Hina tribe, and thus became known as 'Hinawi'. The Nizari tribes were led by Muhammad bin Nasr of the Bani Ghafir, or Miyayihah, and were henceforth known as 'Ghafiri'. Although both leaders were killed in a battle in Sohar in 1724. The bitterness and suspicion engendered during

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[15] Townsend (1977), *Oman: The making of a State*, p. 37.

this costly and cruel civil war has its echoes even today in tribal rivalries and mistrust.[16]

At first the main challenge to the Yaruba Sultans came from inside Oman, from the tribes of the interior whose former dominance had now been displaced by the prosperity of the coast. Civil war broke out in the early eighteenth century and two tribal confederations, the Hinnawi and the Ghafiri, united the 200 tribes of the interior and challenged the coast. A Persian invasion in 1737 marked the beginning of the end of the destructive fratricidal struggle. The Persians left Oman and Ahmad was elected Imam shortly afterwards in about 1744. Ahmad bin Said was that rare man with vision who liberated Oman from Persia. He was probably the first Omani nationalist, and, although he would in turn fall to foreign machinations - between France and Britain - his long rule (1741-83) ushered in the sultanate system. To save the country from further bloodshed, Ahmad bin Said accepted an appointment as Imam, even though he lacked full consensus. His election "was deemed to be a special case" because, as a statesman, he succeeded in making "tradition obey policy and not the reverse".[17] Remarkably, Ibadhi leaders concluded that Ahmad deserved their full backing because he rejected colonial hegemony and rallied the majority around a nationalist mindset. This was an act of merit and an exceptional one at that.

The Yaruba in Muscat were defeated by this internal opposition, and their place was taken by a new dynasty, which exploited the wars in order to seize power on the coast. Once established, this new dynasty, the Al bu Said, as opposed to the tribes, but allowed a division of authority to take place. For the first time political and religious power were separated. The office of Imam was to remain with the tribes of the interior, but his non-religious powers were to be limited. The main political power was to be with the Sultan of Muscat, who was to control the Omani empire. [18] On the political plane, it has been demonstrated that the spiritual ideals of the Ibadhi Imamate had to be backed with statecraft and with considerable temporal power and authority for the polity to have stability. The elective

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[16] D. Hawley (1970), *The Trucial States*, London: Allen & Unwin, p.87.

[17] Ghubash (2006), *Oman: The Islamic Democratic Tradition*, p.70.

[18] Halliday (2002),), *Arabia without sultans*, p. 268.

democratic principle, the very heart of Ibadhism, came up against the sharp rocks of human frailty and encouraged intrigue. The Ya'arubi experience showed that the dynastic principle with hereditary succession had its inherent weakness also, but on balance was more suited to the needs of the Omani people at the time.[19]

There were several uprisings during the Imam Ahmad's 39-year-long reign, and in the last years of his reign he was challenged by a revolt led by two of his sons. Upon his death in 1783, the Imam Ahmad's second son, Sa'id, was elected Imam. The Imam Sa'id was weak and ineffectual, and commanded no respect. His son Hamad usurped political control from his father and moved the capital to Muscat, where he ruled, using the title 'Sayyid' (Lord). He made no attempt to assume the role of Imam, which his father retained, quite ineffectually, in Rostaq, until he died sometime between 1811 and 1821. No attempt was made to elect or appoint another Imam upon his death, nor did his successors ruling as temporal lords in Muscat attempt to use the title of Imam.

Sayyid Hamad bin Sa'id ruled in Muscat from 1784 to 1792. He appeared to have been a shrewd politician and an effective ruler, for the trade of Oman continued to flourish and there is no record of any challenge from the tribes of the interior, suggesting that all benefited in one way or another from the general wealth, either directly or through a generous subvention payment from the ruler. Yet in his rule were sown the seeds of yet another future division of the country. The erstwhile 'Oman' came to be known as 'Muscat and Oman', the people of Muscat and the coastal towns being traders and Oman being the home of the tribal traditionalist.[20] This split caused much discord in the latter part of the nineteenth century and was not finally healed until Sultan Qaboos renamed the country 'Oman' in 1970.

Sayyid Hamad died in 1972 and his uncle took his place as ruler, Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmed (one of the Imam Ahmad's rebellious sons). Sultan was the strongest man and no one was prepared to challenge his assumption of the role of ruler. To strengthen his position against any flickering ambition on the part of his

[19] Townsend (1977), *Oman: The making of a State*, p. 38.

[20] Townsend (1977), *Oman: The making of a State*, pp. 38-39.

brothers Sa'id (the Imam) and Qais (the third son of Imam Ahmed), Sultan concluded a family agreement with them at Barka in 1793. This agreement involved a virtual dismemberment of Oman: Sa'id was to continue in Rostaq as Imam, Qais was to have Sohar, and Sultan to have Muscat. A modern historian has commented: - "The compact of Barka was a tangible manifestation of the changes effected by two generations of Al Bu Sa'id rule. Sovereign power was now divided, the Imamate was falling into desuetude, and the most vigorous member of the ruling family, Sultan, was concerned almost wholly with maritime and commercial enterprises. Not unnaturally, a growing estrangement between the Al Bu Sa'id and the inland tribes developed, becoming more marked in succeeding generations. Oman's great need in the nineteenth century was for strong leadership and military strength."[21]

Oman under British Domination

Oman and Muscat, effectively divided politically in 1785, drifted further apart as the tribes of the interior began electing imams to govern their affairs whereas the sultans of Muscat, dominated by the British, controlled the coast. This political situation was formalized in 1920 with the treaty of Sid and did not end until 1954 when Oman was reunited by Sultan Sa'id Taimur.[22] Said bin Ahmad was an illegitimate successor, and his "Imama was unconstitutional because it was obtained without the required consensus of the ulama and without approval". In other words, this Imam lacked a *bayah* (oath) and, even worse, empowered a son by the name of Hamad to rule in the coastal region as a governor. It was not totally surprising that Said's brothers, Qays and Sultan, would rise against Hamad, forcing the latter to abdicate. These palace intrigues occurred as some Omanis committed a cardinal sin: Sultan bin Ahmad foolishly agreed to British mediation and, even worse, signed on October 12, 1798, a "friendship" treaty.[23] Sultan failed to note that foreign powers harbored no friendships and that his rule in Muscat was ephemeral since he lacked the legitimacy of the Imamate. "No matter what the

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[21] J.B Kelly (1968), *Great Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1793-1880,* London, p. 91.

[22] Calvin H. Allen (1987), *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate,* London: Westview Press, Croom Helm, p. 53.

[23] Ghubash (2006), *Oman: The Islamic Democratic Tradition,* p. 86.

leadership of the Omani nation might have wished in the nineteenth century, their weakness was assured by an event of great long-term significance for Oman."[24] This was the conclusion of a treaty with the British Honourable East India Company in 1798 and the confirmation of this treaty in 1800. The Britishers at that time was to contain French ambition and above all to keep French ships and solders away from India.

Sultan bin Ahmad died in 1804 and left no clear successor. For the next two years, a series of struggles among several Omani contenders ended when Said bin Sultan, then barely 17, won. This ruler held power for half a century (1806-56), becoming the country's first recognized Sayyid. He was then given the title of Sultan, and later he was called 'the Great'.[25] Sayyid Sa'id was almost permanently absent from Muscat from 1832, the Oman dominion tended to become a poor relation, a tendency enhanced by Sa'id closer association with the power of the British exercised through the officials of the Honourable East India Company. Sa'id knew, as did Sayyid Sultan before him, that he could not challenge the British position with any hope of success. There were certain obvious advantages in this association for Omani side, in the sort term at least. The British naval and military powers was formidable, compared to anything that the Omanis could muster, and such allies could assure Omani success against enemies, provided they did not ask too much.

After his rule, however, both the Imamate in the interior as well as the Sultanate in the coastal regions experienced steady declines. Although the Imamate forged Omani democracy, hereditary rule became the norm, especially in Muscat. Periodic confrontations between Imamate forces and successive sultans drained scarce resources, as the British slowly dismembered the mighty Omani empire in East Africa. It was under Said bin Ahmad's rule that Oman had developed this empire in Zanzibar, engaged in impressive trade with various countries, and regularly sent heavily laden vessels to various ports on good will missions. In April 1840, the Omani ship Sultanah docked at New York Harbor. US trade with Muscat

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[24] Townsend (1977), *Oman: The making of a State*, p 40.

[25] Ghubash (2006), *Oman: The Islamic Democratic Tradition*, p. 83.

expanded from Massachusetts companies to those in New York.[26] In short, Oman was a growing political and economic entity, capable of looking after the interests of its own people and ensuring their relative prosperity. Naturally, such prospects attracted predators, principally Britain and France that had growing designs on the Arabian Peninsula.

Tragically, and for all his prowess, the Great Said committed an egregious error when he called on London to secure two thrones for his sons, Khalid and Thuwayni: one in Zanzibar and the other in Muscat.[27] Sayyyid Thuwaini attempted to regain Zanzibar by force of arms and the government of British India, concerned with stability in the area, acted as arbitrator in the dispute. Recognising the economic loss caused to Oman by the severance of the Zanzibar connection, the Governor-General of British India, Lord Canning, ruled in his arbitration that the government of Zanzibar should make an annual payment to the government of Zanzibar should make an annual payment to the government of Oman of 40,000 Maria Theresa dollars, a not insignificant sum in those days. Although Oman received an annual subsidy from Britain after 1866, the economy was undermined by the loss of the African colonies. In a twenty-year period, between the 1850s and the 1870s, the population of Muscat fell from 55,000 to 8,000; the number of ships visiting the port declined, and an increasing number were foreign-owned. Trade fell in 1874-75 to £426,000, a quarter of its level in the 1830.[28] Payment of the Canning Award by the Zanzibaris fell almost immediately into arrears. The government of British India, having stopped the Omani side taking Zanzibar back by force, had a moral responsibility in the matter, as well as a desire to maintain peace and stability in an area lying astride the sea route to India. Thus it happened that the British came to make the payment themselves from 1871; it was paid from Bombay until 1947, when it become the responsibility of the Foreign Office in London. It was discontinued in 1956.[29]

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[26] Susan L. Douglass and Aisa Martinez (2009), "The United States in Global History & Nineteenth-Century American Merchants in the Indian Ocean: Voyage of the Peacock and theTreaty of Friendship with the Sultan of Muscat", Accessed on 15 July 2010, http://docs. google.com/viewer ?a=v&q=cache:I_XBNkz6EsUJ:www.mei.edu/LinkClick.aspx% 3Ffileticket %3D%252FnvTD106zUg%253D%26tabid%3D349

[27] Ghubash (2006), *Oman: The Islamic Democratic Tradition*, pp.110-17

[28] R. G. Landen (1967), *Oman Since 1856,* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[29] Townsend (1977), *Oman: The Making of a Modern State,* p.43.

The destruction of the Omani empire and of the commercial economy had several important consequences which, taken together, defined the history of the country for the next century. First of all, Oman was plunged into an economic depression, which severed its connections with the outside world, depopulated the coastal towns and drove most of its impoverished inhabitants back to a near-subsistence economy. *The second* consequence of the end of empire was that the conflict between the coast and mountainous interior became more pronounced. When the Omani empire collapsed in the 1860s the tribes of the interior no longer saw rule from Muscat as beneficial to them, and they decided either to impose their own rule on the coast, as had been the case before the sixteenth century, or to break away from a regime that brought them no benefits. This hostility to the coast and to the outside world found expression in a militant Ibadhism which called for stricter observance of Islam.[30] The imposition of British colonial rule was the *third consequences* of the collapse of the Omani empire. Although Oman was never a British colony or protectorate, the British government provided the one stable and sure part of the national revenue for 85 years, a fact contirbuting in understanding of political developments in Oman during this period and the evolution of government.[31]

With the British invasion of Muscat and restoration of the Sultan to power in 1871, Oman was established as a *de facto* British colony and after 1891, a vassal of the British Crown. The 1891 agreement plunging that it would never transfer any Omani territory to foreign powers other than Britain according to an analyst was "one of the most compromising and perilous documents Oman had signed in her history".[32] The way the sultan and his successors were treated would be almost comical, were it not so contemptible. A hapless Faysal bin Turki (1888-1913) was not even allowed to abdicate. No wonder another revolution started in 1913 as the Imamate launched a seven-year war to defend the nation against foreign usurpers.

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[30] European writers trend to regard militant religious movement in the third world as 'traditional'. In fact they are usually modern reactions to the violent irruption of an alien culture and economic system. While offering no viable solution to their believers, they nevertheless express a distorted anti-imperialism.

[31] Townsend (1977), *Oman: The Making of a Modern State,* p.43.

[32] Ghubash (2006), *Oman: The Islamic Democratic Tradition,* p.142

The British never admitted that Oman was a colony and describes it always tried to mask the nature of their control. But this was often hard to sustain as British military might upholds the Sultan, British advisers run his government and, until 1967, British money made up over half revenue. The Sultans were British collaborators.

During the twentieth century up to 1970, the Sultanate knew only three Sultans[33]. Each of these individuals marked a distinct era in the history and development of the political structure of the state. The direct and indirect influences of these Sultans on the state cannot be understated; nor can the role played by the ruling family be minimized. In general, circumstances required the Sultans to work administratively within the limitations of the ruling family. Without various members of the family, regardless of how incapable they may have been, the Sultanate could not have been functioned, even in its customary, haphazard way.

Taymur Bin Faysal , 1913-31

The reign of Taymur bin faysal was characterized by a kind of tug-of-war between the Sultan and his British protectors over who should rule the Sultanate. Although this had also been a central concern of Faysal's reign, the difference at this time was that Taymur and the Government of India were both determined that the other party should govern. In consequence, the Sultanate existed in something of a vacuum, especially for the period between 1921, when the British began concerted attempts to improve the administration, and 1929, when Sa'id bin Taymur became President of the Council of Minister and re-established firm Omani control over the state. Taymur's candidacy to succeed his father was double assured by his being the oldest son of Faysal and his parentage. Since he was recognized as heir apparent from early life, the British were determined that he

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[33] Taymur Bin Faysal (1913-31), Sa'id bin Taymur (1931-70), Qabus bin Sa'id Al Sa'id

would become a capable Sultan. In their view, 'capable' meant being well-educated, able to deal with affairs of state, and, of course, pro- British. [34]

Taymur became Sultan on 9 October 1913, in the midst of the dynasty's most serious threat to date and it was patently clear to him that his continued survival depended absolutely on British support. He was forced to sign on ascending the throne reflected this dependence. Never enthusiastic about administration or the affairs of state, Taymur felt that he had inherited a rather insignificant and certainly troubled throne. The territorial authority was rapidly shrinking and its treasury was deeply in debt. Even the continued survival of the state was in doubt, following the outbreak of hostilities on the part of the interior tribes and, later, as a result of Saudi expansionism and intrigues in the 1920s. The Sultan's personal position was also in considerable jeopardy, due to threats of assassination by interior tribesmen on one hand and the hostility and venality of Al Bu Sa'id family members on the other.[35] Although Taymur was a largely compromised ruler, exercising authority over a capital city emptied of its Omani inhabitants. The treaty of Sid divided Oman into two parts: an Imama in the interior under the rule of Muhammad bin Abdallah Al Khalili (1919-54), and a Sultanate of Muscat on the coast under Taymur. Like his two predecessors, Taymur was not allowed to abdicate[36] when he wished to do so. The situation continued satisfactorily for the British, who had managed to isolate the Imamate in the interior of the country.

Taymur effectively made his escape from Oman in 1929 when his son Sa'id turned eighteen and became old enough to assume Presidency of the Council of Ministers. Although this was the period of the strongest British influence in Oman, it was a presence by default, unlike the 1890s when the Government of India actively sought more control in Oman. It is indeed ironic that one of the policies pursued by the British at the turn of the century, i.e. the attempt to ensure that Faysal's successor should more closely identity himself with British interests,

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[34] J.E. Petersion (1978), *Oman in the twentieth century*, London: Croom Helm, p.49.

[35] Taymur faced opposition in particular from a number of his half-brothers, the 'wicked uncles' who later challenged Sa'id bin Taymur during the early part of the latter's regin.

[36] Ghubash (2006), *Oman: The Islamic Democratic Tradition*, p.175

resulted in a successor whose exposure to India and other part of the world made him reluctant to remain confined to Muscat. It is also something of a paradox that this era of heavy British influence should mask a period of decline British interest in the purely domestic affair of Oman.[37]

Sa'id bin Taymur, 1931-70

To a British establishment disappointed over the attitude and actions of Sultan Taymur, Sa'id bin Taymur represented the 'great British hope'. It was thought that he would be the first ruler since his namesake of the previous century; Sa'id bin Sultan (1807-56), to present a character strong-willed enough to reverse the trend of decay in the Sultanate. Soon after he returned to Oman, he was chosen to replace the late Muhammad bin Ahmad al- Ghashsham as President of the Ministers, and thereby inaugurated a three-year regency. He managed to consolidate his control over the family, as exemplified by the dramatic showdown with his uncle, Hamad bin Faysal, then the semi-independent wali of Suhar.[38] When he formally received the title of Sultan in 1932-his accession was announced on 2 Shawwal 1350/10 February 1932, he was forced to sign the same humiliating letter that had been required of his father.[39] Furthermore, necessity compelled him to accept the presence of British advisers for military and financial affairs until he was able to extricate the state from its overwhelming debts, a feat he accomplish by the forthright expedient of simply not spending beyond his income.

Sa'id's grand strategy of independence could not succeed unless he first brought the interior back into the Sultanate. The financial and military help tendered to the Sultanate during World War II, in combination with concession

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[37] Petersion (1978), *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State*, p.51

[38] Sa'id was described as setting off for Suhar 'with a detachment of the Muscat Infantry and a set of irons, which he said he would place on his uncle if he proved recalcitrant!' IO, R/15/3/216: PRPG Fowle, al-Babrayn, to A, E, B Parsons Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, Demi-Official No. C/166, 16 Aug. 1937. John E. Peterson (1978), *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State*, London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes & Noble, p. 66.

[39] Sa'id bin Taymur to PRPG H. V Biscoe, 2 Shawwal 1350/ 10 Feb. 1932. This letter was amended from that given by Taymur bin Faysal on his accession in 1931 and follows draft oreoared by PAM T. C. Fowle as contained in IO, R/15/3/54; Fowle to Biscoe, No. C-284, 15 Dec. 1931, ibid.

payments by the Iraq Petroleum Company, allowed him to pursue his hope of regaining control there. Even though Sa'id's obsession with complete independence was manifested both in the financial field and the awaited reconquest of the interior, the two goals were not incompatible. If the Sultanate were to remain financially independent, then it needed oil revenues. For the concession-holder to find oil, it needed to explore the interior by his own machinations, then the circle of independence would be complete.

To achieve this end, the Sultan relied on the twin methods of reasserting his pre-eminent authority in settling tribal disputes and seeking rapprochement with the important tamimas.[40] In October 1937, he hosted 'Isa bin Salih al-Harithi and two of his sons, Muhammad and Salih and, a week later, sent them on their way with Rs. 4,000. Almost exactly a year later, 'Ali bin 'Abd Allah Al Hamuda of the Bani Bu 'Ali visited Muscat, stayed two weeks and departed with Rs. 14,000. By 1945, the Sultan's activity had come to a head. Many of the Ghafiri and Hinawi (the two major tribal confederations) leaders, including 'Isa bin Salih and Sulayman bin Himyar al-Nabhani, gathered at al-Kamil in the Sharqiya in March. Following this, 'Ali bin 'Abd Allah Al Hamuda and Sulayman bin Himyar met with Sa'id in Muscat in April. As a result both Sheikhs had declared that they would take no part in election of Imam's successor, both had placed themselves under the 'Orders' of the Sultan.[41]

A further triumph for the sultan came when he successfully mediated in a dispute between ' Isa bin Salin and 'Ali bin 'Abd Allah Al Hamuda at Muscat in October 1945. Not only had he increased his own prestige but he demonstrated that he could successfully arbitrate between the Hinawi and Ghafiri factions. Thus by late 1945, Sa'id had achieved the co-operation of the Ghafiri faction and the

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[40] The word is frequently translated as paramount shaykh, the *tamima's* function went beyond that of shaykh: he was at the head of a unified tribe and his decisions were binding on members of that tribe. According to some sources, the definition of a tamima includes the authority to impose the death penalty on tribesmen guilty of wrongdoing.

[41] IO, R/15/3/470; Assistant PAM Hallows to PRPG at Camp Karachi, Telegram R.I, 28 May 1945. Actually, ' Isa bin Salih only promised to remain neutral. This shaky alliance was one reason why the Sultan refused to allow teams from the Anti-Locust Control Group to travel through the interior in the 1945-48 periods, ibid, p. 67.

neutrality of the Hinawis.[42] Particular in the latter part of his reign, the peculiarities of Sa'id's personality came to dominate the political structure of the Sultanate.[43] His major obsession was a complex concern with position. Included in this trait was his drive for complete independence for the Sultanate and correct status for himself. This was manifested in a sensitivity towards what he regarded as the dignity and respect due an independent sovereign. It also appeared in his extreme frugality, which was at first a means to secure independence but later became an end in itself. Externally, this complex appeared in such activities as the concentration of financial decisions in his own hands. Internally, it resulted in what might be termed his 'maharaja' complex. Traditional Arabian concepts of social democracy, the *majlis* (a council where advice is offered to the shaykh or ruler), and salutations on a first name basis between shaykhs and their tribesmen, were anathema to Sa'id. He sought to isolate himself from his countrymen, mistrusted his family, felt more at home with expatriates, found relaxation in India and London and trusted only his slaves. He was comfortable in western company and western were generally impressed by him.

Said affected both the way the country was ruled and the treatment he meted out to those individuals over whom he chose to exercise his powers. Under the guise of respecting Ibadhism a savage regime was upheld. Said's rule prevented Omanis from leaving the country; discouraged education and health services, and kept from the population a whole series of objects, including medicines, radios, spectacles, trousers, cigarettes and books. Even the oil prospecting companies were prevented from carrying out welfare programmes and they wee prevented from any but the most minimal contacts with the local people. In 1958, the British set up a Development Department to ward off criticism but Said prevented anything being done. 'I always felt he was not really interested in development,' his development adviser later wrote;[44] 'the Sultan was, I felt, half-hearted about plans for health, education, agriculture and so on.' On one occasion he told british adviser: 'This is

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[42] ibid, p.54

[43] Ian Skeet (1966), *Muscat and Oman: The End of an Era*, London: Faber and Faber, pp. 214-22.

[44] Holden (1999), *Farewell to Arabia*, pp. 222.

why you lost India, because you educated the people.'[45] Just before he was ousted in 1970 he had decided to close the three existing primary schools in the country-because they had become 'centers of communism'. [46]

The Sultan was particularly adept at manipulating situations to suit himself. After the British had prevented his campaign to real-Buraymi in 1952, he shrewdly acquired more than an additional subsidy for development.[47] Although not particularly religious, he had courted the mutawwi's before the death of Imam Muhammad bin 'Abd Allah al-Khalifi, with the result that his name was mentioned in the nomination process for a new Imam in 1954. An impression often held by the outside world that Oman was a 'colony' of the British suited him because he knew who controlled the country and the resultant isolation helped him to keep it under control. He was also careful to implement his unpopular policies through such officials as Isma'il bin Khalil al-Rasasi and Shihab bin Faysal Al-Sa'id so that some of the unpopularity would be associates with them.[48]

The reasons for Sa'id downfall are rooted in perceptions that others held about him, ranging from convictions that he would never change and had simply outlived his time.[49] A significant charge leveled against him was that he had forsaken his country for his palace in Salalah. Certainly, he had not visited Muscat for twelve years and since the attempt on his life in 1966, he had rarely ventured out even from the palace itself.[50] A more serious allegation against Sa'id was only that he was isolated but that his control of the country was disintegrating, and his critics pointed to increased success by the Dhufari rebels, the rising tide of unfulfilled expectations in Muscat and the National Democratic Front for the

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[45] ibid, pp. 232

[46] Fred Halliday (2002), *Arabia without sultans*, London: Saqi Books, Penguin, p. 270.

[47] Holden (1999), *Farewell to Arabia*, p. 207

[48] Petersion (1978), *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State*, p .57.

[49] R. P. Owen (1973), "The Rebellion in Dhofar- A Threat to Western Interests in the Gulf", *The World Today*, Vol. 29, No.6, p. 382.

[50] Rumours were rift inside as well as outside the country that he was actually dead and that the British ruled Oman in his name.

Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (NDFLOAG) attack on Izki in 1970.[51] Sa'id did not become a profligate like Shaykh Ahmed bin 'Ali Al Thani of Qatar; nor was he even ostentatious.[52] It is clear that Sa'id was not a miser in the pattern of Shaykh Shakhbut bin Sultan Al Nuhaan of Au Dhabi, since he had begun to spend, however cautiously, on development after receiving additional revenues. Until the production of oil the total budget of the country was less than $2 million per year, and £ 1.5 of this was paid by Britain under the 1866 arrangement.[53] This money was used entirely to preserve Said's rule, mainly by bribing sheikhs with 'annual subsidies'. In 1958 Said obtained £3 million from Pakistan by selling Gwadur, an Omani enclave on the Pakistani coast, and this money was put in a Swiss bank.[54] In 1967 oil production began and revenues rose from £8 million in 1967 to £44 million in 1970. This too was put away and Omani reserves rose spectacularly to around £80 million. In a rare interview in 1966, he tried, preposterously, to present himself to the world as an enlightened of cautious despots.

The Sultan made it clear that the oil money would go for development. He said he felt that in the interests of his deeply religious people changes should be gradual. He did not plan, to borrow in advance of his oil revenue. The oil community with their modern ideas were largely segregated from his people. The repressive laws and bans on movements were tightened after the rising of 1957-9 in Oman and from then on no one was allowed into country. The last journalist permitted to visit the Omani interior was in 1962, and the only subsequent visits were stopovers to interview the Sultan at his palace. Said administered the country through appointed governors, *walis;* but even after the reintegration of Oman in the 1950s large areas of the country were left under the autonomous control of the tribal rulers.

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[51] The National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf was an outgrowth of the Dhufari rebel organization.

[52] Hugh Boustead (2002), *The Wind Of Morning*, California: Craven Street Books, Fresno, p. 222.

[53] Holden (1999), *Farewell to Arabia*, p. 222.

[54] ibid, p. 222.

As in Imamic North Yemen, the main tax was the Muslim zakat,[55] a percentage tax on agricultural produce, and the law administered was the Shariah. The walis and sheikhs co-operated in extorting from, and terrorizing, the peasantry.

The judicial system was savage, and up to a year before Said was deposed he had authorized public executions. Sentences were unspecified, many people died in prisons and many others went mad. Said Masoud, a militant from Dhofar who spent the years 1965 to 1970 in Kut-al-Jalali. Prisoners who had been in al-Hosn prison in Salala told of similar conditions to those in al-Jllali, with hundred of prisoners shackled together in dark rooms, without proper food or light or medical attention.[56] It is not surprising that when the UN sent a representative to Oman in 1963 he was refused permission to visit Jalali prison.

Modernisation of the government of the Sultanate in the early twentieth century was a consequence of British fear that, if something was not done in Muscat, the Al-Bu Sa'id regime would fall to the imamte. The development of political institutions is very much a twentieth-century phenomenon in Oman. Throughout Omani history the governments of both sultans and imams were limited to the ruler, one or two advisers, governors or walls in the major towns who were assisted by qadis, and tribal levies raised during times of military necessity. During the twentieth century this structure began to undergo fundamental change in Muscat as the British became increasingly concerned about the survival of the sultanate. A modern cabinet was introduced under Sultan Taimur B. Faisal in 1921 and continued to operate, with periodic modifications, under Sultan Sa'id B. Taimur. After the 1970 coup the government expanded significantly, and Omanis began to play an increasing role in administration, although the basic principles of the political system remained essentially unchanged. Other administrative affairs were to be handled by a four-person council of ministers establishment in 1920. This council, like all later governments of Oman, was dominated by the Al Bu Sa'id family member as finance minister. Zubair b. Alli al-Hutti, a Baluch who had served as Taimur's personal secretary, was minister of justice, and an old family

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[55] Zakat, Arabic zakāt , an obligatory tax required of Muslims, one of the five Pillars of Islam. The zakat is levied on five categories of property—food grains; fruit; camels, cattle, sheep, and goats; gold and silver; and movable goods—and is payable each year after one year's possession. The tax levy required by religious law varies with the category. Recipients of the zakat include the poor and needy, the collectors themselves, and "those whose hearts it is necessary to conciliate"—e.g., discordant tribesmen, debtors, volunteers in jihad (holy war), and pilgrims.

[56] P. S. Allfree (1967), Warlords of Oman, London: Robert Hale, p.164

retainer was in charge of religious affairs. In 1925 the British financial adviser, Bertran Thomas, was brought formally into the cabinet. None of these individuals was especially qualified for their positions, including Thomas who was far more interested in exploring Oman and the Rub Al-Khali than affairs of state, but they did rule Muscat in the long absences of Taimur.

When the pathetic Taimur was finally permitted to retire in 1931 and was formally succeeded by his son Sa'id, who had begun to play an active role in the administration in 1929 when he had returned to Muscat from schooling in India and Iraq, did scrap the council of minister and replace it with departments of finance, internal affairs, and replace it with department of finance, internal affairs, and justice- an act that demonstrated more the new sultan's desire to control affairs directly than a fundamental change in government. Sa'id administered finances himself, as he had done since 1929 when he fired Bretran Thomas. Sa'id financial management system, based in the principle that the government did not spend what it could not afford, ensured that the budget remained balanced until the mid-1950s. When oil income began flowing into the country in the late 1960s, they sultan hired an expatriate financial secretary, but the office never really functioned as Sa'id refused to provide the bureaucrat with any information.[57]

During the first twenty-five years of Sa'id's reign, *interior affairs* were restricted to governing the Batinah, Ru'us al-Jibal, Dhofar although in the last sultan retained personal authority and treatment of the imam in Nizwa. Walis, usually members of the Al Bu Sa'id family, were appointed to the major towns and performed their traditional roles as mediators. They and their qadi assistants were usually corrupt and much less respected than those appointed by the imam in interior towns. Sa'id also corresponded regularly with the principal tribal leader. Sa'id also directed this department until 1939 when Sayyid Ahmed B. Ibrahim, a descendant of Imam Azzam B. Qais, was named minister of the interior, a post he held until 1970.

The reunification of Oman in 1955 and the suppression of the restoration movement of the imamate in 1957-59 brought some changes to the interior department. Following the initial integration of the interior, Shalk Ahmed B.

[57] Calvin H. Allen (1987), *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate*, London: Westview Press, Croom Helm, p. 76.

Muhammad al-Hirthi, who had supported the sultan's efforts in Oman, was made viceroy over Oman, but he was replaced when the civil war began in 1957 with Sayyid Tariq B. Taimur Sa'id's brother. Once the imamate was completely suppressed, Ahmed B. Ibrahim reassumed control over interior affairs and served as liaison between the tribes and the sultan, as well as dispensed tribal subsidies but supervision of the Batinah walls and sharia courts was entrusted to Ismail-al-Rasasi, the Palestinian wall of Matrah.

Several other administrative changes were made. In 1938 a municipality of Muscat and Matrah was established to govern those towns and to deal with sanitation, especially malaria prevention, water supply, and electricity. The justice department, which had continued to be administered by Zubair B. Ali al-Hutti, had ceased to function by 1939 because there was so little justice to administer, since the sharia, British consular, and various communal courts were under separate jurisdiction. Zubair became a personal adviser to the sultan, and judicial matters were handled on an ad hoc basis. Also in 1939 Sa'id appointed his uncle Sayyid Shihab B. Faisal foreign minister to oversee relations with the British and served as the Sultan's personal and ceremonial representative during his long absences in Salalah. Shihad performed these duties until 1945 when he was replaced by the first of several British expatriates. Then in 1960 when Sa'id abandoned Muscat permanently for Salalah, Shihab again entered the government as Sa'id's ceremonial representative and governor of the capital area, and an expatriate, F. Chauncey, was named Sa'id personal adviser to keep a watch over Muscat and deal with the British.[58]

Qabus bin Sa'id Al Sa'id

On July 23, 1970, supporters of Qabus bin Said Al Said stormed al-Hisn, the sultan's seaside palace in Salalah, and forced his father the sultan to abdicate and accept exile.[59] From the first days of his rule, Sultan Qabus bin Sa'ld sought to establish a new image of the monarchy. Within a week of the coup he flew to Muscat and was enthusiastically welcomed. Shortly afterward, in the first radio

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[58] ibid, p.79

[59] J.E. Peterson (2004), "Oman: Three and a half decades of Change and Development", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XI, No. 2, p. 125.

broadcast by an Omani monarch to his people, Qabus declared an amnesty for all former rebels, changed the country's name from the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman to the Sultanate of Oman to emphasize its unity, lifted the numerous petty restrictions in force under his father, and toured the major towns of the Omani interior accompanied by newly submitted Dhofari rebels to meet tribal leaders and establish Oman's "new era."[60] For the next few years, nearly any Omani, when asked what he or she thought of the new ruler, would almost inevitably reply, "Before him, there was nothing. Now, there is everything."[61] Over the next decade or more, the sultanate made enormous strides in developing its potential and raising the standard of living of its people.[62]

Phase- I: Beginnings of a New Era

Oman had suffered thirty eight years of medieval and harsh rule.'[63] As Sultan Qabus himself said, that his accession is marked with mounting concern and intense dissatisfaction due to the ill administration of his father. His first aim, he added, would be 'to remove all the unnecessary restrictions that you have been suffering under'.[64] Official publications reveal that 'it was not until 1970 that oil revenues were used to develop the country. In fact the development of the modern Oman only started in 1976'[65] and that 'there was no effort to explore for oil in other than the Petroleum Development (Oman) concession area] parts of the Sultanate'.[66] These restrictions were, a prime justification for the coup and the more serious ones will be considered in relevant sections. Sultan Qabus's first acts

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[60] Sultanate of Oman, Government Information Service, August 12, 1970, "Sultan's Visit to Bahlah" (mimeo.) and "Transcript of a Statement by Jalalat as-Sultan broadcast over Radio Oman, Sunday 9 August 1970" mimeo, archives of Petroleum Development Oman [PDO], Mina al- Fahl.

[61] Peterson (2004), "Oman: Three and a half decades of Change and Development", p.125.

[62] ibid, p.125.

[63] Ministry of Information (1971), *The New Oman*, Muscat: Ministry of Information, Labour and Social Welfare, p. 24.

[64] ibid, p. 7.

[65] Sultanate of Oman Development Council (1976), *The Five- Year Development Plan 1976-1980*, Muscat, p. 2

[66] Ministry of Information and Youth Affairs (1980), "Oman in 10 Years", Muscat: Ministry of Information and Youth Affairs, p.118; also in, D. Hawley (1977), *Oman and its Renaissance*, London: Stacey International, p.178.

in 1970– abolishing restrictions on smoking, singing and wearing spectacles- were newsworthy enough. Automobiles, radio, cement houses, even sunglasses were forbidden.[67] Sunglasses were forbidden; so under specific circumstances, were shoes.[68] These were typical of the petty and incomprehensible restrictions attributed to Sultan Sa'id regime, and they are, for the most part, the purest nonsense.

Immediately after the coup of 1970, Qaboos faced a myriad of problems-the Dhofar war, popular expectation, general ignorance of conditions in Oman, and few contacts in Muscat. There were few Omanis with any education. The existing government was minimal and ill suited to development. The country lacked nearly all infrastructures, including a modern port, roads, schools, electricity outside the capital area, and even office space for the government. What he was not lacking were expatriate advisers, mostly holdovers from the days of Sa'id. Government came to be controlled by an interim advisory council dominated by expatriates under the direction of the military secretary, Colonel Hugh Oldman, who had replaced Waterfield in January 1970. Immediately upon the coup, Interim Council composed largely of expatriates was established in Muscat to oversee the transition. Sultan Said's two principal Omani officials, both members of his family, retired or left the country. In the following months, a nucleus of capable Omanis took up new positions in the new government, and most existing expatriate advisers were replaced by better-qualified ones. Sayyid Tariq bin Taymur, the new sultan's uncle, returned from years of exile in Cyprus and Germany to assume the newly created position of Prime Minister. Qabus was disposed to rule as a benevolent monarch, while Tariq sought to introduce a constitutional monarchy.[69]

Tariq's return and enthusiastic handling of the prime ministership so soon after the coup resulted in an immediate political crisis. This was caused partly by personality differences and mistrust between the Prime Minister and sultan; Tariq was better known, more confident, and more dynamic than Qaboos, who had spent

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[67] Unni Wikam (1982), *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 6.

[68] Liesl Graz (1982), *The Omanis: Sentinels of the Gulf*, London: Longman, p.16.

[69] Peterson (2004), "Oman: Three and a Half Decades of Change and Development", p.127.

several years in virtual isolation in Salalah. Logistic problems also arose as the respective roles of Prime Minister and Sultan were never clearly defined. It is not even certain that Qaboos had approved the appointment of Tariq in the first place. Finally, the two men had fundamental philosophical differences. Tariq has been portrayed in several Western studies as favoring a constitutional monarchy or even republican from of government. In contrast, Qabus's outlook was very conservative: He saw himself as the inheritor of the Al- Sa'id tradition of absolute rule.

Tariq's distinctive philosophical approach was very apparent in the Omani administration during the first year after the coup. Whether or not one accepts Tariq's reputation as a liberal, the scope and personnel of his cabinet differed greatly from those of any preceding one. New ministries of education, health, justice, information, labor, social affairs, and economy joined existing ministries of interior and foreign affairs. The Al Bu Sa'id royal family still controlled the largest block of ministerial posts, but these men, including Faisal B. Ali Al-Sa'id and Fahd B Mahmud Al-Sa'id, had, like Tariq, opposed Sa'id and gone into exile. Other cabinet members included Saud al-Khlili, a prominent tribal leader, and Asian al-Jamali, a trained medical doctor. There were no expatriates: It was a cabinet of national reconciliation with few ties to the old order.[70] From 1970 until 1990, Oman's priorities were the development of the country's infrastructure, providing health care to all Omanis, and the development of an educational system. Three major factors led Oman to expand the level of popular participation in government include: the accomplishment of the aforementioned goals, the upcoming economic and social challenges to the status quo, and the question of what system or individual will succeed Sultan Qaboos.[71]

Qaboos retained direct control of defense, finance, petroleum affairs, Dhofar, and the Capital Area, just as his father had. Even though the Omanis who held the top posts in these departments resigned, the new appointees had very close ties to the old order; the new governor of the Office; the defense secretary, Hamad b. Hamud Al bu, Sa'id, had been Sa'id personal secretary. The remainder of Qaboos' advisers were expatriates. Even without the power struggle between

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[70] Allen (1987), *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate,* p. 81.

[71] Katzman & Katz (1995), *Oman: Political Development and the Majlis Ash'Shura,* p.16.

Qaboos and Tariq, the transition from Sa'id government to the new order was difficult. The new cabinet was beset with problems: There was no clear idea of either general policies or authority, either collectively or for individual ministers, personnel lacked expertise, and there were staff shortage and almost no coordination. Tariq's relationship with Qaboos meant that the cabinet received little information, a situation exacerbated by Tariq's absence throughout much of the first year while he was settling his personal affairs in Europe and seeking diplomatic recognition for the new government. Tariq did not even have a secretary to handle his correspondence in his absence. By the end of 1971, Tariq felt compelled to resign; he spent many of his remaining years abroad. Qaboos was quick to assert his control over the administration. He assumed the prime ministership- adding that to the defense and finance portfolios.

While Oman's new-found oil production was a god send for the fledgling government, income remained limited in the first several years relative to the enormous need, with government revenues (overwhelmingly derived from oil) only slightly more than 50 million Omani riyals in 1970, 1971 and 1972. It was not until 1973-74 that the oil-price revolution boosted government revenues to 211.6 million riyals in 1974. This bonanza permitted the government to bring expenditures (roughly half of which were on development) back into line with revenues in 1974.2 A first priority was to create incipient ministries for social services, such as education, health and public works. These were staffed in the early days by Omanis returning from abroad, as well as expatriates, with so-called "Zanzibaris" prominent among their numbers.[72]

More "traditional" areas of government fared better, as most of the *walis* (the sultan's representatives in the towns and villages) remained *in situ* under the aegis of the ministry of the interior. The same held true for the *qadis* (judges) under the ministry of awqaf and Islamic affairs. While the new sultan and his govern and rapid economic development, serious questions arose of how to go about it. Sultan Said bin Taymur had initiated the first modest development schemes in the two

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[72] Because of Oman's long connection with the East African littoral, especially but not exclusively the island of Zanzibar, thousands of Omanis had been born in and/or lived in East Africa. Many of them fled Zanzibar after the revolution in 1964, and others returned to Oman only after 1970. They were welcomed because of their education and knowledge of English.

short years he had been in receipt of oil revenues. These essentially amounted to a couple of schools and office buildings, a few roads, a new seaport and a "Greater Matrah" plan, in addition to the barely functioning health dispensaries and agricultural farms he had been forced to establish as a condition of British subsidies in the 1950s and 1960s.[73]

The first uncertain steps were being taken to create an appropriate government almost entirely from scratch. He set up a council of ministers, with himself as chair and Thuwaini b. Shihab as deputy. The process was accompanied by confusion in how tasks were to be divided among government departments: the Ministry of Trade and Development was replaced by the Center for Economic Planning, which was replaced by the Ministry of Development, which in turn was replaced by the Supreme Planning Council. Sultan Said had held steadfast to his policy of isolation until his abdication. He was content to accept British military and financial assistance when necessary while striving to hold Whitehall's demands for liberalization and development at bay.[74] An early point of friction was over the appropriate role of the ruling Al Said family in governing. Elsewhere in the Gulf, the ruling families hold considerable power and influence vis-à-vis the ruler. Oman has no constitution. Absolute power is vested in the sultan, who combines supreme executive, legislative, judicial, and military authority. The sultanate is hereditary in the Al-Sa'id branch of the Al Bu Sa'id royal family, which has ruled the country since 1744. No formal principle of succession exists, although in the twentieth century rule has passed to the oldest, freedom son.

Given the enormous impact of rapid change, it is inevitable that the three major themes in Omani politics- the Sultans and the ruling family, administration and the tribes- should be greatly affected and transformed. Perhaps the role of the Al Bu Sa'id has changed the least, as the ruling family has remained firmly entrenched in the mainstream of the nation's political life. The historical basis of the dynasty assured the Sultanate of an ideological affinity with its neighbours in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia and Iran- close relationships made vital by the threat posed by Dhufar rebellion.

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[73] Peterson (2004), "Oman: Three and a Half Decades of Change and Development", p.127.

[74] ibid, p.129

The Al-Said[75], however, were small in number and had been clearly subordinate to Sultan Said bin Taymur and even to his predecessors. Qabus's word was final on all matters, but he could be lobbied. In the November 1974 cabinet, the Al Sa'id held the portfolios of defence, foreign affairs, information, interior and education. In addition, Al Bu Sa'ids were ministers of justice, land affairs and diwan affairs. The family continued to be a highly visible elite in Muscat, in tandem with the established merchant families and expatriate advisers- an Al Bu Sa'id member of any commercial partnership, such as real estate, seemed to assure success. There the traditional presence of an Al Bu Sa'id wall, a neutral figure admits tribal rivalries, continued. In short, the family seemed destined to dominate the country's politics for some time to come, with the dynastic Al Sa'id undoubtedly retaining importance after the wider role of the Al Bu Sa'id elements has been forgotten.[76]

Administrative Changes

Oman's administrative structure imposes an overlay of modern central government on a traditional, tribal system historically accustomed to relative autonomy. The strength of the central administrative system and authority of the Muscat-appointed wali is a direct function of the strength and effectiveness of the Sultan himself. In tracking the steps made thus far to increase representative institutions in Oman, it is important to remember that it is a strong central government led by Sultan Qaboos that has unified the country, delivered services, and kept the peace in an environment that could have easily developed into unruly local fiefdoms, such as those that remain in Yemen. For Omanis, stability is a prerequisite for the development of democracy.[77]

The Sultanate's administration, almost by definition, changed the most as it expanded beyond recognition. It began to dominate life completely in the capital region, and extended basic services to the interior for the first time.[78] The

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[75] Al- Sa'id is a branch of Al Bu Sa'id royal family.

[76] Petersion (1978), *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State*, p. 210.

[77] Katzman & Katz (1995), *Oman: Political Development and the Majlis Ash'Shura*, p.16.

[78] Before 1970, 'capital' meant Muscat. The governorate was subsequently expanded another thirty miles to the west to include as Sib.

proliferation of ministries, departments and agencies may have seemed to have been created out of thin air, but, nevertheless, there were solid roots in the past. For example, the Ministries of Education, Health and Public Works, as well as the Department of Agriculture, grew out of offices belonging to the old Development of Department of 1950s vintage. The difference between the old and new variations lay in the latter's ability to respond adequately to the needs of the country rather than to the whims of an eccentric Sultan. Only the military establishment, as a result of the exacting requirements for national security, possessed a solid framework; yet it too expanded considerably after 1970.

The man *executive body* in the land is the council of ministers chaired by a prime minister appointed by the sultan. The council includes the nineteen ministers who administer the specialized agencies of the government, the governors of the Capital Area, Dhofar, and Masandam, and various personal advisors to the sultan who hold ministerial status. The ministers, preparing the agenda and memorandum relating to meetings, facilitating communication between and among the various ministries status. The ministry of *diwan* (palace) affairs acts as the secretariat for the council of ministries and the sultan, publishing new laws in the official gazette, auditing state accounts, and administering the civil service. The principal functions of the council of ministers are to prepare draft legislation for proclamation by the sultan and to coordinate government policies and programes. In addition to the council of ministers, the sultan is served by eight specialized national councils, each officially chaired by the sultan. These includes the National Defense Council, set up in 1973 to coordinate activities of SAF, the Royal Oman Police (ROP), and the intelligence service, the Oman Research Bureau; the National Development Council, which is in charge of economic planning and all development projects above prescribed amounts; the Council for Financial Affairs, which draws up the annual budget and studies the financial allocations for economic development projects approved by the Development Council; and the council responsible for education and training; natural gas; agriculture, fishries, and industry; water resources; and conservation and pollution. Each of these councils includes personnel from appropriate ministries and representatives of the private sector.[79]

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[79] Allen (1987), *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate*, p. 83.

Justice is administered by the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf. The sharia, specifically the Ibadi school, governs personal law and theoretically servers as the basis for sultanic decrees issued to deal with wide range of matters not covered by religious law. The great majority of legal issues are handled at the local level in one of the fifty regional courts served by qadis. A three- member appellate court in Muscat handles appeals from the qadi courts, and the sultan is the final appeal. Specialized commercial and traffic courts are located in Muscat.[80]

Local government has changed little since the coup of 1970. The country is divided into forty-one *wllayats* (districts), two provinces Dhofar and Masandam, and the Capital Area each administered by wali who represents the central government and mediates in local disputes. Walis hold *majlises,* daily public meeting to ascertain local opinion and serve as an important conduit between the government and tribal leaders. All walis, except those in Dhofar, Masandam, and the capital area, report to the ministry of the interior. The three exceptions hold cabinet rank and are directly under the sultan. The municipality system, first set up under Sa'id, was expanded to other major towns in the early 1970s. These councils are appointed by the sultan, with elected rural council was abolished by the sultan in early 1985.[81]

Tribal and Religious Concerns

The tribe is 2,000-year-old institution in the Gulf region that has shown remarkable staying power. Throughout Omani history tribal leaders have proved to be very pragmatic, sublimating their own power and authority when faced with superior power and/or authority. In contrast to the ruling family, the role of the tribes was severely curtailed by the new face of Oman. The demise of their importance on the national stage, stretching back in origin to the failure of the 1950s revolt, was concisely symbolized in the fate of Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Harithi. Once the most powerful tribal figure of the interior, Ahmad's uncompromising attitude towards the new Sultan resulted in his house arrest in

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[80] ibid.

[81] ibid, p. 84.

Muscat in 1971 and loss of his political position. The few tamimas remaining after 1970 managed to retain their status only by acknowledging the supreme role of the state and confining their political ambitions to activities within their own tribes. Resentment at being excluded from wider Omani power politics undoubtedly contributed to the cooperation of tribal elements with NDFLOAG and Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLOAG) schemes for subversion in Oman, but their inability to carry out plans pointed up the futility of resisting the new order by traditional means.[82]

Even though the national arena was closed to tribal intrigue, the shaykhs still exercised predominant influence in the countryside. They held local authority for many settlements and administered the law in tribal diras: it was still the Shaykh who journeyed to the Ministry of the Interior in Muscat to seek settlement of a grievance for a member of his tribe.[83] But the countryside was changing as well. Traditional authority patterns were eroded in the larger towns by the establishment of municipalities responsible to Muscat and municipal councils initially appointed from the capital. The traditional responsibility of the shaykh to serve as intermediary between the government and his people in procuring basic services was largely superseded by the establishment of government clinics, agricultural extension units and schools, all of which encouraged direct contact between the government's representatives and the subjects.

Religious opposition is yet another cause for concern. Throughout its 240-year history, the Al-Sa'id regime has been at odds with the Omani tradition of an elected imamate. During the early years of Qaboos' reign, religious opposition was occasionally expressed, symbolically at least, by the flying of the white banner of the imamate over his new mosque in Nizwa or the ruins of tanuf, a stronghold of imamate support during the 1957-1959 restoration movement. The popularity of Qaboos and the supposed diminishing of tribal allegiance and authority neutralized considerable any potential religious challenge to the regime. The popularity of

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[82] Petersion (1978), *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State*, p. 211.

[83] In this connection, it will be recalled that the Duru' sheikhs have adapted to new circumstances by acting as labour brokers for the oil company.

Qaboos and the supportive of religion, to deflect any potential criticism from that direction.

When almost twenty years of scientific socialism have failed to destroy tribalism, the attempted coup of January 1986 quickly became a tribal leaders have proved to be very pragmatic, sublimating their own power and authority when faced with superior power and/or authority. When there is a political vaccum, they reassert their positions. Furthermore, the imamate is one institution that could galvanize both traditional and nationalist support because the imamate has traditionally been the focus of Omani nationalism is time of crisis, and its quasi-democratic principle of an elected nonhereditary head of state is much more in line with modern theories of participatory democracy than is the anachronistic absolute monarchy of the Al-Sa'id. Much of the Qaboos' opposition to the introduction of democratic institutions can be attributed to the precedent that this would set vi-a-vis the legitimacy of his own position.

Dhofar War

The most serious challenge to the new regime was the war in Dhofar. Dhofar itself was a dependency of Oman and it was subjected to severe economic exploitation.[84] In 1962 a dissatisfied tribal leader, Mussalim bin Nafl, formed the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) and obtained arms and vehicles from Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia and Oman had earlier clashed over ownership of the Buraimi Oasis, and the Saudis had already supported two failed insurrections in the Jebel Akhdar in the interior of Oman in 1957–59. The DLF also received support from Imam Ghalib Bin Ali, the exiled Imam of Oman, who had led these earlier revolts.

Hostilities had begun in a small way in 1962 with a single disgruntled tribesman raising a few followers and using small arms acquired in Saudi Arabia to attack irrigation systems and American oil-company vehicles. Within a few years, the rebellion had acquired a Dhufari nationalist character, fueled by money and support from Dhufaris working elsewhere in the Gulf. South Yemeni independence in late 1967 led to additional support from Aden, China and the Soviet Union, as well as a stronghold across the Yemeni border. Within a few months, Marxist

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[84] Halliday (1974), *Arabia Without Sultans.*

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leaders had secured control of the front. Sultan Said was forced to spend increasing amounts on expanding his armed forces, accompanied by small-scale British assistance. By early 1970, most of Dhufar lay in the front's hands. Most Dhufaris were won over by a combination of the obvious commitment of the new regime to development and a better life, and mistakes by the front's hardline leadership in its sometimes brutal suppression of Islam and tribalism. Gradually, the front's fighters defected to the sultanate side and were regrouped in tribal militias to defend their tribal territories against their erstwhile comrades.

Social Change

Like its Gulf neighbors, Oman has been transformed by oil wealth during the last fifteen years. Educational and health improvements have contributed markedly to the general welfare of the Omani people, and other services and increased employment opportunities have brought material gains that a generation ago would have been unimaginable. In 1970 in the whole country there were only three boys' schools containing 30 teachers and 909 pupils,[85] that 'education for girls was considered taboo by the previous Sultans', and that Omanis were thus obliged to seek education abroad and, having done so, were forbidden to return,[86] To this last point is usually added the charge that Omanis who left the country for work were unable to return.[87]

Sultan Sa'id had, in fact, been among the first rulers in the Arabian Peninsula to open schools, in spite of the state's exiguous income. The most interesting aspect of pre 1970 education, however, is probably the existence of a least 50 Qur'anic schools,[88] one in almost every village, and with an estimated enrolment of about 4,800.[89] The Qur'anic school were attended by girls as well as

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[85] National Statistical Department (1975), "Development in Oman 1970- 1974", Muscat: Ministry of Development, p. 143.

[86] Liesl Graz, (1982), *The Omanis: Sentinels of the Gulf,* London: Longman, p 196.

[87] Ian Skeet (1974), *Muscat and Oman; The End of an Era*, London: Faber and Faber, p.196.

[88] IBRD (12 September 1972), The Economy of Oman, Report no. EMA- 55a, cited in Ian Richard Netton (1986), *Arabia and the Gulf: from Traditional Society to Modern States*, Australia: Croom Helm Australia Pty Ltd, p. viii.

[89] IBRD (31 May 1974), Current Economic Position and Prospects of Oman, Report No. 393a- om, ibid, p.13.

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boys. In 1973, 22 per cent of mother interviewed in Nizwa had attended school,[90] and in 1980 a researcher in Hamra found that some 50 per cent of adult women of shaykhly status were literate. This rate of literacy remained fairly constant over the generations and compared favourably with the situation in Morocco where 'almost all women over a certain age regardless of their status were illiterate'.[91] In fact, female illiteracy in each of Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia was estimated to be 98 per cent in the mid- 1970s.[92] The first official girls' school was ordered by Sultan Sa'id and opened in 1970.[93] Sultan Qaboos himself declared early in his regin that 'if education in Oman does not proceed along the right track, then the provision of education may turn out be more disastrous than the lack of it. Before 1972 there was no education policy, but even the new temporary policy adopted in that year was 'in the absence of an overall social and economic plan. It had been realized that *any* policy was better than none at all.

Despite changes, Omani society retains many of the features of its traditional organization and has not been immune to some of the problems associated with rapid economic development. Family, both in terms of the immediate extended unit and the wider tribal affiliation, remains the focus of social life, influenced primarily by ethnic background and Islamic values. The home remains the women's world: Her activities are limited to raising children, tending to domestic affairs such as cooking, and visiting with other women. Many women are limited to raising children, tending to domestic affairs such as cooking, and visiting with other women.

Life is changing for an increased number of Omani women. The government has sought to provide far greater opportunities for the country's women than have some of its Gulf neighbors. Although they follow the Muslim

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[90] UNICEF (December 1973), *Beliefs and Practices Related to Health, Nutrition and Child Rearing in Two Communities of Oman*, Abu Dhabi, UNICEF First draft, Vol. 1, p.15

[91] Christine Eickelman (1944), *Women and community in Oman*, United States America: New York University, p. 199

[92] F. Allaghi and A. Almana (1984), "Survey of Research of Women in the Arab Gulf Region" in *Social Science Research and Women in the Arab World* (UNESCO and Frances Pinter, London, pp 22, 30

[93] Townsend (1977), *Oman: The making of a State*, p.170.

regulation on segregation of the sexes in schools and medical facilities, women do mix with men occasionally in the workplace, and some hold administrative positions in government in which they supervise male employees. The women's branch of the Royal Oman Police[94], which performs various functions such as customs inspection at airports, is one of the most highly respected institutions in the country. Despite these changes, male members continue to dominate public life in Oman. But changes are occurring even in the male world. Economic development and an increasing role of government in society have created a wide range of employment opportunities, although employment patterns are somewhat bound by tradition. Although no formalized caste structure exists, certain categories of employment are associated with particular groups within society. Increasingly, the Arab majority is found in business, government, land owning, the army and police, and services sectors. The only manual labor deemed suitable by Arabs is taxi driving, perhaps a throwback to the Bedouin tradition. Manual labor is performed by Baluchi or other minority groups or by expatriate South Asians. Oman's new middle class, educated largely in Britain and the United States, is just beginning to exert pressure for a greater role in the country's political, economic, and social development and can be expected to have a long-term impact on Oman.[95]

Political Dynamics

Despite tremendous expansion in the range of government activities and greater participation by Omanis is their government's affairs, there was little change in either the operation or principles of politics in Oman until the end of cold war. As the formal structure demonstrates, the sultan retains absolute control over political affairs. Despite public statements to the contrary, Qaboos has shown little inclination to give up those powers. His own style of government differs little from that of his father as he remains very isolated from the general population and continues to rely on a small crops of personal advisers (in some cases holdovers from the 1960s) in those areas deemed most critical, such as finance and defense. Qaboos has retained the prime ministership and the direction of finance, foreign

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[94] The women's branch of the Royal Oman Police was established in 1980.

[95] Allen (1987), *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate*, p. 103.

affairs, and defense, and he continues to administer directly Dhofar, Masandam, and Muscat.

The cabinet has assumed a much more independent and active role in nondefense and finance areas as government becomes more complex and ministers become more sophisticated and confident. The Sultan deserves some of the credit for this turn of events as the council of ministers did provide some much needed coordination and a vehicle for discussion of policy matters. Also, younger, more capable ministers, like Salim and Ahmed al-Ghazali, the ministers of commerce and industry and housing, and Yusuf al-Alawi Abdallah, minister of state for foreign affairs, have made valuable contributions to he process. Although ostensity a representative body, the council is very much controlled by the sultan through his power of appointment, and it has been dominated by Al Bu Sa'id loyalists, the Muscat commercial community, and traditional elites from the interior. The newly appointed president, Salim b. Nasser Al Bu Saidi, is a member of the royal family. There appears to be little desire to turn the council into an elected body, and Qaboos seems very reluctant to introduce any form of democracy into the country, as demonstrated by the abrogation of the rural council.[96]

In Oman, like most other countries of the Arabian Peninsula, explicit controversy over political and religious issues does not form part of the standard fare of local newspapers or the broadcast media. A significant shift in religious and political sensibilities began in the early 1980s, when young Omanis throughout the country began to ask for such seemingly apolitical amenities as libraries in the youth clubs associated with every major town and village, and for provisions to be made for Friday sermons. The move to open libraries was often met with suspicion, as those most interested were university students active in various Islamic community organizations outside of Oman. Permission was often denied under various pretexts.[97]

While Oman's rich culture and identity is more than 2,000 years old, it is only since Sultan Qaboos' ascension to power that the country has witnessed a

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[96] Petersion (1978), *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State*, pp.85-6

[97] Joseph A. Kechichian (ed.) (2001), *Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States*, New York: Palgrave, p. 204.

"renaissance," guided by the Sultan himself and propelled by oil and natural gas revenues. The political changes in Oman are not being brought about by regional conflicts, political grassroots movements, or by broad-based popular dissatisfaction. The personal involvement and leadership of Sultan Qaboos has placed Oman's political liberalisation within an overall framework of national development, and as such, falls within the responsibility of the government to fashion and implement. One important result of this approach is the long-term, incremental nature of the process. Elections and comprehensive legislative authority are viewed as mid- to long-term objectives, rather than as a facade to convince the world of Oman's democratic progress. This vision has driven the political and economic liberalization process in Oman.[98]

State Consultative Council

The Sultan eventually began to build the foundation for an incremental transition to representative government in Oman. In the early 1980s, this was initiated with the Sultan's annual "meet the people" tours. The "meet the people" tours are rooted in the tradition of *shura* and serve as a link between the central government and the grassroots. When Oman had completed the first stage of its economic development and had built up a nation-wide infrastructure, Sultan Qabus began the process of reforms towards democratic representation in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution. In 1981, the State Consultative Council (SCC), known in Arabic as *al-majlis al-istishari lil-dawla* was first time set up apparently with the purpose of reflecting the needs and wishes of people.[99] It provided a singular opportunity to discern how a late 20th century Islamic monarchy, one that had undergone especially rapid economic and social change since 1970, sought to maintain popular legitimacy. By the mid-1970s, the Council of Ministers remained as the only forum outside the palace for the sustained general discussion of policy matters. Opportunities to make systematic suggestions concerning over all policy became confined principally to an elite inner circle. Various advisory councils were established from time to time, but most were short-lived and not intended to deal

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[98] Katzman & Katz (1995), *Oman: Political Development and the Majlis Ash'Shura*, p. 8.

[99] Aswini K. Mohapatra (2007), "The Sultanate of Oman- Liberalised Autocracy", *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, p.133.

comprehensively with affairs of state. The first modest effort to broaden consultation was the short-lived Council on Agriculture, Fisheries and Industry, which was established in April 1979.[100] The express purpose of this appointed 12-member Council was to "discuss the economic future of the nation and to get citizens to participate "in the process of promoting growth. Meetings were held monthly. Preparations for the SCC itself date from November 1980. At the request of the Sultan, several ministers met to discuss how broader formal consultation might take place in Oman.

According to participants, their wide-ranging discussions included such topics as what "democracy" might mean in the context of Oman, representation, a parliamentary versus a consultative body, and even the possibility of voting. The decrees establishing the SCC and appointing its first members were published on October 18, 1981.[101] On November 3, 1981, Sultan Qaboos opened the first session of the SCC, which he described as "a continuation of our policy aimed at achieving a greater scope for citizens to participate in the efforts of the government to implement its economic and social projects" through "the task of formulating opinion and advice" on the country's economic and social development. "Today we take another step toward broadening the consultative base in conformity with the country's stages of development." Perhaps the most dramatic change in Omani politics since 1970 was the creation in October 1981 if the State Consultative Council (SCC). The SCC is unique in the history of the Al Bu Sa'id regime because sultans have rarely if ever made any attempt to seek out popular opinion; the practice of holding the public majlis, so common elsewhere in the Gulf region, has never been followed by Al-Sa'id sultans.

As its name implies, the SCC is strictly a consultative body, not a parliament or legislature. It is restricted to making recommendations to the Sultan, who approves or rejects them. Approved recommendations are passed in confidence to appropriate ministries. The SCC is a purely advisory body with no legislative power whose primary function is to provide a conduit for public opinion. The

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[100] Established by decree79/19, April 12, 1979, published in the Official Bulletin, May 1, 1979, pp. 81-83. It was dissolved by decree 81/84, October 18, 1981, which also created the SCC.

[101] Dale F. Eickelman (1984), "Kings and People: Oman's State Consultative Council", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 55.

substance of the decrees establishing the SCC (81/84-86, dated October 18, 1981) suggest that their drafter is *plus royaliste que le roi*. [102] Articles 3 and 51 of decree 82/86 guarantees SCC members' freedom of speech during meetings (making, remarked one delegate, the SCC the only place in the Sultanate where this freedom is explicitly granted), provided that they adhere to the approved agenda, obey the laws of the land, and respect the state. Deliberations are secret. The SCC recommendations (*tawsiyat*) are communicated by the President of the Assembly confidentially to the Sultan, who acts upon them as he sees fit.

The body originally had forty-five members but was expanded in 1983 to fifty-five. Nineteen of the members represent the government with ten of those being designated undersecretaries. The thirty-six remained "popular" delegates are divided between eleven representatives of the business community and twenty-five regional representatives, although by sultanic decree all members of the council are expected to represent all Omanis. All SCC delegates are appointed by the sultan to two-year terms, which can be extended. This body was fully appointed and served a purely informal advisory role. The *Majlis al-Ishtishari* consisted of 45 members with 17 appointed from the central government, 11 from the private sector, and 17 from the wilayats. Although this body was appointed, the method of selection virtually guaranteed that its members met high standards and generally possessed a high level of expertise in their respective areas. The purpose of this body was however, merely to offer advice rather than represent any sort of constituency other than the "general public good."[103] In 1983, the State Consultative Council (SCC) was expanded by ten members to 55. Eight of the ten new seats were given to the wilayats,with the other two going to the government and the private sector. Because of their other government positions, members of the SCC were able to play a visible role in providing advice to the government in carrying out its programs, thus creating a certain receptivity in the ministries to receiving outside opinions. This also created high expectations for the quality of technical advice being given.

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[102] ibid.

[103] Katzman & Katz (1995), *Oman: Political Development and the Majlis Ash'Shura*, p. 17.

The SCC decrees also grant wide powers to the appointed President and seven-member Executive Bureau (*al-maktab al-tanfidhi*). All requests by delegates for information from government agencies or other outside organizations must be channeled through the President. Members may speak in general sessions only after recognition by the President (or the appointed Vice-President if the President is absent), and the President can interrupt delegates if he determines that they have raised issues not specified by the agenda. The President also automatically assumes the chair at any committee meeting he attends. A seven-member executive bureau serves as secretariat for the council.[104] The executive includes a president and vice-president, both appointed by the sultan, and two government and three popular representatives elected by the council at large. Four standing committees have been established, including those for legal affairs, economics, general services, and utilities. The SCC meets four times a year. Its proceedings are secret; and- unique in Oman- delegates a guaranteed freedom of speech. Deliberations are restricted to economic and social affairs, and the council is charged specifically with making general recommendations in those areas and commenting in proposed legislation before it becomes law. SCC recommendations go directly to the sultan, who can reject them or pass them on to appropriate ministers for further action.[105]

With many of the essential foundations of the political and economic infrastructure successfully laid during the 1970s, the second decade of the Qabus era saw a more systematic approach to the expansion of government capabilities and development efforts. Government departments filled out, and more Omanis occupied senior positions, enabling an increasingly competent and satisfactory approach to the provision of social services. The haphazard path to development experienced during the first decade gave way to more rational and better prioritized planning. The first five-year development plan had begun in 1976, with emphasis on infrastructural expansion. A central focus remained the development of Muscat as the center of government, the largest (and rapidly growing) urban center in the country, and the site of the principal sea and airports. Simultaneously, Dhufar received considerable attention, as the government sought to eliminate any potential grievances that might lead the region's population to renew opposition.

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[104] Allen (1987), *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate*, p. 83.

[105] ibid, p.83.

Unfortunately, the oil bubble burst in 1986, leaving the new third five-year plan in tatters. The building of Muscat was nearly complete, with an urban road system in place, the groundwork laid for a quilt of modern suburbs, a shining new row of government ministries along the main road to the airport, the armed forces transferred to a new headquarters and central base, and plans for the country's first university well underway. But the effort to develop the coast and the interior, as envisaged in the new plan, inevitably suffered, and the grumbling grew more sustained.

In conclusion, the post-1970 era should not be viewed entirely as the abrupt departure from the past that slogans such as 'new dawn' would have it. Sultan Qabus bin Sa'id remains very much an Al Bu Sa'id Sultan and his actions in the first five years of power addressed to the needs of his people. Clothed in the aura of a 'modern' or 'developing' country, Omani politics have become more pluralistic than at any time in its history-a trend which will undoubtedly increased at a steady and measured pace. In terms of political development and participation, the Sultanate remained several decades behind al-Kuwayt and al-Bahrayn.[106]

Formal political authority in Oman remains as it was before the coup; an absolute monarchy- the Omani state encourages modernization, renewal, and transformation in all other spheres except that of selection for rule at the top. Even in this sphere, the rhetoric of modern legitimacy requires a commitment to change. The Sultanate's slow progress through State Consultative Councils, initiated in the early 1980s and gradually expanded, gives a semblance of transparency to governmental action.[107] His twenty years (1970-90) as ruler have seen unprecedented economic growth, political reforms that have brought Omanis into the government and decision-making processes, a victory against communism in Dhofar, and the entry of Oman into the wider world. In sum, Sultan Qaboos has accumulated a great deal of popular support in the past two decade despite being a somewhat reclusive leader. That popularity, unlike the sultan's authority, is not absolute it, however, could quickly dissipate. Economic benefits have been uneven, leading to dissatisfaction in interior Oman and growing concerns about corruption

[106] Petersion (1978), *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State*, p. 212.

[107] Eickelman (1984), "Kings and People: Oman's State Consultative Council", pp. 51-71.

as the "Muscat Mafia" and a small number of British and even U.S advisers seem to control the Sultan. Religion, which is so closely tied to the traditional tribal order, is another area of concern: The Al-Sa'id regime is in violation of the Omani ideal of an elected, nonhereditary imamate and has long been in conflict with conservative supporters of a theocracy. Finally, there is the question of succession: No provision has been made for a new ruler, if Qaboos die suddenly or is somehow incapacitated. The uncertainty and intermittency of Omani political transition will be the focus in the following chapters.

Chapter-4

Aspects of Political Reform in Oman

Oman under Sultan Qaboos adopted a path of careful and gradual development and modernization since his accession to power in July 1970. He inherited an old, autocratic-patriarchal Arabic system of power in which the sultan holds all the power.[1] On August 9, 1970, in his first address to the Omanis, he launched his vision for his country's future and his people's well being.[2] He set his goal to "restore the past glories" of the Sultanate of Oman.[3] Unlike his father, Sultan Qaboos has the advantage of oil revenues. He has used this advantage in order to create a prosperous state. He has established a modern government structure, launched a major development program to upgrade educational and health facilities, built a modern infrastructure and developed the country's resources.[4] He has also initiated economic plans and programs to boost economic sectors such as industry, agriculture, animal husbandry, fishery and tourism. He has them proposed to reinvent a nation that was once a mighty empire, and his words elevated the spirit of a hapless population that had drifted from past accomplishments.[5]

Since 1970, the Sultanate has witnessed a sea change in all walks of life. During the early years, the Sultanate's government focused on availing the required infrastructure and basic services to ensure active involvement of all nationals in the development process. The Sultanate was able to realize during the last forty years significant developments in the various areas. Given the dreadful social situation in the early 1970s, Oman has realized a considerable level of economic growth in a short period of time, as measured by the UNDP's Human Development Index

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[1] Abdullah Juma Alhaj (June 2000), "The Political Elite and the Introduction of Political Participation in Oman" *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 7, No. 3, p.98.

[2] Ministry of Information and Culture (1986), *Sultan Qaboos addressing the Omani people*, Muscat, August 1970, in al-Notiq al-Sami [The prominent speech], Muscat: Ministry of Information and Culture, p. 3.

[3] Ministry of Information and Culture (2005), *Speech of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said on the Occasion of the 2nd National Day, November 18, 1972*, Muscat: Ministry of Information, p.14

[4] *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (1998), Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, pp. 1544-51.

[5] Joseph A. Kéchichian (2006), *A Vision of Oman: State of the Sultananate Speeches by Qaboos Bin Said, 1970-2006, Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos*, p.1. Accessed on 12 August 2009 http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy.archive/vision-oman-state- sultananate- speeches-qaboos-bin- said- 1970-2006 on 01.02.2011

(HDI). In its Human Development Report 2009 titled 'Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development'', the UN placed the Sultanate of Oman among countries with a higher rate of human development. Oman was ranked 56th among 182 countries and territories covered by the report and came fifth among the GCC countries as its HDI value stood at 0.846 for 2008-2009 compared to 0.839 between 2006 and 2007.[6] The Sultanate was able to uplift the GDP (170) times by the end of 2009 to reach RO. (17.7) billion from that of 1970.[7] Also, the per capita income increased by more than (35) times during the same period to reach RO.(5808); the size of trade exchange increased by about (23) times from 1975 where total merchandize exports of the Sultanate reached RO. (10.6) billion and imports RO. (6.9) billion compared with exports of RO. (753.5) million and imports RO. (488) million in 1975; the increase in the daily oil production from (332,000) barrel in 1970 to above (812,500) barrel by the end of 2009; also, the Omani oil reserves increased above (4.8) billion barrel compared to (1.4) billion barrel in the early 1970s.[8]

Key Indicators

Population	mn.	2.7	HDI		0.85	GDP p.c.	$ - 6%
Pop. growth	% p.a.	2.1	HDI rank of 182		56	Gini Index	-
Life expectancy	years	76	UN Education Index		0.79	Poverty	% -
Urban population	%	71.6	Gender equality		0.43	Aid per capita	$ -12.0

Sources: *UNDP, Human Development Report 2009; The World Bank, World Development Indicators 2009.*

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[6] *UNDP: Cutler Cleveland, Human Development Index, Sustainable Development,* (October 10, 2008), Accessed on 18 July 2010 http://www.eoearth.org/article/Human_ Development_Index

[7] Observer (03 November 2010), 'All-round economic development', Accessed on 5 January 2011 http://main.omanobserver.om/node/28827

[8] Ammar Shikhani (22 November 2010), "Oman - Development Achievements in Forty Years", Accessed on 112 January 2011 http://www.english.globalarabnetwork.com/201011228111/ Economics/oman-forty-years-of-development-achievements.html)

The country's economy was transformed from a traditional economy to a modern developing one where Omani citizen enjoys political and economical stability and good living standard. As a result, the Sultanate took a prominent and advanced place worldwide. In the UN Human Resources Report, the Sultanate ranked (56) among (186) countries and classified within the countries with medium human development and high growth.[9] Also, it ranked (15) among (57) countries in the advancing (16) ranks from that of 2004.[10] This was due to the strong economic performance, increasing government's efficiency and ability of the Sultanate to create an economy based on completion and attraction of foreign investments, the Sultanate is ranked third amongst Arab countries and (29th) worldwide amongst (125) countries.[11] The classification takes into account a number of important indicators related to overall economic performance, such as, facilitation of investment's procedures and related legislations, customs and administrative procedures at customs outlets, non-tariff restrictions, freedom and procedures of export and import, availability of infrastructure and the business environment in general.[12]

From a backward, medieval kingdom, Oman has entered a new period marked by unprecedented material progress and infrastructure development. In a country, where there were hardly three primary schools with 900 students,[13] one hospital, five kilometers of paved road and one hotel is currently bursting with revolutionary changes.[14] In sharp contrast to the appalling medieval conditions till the mid-seventies, Omanis now have an expanded postal system, telephones,

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[9] *UNDP: Cutler Cleveland, Human Development Index, Sustainable Development,* (October 10, 2008)

[10] Observer (03 November 2010), "All-round economic development".

[11] Klaus Schwab (2010), *Global Competitiveness Report, World Economic Forum,* Geneva, September 2009-2010, p.63. Accessed on 14 February 2011 http://www.scribd.com/doc/19345852/The-Global-Competitiveness-Report-20092010

[12] Ammar Shikhani (22 November. 2010), "Oman - Development Achievements in Forty Years".

[13] Ministry of Education (September 2004), *Sultanate of Oman, Educational Statistical Yearbook,* Issue 34 (Academic Year 2003-2004), Muscat: Ministry of Education, September.

[14] Michael E. Bonine (1980), "The Urbanisation of the Persain Gulf Nations", in Alvin J. Cottrell (ed.), *The Persian Gulf States,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University press, p. 270.

power, health-centers and most important of all, water in virtually every town and village.[15] No less significant is the construction of a network of highways that traverses the length and breadth of the Sultanate. Omani population no longer suffers the geographical and social tyrannies of distance and ignorance. The wider world for long both hidden from and forbidden to them is now within free and simple reach.[16]

Doubtless, progress in the modernisation process has been startling, and status of Oman has been elevated from one of the lowest to one of the richest countries in the world. Much like its Gulf neighbors, Oman, however, owes its economic advancement essentially to steady oil production. Since its commercial production began in 1967, Oman has been dependent almost entirely on revenues accrued from oil exports. Now that the thrust has shifted to consolidation of domestic economic base, Oman is likely to experience a gradual industrial diversification mainly through expansion of the private sectors in the years ahead. Despite rapid economic and social change, the speed of transformation in Oman's formal political institutions remains rather glacial.[17] The country is engaged in segmental modernisation, which has encouraged changes in all spheres without altering the traditional political system. There is a frequently quoted remark by Sultan Qabus suggesting that Oman is not yet ready for Western-style parliamentary democracy and its implantation could be counter-productive. In an interview with an American journalist, he said, "You can't push things too far too fast in the Gulf."[18] Instead, the Sultan has opted for a gradualist course through reforms and incremental changes in Omani polity so as to reduce the possibility of political chaos that generally accompanies sudden openness in the political system.

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[15] *Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU)* 2003, *Country Profile: Oman* , London, Accessed on 12 August 2009 *Arab Net - Oman* at www.arab,net/oman/on_business.htm

[16] Aswini K Mohapatra (2007), "The Sultanate of Oman- Liberalised Autocracy", *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies,* Vol. 15, No. 1, p.80

[17] ibid, p.80

[18] Judith Miller (1997), "Creating Modern Oman: An Interview with Sultan Qabus," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No.3, p. 14.

All in all, the reform as a process is firmly on the agenda of the Omani ruler, which would, doubtless, open up the outlets for free expression of opinion, limit the arbitrary exercise of power and encourage political participation - the essential pre-requisites for good governance and the eventual establishment of representative government. But the question often raised is whether the above reforms would succeed in brining about a systemic change at the cost of the monopoly of power enjoyed by the ruling family, and would the core elite tolerate the rise in the influence of the politically relevant elite and that too from the non-royal background in the decision-making process? Before addressing this issue what Samuel Huntington has aptly described as "the king's dilemma,"[19] it would be analytically useful to explain the factors that prompted the initiation of reform process in the Sultanate of Oman.

Political Liberalisation

Political liberalisation is generally attributed either to schism between the hard-liners and soft-liners within the regime or mass pressure caused by internal structural problems, such as state failure, financial crisis and the globalisation-induced economic reforms.[20] In the years immediately preceding the Gulf crisis in1990, several Arab regimes were already sensing their deepening loss of internal legitimacy. This was expressed in increasingly frequent violent confrontations between regimes and one or more of the major socio-economic formations. The upper rungs of the new middle class engaged regime in nonviolent battles over basic freedoms, human rights organizations and more autonomous professional associations, thus revitalizing stunted civil societies.

There were varying levels of popular demands vis-à-vis Arab regimes. On one level, the demands were for greater "liberalization," such as freedom of the press and association, as well as the right to travel abroad. Nearly all regimes made some concessions in response to these demands. On a more elevated level, the

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[19] Samuel P. Huntington (1968), *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 177.

[20] Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (1986), *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

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demand was for serious and explicit democratization, such as legalized political parties, equal access to the mass media, and free and honest elections. None of the regimes fully responded to these demands in the 1980s.[21] During the 1980s and into the 1990s, this phenomenon occurred across the region: in Algeria in 1988; Egypt in 1981 and 1986; Jordon in 1989; Kuwait in 1989 and 1990; Mauritania in 1986 and 1988; Morocco in 1984, 1988 and 1990; South Yemen between 1986 and 1990; Sudan in 1985; and Tunisia in 1984 and 1988. The ruling elites in these countries responded to mounting discontent with promises of economic and political reform.[22]

In the case of Oman, there was no great public demand for political reforms, akin to that appeared in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. Nor did the economic downturn in the early 1990s spark off urban protests or popular unrest what other Arab countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan and Egypt) had experienced during the 1980s.[23] In any case, the Sultanate has confronted no extremist threats since the termination of the ten year-long Dhufar War in the mid-1970s.[24] Since the defeat of the rebellions in the 1970s in the south, the sultan has ruled with very little challenge. Although there have been two minor attempts (in 1994 and 2005) by Islamist groups to organize opposition, the sultan enjoys an absolute power to govern. Even the release of the conspirators involved in the suspected Islamist

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[21] Saad Eddin Ibrahim et al. (1988), *al-Mujtama' wa al-dawal fi al-watan al-arabi* (Society and State in the Arab World), Amman: The Arab Thought Forum; also in Giacomo Luciani ed. (1990), *The Arab State,* Brekely and Los Angels: University of California Press cited in Saad Eddin Ibrahim (1995), "Liberalization and Democratisation in the Arab world: an overview", in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Nobel (eds.) *Political Liberalisation and Democratisation in the Arab World,* Vol. 1, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, p.42

[22] Luciani (1990), *The Arab State*, p.42

[23] Larbi Sadiki (2000), "Popular Uprising and Arab Democratisation", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 32, pp. 75.

[24] It started in the southern Omani province of Dhufar in 1964 as a tribal revolt and later split into a communist-inspired ideological revolution led by the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG). Sultan Qabus crushed the rebellion with the British military support. Uzi Rabi (2006), *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society: Oman under Sa'id bin Taymur, 1932-1970,* Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, Chap. V.

plots of 1994 and 2005 has raised doubts as to whether there was actually a conspiracy to overthrow the Sultan.[25]

Oman is one of the few states in the Gulf region where popular legitimacy of the ruler is not rooted in Islamic traditions. Although the Omani monarch makes general invocations of religion in order to justify his political actions, these are meant to dilute the impact of the 8th century *Ibadi* ideas on the society. Central to Ibadism, founded by a radical dissident Muslim group, *al-Khawarij* is the legitimate election of the head of the state called Imam.[26] With the political ascendancy of the ruling Bu-Said dynasty, position of the Imamate was undermined, so much so that after a brief period of bloody struggle in the 1950s the institution became defunct. Currently, it appears difficult either for the Ibadi conservatism or any radical ideology to make progress against the tide of material prosperity enjoyed by the people of Oman. Moreover, the Omani monarchy has come to symbolise stability by sustaining and balancing the social adhesives of religion, tradition, and heritage.[27] Despite the existence of modern state structures, contemporary Omani society continues to be run by a tribal mentality. Thus, it seems that the elite realized that the most immediate internal-security problem it faced stemmed from a reluctance to introduce political reforms based on political participation. A look at the history of Oman will reveal that the relationship between the stability of the elite and political participation is an old, crucial, complex and constant issue that goes back to the early days of Ibadhlism,[28]

Oman's structure as a rentier welfare state has not produced conditions conducive to organized societal demands and pressures. Oman provides its citizens with extensive social services. Human development indices have improved with respect to income, education and health, life expectancy, and education. Although it is not sufficient, government assistance for the poor helps to reduce poverty at

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[25] J.E. Peterson (2005), "Oman: Omanis, Ibadis, and Islamism", *Tharwa Features*, Accessed on 7 May 2008 www.tharwaproject.org/node/843

[26] John C. Wilkinson (1987), *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 169-76.

[27] Owen H. Kirby (2000), "Want Democracy? Get a king", *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol.7, No. 4.

[28] Paula Casey-vine ed. (1995), *Oman in History*, London: Immel Publishing, p. 248.

least to some degree. According to the Ministry of Social Development, pensions and social insurance have been widened to include both public and private sector employees. Nationals employed in the private sector are guaranteed a minimum monthly wage. The foreign workforce is not included in the welfare schemes. Unemployment benefits and state-sponsored insurance schemes do not exist.[29]

Through economic and social policies Sultan Qaboos has tried to eliminate social divisions stemming from tribal rivalries, struggle between coastal and interior regions etc. Within this framework Sultan Qaboos has paid a special attention to the geographical distribution of investments to narrow the gap in the standard of livings in different regions, and to the development of local human resources to increase indigenous participation in the private and public sector.[30] Transformation of the poor, underdeveloped state into a welfare state has, resulted in some social changes never seen before. For example tribes played a determinant role in the history of Oman. Before the centralization of the state under the rule of Sultan Qaboos some social services used to be provided by the tribes. Tribes were a basic element in the social mosaic of Oman. For hundreds of years, the social order in Oman was based on the centrality of the tribe in local life.[31] With the centralization and modernization services, which used to be provided by the tribes have been provided by the central government. Thanks to steps taken in the field of health, education, transportation, telecommunications, electricity, water and housing most of the functions of the tribes have vanished. In other words the role of the tribes has been severely diminished since 1970s. But it does not mean that tribal structure has become extinct. Tribal structure still persists but the power and the function of the tribes and tribal rulers are decreasing. With penetration of state and market into all sectors of society, tribe and tribal loyalty in 20th century West

[29] Bertelsmann Stiftung (2009), *BTI 2010 — Oman Country Report*, Accesses on 12 Aprol 2010 http://docs.google.com/ viewer ? a=v&q=cache:mB2RYpBdCe8J:www.bertelsmann-transforma

[30] Carol J. Riphenburg (1998), *Oman Political Development in a Changing World*, London: Praeger Publishers, p.147.

[31] Uzi Rabi (2006), *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society: Oman under Sa'id bin Taymur*, pp. 9-16.

Asia are qualitatively different from their seventeenth- or eighteenth- century antecedents.[32]

Although Omani society is split along social, ethnic and regional lines, the regime has been highly successful in imposing the idea of an Omani nation as the collective framework of belonging. The lack of a dominant group or dominant tribe has encouraged this sense of national identity. This, coupled with the state power and its even-handed policy in creating equal opportunities to all citizens regardless of their background, has mitigated any cleavages within Omani society and thus any potential societal conflict. Structural unemployment for the past ten years has, however, produced growing frustrations and mutual prejudices, which could contribute to a re-polarization of the society and an increase in competitive declarations of loyalty to the nation by intra-national groups. This type of competition has not yet reached a level that could threaten national unity.[33] Another important ramification of the economic and social development has been the emergence of a middle class. Sultan Taimur had used the funds from state treasury to gain the allegiance of influential segments of Omani society. It has continued to be the case in the Sultan Qaboos reign but in a different and expanded way. After 1970, as pointed out by a western observer "income distribution continued as a principal mechanism for guaranteeing political stability, but the system involved a state administrative structure rather than the more direct and personal individual-ruler relationship. Furthermore, the arrangement expanded to include the average Omani through the formation of a public sector. The outcome has been the making of a salaried middle class whose economic interest are intimately linked with the government."[34]

It is appropriate to consider the introduction of Western-style forms of institutions as contributing significantly to political change in both the system of government and the composition of the political elite. In fact, the introduction of consultative councils in Oman has enabled representatives of certain social groups

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[32] Fred Halliday (2005), *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.41.

[33] Bertelsmann Stiftung (2009), *BTI 2010- Oman Country Report*.

[34] Riphenburg (1998), *Oman Political Development in a Changing World*, p. 147.

with little or no power, such as Bedouin tribal members and emergent middle-income individuals, to gain some elite status.[35] Individuals who occupy membership in representative councils seem pleased by their participation in the political process and by the rewards those positions bring.

In fact, even the most vocal opposition groups led by radical political activists have chosen to work within the system rather than advocate radical changes.[36] On the other hand, with the development of the oil industry, new social forces and institutions, or old institutions that had taken on new meanings, began to exercise pressure on the authority system. The oil economy created visible collective inequalities which, when combined with Arab nationalistic or Islamic religious trends, produced several acts challenging the legitimacy of the traditional political elite and the policies of the government.[37] The emerging social, economic and political forces created by the oil market worked to modernize the composition of the Omani political elite.[38]

Oman prohibits the existence of political parties and politically motivated associations. Despite the ban on parliamentary groups within the *Majlis al-Shura*, lobbies based on shared interests (like justice, education and health matters) are being formed. Whereas the lobbies' ability to influence national policy remains weak, their very existence illustrates a qualitative evolution of some delegates' perceptions of their place in the general balance of powers. Societal interests are articulated and channeled informally through friendships, family and tribal clans, and connections with public figures. These interests are articulated in the political sphere by the elected Majlis al-Shura members, local sheikh and tribal representatives, and even by the sultan himself, especially on his annual meet the people tour throughout the country. Omani political culture is dominated by a respect for patriarchal leadership and a general acceptance of the government's omnipotence, despite society's diversity and its fragmentation between rich and

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[35] Alhaj (June 2000), "The Political Elite and the Introduction of Political Participation in Oman", p.8

[36] Ian Skeet (1992), *Oman: Politics and Development*, London: Macmillan, p. 33.

[37] Abdulkarim Homoud Al-Dakheel (1996), "Political Modernization in Oman" (in Arabic), *Journal of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies*, Vol. XXI, No. 82, p. 274.

[38] Abdulla Juma Alhaj (1996), "The Politics of Participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council States: The Omani Consultative Council," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 4, p. 564.

poor, urban and rural, old and young, and male and female. The public is generally reluctant to organize itself in any politically meaningful manner.

Oman has a very limited civil society tradition and no tradition of civic engagement in NGOs. The government's fear that social or public associations could polarize society or galvanize public opinion has prompted it to ban any sort of politically-oriented civil society organization or association. The government has slightly relaxed its stance on civil society organizations but continues to control them by issuing licenses only to those deemed apolitical. All this the Omani experience in the advance of political liberalization cannot be attributable to domestic factors, such as the civic pressure, street politics (strikes/demonstrations or riots)[39] and division in the regime. Alternatively, it is argued that the impact of external forces and developments needs to be addressed in accounting for the transition in Oman.

Participatory Structures

A look at more than three decades of evolution in the political institutions of Oman suggests that the steady growth of participatory government, guided by a farsighted leader, may offer a solidly grounded foundation for establishing the institutions, practices and attitudes needed for representative government, with little if any reference to Western models. Over the last 40 years, while building a modern infrastructure through the judicious use of limited petroleum resources, Oman's ruler, Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Busaid, has gradually enfranchised his people, established a bicameral advisory council, prepared the way for a supreme court to be the arbiter of the laws, and worked tirelessly to promote tolerance and understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. The result is a peaceful and secure nation, tolerant of other religions and customs, unthreatened by internal conflicts.[40]

In any society, modern political institutions can be established if four basic criteria exist. First, there must be a legal structure capable of transforming the

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[39] Reports of peaceful pro-Palestinian protests following the *intifada* in 2000 and anti-American demonstrations in 2003 are the first examples of political activism in Oman's recent history. They were not directed against the regime as such.

[40] Charles O. Cecil (2006) "Oman's Progress Toward Participatory Government", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 1, p.1

public will into activities in harmony with general policy. Second, the public must be involved in the political process and enriched by its participation. Third, the elite must want to achieve national integration through the systematic accommodation of cultural, religious, ethnic and tribal structures. Fourth, there must be a convergence between the administrative knowledge, responsibility and rationality of the elite and the public desire for participation, subject to a neutrally executed justice system.[41]

Besides this, a contemporary state that seeks to be modern should adhere to three basic authorities: the legislative, the executive and the judicial. These authorities should cooperate with each other and share responsibilities. Each authority must not exceed the limits of its responsibilities and must not involve itself in the responsibilities of the other authorities. However, in Oman, as in other GCC states, there is an overlap between the functions of these authorities sufficient to create serious problems. While the elite is willing to change its policies in the fields of public social services and wealth distribution, it is evident also that the elite is reluctant to fully accept new methods in political affairs, especially those concerned with political participation and decision-making processes.[42]

During the first decade of the Qaboos regime, the elite achieved many of its goals for the development of the country. In order to harmonize its social and economic efforts with political activities, the elite worked toward modernizing the government, gradually introducing specially designed political participation.[43] Since the 1980s, Sultan Qaboos has called for the establishment of democratic governance in accordance with the traditions and customs of Omani society. This means a gradual, top-down reform process. Qaboos' reforms focus on good governance, rule of law, accountability and transparency. The sultan encourages popular participation without providing the political structures for the people to contest his executive power. Sultan Qabus began the process of reforms towards

[41] Ralph Braibanti (1966), "Administrative Modernization" in Myon Weiner (ed.) (1996), *Modernization: The Dynamics of Growth*, New York and London: Basic Books, pp. 166-7.

[42] Abdulla Juma Alhaj (1992), "The Gulf Political Elites After the Second Crisis," *Social Affairs (UAE)*, No. 33, pp. 204.

[43] Joseph A. Kechichian (1999) "Oman, A Council," *Arabies Trends*, No. 19, p. 240.

democratic representation in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution. In 1981, the State Consultative Council (SCC), known in Arabic as *al-majlis al-istishari lil-dawla* was first time set up apparently with the purpose of reflecting the needs and wishes of people. Despite that the SCC was strictly a consultative body, restricted to submitting recommendations and providing advice to the ruler rather than debating national issues. In other words, it was intended to implement the explicit writs of the Sultan, not to limit the royal authority.[44]

Consultative Council (*majlis ash' shura*)

In 1991, the Majlis Al-Shura (OCC) replaced the 10-year-old SCC in an effort to systematize and broaden public participation in government. On November 18, 1990, in a speech Qaboos gave to mark his twentieth anniversary on the throne, he announced that a new council was to be set up within a year. By November 25, 1991, the new council had been established and its powers and operating framework had been defined by the royal decree of November 12, 1991, which became effective on December 1, 1991.[45]

The concept of shura, "consultation" in Arabic, has Quranic roots. Islamic scholars do not agree on whether consultation with those affected is obligatory or merely desirable (verses may be found to support either interpretation), but it is clear that Muhammad did consult with his followers on numerous occasions before making a decision. Since it is impossible to consult with the entire population, the idea of individuals being chosen to represent the views of their kinsmen or neighbors follows naturally. Ibadis believe that the ruler (imam) should be selected by the consensus (ijma) of the community (umma).[46] Any Muslim, regardless of his family or origin, could become imam. Moreover, the imam was expected to act justly in accordance with the law derived from the Quran and Hadith. If the ruler proves unjust, he should be deposed. Ibadis thus reject the notion that "100 years of tyranny is better than one day of chaos." In good Ibadi tradition, therefore, Oman's 1996 Basic Law provides for the selection, not the election, of a successor to Sultan

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[44] Dale F. Eickelman (1984), "Kings and People: Oman's State Consultative Council," *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 65.

[45] *The Official Gazette of Oman*, (November 12, 1991), Muscat: Ministry of Information, decree no. 94/91.

[46] Albert Hourani (1991), *A History of the Arab Peoples,* Harvard University Press, pp.61-62.

Qaboos.[47]

A former Omani ambassador to the United States, Sadek Sulaiman, points out that the change in the Consultative Councils mentioned above constituted a subtle evolution, noticeable only to Arabic speakers. "The etymological form of shura, derived from the root shawr, or advice, means mutual consultation in its widest scope--a collective deliberation in which all parties are exchanging counsel. The term *shura*, as such, is to be distinguished from the term *istishara*, which means one side seeking counsel from another. In my country, Oman, the present assembly was first named al *majlis al istishari*, and only several years later renamed as *majlis al shura*, thereby claiming a more democratic posture."[48]

Elections of the Omani Shura Council

Unlike the SCC, no serving government official was eligible to participate in the new *majlis* as a member. It represented the country's 59 *wilayat* and its members were initially appointed by the Sultan from lists of candidates indirectly elected in caucuses of 100 to 200 prominent citizens, namely the local notables, presidents of *al-ashair* (clans), intellectuals and businessmen of each *wilaya*.[49] In its first formation, the new OCC represented the 59 Wilayat of Oman and had 59 members and a chairman. Even though the decree stated that the members of the OCC were to be elected, the reality turned out to be somewhat different. Each member was chosen by the deputy prime minister for legal affairs from a list of three candidates indirectly selected in caucuses held in the Wilayat in which hundreds of prominent citizens participated.[50] These citizens included local dignitaries and people of valued opinion and experience. The names of the candidates were then submitted to the deputy prime minister for legal affairs, who chose one member for each Wilayat and then submitted a list with the proposed

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[47] Jeremy Jones (2007), *Negotiating change: the new politics of the Middle East*, I. B Tauris & Co Ltd, New York, pp. 161-162.

[48] Sadek Jawad Sulaiman (1999), "The Shura Principle in Islam", Al-Hewar Center, Inc., p.2, Accessed on 7 May 2008 <http://www.alhewar.com/sadekshura.htm>.

[49] *US Department of State: Oman Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996*, (1997), Washington, D. C.: US Government Printing Office.

[50] *US Department of State: Oman Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997*, (1998), Washington, D. C.: US Government Printing Office, p. 1544.

names to the sultan. The final choice was made by Qaboos, who picked 59 of the 60 members from the list of proposed names submitted to him and also appointed the chairman. In contrast to the SCC, no serving government official was eligible for OCC membership.[51]

After the first national census in 1993, the Sultan expanded the membership of the new Council to 80 seats for its second term. In November 1994, the elite decided to implement more reforms. It expanded the number of council seats to 79 plus a chairman. The new council assumed its duties in December 1994. According to the new regulations, each Wilayat with a population of less than 30,000 had to elect two representatives, one of whom was then nominated to the membership of the OCC. The Wilayat with more than 30,000 citizens elected four representatives, of whom two were nominated as members of the Council. Thus, while each Wilayat had one representative in the OCC of 1991, the OCC of 1994 doubled the number of representatives for all the Wilayats with more than 30,000 citizens.[52] This change added an element of greater representation to the Council. The number of representatives for each area in the 1994 OCC (an area consists of several Wilayats) was as follows: 11 members represented the Muscat area, which comprises six Wilayats (two of the 11 members were women); 20 members represented the Al-Batinah area, which comprises 12 Wilayat; 14 members represented the Al-Shargiyyah area, which comprises 11 Wilayats; six members represented the Al-Dhabira area, which comprises five Wilayats; four members represented the Dhofar area, which comprises ten Wilayats; and four members represented the Musandam area, which comprises four Wilayats.[53]

Due to the 1994-97 population increase, the number of seats was further expanded to 82 for the October 1998 elections. In the October 1998 elections over 50,000 Omani men and women (3 percent of the total population) were eligible to vote in all districts throughout the country. These voters had volunteered for the position, their police records were checked by the government, and they were subject to government approval. In some cases nominees with the most votes might

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[51] Alhaj (1996), "The politics of participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council states", p. 71.

[52] *Omam 2009-2010*, (2010), Oman: Ministry of Information, Saltanate of Oman,

[53] Kechichian (1999), "Oman, A Council", p. 25

not win appointment to the OCC if the sultan decided not to appoint them.[54] More importantly, Oman empowered women to be nominated for all seats in the *majlis*. Until then women were allowed to compete only for seats in the six *wilayat* of the Muscat governorate. Given the conservative, patriarchal nature of Gulf society, the inclusion of women in the political process constitutes a breakthrough among nations belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).[55] Oman was the first GCC state to grant women the right to vote and stand for elections, followed by Qatar in 1999, Bahrain in 2000 and Kuwait in October 2003 only for municipal elections. Indeed, female participation was encouraged throughout election process in 2000, which led to two women candidates being elected out of thirty-two standing.[56]

Finally in early 2003, the sultan granted universal suffrage to all Omanis over the age of 21 though only 262,000 registered. As the population continued to grow, the Council was increased to 83 members for its fourth term, 2001-04. It remains at this size during its fifth term, 2004-07. Over 70 per cent of those registered exercised this suffrage in October 2003 and elected 83 new members including two women in an election deemed to be free and fair. The Main Election Commission conducted the elections while vote counting and announcement of election results were entrusted to the judiciary. In 2003 election, candidates did not require prior government approval, and the sultan declared to accept the verdict in each race.[57]

Within limits, the elections were considered free and fair. In the earlier elections, however, the final choice was made by the sultan without whose approval the elected candidates could not assume office regardless of the votes they polled. Sultan Qaboos Bin Saeed inaugurated the third session of Oman's joint majlis with talk of the country's "enterprise in the field of democratic action in which the citizens play their part in taking national decisions. This enterprise has

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[54] ibid.

[55] Carol J. Riphenburg (1998), "Changing Gender Relations and the Development Process in Oman" in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (eds.), *Islam, Gender, & Social Change*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 146.

[56] "Oman: Elections Carry Forward a Quiet Experiment to Gulf Democracy", *Gulf States News*, (2000), September 25, No. 24, p. 7.

[57] Cecil (2006), "Oman's Progress Toward Participatory Government", p. 64

been built up brick by brick on firm foundation based on the realties of the Omani life and the conditions of the age in which we live. This is reflected on the step by step approach which we adopted in this regard, which culminated in all legally eligible citizens – both men and women – being granted the right to vote."[58], but although steps toward political reform in the Sultanate have looked good on paper, they have yet to satisfy a populace that would like more of a voice in the country's affairs.

Oman has long been known as a peaceable garden spot in a region given to big ambitions and occasional strife, but real reforms both political and economic will be needed before long if the sultanate is to avoid the kind of social and economic strains that have beset other Gulf monarchies. The 2003 elections for the Majlis Al-Shura (consultative council) saw less than impressive voter turnout. Of the approximately 822,000 Omanis eligible to vote, some 262,000 registered, and less than 200,000 actually voted.[59] Sultan Qaboos was clearly hoping for more. Private sector employees were given a day's holiday if they could demonstrate they had voted, and the government mounted a huge get-out-and-vote campaign prior to the election[60] though this was perhaps too little, too late.

Local critics also questioned the ban on campaigning in the media, which made it difficult for the 500-plus candidates to reach more people than they could shake hands with. Ultimately, the problem was lack of voter engagement, especially in the more liberal and educated precincts in and around Muscat. Although Omanis were pleased to vote (previous electorates have consisted of a small number of voters hand-picked by regional administrators), but widespread scepticism about the council's effectiveness kept many away from the polls. Turnout was reportedly higher in the interior, where voters tend to support whoever the local leaders – themselves appointed by the government in Muscat – tell them

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[58] Sultanate of Oman, Majlis A'Shura (21 October 2003), *Royal Speech at the opening of the third term of the Council of Oman*, Accessed on 12 April 2010 http://www.shura.om/en/index.asp.

[59] *MENA Election Guide* (Dec 10, 2006), "Elections of the Omani Shura Council", KAS Regional programme, Accessed on 12 June 2009, http://www.mena-electionguide.org/details.aspx/ 20/Oman /article724

[60] "After Elections, Oman Faces Challenge of Reform," *Gulf States Newsletter* (2003), October 31, No. 721, Accessed on 12 June 2009, http://www.boyreporter.com/2003/10/31/after-elections-oman-faces-challenge-of-reform/

to. Incumbents were forced out of many seats by term limits, and more than half the 83-member council consists of new faces. The two female incumbents held their seats, though none of the 13 other women standing won their races. Sultan Qaboos is seemingly more progressive than his citizens in this regard. He always wanted more female Majlis members, and has appointedinstalled a number of women in senior government posts and earlier in 2003 appointed Sheikha Aisha Bint Khalfan Bin Jameel Al-Sayabiyah minister of the National Authority for Industrial Craftsmanship, the first female minister in any of the six Gulf Co-operation Council states.[61] Universal suffrage increases the Majlis's mandate, but the low turnout calls it into question. Other changes may give members more latitude: term limits have been lifted, and the term has been increased to four years from three.

In 2007 elections, the *Majlis al-Shura* was *composed of 84 members* elected for a renewable four-year term. Governorates (vilayas) whose population exceeds 30,000 inhabitants have two representatives, and smaller wilayas just one. According to the Omani Interior Ministry said 388,683 people were registered to vote, with 632 candidates standing in 61 electoral areas, including 21 women.[62] Contesting candidates compete in their names only, because the regime outlaws political parties, platforms and public gatherings. For the first time in 2007, however, it did permit posters, banners and advertisements on TV and in the newspapers. The president of the Majlis was appointed by royal decree.[63]

Achievements of Majlis ash'-Shura

Unlike its predecessor, the SCC, which was a purely advisory body of experts, the *majlis ash'-shura* has broader jurisdiction including some authority over development policy, social welfare, education and environmental issues. Most significant function of the new Council is to articulate the interests of the local

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[61] "After elections oman faces challenge of reform" *Gulf States Newsletter* (2003), October 4, No.720, Accessed on 12 June 2009, http:// www.boyreporter.com/2003/10/31/after-elections-oman-faces-challenge-of-reform/

[62] Sunil K. Vaidya (October 27, 2007), "Heavy voting in Oman Shura council elections", *Gulf News*, 15:31, Accessed on 5 May 2009 http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/heavy-voting-in-oman-shura-council-elections-1.208108

[63] Bertelsmann Stiftung (2009), *BTI 2010- Oman Country Report*, Gütersloh.

community and region through the elected representatives to the central government. The membership of the Council, as Sultan Qabus in an interview maintained, would provide "an accurate and comprehensive sounding-board in the formation of future polices."[64] The *majlis ash'-shura* meets in plenary session four times a year in January, March, May and October. Between these sessions, several committees, which meet almost every week, work on drafting legislation. The Majlis Bureau made up of a president, two vice presidents and five other members of the Council determines the number of members of each committee. The Council of Ministers and the *majlis* Bureau are required to meet twice a year to discuss coordination procedures between the legislature and the executive branch.[65]

Omani Majilis

Chairmanship
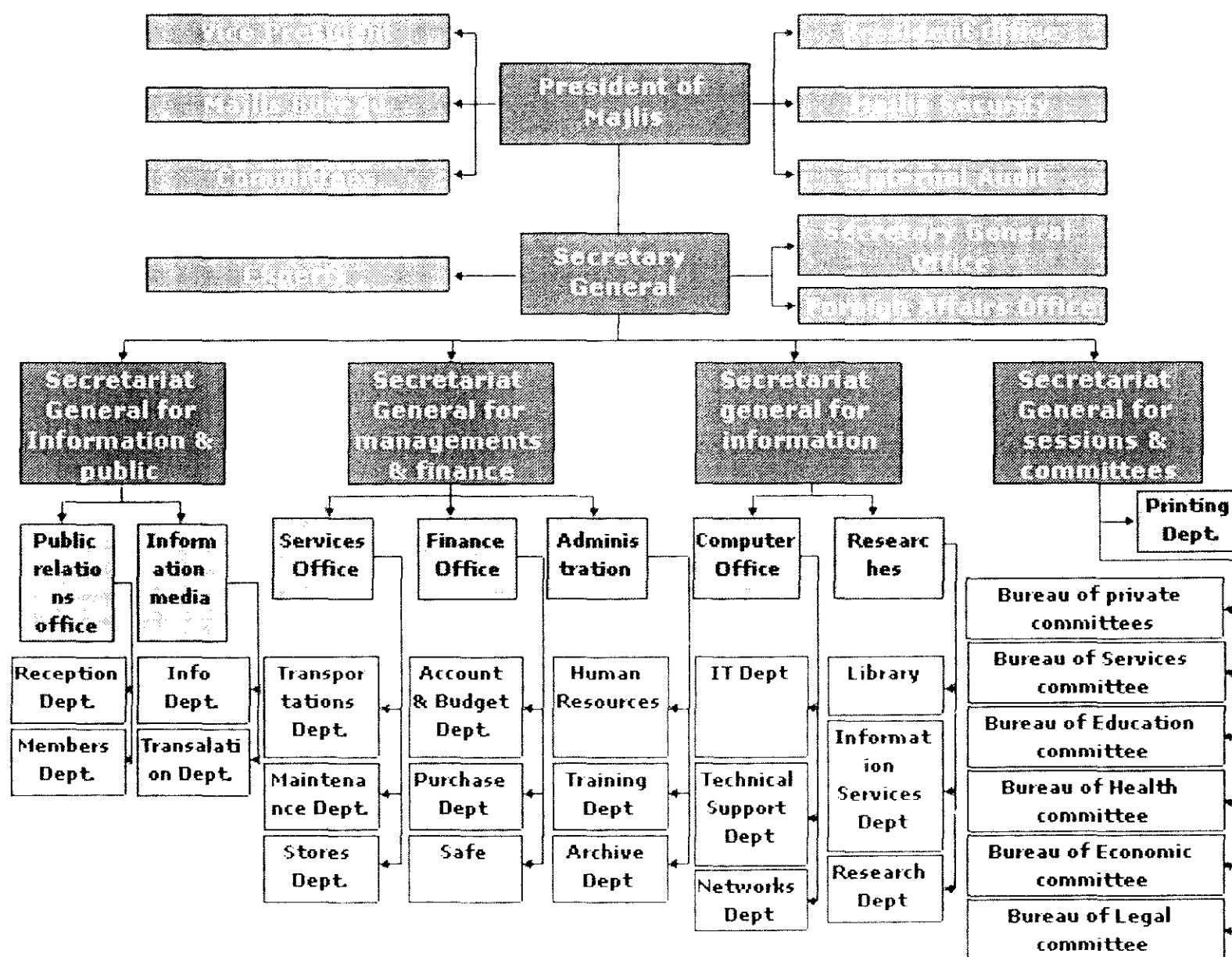
Source: Ministry of Information (2010). *Omam 2009-2010.*

[64] "Oman: Consensus and Consultation", *The Middle East,* Online library (1993), Vol 219, Accessed on 23 October 2009, http://www.bookrags.com/highbeam/oman-consensus-and-consultation-hb/.

[65] Ministry of Information (2010). *Omam 2009-2010.*

The *majlis* serves as a forum where social, economic or development matters are discussed and debated. Except the Foreign Affairs and Defense, all the other ministers have to submit annual reports to the *majlis* pertaining to their past performance and future plans. Its most notable activity is the questioning of ministers by its members either on a specific issue or the overall performance of a particular ministry. The question-answer sessions are transmitted live on nation-wide television and discussed at length in the official press. The Minister of Information, for instance, was called to explain his department's policies in response to the concerns voiced by the Council members about the impact of 'immoral' television programme on the Omani public and specifically the decision to legalise satellite dishes.[66]

Apart from ensuring some degree of ministerial accountability, the *majlis* also performs certain legislative responsibilities, notably reviewing and recommending amendments to the draft legislation pertaining to economic development and social services before its becoming law.[67] In all, the new *majlis*, unlike its predecessor, *al-majlis al-istishari lil-dawla*, is not simply a rubber stamp even though both the assemblies are based on the Islamic tradition of *shura* (consultation).[68] Oman's executive branch is free to manage the country with very limited democratic input. Although the *Majlis al-Shura's* powers have increased, it cannot address important issues such as national security, foreign relations or the structure of the political system. It remains limited to providing consultation and advice in economic and social areas only, and proposing amendments to laws submitted for its consideration by the sultan's cabinet in these fields. The Majlis cannot initiate legislation. It is limited to questioning ministers about work related to public services.

Majlis A'shura assists the government in all issues related to the Omani society, and provides what is considered as appropriate for supporting its basic

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[66] *Oman: Political Development and the Majlis Ash'Shura*, (1995), Washington, D.C.: International Republican Institute, pp. 22-23

[67] Ministry of Information (2010), *Omam 2009-2010*, p 25.

[68] Mohapatra (2007), "The Sultanate of Oman- Liberalised Autocracy", p.94

values. To achieve its objectives, the Majlis entertains a wide range of competences, which include:- a) reviewing draft laws prepared by the Ministries and other government authorities before their promulgation; b) submits what is deemed as appropriate for promotion of the economic and social laws in force in the Sultanate; c) gives opinion on matters referred to it by the Government, and submits appropriate recommendations to this effect; d) reviews draft development plans and general budgets of the State, in preparation for their endorsement; e) participates in consolidating awareness among citizens with regard to development targets, their functions, priorities , and efforts made for their implementation, with a view to ascertaining the nature of the necessary requirements of the regions and reinforcing relations between the citizens and the government; f) participates in the efforts aiming to safeguard the environment and its protection from pollution; g) looks into the matter related to service and public utilities and suggests methods of developing them; h) examines matters related to services and public utilities and suggests means of developing them; i) gives opinion on other issues referred by His Majesty the Sultan to the Majlis.

In practicing these competences the Majlis depends on a wide range of methods and mechanisms governed by rules and procedures set out in its by-laws[69]. The most important works and achievements of the Majlis throughout its sixth terms (1991–20011) were as follows:-

- Declaration of Laws: A number of draft law were referred to the council as follows:- a) *Labour Draft Law*, which was studied by the Legal Committee and approved by the Majlis in October 1994, which approved it in October 2001.[70] b) *Advocacy Draft Law*, which was referred to Legal Committee immediately upon receipt. The Majlis reviewed and approved it in May 1996.[71]

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[69] *Royal Decree No. 88/97*, Accessed on 23 October 2009 http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:EMYdi14QR6gJ:www.shura.om/downloads/internalreg.doc

[70] Law was issued by *Royal Decree No. 35/2003*, Accessed on 12 April 2009 http://www.manpower.gov.om/en/law_royal_decree.asp

[71] Chinalat Law (30 December 2010), *Royal Decree No. 108/1996,* Accessed on 31 December 2010 http://www.chinalat.com/2010/12/articles/another-category/intellectual-property-rights-in-the-sultanate-of-oman/

- Development of Valid Laws: The Majlis through the previous years studied development of a number of economic and social applicable laws as:- Reviewed and amended provisions of Article (50) of traffic Law amended by Royal Decree No. 91/2001 related to the penal part of this code, which was approved by the Majlis in October 2002.[72]

- Reviewing Drafts Laws: In addition to the Majlis's role in reviewing Drafts Laws and studying development of applicable laws, its legislative role included suggesting issuance of new laws in its studies and recommendations. One of the most important works of the council in this regard its study about development of the Judiciary Authority in the Sultanate, which was approved by the council in October 1998.

- Citizens' Proposals & Demands: A citizen may submit requests or suggestions about the public issues to the Majlis; the Majlis's Bureau receives such requests and suggestions. When requests and suggestions are presented to the Majlis it may decide the followings: -a) Seeks the government opinion on them; b) Refers such requests and suggestions to the concerned committees, in order to study and make reports about them.

- To ignore these requests and file them if the issue is irrelevant to the duties of the Majlis or related to personal issues.

"The growing importance of Shura is an extension and empowerment of civil society in Omani society. With the strengthening of private and public sectors, the civil society is also strengthening. Bodies like Shura, are very important in a civil society as they work as catalysts between the two major pillars of government known as Executive and Judiciary. Shura is the reflection of His Majesty the Sultan's vision and his first address in 1970 in which he had said that there would be participation of every member of the society in the development of the Sultanate," said Khalid Alsafi al Haribi, Managing Director of Tawasul.[73] *Majlis Ash'shura* is an important tool of civil society. It guarantees the citizen the freedom of expression and right to participate in the public affairs. It works as a medium

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[72] *Royal Decree No. 91/2001*, Accessed on 12 April 2009 http://docs.google.com/viewer?a =v&q= cache:aRCN2i SUPpcJ:world. moleg.go.kr/download.do%3Ffile_id%3D12843

[73] Kaushalendra Singh (15 January 2011), "Strengthening civil society through Majlis Ash'shura", *Oman Daily Observer* (Muscut) p.1. Accessed on 23 February 2011 http://main.omanobserver.om/ node/36977

between the government and the people by giving the citizens the right to choose their representatives. Moreover, the Basic Statute of the State is based on the principle of equality and non-discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens including women.[74]

The *Majlis Ash'shura* must serve all segments of society and address cultural, social and economic issues. Women are equally capable in serving the society and it would be achieved only by their representation in a civil society body. There is wide public support for the expansion of the *Majlis al-Shura's role*. The sultan, however, exhibits no sign of any commitment to enhance the *Majlis al-Shura's* power or to transform it into a proper legislative body. Political stakeholders agree on the need for good governance, although not necessarily through democratic institutions. No public opinion poll has been conducted to assess the popularity of the current system. However, it is widely believed that citizens welcome the idea of greater political participation. Despite this, there appears to be a general feeling of apathy among the public that the process of democratization is slow and that the *Majlis al-Shura* is less powerful than many had hoped. Not surprisingly, therefore, despite an intense government media campaign urging citizens to vote in the 2007 elections, no more than 30 percent of eligible nationals participated.[75]

Council of State (*majlis al-dawla*)

As the *shura* began its march towards becoming an elected parliament, the Sultan in November 1996 presented his people with the "Basic Statute of the State", a constitution-like document codifying state-civil relations. Article 58 of the Basic Statute of the state deals with the Oman Council or Majlis Oman. It reads, "The Oman Council shall consist of: (1) the Shura Council and (2) the state council.[76] The law shall specify the jurisdiction of each, its term, sessions and rules of procedure. Also the law shall determine the number of its members, the conditions they should satisfy, the way they are selected or appointed, the reasons

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[74] ibid, p.2

[75] Stiftung (2009), *BTI 2010- Oman Country Report*.

[76] The White Book (1996), *The Basic Law of the Sultanate of Oman*, Accessed on 23 September 2009, http://www.politicsresources.net/docs/ omanbasiclaw _e.htm

for their dismissal and other regulatory provisions."[77] In accordance with the article, the elite announced the State Council Majlis al-Dawla. By this the two pillars of Omani shura were launched, permanently altering the political fabric of Omani society. On December 16, 1997, Sultan Qaboos announced the appointment of 41 members to the new SC.[78] In 2003, this Council was expanded to 57 members and again to 58 members in 2005, including nine women. Members of this body must be native Omanis not less than 40 years old and "of good social standing and reputation and with appropriate practical experience".

However, it seems that the SC is a form of representative body established to match the British House of Lords or the U.S. Senate. The SC members are selected by the Sultan from former employees such as ministers, ministry secretary-generals, former ambassadors, former senior judges, retired senior officers, retired military officers, dignitaries, businessmen and individuals with expertise in science, the arts and culture as well as academicians for a four-year term.[79] Council regulations indicate that dignitaries and businessmen as well as prominent Omani citizens who have given distinguished service to the country, or anyone else whom the sultan considers fit to appoint, qualifies as well. Observers consider this upper house a reservoir of talent from former senior Omani Officials and citizens. Since no SC member is allowed to hold any other public office, the aim was to free these individuals to serve the country as a whole rather than promote a narrow constituency.[80]

Even though the precise responsibilities of the SC and its relationship to the existing OCC remain to be clarified, building on the experience of the OCC, the Omani government has called on the SC to prepare studies on the following: (1) solving economic and social problems, (2) encouraging investment in different sectors of the economy, (3) implementing administrative reforms and improving

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[77] *Sultanate of Oman* (6 November 1996), Accessed on 12 April 2010. http://www.omanreference. com/govtmuscat.aspx

[78] U.S Department of State Diplomacy in Action (2000), *Oman: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, Accessed on 4 November 2009 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/1999/424.htm#

[79] In 2003 a royal decree extended the term of office to four years for Council of Oman members. US Government (2006), *US Department of State: Oman Report on Human Rights Practices for 2005*, Washington, D. C.: US Government Printing Office.

[80] Kechichian (1999), "Oman, A Council," p.25.

performance, (4) drafting laws prepared by ministers and government institutions and proposing draft amendments before steps are taken for their promulgation and after they have been referred to the OCC, and (5) reviewing and critiquing subjects serving the public interest that have been referred to it by the sultan or the Council of Ministers. The State Council serves as an advisory body that reviews draft laws proposed by the government, and presents its opinions to the sultan and his ministers in cooperation with the Consultative Council. Even though the *majlis al-dawla* acts as the upper chamber, its functions do not resemble the role played by Britain's House of Lords or the Senate in the United States.[81] Instead, it is intended to serve as a kind of "think tank" that would provide expertise to the government for implementation of development plans and programmes, economic and administrative reforms.

Basic Law

While gradually expanding the size and scope of the two advisory bodies, the sultan in November 1996 presented his people with the "Basic Statutes of the State," effectively a written constitution for Oman.[82] It defines the State and the system of Government. Its says that the Sultanate of Oman is an independent, Arab, Islamic, fully sovereign state with Muscat as its capital.[83] The religion of the State is Islam and the Islamic Shariah is the basis of legislation.[84] Although observers of Omani politics agree that Oman's first Basic Law is a milestone on the path to state formation, its impact on political and legal development is far from clear. Neverthless, the Basic Law is seen by writers as a turning point towards a representative monarchy and democratization.[85]

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[81] Peterson (2005), "The Emergence of Post- Traditional Oman", p. 134.

[82] *Sultanate Of Oman* (1996), *The Basic Statute Of The State*, Accessed on 14 November 2010 http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/protrav/iloaids/documents/ legaldocument /wcms_125868.pdf

[83] *Basic Law of the State,* Articles 1, Accessed on 14 july 2009 http://www.omanet. om/english/ governmnet/basiclaw/law.asp?cat= gov&subcat=blaw

[84] ibid, Articles 2.

[85] Nikolaus A. Siegfried (2002), "Legislation And Legitimation In Oman: The Basic Law", *Islamic Law and Society,* vol. 7 no. 2.

As noted, the "Basic Statute of State" is effectively a written constitution for Oman. It defines the type of governance as *sultani* and enshrines sultanship among the male descendants of the 19th century ruler, Sayyid Turki bin Said bin Sultan.[86] Sultan Qaboos is a direct descendant of Said bin Sultan and eighth in the direct line of the Al Bu Said dynasty, founded by Imam Ahmed bin Said in 1774.[87] Since Sultan Qabus, unlike other Gulf monarchs, is childless and has no obvious heir apparent, the 'Basic Statute' has laid down the rules of succession according to which the al-Said royal family will select a new sultan within three days of the throne falling vacant.[88] If the Royal Family Council (RFC) fails to nominate a successor, then a letter left behind by Sultan Qabus, which names his selection for the post is to be opened by the head of the Defence Council.[89]

Apart from addressing the issue of succession, the seven-chapter document provides a *Bill of Rights* and guarantees a full range of personal freedoms including freedom of religion, assembly and expression. Freedom of association is also mentioned in the document, although there are extensive limits on permitted activities. The basic law guarantees freedom to form associations insofar as they are constituted for legitimate objectives and their activities are not considered to be inimical to social order.[90] The Ministry of Social Development must approve the establishment of all organizations and their by-laws. The basic law provides a limited right of freedom of assembly within the limits of the law.[91] In practice, prior government approval is required for all public gatherings. Associational rights are generally underdeveloped. As part of the bilateral free trade agreement with the United States, the government of Oman amended its labor law. Among these reforms was a 2006 royal decree that granted the right to form trade unions to

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[86] *Basic Law of the State*, Articles 5.

[87] Abdullah Juma Alhaj (2000), "The Political Elite and the Introduction of Political Participation in Oman", pp. 98-99; also in John Townsend (1977), *Oman: The Making of a Modern State*, London: Croom Helm; St. Martin's Press, Chap. I.

[88] *Basic Law of the State*, Articles 6.

[89] Uzi Rabi (2002), "Majlis al-Shura and Majlis al-Dawa: Weaving Old Practices and New Realities in the Process of State Formation in Oman", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 4, p. 45.

[90] *Basic Law of the State* Articles 33.

[91] Ibid, Articles 32.

private sector workers. The Ministry of Manpower later outlined provisions for collective bargaining in the private sector and affirmed the right of private sector workers to stage peaceful strikes.

Omani culture seems not yet fully at ease with the free expression of ideas on political and social subjects, nor with the idea that citizens may organize themselves into interest groups to work toward shared goals. Government permission is still required to form a non-governmental organization. Limits on the expression of political and social views deemed critical of the government were demonstrated by the detention of two Omanis in the summer of 2005 for overstepping the bounds of expression tolerated by Omani authorities. In the first case, Ms. Tayba Mawali, a journalist and former member of the Majlis Ash-Shura, was arrested and charged in June with insulting public officials via telephone and on the internet. On July 13, she was sentenced to 18 months in prison for her actions.[92] The Omani Court of Appeal reduced this sentence to six months on August 7, 2005. Amnesty International believes that she may be considered a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the non-violent expression of her beliefs.[93]

The second case involved an Omani human-rights activist, poet and playwright, Abdullah Ryami. In May and June, Ryami had publicized the government's treatment of Ms. Mawali. He had also vocally criticized the government's handling of the 31 Omanis charged with plotting the overthrow of the sultan. They were held incommunicado for at least a portion of their imprisonment prior to their trial. Ryami had also criticized what he described as the excessive use of force by Omani police against a public demonstration protesting the conviction of the 31. Twenty-four of these demonstrators were arrested and subsequently tried before the State Security Court but were pardoned by the sultan before the conclusion of their trial. Ryami was summoned for questioning on July

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[92] Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout (2005), "Democratic Development in Oman", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 59, No 3.

[93] *Public Amnesty International Index*, (August 9, 2005), *MDE*, Accessed on 14 July 2009 http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE200072005.

12 and was held without charge and without access to family or lawyers, for a week, until his release on July 19, 2005.[94]

Similarly, freedom of press is guaranteed, but wide-ranging caveat that anything leading to public discord, violating the security of the State or abusing human dignity or rights is prohibited. The basic law provides for freedom of opinion and correspondence within the limits of the law.[95] The 1984 press and publication law still authorizes the government to censor all domestic and imported publications and the Ministry of Information can take legal action against any material it regards as politically, culturally, or sexually offensive. Editorials are generally consistent with the government's views. The government influences the privately owned press through subsidies. In practice, these restrictions favor self-censorship. Criticism of the sultan in any form is prohibited. The government owns four radio stations and two national television stations. In 2004, a royal decree gave Omani citizens the right to establishment private radio and television companies, as long as they used their own capital to do so. The first private Omani television channel went on air in February 2009.[96]

It, in brief, spells out the responsibilities of the state towards its citizens including provision for public health, education and security. In return for these rights and services promised by the state, citizens are expected to consider the "defence of the homeland" as a "sacred duty." The statute characterises the country as "Arab" and "Islamic" with the Islamic Shariah as the basis of legislation, although adherence to Islam is not a requirement for Omani citizenship.[97] It declares all citizens equal before the law and authorises an independent judiciary, which, emulating a Supreme Court scheme, would interpret the Basic Law and act as its guardian. Speaking of his conception of the role of a Supreme Court in a 1997 interview with journalist Judith Miller, the sultan said, "The Supreme Court will be the guardians of the law. Without that you can't have a proper government.

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[94] Cecil (2006), "Oman's Progress Toward Participatory Government".

[95] *Basic Law of the State*, Articles 29.

[96] Stiftung (2009), *BTI 2010- Oman Country Report*.

[97] *Basic Law of the State*, Articles 1 to 3.

They are the ones to say what is right and wrong. My role is to see that the interests of the people are taken into account. It's not my role to interpret the law. Only if certain basic things go wrong would 1 intervene, as would any head of state. And I will appoint the judges."[98]

It guarantees certain rights to the people, based on Quranic and customary law, and bans cabinet ministers from being officers of private-sector companies. The Basic Statutes guarantee the right to practice non-Muslim religions but not to carry out proselytizing activities. Many Christian denominations meet regularly and openly, as does the Hindu community. Non-Muslims are free to worship at temples and churches built on land donated by the Sultan, but not allowed to publish religious materials in Oman. Members of all religions and sects are free to maintain links with coreligionists abroad and travel outside Oman for religious purposes.[99] In addition, the statute has underlined the "principles of a free economy" together with "justice" as the basis of the national economy (Article 11). This in a way reflects the Omani government's commitment to the pursuit of economic reform to cope with a range of challenges stemming largely from the combination of a rapidly growing population, a public sector-dominated economy and limited oil resources.[100]

Rule of Law And Political Rights

Oman is not an electoral democracy but a liberalized autocracy ruled by the sultan and his appointed government. Liberalized autocracies not only tolerate but depend on a limited, state-managed pluralism of ideas and organization as a strategy for legitimation and hence survival. However, the sultan has allowed a steady and incremental diversification of political personnel through the bicameral Council of

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[98] Miller (1997), "Creating Modern Oman: An Interview with Sultan Qaboos", p. 7.

[99] Kenneth Katzman (2005), "Oman: Reform, Security, and US Policy", *Congress Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress*, Accessed on 28June 2008 at http://www. fas.org/sgp/crs/ mideast/Rs21534.pdf.

[100] Oman's oil reserves are relatively modest in comparison to other Gulf states. In 2004, Oman's proven oil reserves were modest estimated at 5.7 billion barrels, which would last for another 20 years going by the current rates of production (700,000 bpd in 2004). Energy Information Administration (EIA) (2007), "*Country Analysis Briefs, Oman*", Accessed on 13 September 2009 at www.eia.doe.gov

Oman, which acts as an advisory body. Citizens elect the 84-member Consultative Council for four-year terms, but the chamber has no legislative powers and can only recommend changes to new laws. The Consultative Council is part of a bicameral body known as the Council of Oman. The sultan, who has absolute power and issues laws by decree, appoints the other chamber, the 59-member State Council. The basic law states that "the Sultan is preserving the country's independence and territorial integrity and assuring its internal and external security, maintaining the rights and freedoms of its citizens, guaranteeing the rule of law, and guiding the general policy of the State.[101]

Oman has no system of checks and balances, and thus no separation of powers. All power is concentrated in the sultan. The sultan serves as the country's prime minister; heads the ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Finance; and is the governor of Oman's central bank. The executive branch of government tries, however, to exercise its powers in a legitimate fashion. Article 59 of the basic law states that "the sovereignty of the law is the basis of governance in the state. Rights and freedoms are guaranteed by the dignity of the judiciary and the probity and impartiality of the judges."[102]

All citizens are equal before the Law, and they are equal in public rights and duties. There shall be no discrimination between them on the grounds of gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile or social status.[103] Under the country's constitution, citizens have the right to address public authorities on personal matters or on matters related to public affairs in a manner consistent with Omani law. Personal freedom is guaranteed in accordance with the Law. No person may be arrested, searched, detained or imprisoned, or have his residence or movement curtailed, except in accordance with the provisions of the Law.[104]

Freedom of expression and democratic debate are limited, and criticism of the sultan is prohibited. Freedom of the press, printing and publication is guaranteed in accordance with the conditions and circumstances defined by the

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[101] *Basic Law of the State*, Articles 42.

[102] ibid, Articles 59.

[103] ibid, Articles 17.

[104] ibid, Articles 18.

Law. It is prohibited to print or publish material that leads to public discord, violates the security of the State or abuses a person's dignity and his rights.[105]The 2004 Private Radio and Television Companies Law established regulations for setting up private broadcast media outlets, a first for the country. The government permits private print publications, but many of these accept government subsidies and practice self-censorship. Omanis have access to the Internet through the national telecommunications company, and the government censors politically sensitive and pornographic content. The sultan issued a decree in 2008 expanding government oversight and regulation of electronic communications, including communication on personal blogs. In April 2009, Ali al-Zuwaidy, a civil aviation official, was sentenced to one month in prison and fined $520 for leaking a government document on a popular website. Al-Zuwaidy had posted a cabinet directive calling for a popular radio program to cease its anti-government criticism. He served 11 days of the sentence, with the remainder suspended. The public has limited access to political information through the media. It does, however, keep the executive under a certain degree of unofficial scrutiny via the Internet. The government restricts academic freedom by preventing the publication of material on politically sensitive topics. Omani law does not protect noncitizens from discrimination.

Already mentioned political parties are not permitted, and no meaningful organized political opposition exists. The basic law provides for the right to peaceful assembly within limits. However, all public gatherings require official permission, and the government has the authority to prevent organized public meetings without any appeal process. The basic law allows the formation of nongovernmental organizations, but civic and associational life remains limited. The government has not permitted the establishment of independent human rights organizations and generally uses the registration and licensing process to block the formation of groups that are seen as a threat to stability. Oman's 2003 labor law allows workers to select a committee to voice their demands and represent their interests but prevents them from organizing unions. Additional labor reforms enacted in 2006 brought a number of improvements, including protections for

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[105] ibid, Articles 31.

union activity, collective bargaining, and strikes. However, legal provisions covering migrant workers remain inadequate, and domestic servants are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Employers using child labor face increased penalties, including prison terms, under the law.[106] Islam is the state religion.[107] Non-Muslims have the right to worship, although they are banned from proselytizing. Non-Muslim religious organizations must register with the government.

Oman's legal system is based primarily on the *Ibadhi school* of Islam. Though the basic law guarantees judicial independence, article 59 allows the sovereignty of the Law is the basis of governance in the State, Rights and freedoms are guaranteed by the dignity of the judiciary and the probity and impartiality of the judges,[108] the judiciary is nonetheless strongly influenced by the executive branch. The sultan makes all judicial appointments and presides over the Supreme Judicial Council, which, in turn, oversees the judiciary and formulates judicial policy. Independent judiciary is not exited in Oman, which is an essential criterion for rule of law and democracy. The judiciary is remains subordinate to the sultan and the Ministry of Justice. *Sharia* (Islamic law) is the source of all legislation, and Sharia Court Departments within the civil court system are responsible for family-law matters, such as divorce and inheritance. In less populated areas, tribal laws and customs are frequently used to adjudicate disputes. Many of the civil liberties guarantees expressed in the basic law have not been implemented.

Although Oman's legal code theoretically protects civil liberties and personal freedoms, both are regularly ignored by the regime. Oman, therefore, cannot be considered free. According to the law, arbitrary arrest and detention are prohibited. In practice, the police are not required to obtain an arrest warrant in advance. Government authorities must obtain court orders to hold suspects in pretrial detention, but the police and security services do not regularly follow these procedures. Prisons are not accessible to independent monitors, and former

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[106] *Oman 2007–2008.* Ministry of Information, Muscat: Al Nahda Press.

[107] *Basic Law of the State,* Articles 2.

[108] ibid, Articles 59.

prisoners report overcrowding. The penal code contains broad and vague provisions for offenses against national security. These charges are prosecuted before the State Security Court, which usually holds proceedings that are closed to the public. The justice system is relatively capable of operating independently of government intervention, except in security-related cases or other sensitive areas. Corruption is not perceived to be a serious problem in Oman. However, the legal code does not include freedom of information provisions. Oman was ranked 39 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index.[109] The U.S. State Department Trafficking in Persons Report in June 2008 ranked Oman among the worst in the world. Following bilateral discussions between the United States and Oman in November 2008, royal decrees promulgated a law against human trafficking and established a National Commission for Human Rights. This commission, however, is attached to the appointed State Council and does not enjoy any independence from the regime.[110]

Women's Empowerment and Political Participation

Omani women lead the world in the modern era and since 1975, which was announced the year for women and after Beijing Conference in 1996, calls were loud of the importance of activating the role of women in order to be able to effectively play their role in social, political and economic aspects as well as their participation in decision-making process.[111] Women continue to demonstrate their efficient role to undertake national responsibilities as cabinet ministers, ambassadors and members of the State Council while others affirm their efforts as partners in development in diverse spheres of life like doctors, engineers, teachers, in the police and each and every field of the society. The basic law of Oman prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, origin, color, language, religion, sect, domicile, or social status.[112] There are no formal restrictions for either males or females in education, jobs or public services. Article 12 of the statute provides

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[109] *Omam 2009-2010*, (2008), Oman: Ministry of Information, Saltanate of Oman.

[110] Stiftung (2009), *BTI 2010- Oman Country Report*.

[111] "Omani women achieved incredible progress in four decades", (17 October, 2010), *Oman Daily Observer*, Accessed on 12 January 2011 http://main.omanobserver.om/node/26647

[112] *Basic Law of the State*, Articles 17.

that "justice and equality and equal opportunities for the Omanis are pillars of the society and are guaranteed by the state."[113] No national laws or legislations impose any gender discrimination against women in Oman. Women in Oman enjoy similar chances as men, as well as institutionalised obligations. The Omani Women's Association (OWA), which began in Muscat in 1970 and then expanded at the beginning of the 1980s to at least twenty-seven localities, has an active role in the country's social development. OWA recruits women for voluntary work in areas such as running workshops and training courses, lectures, seminars and exhibitions. At the end of 2002, OWA had 3,592 members and thirty-eight branches have been opened in most of the provincial entities (*wilayáts*).[114]

Qaboos's support to women was clear during the launch of 'Omani Women's Symposium' in Saih Al Makarim in the Wilayat of Sohar in October 2009 at the Royal Camp and the recommendations approved by him when he said: "We give our full attention to women's participation in the march of the Omani Renaissance. We provide her opportunities for education, training and employment and stressed the need for her contribution in the various areas of development through the systems and laws and ensured her rights and showed her duties and made her able to promote herself." The Sultanate marked the International Women's Day by a number of Royal grants and major events, including the Omani Women's Forum from October 17 to 19, 2009.[115] October 17 has thus become an Omani Women's Day. Despite of all measures taken by Sultanates, Omani women are severely underrepresented in the public field and continue to face difficulties gaining justice.

In the field of political participation, Omani women are given the right to vote and stand for the election on an equal footing with men. Oman became the first GCC state to grant women voting rights in 1994,[116] although these rights were

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[113] ibid, Articles 12.

[114] *Oman 2003–2004*, (2003), Ministry of Information, Muscat: Al Roya Press.

[115] *The 40th anniversary, Oman (Muscat)*, 18 November, 2010 Accessed on 12 January 2011 http://www.english.globalarabnetwork.com/201011198079/Oman-Politics/oman-40-years-of-glory-and-prosperity.html

[116] Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami (15 January 2011), Women: partners in decision-making, Accessed on 2

extended only to a small number of citizens selected by Sultan Qaboos. Women first ran for national office in the 2000 elections for the Consultative Council, the elected chamber of Oman's bicameral representative body, the majlis; two women won.[117] In 2003, Oman established universal suffrage. In the elections held in October of that year, the two women already serving in the majlis were reelected.[118] The number of women in appointed positions increased in 2003. Seven women serve in the State Council, the appointed chamber of the majlis. Qaboos named a woman to the rank of minister, giving that rank to a woman in charge of the national authority for industrial craftsmanship. He added three female ministers—of higher education, of tourism, and of social development—and these ministries remain headed by women. In April 2004, Qaboos made five women among the 29 appointees to the public prosecutors office.[119] For the first time since women were granted the right to participate in 1994, no female candidates were elected in the Consultative Council elections of October 2007.[120]

Over and above, the new Council offers public space into which the Sultan can promote women "who will serve as role model for the coming generation and as proof to those who may be worried about the social consequences of the entry of women into public life."[121] It is worth mentioning that the promotion and participation of women in national life commensurate with their numbers and education has been a major priority of the sultanate. The impetus for improvement in women's role in Oman has, however, come from the top through the initiatives of Sultan Qabus.

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[117] Ebtisam Al-Kibti (2004), "Women in the GCC: progress but little political emancipation", *The Daily Star*, Accessed on 12 October 2010 http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/ Commentary /Jul/23/Women-in-the-GCC-progress-but-little-political-emancipation. ashx#axzz 1LOlSog8t

[118] Ebtisam Al Kitbi (20 July, 2004), "Women's Political Status in the GCC States", Accessed on 23 August 2008 http://carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=42099.

[119] Kenneth Katzman (2005), "Oman: Reform, Security, and US Policy", *Congress Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress* Accessed on 10 April 2009 http://www.fas.org/spg/crs/mideast/ rs21534.pdf, p 5.

[120] Jeremy Jones (2007), *Negotiating the Change: The New Politics of the Middle East*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.

[121] Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout (2005), "Democratic Development in Oman", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 3, p. 391.

According to statistics for 2000 the total economically active population, including Omanis and expatriates (men and women), was 721,000.2 There were 598,000 employed men and 123,000 employed women, which translates to 17 percent of the female population.[122] If we compare that figure with the 11.9 percent proportion of women in the labour force in 1990, we find that the progress achieved in a decade is considerable. Women enjoy an outstanding position in the Ministry of Education. According to 2003–2004 statistics, there are 18,249 women on the teaching staff, 1,906 women on the administrative staff of schools and 608 women on the administrative and technical staff working in headquarters and regional offices, for a total of 20,763.[123]

With Omanization as one of the pillars of government policy, women and girls are expected to acquire appropriate knowledge and skills. Some educated women have attained positions of authority in government and business. Approximately 30 percent of all civil servants are women, and of these 59 percent are Omani citizens. In the public sector women are entitled to equal pay for equal work, though not all private sector employers observe such regulations. Some educated women still face job discrimination because prospective employers fear that they might resign to marry or raise a family, a problem found in many countries and not specific to Oman.[124]

However, allegations of spousal abuse and domestic violence are fairly common, with women finding protection primarily through their families. Omani women also continue to face social discrimination often as a result of the interpretation of Islamic law.[125] Although the basic law prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, women suffer from legal and social discrimination. While Oman remains a destination and transit country for trafficking in women and men,

[122] Shapour Rassekh (2004), *Education a Motor as for Development: Recent Education Reforms in Oman with Particular Reference to the Status of Women and Girls*, UNESCO, IBE: Geneva, p. 5.

[123] *Oman 2004–2005*, (2004), Ministry of Information Muscat: Al Roya Press.

[124] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2002). *Country report on human rights practices, Oman*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State.

[125] Kenneth Katzman (2008), "*Oman: Reform, Security, and US Policy*", Congress Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress. Accessed on 12 July 2010 http://www.fas.org/spg/crs/mideast/rs21534.pdf.

a new anti trafficking law went into effect in December 2008. The government tried its first case under the new law in March 2009, convicting 11 men of bringing 13 women into the country for prostitution. The government also provided shelter for the women involved in the case. In April, the newly formed National Committee for Combating Trafficking in Persons convened its first meeting.[126]

In celebration of 40 years of the Sultanate's prosperity and to highlight its achievements and to further motivate women to advance on the 'road to success', a campaign, which acknowledges and celebrates the achievements of women '2010 Omani Women' will be launched. The campaign, the first of its kind to be pioneered and led by youth, seeks to highlight the significant strides Omani women have made as active players in shaping the Sultanate's modern renaissance over the last four decades. The campaign calls for men and women to collectively join efforts to work towards the common goal of helping women to recognise their potential particularly that the Sultanate has pledged to, and implemented gender equity, according women equal participation in all sectors and recognise their capabilities, thus setting a regional precedent.[127]

Oman has been successful in enhancing the status of women, who – at least in theory – have the same opportunities as men in public and private jobs. Oman's government has a deliberate policy of inclusiveness regarding all segments of the population. In reality, however, women and other groups of society such as the descendants of client and slave groups (descendants of slaves brought from Africa who are considered not to be of Arab blood) still face high barriers to their participation in formal economic activities. In domestic life, women face discrimination in many areas. Men are traditionally and legally seen as the heads of household, and as such, women are not entitled to certain state benefits, including housing loans. Women do not have full freedom to make decisions about their health and reproductive rights.

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[126] *Freedom House* (3 May 2010), "Freedom in the World 2010 – Oman", Accessed on 19 January 2011 http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c0ceadb28.html.

[127] Maryam Khalfan (23 May 2010), "Campaign to highlight achievements of women", *Oman Daily Observer*, Muscut.

Omani Developmental Model

During the last four decades, the Sultanate of Oman has realized significant achievements despite the ever-changing and variable regional and global conditions that marked this period. The government basic goal is to achieve growth and progress that comprises the economic and social dimensions and reflects directly and positively on the Omani citizen by way of raising the standard of living and providing a better life and well-being for him and his family. To achieve this, the government adopted a comprehensive development concept on the basis of free market and perfect competition to activate and stimulate the national economy, raise its efficiency and growth rates. It also, followed indicative planning to rationalize the economic path and maximize the social return of growth and improve the quality of life of its citizens. In acknowledging Oman's achievements, the UN Report describes the Sultanate as a "success story" and thus a model for other nations to emulate. Through the judicious utilisation of its hydrocarbon resources, Oman made the "evolution from a very poor to a very rich country, showing a quadrupling of gross enrolment and literacy rates and a 27-year increase in life expectancy."[128]

Within 40 years, the Omani economy has been witnessing an excellent growth mainly due to economic liberalisation, diversification initiatives, increased government and private sector spending on infrastructure developments and healthy population growth.[129] Regional distribution of development is observed in the total public expenditure, which has reached RO. (94) billion during the past forty years. Education, health, electricity and water, in addition to, roads and communications have been expanded to cover the different Sultanate's Governorates and Regions.

Social services were awarded special observance and the government expenditure on education during (1976-2009) amounted to RO. (10.3) billion. The

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[128] "Oman: A success story in achieving high human development", (6 November 2010), *Oman Observer,* Mascut.

[129] Samuel Kutty, Liberalisation, diversification accelerate economic growth in Oman, 1 January 2011. Accessed at http://www.english.globalarabnetwork.com/201101018481/Economics/ liberalization diversification-accelerate-economic-growth-in-oman.htm on 8 January, 2011.

Total number of students in the general education stage reached (531,393) in 2009 and the number of schools totaled (1040) compared to (3) in 1970. Ministry of Information indicated that (23,644) students, success in the general diploma in 2009, were admitted in higher education institutions inside and outside the Sultanate at (52.9%).[130] The total expenditure on preventive and therapeutic health services during (1970-2008) amounted to (4.1) billion. The mortality rate declined to (3%)/(000) population compared to (13.3)/(000) in 1980 and life expectancy at birth to (72.5) years compared to (49.3) in 1970. Under-five Mortality Rate has dropped from 31 per 1000 live births in 1990 to 12 in 2009, while the immunisation rates stand at 99 per cent over the past five years. [131]

Oman was placed second at the Arab level in the Global Peace Index 2010. The global peace index includes 23 sub-indices which cover the internal and foreign conditions of the countries, such as the military expenditure, relations with the neighbouring countries, spread of crime, respect for human rights and contribution to preserving peace. As per the index which covers 149 countries around the world, the Sultanate came 23rd and second at the Arab level after Qatar.[132] The Sultanate had gained advanced positions in an another survey of 100 countries that offer citizens the best opportunities for success in all walks of life and providing them with opportunities for a sound and secure livelihood. Oman was ranked 60th after China in the survey, which took into account such factors as quality of education, life, health, economic conditions and political freedom. The report ranked the Sultanate 4th among the GCC countries based on the aforementioned criteria. In education, the Sultanate was placed first among Gulf states, but 58th among the 100 countries. On health, the Sultanate was fourth in the Gulf and 50th globally. On the quality of life, it was 4th in the Gulf and 48th globally. With regard to economic activities, Oman was fifth in the Gulf and 57th

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[130] *Oman 2009-2010*, (2010), Ministry of Information

[131] Maryam Khalfan (20 September 2010), Oman on track: Millennium Development Goals by 2015, *Oman Observer* (Mascut), Accessed on 12 January 2011 http://main.omanobserver. om/node/23590

[132] Peace and Economy Institute (June, 2010), *Global Peace Index*, Washington DC:Peace and Economy Institute.

internationally.[133]

The national development in Oman is designed to be a gradual process guided by the Sultanate's own domestic circumstances where people play their part in formulating national decisions.[134] In the minds of most of Oman's citizens, the Omani model of development is intimately linked to the person of Sultan Qaboos. The ruler has no heir and does not feel necessary to designate one; at times, seemingly indicating little intrinsic motivation to be concerned with the long-term development of the dynasty or the country. This has resulted in a growing feeling of anxiety among the population concerning a future without the reassuring paternal figure of Qaboos. Thus far, the government has been quite successful in setting, maintaining and even achieving some of its development objectives, particularly its goals for economic reform and liberalization. From 1970 to 2010, seven Five-Year Development Plans were implemented. All these plans sought the achievement of the long-term strategic plan. The plans were characterized by wide participation of the various community entities, so that their directives meet the ambitions of all society groups and sectors.

Omani development path during the four decades, passed through two important stages:- the first stage from the beginning in 1970 and continued for (25) years until the beginning of 1996. The Sultanate was able during this period to setup successively the basic pillars for economical and social transformation. The second stage from 1996 till now, which manifests the beginning of the launch to the future horizons, realizing the sustained self-growth and full readiness for deeper and wider link with the global economy and its surrounding significant political and economical challenges. The second stage started with the preparation of the long-term development strategy (1996-2020), which anticipates the development vision for the next (25) years.[135] Within the context of this 2nd stage, the

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[133] "Oman: A success story in achieving high human development", (6 November 2010), *Oman Daily Observer* Accessed on 13 December 2010 http://main.omanobserver.om/node/29063

[134] Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami (06 November, 2010), Oman's progress in record time, Oman Observer Mascut, Accessed on 12 January 2011 http://main.omanobserver.om/node/29064

[135] Oman Observer (Mascut) (03 November 2010), "All-round economic development", Accessed on 23 February 2011 http://main.omanobserver.om/node/28827

preparation and implementation of the successive Five-Year Plans have been achieved since 1996. The vision defines the path of the Omani economy for (25) years in four main dimensions. Each dimension constitutes a number of objectives to be realized. These includes a) realizing sustainable comprehensive economic development within a stable economic framework; b) advancing human resources development, so that the Omani citizen is enabled to undertake his full role in national economy; c) development and diversification of the production base of the Omani economy within a dynamic and interactive framework with the global economy; d) creation of an efficient and effective private sector that is capable to participate in the economical and social development process and able to compete globally.

There is a widespread agreement on key elements of the country's mid-term plan for economic development. First, the plan calls for Oman to develop and upgrade its human resources so as to better cope with international competitors. Secondly, the plan specifies that Oman's private sector needs to be made capable of using human and natural resources effectively and in a sustainable perspective. In general, the economic plan expresses that Oman should utilize the value of its geo-strategic location, optimize the use of its natural resources, promote economic diversification, and distribute the fruits of development equally among all regions and all citizens.

The economic crisis of 1994 triggered by chronic government deficits and an inability to rein in public spending, Sultan Qabus convened a conference in 1995 entitled "Vision 2020" in which he called for developing a new strategy centered on three themes:- Omanisation, economic diversification and privatisation.[136] These policies dominate economic thinking, and are the main features of the five-year plans. *Omanisation programme* has been in operation since 1988, working toward replacing expatriates with trained Omani Personnel. Omanisation refers to the replacement of the expatriates by the Omani nationals, which the government launched in earnest in the first half of 1994 mainly in the

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[136] Philip Bowring (29 July 1995), "Omanis Look Back with Awe, and Ahead with Apprehensions", *The New York Times,* Accessed on 23 September 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/29/opinion/29iht-edbow.t.html.

banking sector. By the end of 1999, the number of Omanis in government services exceeded the set target of 72 percent, and in most departments reached 86% of employees. The Ministry has also stipulated fixed Omanisation targets in six areas of the private sector.[137]

Omanisation, a campaign meant not only to ensure job for each citizen but also to reduce dependence on expatriates in search of self-reliance in human resource, has become the government's top priority more than ever before since the recent address by the Omani leader to the joint house of parliament, devoted as it was to the national manpower development. Sultan Qaboos has underlined the growing need for collective efforts to boost Omanisation, saying he would personally follow up the implementation of the recommendations of the newly created National Manpower Employment Forum. "Forums and studies usually tackle hypothetical issues but the subjects of this forum are realistic and the implementation of its recommendations will be possible only if there is a concerted effort from the government and the other sectors of the community", said Sultan Qaboos.[138] The local media has been geared up to drive home the royal message to ensure a complete success of the campaign. Already, thousands of illegal workers have been sent back home to create room for citizens. But one of the main obstacles was the presence of foreign top management which prefers expatriate workers, a clear hint that this top strategy needs to be 'Omanised.' Sultan Qaboos said the Omani youth constituted a large vital section of the society and no effort would be spared to ensure a bright, dignified future for them. At the same time, he exhorted the youth to work diligently and selflessly for the development of the country, as "work, whatever its nature, is a virtue." [139]

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[137] Lisa Little and James Buchan (2007), "Nursing Self Sufficiency/Sustainability in the Global Context: Developed for the International Centre on Nurse Migration and the International Centre for Human Resources in Nursing," *ICNM - International Centre on Nurse Migration*; Geneva, Switzerland, p. 5.

[138] Sultan Qaboos while addressing at the royal camp in Ibri Walis, members of the State Council, the upper house of parliament, Majlis Al Shura, the lower house and dignitaries belonging to the Dhaihra region

[139] *Oman 2010–2011*, (2011), Ministry of Information, Muscat: Al Nahda Press.

The Ministry of Information has stipulated a fixed Omanisation ratio in six areas of the private sector. Transport, storage and communications are to have 60 percent Omanisation, finance; insurance and real estate 45 percent; industry 35 percent; hotels and restaurants 30 percent; wholesale or retail trading 20 percent and contracting 15 percent.[140] The Omanization policy adopted by the Sultanate is continuing and proved its success in providing more work opportunities for citizens. Omanization ratio in government sector reached about 87 percent in 2008. Also, the government will continue to expand the training and qualification programmes particularly training linked to employment to those nominated to take private sector jobs and raise the Omanization ratio.[141] The number of national manpower employed at the private sector at the end of November 2010 rose by 13.43 percent to 204,838 citizen compared to 180,590 citizen at the same period in 2009. The Omani government has sought to increase the percentage of Omanis working in the private sector through an "Omanization" program aimed at reducing the Sultanate's dependence on immigrant labor. Despite that Omanis still constitute very nominal presence of private sector employment.

The second programme aims at diversifying the economy away to a level whereby the year 2020 the share of the oil sector on the country's GDP will be 9 per cent only instead of 41percent in 2009. With the government's recognition of the leading role of the oil sector in the Omani economy, it pursued during the previous period to create a structural change in the national economy, diversify its production base and reduce its dependence on oil. The non-oil sector share in GDP increased from 31.6 per cent in 1970 to 59 per cent in 2009.[142] Unlike its Gulf neighbors, Oman does not have immense oil resources. Total proven reserves are about 5.5 billion barrels. In addition to this, geology of Oman makes exploration and production comparatively expensive. Oman is a member neither of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) nor of the Organization of

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[140] *Oman 2008–2009*, (2008), Ministry of Information, Muscat: Al Nahda Press, p. 172.

[141] Ammar Shikhani (22 November 2010), "Oman - Development Achievements in Forty Years", Accessed on 23 February 2011 http://www.english.globalarabnetwork.com/201011228111/ Economics/ oman-forty-years-of-development-achievements.html)

[142] "All-round economic development", (03 November 2010), *Oman Observer*, Accessed on 23 February 2011 http://main.omanobserver.om/node/28827

Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) in order to have more flexibility in terms of pricing and production.[143]

With the large discoveries of natural gas recently, the focus of Oman's diversification drive has shifted from developing manufacturing sector and promoting tourism industry to encouraging the development of gas-based industries.[144] Natural gas reserves are more modest than its oil reserves. Oman's estimated gas reserves are 25 trillion cubic feet, of which 11 trillion are proven. But when it comes to diversification of the economy there is still a long way to go. Despite the successive plans and programs prepared to boost the fields of industry, agriculture, animal husbandry, fishery and tourism, Oman's economy is still mostly based on oil revenues.

As the diversification plans have not borne fruit yet it can be said that Oman is still a rentier state like other Gulf countries. As Allen and Rigsbee put it, Oman's economic situation is however very different in three important ways from its neighbors. Firstly its oil income is more modest comparing to other Gulf countries so that the government has always had to act within some financial constraints. Secondly, despite their limited quantities Oman possess a variety of other resources such as minerals, agriculture and fisheries that may make diversification easier. Thirdly, the merchant class has not been supplanted by the royal family so that there has been internal pressure to keep economy open.[145]

While diversification of the economy away from its reliance on the oil is moving at a slow pace, Oman's privatisation programme is one of the most advanced in the Gulf region. The two main forms of privatisation utilised so far are the sale of government companies and shares as well as the establishment of service projects in the spheres of electricity, water and sewage.[146] Besides, the

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[143] Calvin H. Allen, Jr. and W. Lynn Rigsbee (2000), *Oman under Qaboos: From Coup to Constitution, 1970-1996*, Frank Cass, p. 183.

[144] *Doing Business In Oman: A Country Commercial Guide for U.S. Companies*, (2005), Washington: U. S & Foreign Commercial Service and U.S Department of States, p 1.

[145] ibid, p.122.

[146] Afshin Molavi (1998), "Oman's Economy: Back on Track", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 2-11

statute provides constitutional guarantees for the free market, which, supplemented by relatively low levels of corruption and Oman's entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in the year 2000, have created conditions conducive to the expansion of trade and investment.[147] In fact, recent policy-incentives, such as the modification of laws to accommodate non-Omani investors, low taxes and protection of small business and foreign firms add to the attraction of the country as an investment destination.

Problems and Prospects

Oman faces challenges both on the economic and political fronts. In the economic realm, the Sultanate's main problem is easy to identify: its oil reserves are decreasing while its population is increasing, and its led to several structutal problems like- increasing unemployment among Omani youth and demographic imbalance of labour market. Despite the Ministry of Manpower exerts its utmost efforts to implement the directives of the Sultanate's government for regulating the labour market, developing the national manpower and meeting the required needs for human cadres in the labour fields throughout the roles being played by the ministry in the sectors of labour, technical education, vocational training and Sanad Programme.

In the field of the labour welfare, the Ministry of Manpower has given priority to the issue of regulating the labour market and making balance between the labourer and the employer.[148] The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Manpower signed a Memorandum of Understating (MoU) with the International Labour Organization (ILO) for implementing the proper national labour programme on June 15th, 2010 during the 99th session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva.[149] On the other hand, the issue of employment and

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[147] *Omam 2008-2009*, (2008), Ministry of Information, p. 172

[148] For regulating the labour market, the labour law was amended by the Royal Decree No. (63/2009) in October 2009 for the sake of limiting some of the negative phenomena in the labour market whether by expatriate labourers or the employers.

[149] Shahid Abbas (24 November 2010), Oman developing manpower, regulating labour market, Accessed on 17 January 2011 http://www.english.globalarabnetwork.com/201011248148/ Economics/oman-developing-manpower-regulating-labour-market.html

availability of appropriate work opportunities for all unemployed citizens represents a priority to the government.

The government provides work opportunities to 71,477 annually in government and private sector establishments or through *"Sanad"* and *"Kasseb"* programmes. The total number of Omani citizens employed in the government amounted to 136.6 thousand at the end of 2009. The number employed in private sector establishments who are registered at the Public Authority for Social Insurance reached (158,315) by the end of 2009.[150] In addition, there are a large number of self-employed citizens working in sectors of agriculture, trade, fisheries and other not registered in the social insurance system. The annual bulletin of manpower indicators issued by the Manpower Ministry have pointed out that the relative distribution in terms of the level of proficiency, the number of specialists constituted 9 percent out of the total number of national manpower to 18,465 technicians constituted 6.2 percent to 12,619 vocational manpower 30.9 percent to 63,301 professional workers 18 percent to 36,835 and limited skill workers constituted 35.9 percent to 73,618. The number of manpower registered as job seekers for the first time during November 2010 stood at 6,321.[151]

The Higher Education Ministry has made steady strides in terms of developing the infrastructure for higher education in the Sultanate through setting up prestigious universities and providing Omani students with more opportunities to study wide scientific majors that meet the needs of the Omani labour market. In 2010, a graduate survey was introduced in a bid to assess the output of the higher education institutions in terms of knowledge, skills, efficiency and how far they work at the different business sectors. As of today, there are 5 universities and 19 colleges spread all over the Sultanate. As per the statistics of the academic year 2008/2009, the number of students amounted to 33521, about 43.3 percent of the

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[150] *Omam 2009-2010,* (2009), Ministry of Information.

[151] Mohammed Almasri (24 December 2010), "Oman: 13% Increase in Workforce Market," Accessed on 11 January 2011 http://www.english.globalarabnetwork.com/201012248451/ Economics/oman-13-increase-in-workforce-market.html

students registered at the diploma and bachelor degrees at the higher education institutions in the Sultanate.[152]

Despite several above mentioned steps taken by government, *Labour market scenario in Oman is not better in term of demographic structure of workforce and unemployment problem also one of the major critical issue for Omani youth.* Oman's population growth is estimated at a rapid 2.1 percent,[153] its population growth during the 1980's and 1990's is believed to have been close to an extremely rapid 4.0 percent.[154] From less than one million in 1970, Oman' s population has grown to 2.7 million.[155] According to the Population Reference Bureau, it is expected to reach 4.0 million in 2025.[156] Oman is now facing "the dilemma of what to do with the addition of well over 40,000 secondary-school graduates and drop-outs every year."[157] But if Oman's oil income declines, this task will become far more difficult and the sultanate could face a serious crisis. The Omani government does not publish unemployment figures. According to Peterson, though, Oman is now experiencing "serious unemployment problems,"[158] it appears doubtful, that either the declining oil sector or the small non-oil sector will be able to absorb the growing number of young Omani job seekers. Government, of course, employs a substantial number of people, but the ability of the government to employ more people productively appears limited.

Problems in the political realm, by contrast, are harder to identify and assess since obtaining information about Omani politics--especially opposition sentiment and activity--is extremely difficult. There have been indications over the

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[152] Amina Murtada (15 November 2010), "Oman Developing Higher Education to Meet Labour Market Needs," Accessed on 1 March 2011 http://www.english.globalarabnetwork.com/ 201011158045/Economics/oman-developing-higher-education-to-meet-labour-market-needs.html

[153] *UNDP: Human Development Report,* (2009), New York: UN.

[154] J.E. Peterson (2004), "Oman: Three and a Half Decades of Change and Development," *Middle East Policy,* Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 135.

[155] *UNDP: Human Development Report,* (2009).

[156] Population Reference Bureau (PRB) (2004), *World Population Data Sheet,* Washington, DC: PRB.

[157] Peterson (2004), "Oman: Three and a Half Decades of Change and Development", p. 135.

[158] ibid, p 135.

past decade that there is frustration and discontent not just with some of the Sultan's policies, but also with his rule. Oman is likely to face several political because of problems the extraordinary concentration of authority in the hands of one man (Sultan Qaboos), the sultan's unwillingness to allow meaningful political participation or dialogue, political legitimacy concerning both Sultan Qaboos and the succession process he has set up.

The possibility of a *succession crisis* upon his death raises the possibility of instability. It will show that while the rule of the sultan does not appear to be in any immediate danger, there is a significant possibility that Oman's problems could exceed the ability of its government to deal with them effectively. Such a development, especially combined with a succession crisis, could affect the stability and even the viability of the sultanate.[159]

Sultan Qaboos has no children himself and has not named any of his relatives as his heir. The succession will instead be decided only after his death in the following manner as described by Qaboos himself: "When I die, my family will meet. If they cannot agree on a candidate, the Defense Council will decide, based on a name or names submitted by the previous sultan. I have already written down two names in descending order, and put them in sealed envelopes in two different regions."[160] It is possible that this process will work smoothly. But several problems could arise :- a) the royal family might not be able to agree on a successor, or even on who among them should be in on the decision; b) even if it cannot decide, the royal family might not be willing to let the Defense Council do so, or royal rivals might vie for allies on it; and c) different versions of Qaboos's list of successors might suddenly be "found," thus causing greater confusion. These problems might be avoided if only the sultan would name an heir, as has been done in all the other Gulf monarchies. But since Qaboos overthrew a sultan when he himself was heir, he may well fear that any heir he named might do the same to him. The possibility of an unstable succession, though, is a high price to pay for the continued stability of Qaboos's own reign.

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[159] Mark N. Katz (2004) "Assessing the Political Stability in Oman", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3, p.1

[160] Miller (1997), "Creating Modern Oman: An Interview with Sultan Qabus," p. 17.

In the Gulf monarchies where power has been shared among members of the royal family have survived, whereas those in which the monarch has excluded his family members from governance are the ones that have been overthrown.[161] While Oman is a country where the monarchy has not been overthrown, "the dynasty as a ruling institution is weaker" and that Sultan Qaboos "has concentrated much power in his own hands, and shared less with his relatives than is common elsewhere in the Gulf."[162] Furthermore, unlike the other Gulf monarchies where the successors to the throne have all been designated, Sultan Qaboos has not named an heir but has called upon the royal family to do so after his death. Sultan Qaboos's style of governance has important implications. Elsewhere in the Gulf, several members of each country' s ruling family have acquired administrative experience through holding important cabinet positions. Upon the death or incapacity of the monarch, there are other members of the ruling family with senior level administrative experience who can quickly step in. As argued by Herb that the ruling families in each of these countries serve as an important check on the monarch, since the family ultimately has the power to depose him if he undertakes a course of action seen as harmful to the continuation of the dynasty. Unlike elsewhere in the Gulf, Oman's royal family does not appear to have the power to restrain--and certainly not to depose--Qaboos. "Whereas the other Gulf monarchies are family enterprises, Oman is a sole proprietorship."[163] The quality of Qaboos's rule, then, is crucially important for Oman's stability.

While political discontent is obviously present in Oman, the sultan's regime does not appear to be in any immediate danger. So long as the government is able to provide a decent standard of living, most Omanis seem prepared to tolerate Sultan Qaboos's rule even if they question his legitimacy and see the "democratization" process he has set off as largely meaningless. Oman's political system is stable and there is little expectation of any challenge to the rule of the absolute monarch. The succession issue remain unresolved as the Sultan has failed to nominate a successor. In all, Oman's gradual political liberalization process is

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[161] Michael Herb (1999), *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies,* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

[162] ibid. p. 180.

[163] Katz (2004), "Assessing the Political Stability of Oman".

likely to continue, even though the Sultan decisively retains personal control over the Omani political system.

Chapter-5

Political Liberalisation in Oman:

Regional and Global Factors

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the Omani experience in the advance of political liberalisation cannot be attributable to domestic factors, such as the civic pressure, street politics (strikes/demonstrations or riots)[1] and division in the regime. Alternatively, it is argued that the impact of external forces and developments needs to be addressed in accounting for the transition in Oman. In the initiation of political reforms in the early 1990s, for instance, the significance of post-Cold War global changes, notably the ideological hegemony of the West and the political fall-out of the Kuwaiti crisis is difficult to ignore. It may be noted that several Arab states during this period attempted what Ayubi calls the "cosmetic democracy" because democratisation meant some form of identification with the West.[2] Likewise, the 'neghbourhood effects' of the democratic experiment in Kuwait and the united Yemen on Oman's pace of reforms particularly during the latter half of the 1990s cannot be discounted. The reforms were also abetted by the intervention of the multilateral agencies and pro-democratic Western actors.[3]

However, Oman's experience is unique in the sense that the process is not the product of internal development rather due to change in the external arena. This chapter is partly devoted to the debate as regards the significance of external context (global and regional) followed by a brief discussion of the democratic campaign by the US in the aftermath of 9/11 terror attack. In the backdrop of dramatic changes in the post cold war international arena, Omani experience in political liberalization is explained.

Regional Factors

Political liberalisation is generally attributed either to schism between the hard-liners and soft-liners within the regime or mass pressure caused by internal structural problems, such as state failure, financial crisis and the globalisation-induced

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[1] Reports of peaceful pro-Palestinian protests following the *intifada* in 2000 and anti-American demonstrations in 2003 are the first examples of political activism in Oman's recent history. They were not directed against the regime as such.

[2] Michael C. Hudson (1991), "After the Gulf War: Prospects for Democratisation in the Arab World", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 407-426.

[3] Peter Burnell and Peter Calvert, "Promoting Democracy Abroad", *Democratisation,* Vol. 12, No.4.

economic reforms.[4] In the case of Oman, there was no great public demand for political reforms, akin to that appeared in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain.[5] Nor did the economic downturn in the early 1990s spark off urban protests or popular unrest what other Arab countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan and Egypt) had experienced during the 1980s.[6] In any case, the Sultanate has confronted no extremist threats since the termination of the ten year-long Dhufar War in the mid-1970s.[7]

From 1982-1992 several major interrelated developments have restructured the social, economic, political, and ideological orders of the Arab Gulf States in general and Oman in particular. Among the most significant are the sharp decline in oil revenues, the commensurate economic stagnation and deterioration of the "Arab oil economy" and the respective state economies linked to it, and the rise of the international Arab debt. The oil revenue boom of the 1970s and early 1980s created in the region an expansive (and expensive) social and physical infrastructure that in the "oil-bust" period (mid-1980s, and more so in the early 1990s), are burdens on the undiversified state economies, on the masses dependent on public investment and social welfare provided by the state, and even on those dependent on remittance from expatriate workers. Moreover, the financially weakened states have become simultaneously vulnerable to internal anti-systemic movements and to external economic and political pressures.[8]

The 1980- 90 decades were also punctuated by three major wars (the Israeli invasion of Lebnon of 1982, the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988, and the Gulf War of 1990-1991) that have had a significant impact politically, economically, and socially

[4] Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (1986), *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

[5] Fred H. Lawson (1994), "Postwar Demands for Political Participation in the Arab Gulf States", *International Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 2.

[6] Larbi Sadiki (2000), "Popular Uprising and Arab Democratisation", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 32.

[7] It started in the southern Omani province of Dhufar in 1964 as a tribal revolt and later split into a communist-inspired ideological revolution led by the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG). The rebellion was crushed by Sultan Qabus with the British military support. For details, see Uzi Rabi (2006), *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society: Oman under Sa'id bin Taymur, 1932-1970*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, Chap. V.

[8] Rex Brynen (1995), *Political Liberalisation and Democratization in the Arab World: Volume 1* Theoretical Perspectives, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, p. 264.

on unwilling to solve the fundamental socioeconomic and political issues facing their respective countries and the region are also seen as dependent clients of the United States and thus increasingly delegitimized in the eyes of the disadvantaged groups. Collectively, these developments and perceptions led to increasing alienation and discontent among large sector of the Arab peoples. With the promises of Arab socialism and oil wealth unfulfilled "the anger of disillusionment"[9] set in dramatically among the disadvantaged social classes.

The Arab Gulf region has gone through two tragic wars in near decades. The first war, between Iran and Iraq, which began in September 1980, lasted for eight long years. Some as one of the costliest conflicts has labeled this war in the 20th Century,[10] whereas others referred to it as the longest war.[11] Two years after the cease-fire between Iran and Iraq, the latter, taking the whole world by surprise, invaded Kuwait. The shocking 2 August 1990 invasion set in motion a series of political, diplomatic and military activities which eventually led to the 16 January 1991 war. This second Gulf war lasted for 42 days, but was nevertheless as damaging and as catastrophic as the first.[12] During the Gulf crisis was based on the proposition that the crisis was as much an internal Arab political crisis as to be a regional international crisis. In fact, elements of participatory governance did materialize in a number of Arab countries, but the trend was already underway before the crisis. What the crisis has done is to expedite it. In the years immediately preceding the Gulf crisis, several Arab regimes were already sensing their deepening loss of internal legitimacy. This was expressed in increasingly frequent violent confrontations between regimes and one or more of the major socio-economic formations. The ruling elites in these countries all responded to mounting discontent with promises of economic and political reform. In fact, some began to honor such promises before the outbreak of the Gulf crisis. Others took advantage of the crisis to renege on or delay honoring them.

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[9] Immanuel Wallerstein (1992), "The Collapse of Liberalism," in Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch eds. (1992), *Socialist Register,* London: Merlin Press, pp 44-75.

[10] Abbas Alnasrawi (1986), "Economic Consequence of Iran-Iraq War," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 8.

[11] Dilip Hiro (1990), *The Longest War*, London: Paladin.

[12] Ibrahim M. Oweiss (1992), "The Economic Impact of the Gulf War", in Ibrahim (ed.) (1992), *The Gulf Crisis: Background and Consequences,* Washington, D.C.: Contemporary Arab Studies.

Since the Gulf War, political liberalization has unfolded in a number of Arab Gulf countries only slowly and reluctantly. In the countries directly involved in, or close to the heart of, the crisis- Iraq, Syria, and the six states bordering the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman- ruling elites claimed a "legitimate" excuse to delay moves toward democratization, and one must wonder if any such moves were ever seriously intended. It was a full year after the crisis before Arab elites showed a serious inclination towards genuine participation politics, although promises had been extracted from them in some instances, such as in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. During 1991, it became obvious that something had to be done.

One positive development among the many negative aspects of the Gulf crisis was has been the unprecedented political mobilization of the Arab masses. Popular expressions of support for one Arab side or the other in the crisis were not always in accord with the official positions of regimes. This had the effect to breaking the wall of fear between many Arabs and their ruling elites. Iraq is a dramatic example of this trend. This Shi'a in the south and the Kurds in the north rose up against the regime of Saddam Hussein-emboldened, it could be argued, by Iraq's crushing defeat and the prospect of aid from the victorious allies. Even the Gulf elites on the winning side faced mounting demands from their intelligentsia for more political participation.[13] But regional factors have not been powerful enough to detail ongoing liberalizing experiments. In each case liberalization was preceded and accompanied by important political events that served to clarify and strengthen- at least in the eyes of the rulers who were making the liberalizing decisions- national identity. Unity in Yemen, the disengagement from the West Bank in Jordan, and the Iraqi invasion and subsequent liberation of Kuwait all removed at least some of the fears that the rulers had about the consequences to them and their regimes of partial openings in the political system.

The Omani approach to all regional and global trends, crafted by Sultan Qaboos since he took power in 1970, is subtly independent from that of the other GCC states - especially Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. It tends to be highly

[13] Saad Eddin Ibrahim (1988)et al., *al-Mujtama' wa al-dawal fi al-watan al-arabi* (Society and State in the Arab World), Amman: The Arab Thought Forum; and Luciani, Giacomo ed. (1990), *The Arab State,* Brekely and Los Angels: University of California Press; cited in Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Liberalization and Democratisation in the Arab world: an overview", " in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Nobel (eds.) (1995), *Political Liberalisation and Democratisation in the Arab World,* Vol. 1, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, p.44

pragmatic, low profile and generally apolitical. This approach has served the sultanate well, in that it has managed to overcome most of the challenges faced by the region in recent decades. Thus Oman remained relatively immune from the Iran-Iraq conflict in the 1980s, the Gulf crisis and its aftermath in the 1990s, and now the US-led war against terrorism, which could last beyond the current decade. The sultanate has emerged as a key, but largely silent, player in Operation Enduring Freedom, much as it was during the previous Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. In the assault against Afghanistan, Oman has been a sort of staging ground for British and US troops. It also served as a sort of dress rehearsal location for the campaigns of the British Special Forces in Afghanistan.[14]

Political Liberalisation in the Arab States is the result of regime decisions-a calculus of costs and benefits made by leaders facing a myriad of domestic, regional, and international pressures in the political and economic realms. Thus any opening of the political system must be seen, on balance, as increasing the leader's chances of overcoming whatever political or economic crisis are challenging the stability of his rule. Arab leaders who also allow political opening are gambling that the risks of maintaining the status quo are greater than the risks of what they hope will be cautions, gradual, and nonthreatening political evolution. The focus here is not on long-term historical or social factors either contributing to militating against more open political system, but rather on the immediate calculus of leaders confronting difficult choices.[15]

International Context

The contribution of global factors to processes of domestic political transformation is tremendously varied in scope and effect in Oman. Their role depends on the particular combination of internal and external economic, social and political circumstances and on the ideological and normative climate of the times. The

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[14] "Oman - The Challenge of Globalisation," Accessed on Dec. 21,2010 http://www.thefreelibrary. com/OMAN+-+The+Challenge+Of+Globalisation+-+Part+12.-a080859632

[15] The focus on the decision calculus of individual leaders follows from a strand in the democratization literature that emphasizes the contingent nature of transitions to democracy as, in effect, elite bargains aimed at meeting immediate political needs. See, Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (1986), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Volume 4-Tentative Conclusion about Uncertain Democracies,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; and Samuel Huntington (1984), "Will More Countries Become Democraric?" *Political Science Quarterly,* Vol. 99, No.2.

spread of democracy elsewhere set in motion internal reforms that contributed to greater demand for openness in the Oman during the 1990s. But the drive toward more substantive reform was cut short, as incumbent leaders did not risk endangering their positions by embarking on genuine democratization processes.[16] The end of the strictures of the Cold War, the advancement of a global "democracy promoting ethos, the establishment of regimes of "democratic conditionality" such as that exemplified by the EU or U.S, the emergence of powerful transnational activist networks, and the fact of globalisation and growing interdependence themselves,[17] have all been part of global "climate change" in favour of Political Liberalisation in Oman.

Impact of Globalization

Globalization has the potential to buttress the freedom of the individual as a result of minimising the State's capacity to repress people, particularly their ideas and aspirations. It can also, expand people's opportunities to acquire knowledge and broaden their horizons by facilitating communication and the circulation of ideas. Globalization can support freedom by strengthening civil society through wider networking among its actors, using modern information and communication technology. Yet globalization also entails the selective restriction of certain liberties worldwide through restrictions of vital knowledge flows and on the free movement of people.[18]

It is not possible to understand the problem of freedom in Arab society general and Oman in particular without considering the effects of regional factors and of influences coming from outside the region, particularly those related to globalization.[19] One of the few countries in the West Asia to adapt almost seamlessly to the challenges of globalisation, the Sultanate of Oman is slowly but steadily

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[16] Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers (2004), "Think Again: Middle East Democracy," *Foreign Policy*, No.145. Also see Richard Haas (19 January 2004), "Ending Islamic Democracy Deficit," *Korea Herald*, and *Freedom House* (2003), "Freedom in the World 2001-2 and 2003", at http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/index.htm.

[17] Alexandra Barahona de Brito (2006), "Political Liberalisation and Transition to Democracy: Lessons from the Mediterranean and Beyond Morocco, Turkey, Spain and Portugal", *Euromesco paper*, Vol. 58.

[18] *United Nations: The Arab Human Development Report 2004: Towards Freedom in the Arab World*, (2005), New York: United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS), p. 18

[19] ibid, p. 18

adapting to regional and worldwide changes.[20] As the Omani Centre for Investment Promotion and Export Development (OCIPED) in it's report spelt out "The main challenges facing Oman, as with every other country in the world, is the globalisation of the world economy. The technological revolution particularly in the area of telecommunications and information technology is generating a whole series of opportunities and threats for Oman and its business. It is the market that determines the competitiveness in industry. With globalisation, geographical distances do not seem to matter and boundaries seem to have disappeared in this global village. Omani industries have to take up this challenge and become competitive in view of excellent government mechanisms, which provide free economy, excellent infrastructure and a hassle free environment."[21] On globalisation in the 55th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2000, the Omani Foreign Affairs Minister Yousef Bin Alawi Bin Abdullah said "At the turn of the century, this stage of our history is characterized by great technological progress, which widens the horizons for development and prosperity. But the emerging international order commonly called 'globalisation', has created and increased economic, social and political disparities, at both the international and national levels. Globalisation presents many concerns and challenges to developing countries, sometimes with outcomes which are unpredictable, and this will be a real hindrance to the developing countries' development and progress, limiting the effectiveness of economic integration in a globalised economy."[22]

Oman has been moving steadily to liberalise its economic system through much of the 1990s. This is largely because Sultan Qaboos has placed a strong emphasis on economic liberalization in order to prepare Oman for the challenges of the 21st century. Oman economy has undergone a series of basic structural changes over the past two decades, characterized by a rapid, intensified and multifaceted integration into international capital and a dramatic shift from state capitalism to

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[20] "Oman-The Challenge Of Globalisation," (15 December 2001), The Free Library, Accessed on Dec. 21, 2010 http://www.thefreelibrary.com/OMAN+-+The+Challenge+Of+Globalisation+-+Part+12.-a08 0859632

[21] Pat Lancaster (Nov 1, 2000), "Special Report: Oman, The Middle East". Accessed on 27.12.2010 at http://www.thefreelibrary.com/SPECIAL+REPORT%3a+OMAN.-a066961973

[22] "Oman- Challenge of Globlisation- Part 12 (military and economic policies)," (2001), *APS Diplomate Fate of Arabian Peninsula*, Vol. 42, No. 6.

privatized, free market, and internationally linked economies.[23] In the economic sphere, one effect is that the Oman has become more resilient with the emergence of a robust non-oil sector and increasing business opportunities for both local and foreign investors. Rapid diversification of the economy is a priority for Oman, which has a population of over 2.5 million growing at around 3.9 percent per year, one of the highest rates in the world.

Commercially exploitable oil fields were discovered in Oman in 1964. Oman found itself at a disadvantage compared to countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as its smaller and more widely scattered oil fields cause its production costs per barrel of oil to be higher. Oman's proven oil reserves are estimated (Janary 15, 2010) at about 5.5 billion barrels, ranking Oman twenty-fifth in the world. Based upon the current rate of production of 740,000 barrels per day, of which 733,000 are exported, Oman will run out of oil in about 20 years.[24] This economic transition may be eased by Oman's proven natural-gas resources, estimated in January 2008 at 849.5 billion cubic feet (bcf),[25] Based upon current estimates of reserves, domestic consumption and exports, Oman's natural-gas reserves may last another 35 years. In the Arab Gulf states have successfully placated opponents by providing their subjects with jobs that pay well and with excellent social services. In twenty or so years, however, the Sultanate of Oman, will enter the post-oil phase of their histories. Without oil income, it will be difficult for each to satisfy the needs and wants of its population. Nor will preventing outside-power encroachments be easy, once oil resources have been exhausted.[26] This means that if the Omani economy is to adapt to the twenty-first century, it has to adapt to being an economy in which oil is no longer the primary engine of growth, the handmaiden but not the engine of economic change. That, of course, means that there is a need for economic adjustment.[27]

[23] Brynen, Korany and Nobel (eds.) (1995), *Political Liberalisation and Democratization in the Arab World: Volume 1* Theoretical Perspectives, p.271.

[24] Marc J. O'Reilly (1999), "Oil Monarchies without Oil: Omani and Bahraini Security in a Post-Oil Era," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 6, No. 3.

[25] *The World Factbook*, (January 15, 2010), CIA, New York: Skyhorseinc, p. 52.

[26] O'Reilly (1999), "Oil Monarchies without Oil: Omani and Bahraini Security in a Post-Oil Era".

[27] Jr John Page (1996), "Oman's Economy: The Promise and the Challenge, Symposium: contemporary Oman and U.S.-Oman relations", *Middle East Policy*. Accessed on 11.5.2010 at http://www.the freelibrary. com/Symposium%3a+contemporary+Oman+and+U.S.-Oman+relations.-

Oman's modernization program over the past four decades has been fuelled largely by its oil exports. Revenue generated by the sultanate's oil and natural gas resources accounts for 48 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 79 percent of export earnings and 78 percent of government revenues. The Omani government hopes to reduce oil exports as a percentage of GDP by the year 2020. This objective is dictated by necessity, not choice. Through the years, Oman's petroleum industry has remained open to foreign investment. While the government owns a 60 percent share of the Petroleum Development (Oman), Ltd, (PDO) that controls Oman's oil, Royal Dutch Shell owns a 34 percent share and the French oil companies Total and Partex own a 4 percent and 2 percent share, respectively. The U.S-based Occidental Oil Company is also currently operating in Oman. This sends an important message to foreign investors that Oman is open for business. Attracting foreign investment will become critically important over the next 15-20 years.

The Oman government however, prefers to do this cautiously, without causing much disruption to the socio-economic balance in the country. As such, the leadership is trying to integrate the Omani economy into the global market to the extent that it can benefit from investment flows and trade, while retaining a degree of insulation from the negative repercussions of globalisation. Western economic pressure is a key force pushing the ruling elites to adopt reforms conducive to good governance. Economic openness implies a greater political transparency in decision-making and more accountability to international financial bodies. This has implications for the traditional mechanisms of governance. Pressure for economic reform holds the potential to change business culture in the long term, which in turn will lead to pressure for changes in the traditional system of governance.[28]

The country's ruler and technocrats have not been slow to recognise the implications of globalisation. They have been approaching the issue from a local, regional and worldwide perspective. There have been changes in the economic and political systems to bring the sultanate more in tune with the global trends towards liberalisation in political and economic spheres. Oman joined the WTO on November

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[28] Tom Najem Pierre (2003), "Good governance: the definition and application of the concept", in Tom Najem Pierre and Martin Hetherington (2003) *Good Governance in the Middle East oil monarchies,* London: Routledge Curzon, pp. 14–26.

9, 2000,[29] after fulfilling conditions for membership. Oman's decision to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) and negotiate an FTA with the United States highlights the critical role Muscat expects international trade to play in the post-oil economy. Certainly membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which commits Oman to greater deregulation, fostering domestic competition and improving foreign direct investment (FDI) ensures continued activity in the financial markets. With a small population of just over 3 million, Oman does not offer much business opportunity for large foreign corporations.

The question of reform is likely to become a more prominent feature of political life in Oman. The effects of globalization through the growth in ICT (information and communications technologies), and in particular internet access, will expose many of its young people, a demographically prominent sector, to norms and values which are likely to result in greater political awareness. The impact of satellite-based media on the region has already been instrumental in establishing a political culture of engagement and awareness, but interestingly the use of the internet has been decidedly low—some estimates put it as low as 10 percent. It is likely that internet usage will become much more common among youth and professionals in these countries, mirroring the trend of internet usage in the West.[30] Such exposure is likely to foster a better understanding among the younger generation of political and social practices on an international level, which has the potential to translate into domestic political demands stemming from frustration with certain traditional practices within the country.

In line with this, the Sultanate has experienced a series of measures and subtle but important changes to the political system. In short, government intervention under the ideology of economic liberalization and structural adjustment is shifting wealth and benefits into the hands of a minority class of elites who are accumulating great affluence at the expense of vast impoverishment of the population, social services, and public welfare. "Under the euphemistic label of 'structural adjustment' states are required to imposed domestic austerity with the effect of raising unemployment and domestic prices which fall most heavily on the economically weaker segments of the

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[29] Susan L. Sakmar (2008), "Globalization and Trade Initiatives in the Arab World: Historical Context, Progress to Date, and Prospects for the Future", 42 U.S.F. L. Rev. 919 (2007-2008), p. 924.

[30] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Steven Wright (2007), "Political change in the Arab oil monarchies: from liberalization to enfranchisement", *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5, p. 931.

population.[31] The function of electoral (or even liberalized monarchial) regimes is "to facilitate domestic public support for imperial policies (of economic liberalization) while retaining the armed forces as political insurance if the electoral regimes lose control or the disintegration of free market economies provokes popular uprisings."[32]

Economic liberalization is exceedingly difficult if not impossible without political liberalization. Partial or cosmetic political liberalization, designed to further a regime's survival rather than to reform it, results in equally distorted economic liberalization and integration into the international economy. In fact, desperate measures aimed at finding new sources of rent can deepen dependence on international suppliers, thereby heightening popular resentment to the perceived negatives of globalization.[33] The effects of political liberalisation have been less visible although political reforms have been introduced in recent years in Oman. Through State Consultative Council elections, Omanis have been able to get an understanding of democratic principles. Over the coming years, these political changes would become institutionalised to the extent that Oman may be able make a smooth and gradual transition into a constitutional monarchy.

Democratisation Initiative of the European Union

The Gulf in turn has been heavily dominated by the US politically and militarily, and the EU has at best played a secondary role to America on issues of political liberalization and trade. America's assertive strategy of democracy promotion, however, also played an important role in the EU's renewed focus on the Gulf and GCC relations. When the Bush Administration in 2003 turned its previous security strategy on its head, by arguing that it would revise its close relationships with the dictatorships of the region; promoting democracy rather than supporting authoritarian regimes, the Europeans looked at this transformative strategy with mixed feelings. On the one hand, several European states were sceptical about the

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[31] Robert W. Cox (1992), "Global Perestroika," *Socialist Register*, Vol 28, p. 37.

[32] James Petras (1993), "Transformation of Latin America: Free Market Democracy and Other Myths." Unpublished manuscript, Department of Sociology, State University of New York: Binghamton, p. 6.

[33] Haggard Stephen and Robert Kaufman (1995), *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions*, Princeton University Press.

means and ways whereby the US intended to further democracy in the region. The EU emphasised that democracy could not be imposed from outside: Democracy should be furthered in close dialogue with local partners of the region; essentially emerging from within rather than from outside. The US, it was frequently suggested by EU, had an imperial approach to the West Asia, and lacked knowledge about the differences and diversities between the countries of the Middle East. On the other hand, some EU member states also saw the new initiatives by the US – "the so-called Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)" and later the Broader Middle East Initiative - as duplicates of the EU's own long-term approach to the Mediterranean region. The concern was that the new US initiatives would compete with the EU's programmes in the region especially with the Barcelona Process (EMP), and that they would once again strengthen the US's position in the Middle East.[34]

The EU has a record of supporting democracy and human rights, which is primarily expressed in its capacity to induce political transformation through the "politics of inclusion." It is based on offering closer economic and political ties as the best long-term strategy to encourage regime reform. For the EU, then, promoting democracy in these disparate regions and countries is synonymous with stability, peace and economic development: it is nothing short of a security issue. The GCC countries have in general been cautious of one another and have seldom acted as one united block. They have tended to make separate agreements on defence and free trade with external powers, instead of for instance enhancing own collective institutions and capabilities. Each of the Gulf monarchies, except Saudi Arabia, has bilateral rather than multilateral defence agreements with the US, and their weapon systems and platforms have generally been acquired without considerations of interoperability between them. Lately Bahrain and Oman have made bilateral free trade agreements with the US despite of the newly established Custom Union.

The first contractual relations with the GCC states were established in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War. The EU and the six Gulf States entered a Cooperation Agreement in 1991. The Agreement is primarily concerned with economic cooperation and energy security, yet the preamble emphasises that the

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[34] Helle Malmvig (2006), *An unlikely match or a marriage in the making? EU-GCC relations in a changing security environment*, Copenhagen K : Danish Institute For International Studies, p. 6

agreement shall promote "all spheres of cooperation". New security conditions and priorities have, however, emerged for both the EU and the Gulf states. In the wake of the terror attacks of 9-11, the invasion of Iraq, and the US's forward strategy of democracy promotion, the EU and the GCC monarchies have become more interested in developing stronger ties. In 2003, the EU High Representative Solana and the Commission recommended that EU-GCC relations were tied better to the EU's partnership programme with the Mediterranean states (EMP), and in 2004 the Council adopted the so-called *Strategic Partnership Initiative with the Mediterranean and the Middle East* (SPI). This initiative calls, among other things, for democratic reforms in the West Asia and for strengthening relations with the "countries east of Jordan"; meaning Yemen and the GCC states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and UAE.[35]

At the end of the last EU-GCC Joint Co-operation Council held in April 2009, both parties "reaffirmed that they share the universal values of respect for human rights and democratic principles, which form an essential element of their relations (and) reiterated their continued commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms" On the eve of the EU-GCC Joint Co-operation Council to be held on the 14th of June 2010, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) calls upon the EU and GCC Ministers to put human rights at the centre of their relations in all fields and at all levels.[36]

Issues of human rights and political reform remain sensitive areas, and deep-seated suspicions of the role of external actors in such reform processes prevail. But the EU's approach of consultation, dialogue and co-ownership was perceived as less coercive and patronizing than that of the US, and this potentially gave the EU an important role to play in terms of assisting reform processes in the Gulf region. The EU also faces both barriers and divergences in term of assisting reform processes in the Gulf. While the Gulf monarchies have taken small steps toward transition, it is still too early to judge whether they are genuinely going down the path of reform or merely engaging in cosmetic changes; playing to the foreign tunes of democratization.

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[35] ibid, p. 1

[36] Fidh (International Federation for Human Rights) (11 June 2010), "Open letter in view of the EU-GCC Joint Co-operation Council". Accessed on 8 February 2011 http://www.fidh.org/Open-letter-in-view-of-the-EU-GCC-Joint-Co

With the booming oil prices the monarchies have gained renewed self-confidence and can more easily shake off criticism from outside. It is also well known that past openings in the West Asia frequently have been followed by backlashes and repression. In Bahrain new tough media laws accompanied elections, just as the Saudi municipal elections only with difficulty can be rated as democratic; in so far as women were not allowed to vote and the royal family appointed half of the seats in advance.

In direct dealings with the EU, the Gulf governments are still reluctant to give political reform and human rights central stage. References to human rights and democracy now feature regularly in EU-GCC documents in stark contrast to earlier practices, where GCC officials allegedly were displeased with the mere mentioning of issues of reform and human rights during discussions of business and trade, or where democracy outright was determined as a Western concept irreconcilable with Islam. Even today, talk about human rights and democracy are ritually followed by explanations of how reform must come from within and must proceed gradually and in accordance with the historical, religious, and cultural particularities of societies in the Gulf. While such formulations clearly echo the main elements of the EU's own approach to political reform in the West Asia, it is also clear that these 'agenda' easily can be used both by the EU and the GCC states as excuses not to move forward on the agenda of democratization.[37] In order to encourage change the EU has to a large extent to rely on the will and pace of the monarchies themselves. Up to now the EU has had difficulties moving forward on the reform goals of the SPI, and concrete proposals for EU-GCC cooperation on reform issues appear yet not to have materialised. In addition, the democratic reform agenda is a cause of division among EU members themselves, and several member states favour pragmatic security and trade cooperation over long-term goals of reform.

The EU may especially offer support, training and/or engage in dialogue on the role and participation of women in social and political life, human rights, and constitutional reform; areas where there are already willingness and interest in moving forward in some of the Gulf countries. Preparation, and/or monitoring of

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[37] Helle Malmvig (2006), *An unlikely match or a marriage in the making? EU-GCC relations in a changing security environment*, p. 10

elections are other areas of reform, where the EU may offer expertise and training. The EU should continue to pursue close dialogue and coordination of initiatives with NATO and G8 to avoid competition and sending mixed messages to the region, and work to ensure that reform and human rights are kept on the agenda. The EU may also consider initiating bilateral negotiations with those countries that wish to move forward on the reform and human rights agenda.[38]

Oman enjoys excellent relations with the European Union. In this regard, it has actively participated in all rounds of talks between the GCC and the EU. In February 1997, GCC officials and their EU counterparts met in Doha, Qatar, to review progress in the economic relations between the Gulf States and the European Union. Recently, delegation from the European Parliament currently visiting the Sultanate and have discussed matters of mutual interests in order to find ways and means to strengthen the cooperation between them. The meeting addressed the situations, economic challenges and development programmes and plans in the Sultanate, as well as, the policy of income diversification pursued by the Sultanate, in addition to, the outcome of the negotiations of free trade agreement between the GCC states and the European Union "EU."[39]

It is important to note that the European Union is the largest trading partner of the GCC countries. With the declining trend in oil prices, the trade balance has tilted towards the EU, which in addition has levied tariffs on oil imports and petrochemicals from the Gulf. Oman and her neighbors want to encourage more inward investment from Europe and to see an end to trade barriers which they consider go against the spirit of the initial accord signed in Luxembourg in 1988 and the guidelines of the World Trade Origination.

U.S Policy of Promoting Democracy

The issue of external intervention by USA to transplant a democracy in a typical authoritarian state like Oman needs a critical attention. Democratization has emerged as a central component of U.S thinking in the reassessment of its security

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[38] ibid, p.13

[39] "Oman, EU discuss economic challenges", (22 Feb 2011), *Oman Observer*, Muscat, Accessed on 24 Feb 2011 at http://main.omanobserver.om/node/41462

perceptions in the post-9/11 environment and looks to be a central factor for some time to come. Just as the idea of democratization is not new to the thinkers behind U.S foreign policy, so too is it not new to the body of academic writing that informs and feeds into that thinking. Indeed, the roots of the Bush administration's understanding of how democracy can function in the West Asia can be traced in the wider Western academic discourse on democratization in the region over the last couple of decades.[40] In this connection, Thomas Carother presents a broad outline of the role of the United States in promoting democracy in the world in general and in West Asia in particular.[41] Noam Chomsky has also argued that anti-American feelings are widespread throughout the Arab regions. Promoting democracy means establishing anti-American regime in the region. Most of the Arabs believe that current American policy is nothing but the emergence of the war between 'Cross and Crescent' and like previous 'Crusade' again they have to swallow the bitter pill of defeat, which is not acceptable to them. For this reason, Chomsky concludes that Arabs are not so enthusiastic about the regime change, nor do they support the American way of transplanting democracy in the region.[42]

The arguments put forth in the US foreign policy debate can be grouped into four categories according to their theoretical approach- democratic universalism, political culture (sociological approach), sequentialism and rational choice.

The Universalist Approach

The Universalist theorist assume that all societies both want and are capable of democratic government, regardless of historical and cultural legacies or level of economic development. The core idea of democratic Universalist thinking is that democracy is not a rare and delicate plant that cannot be transplanted in alien soil.[43] In other words, it can take root anywhere and anytime, so long as people are free from

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[40] Daniel Neep (2004), "Dilemmas of democratization in the Middle East: the "Forward Strategy of Freedom" *Middle East Policy Council,* Vol. XI, No. 3.

[41] Thomas Carothers (2004), *Critical Mission: Essay on Democracy Promotion,* Washington D.C: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

[42] Noam Chomsky (2005), "Promoting Democracy in Middle East", *Khaleej Times,* Dubai (6 March 2005), Accessed 23 October 2008, URL: http://www.countercurrents.org/iraq-chomsky060305.htm

[43] Doh C. Shin (1994), "On the Third Wave of Democratization: A Synthesis and Evaluation of Recent Theory and Research," *World Politics,* Vol 47, No.1.

tyranny and allowed to choose their system of government. Oppressed societies need only be liberated with the help of the US, and they will naturally move towards democratic governance either sooner or later. The democratic Universalist outlook has dominated the foreign policy of the Bush Administration.

This democratic Universalist policy can be traced to the political ideology of several members of what is often called the Neoconservative faction of the American Right. They saw in the shocking terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 a dire threat to American security and an opportunity to fulfill the Neoconservative vision of eliminating future menace by transforming the world order, especially West Asia. William Kristol and Robert Kagan have vigorously insisted that democracy is possible for all people, and that the task of bringing democracy to other lands is well within the capabilities of the US. They pointed to the "third wave of democracy"[44] as evidence that democracy is within the reach of oppressed peoples.[45] Huntington identifies three historical or "long waves" of democracy. The first began in the early 19th century with the extension of the right to vote to a large proportion of the male population in the United States, and continued until the 1920s. During this period, some 29 democracies came into being. The ebb, or reversal, of the first wave began in 1922 with the accession of Mussolini to power in Italy and lasted until 1942, when the number of the world's democracies had been reduced to 12. A second wave began with the triumph of the Allis in World War II, cresting in 1962 when the number of democracies had risen to 36. The ebbing of the second wave between 1962 and the mid-1970s brought it back down to 30. Since 1974, however, democracy's third wave has added approximately 30 new democracies, doubling the number of such societies.[46]

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[44] Samuel P. Huntington which outlines the significance of a third wave of democratization to describe the global trend that has seen more than 60 countries throughout Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa undergo some form of democratic transitions since Portugal's "Carnation Revolution" in 1974. The catchphrase "the third wave" has been widely used among scholars studying what is considered by some to be democratic transitions and democratization throughout much of the developing world.

[45] Robert Kagan and William Kristol (2000), *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defence Policy*, San Francisco: Encounter Books.

[46] Samuel P Huntington (1997), "After Twenty Years: The Future of the Third Wave" *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 8, No 4.

Charles Krauthammer has highlighted that the region most in need of democracy was the West Asia. Its vast oil reserves as well its troubles with Islamic radicalism and authoritarian rule made it a vital region to US interests.[47] Kenneth Pollack, supported in a major way the universalist contribution to the debate over Iraq. Kenneth Pollack like Krauthammer looked to the dramatic increase in the number of democracies in the last thirty years as proof that democracy does not necessarily require certain preconditions. In support of his stand he has argued that there are countless countries around "the world today that had no democratic tradition in the past but within the last twenty years have developed into functioning democracies, despite the naysayers who claimed that this country or that was culturally, psychologically, or even racially unsuited to democracy."[48] Paul Wolfowitz was also an ardent advocate of this approach. However, he expressed doubt that the US could plant democracy wherever it wanted. He has further pointed out that Promoting democracy requires attention to specific circumstances and to the limitations of the US leverage. Both because of what the US is, and because of what is possible, we cannot engage either in promoting democracy or in nation-building as an exercise of will. We must proceed by interaction and indirection, not imposition.[49]

Political Culture

In opposition to the tenets of democratic universalism, the sociological school assumes that democracy require certain cultural and social transformations before it can emerge and become a viable and sustainable system for government. Political culture does matter to democracy, independently of other variables, and the development of a democratic culture cannot be taken for granted as a natural by-product of democratic practice or institutional design.[50]

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[47] Charles Krauthammer (2004), "In Defence of Democratic Realism", *The National Interest,* Fall (77): 15-25, (Online; web) Accessed 13 October 2008, URL: http://arts.anu.edu.au/sss/ pols3017Recent %20Articles/in%20Defense%29of%20 Democratic%20Realism%20Krauthammer.pdf.

[48] ibid.

[49] Paul Wolfowitz (2000), "Statesmanship in the New Century", in Robert Kagan and William Kristol (2000), *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defence Policy,* San Francisco: Encounter Books.

[50] Larry Diamond (1993), "Political Culture and Democracy", in Larry Diamond (ed.) *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries,* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Not all democratic Universalists consider political culture to be a flexible determinant of democracy. Charles Krauthammer, who boasts unassailable Universalist credentials, has taken a different track in recent times, leaning towards the belief that political culture can possibly be an incontrovertible obstacle to democracy. In the early days of the U.S occupation, Krauthammer clung adamantly to his vision of a democratic Iraq in the middle of the Arab-Islamic crescent that would serve as a bulwark against the tide of Islamist extremism and totalitarianism. He dismisses the suggestion that the United States must understand the unique history and culture of a country in order to establish a democracy.[51]

Another leading figure of the US foreign policy establishment Francis Fukuyama has made similar arguments as Krauthmmer about the difficulty of changing a country's political culture. However, he argues that in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, liberal democracy is the last real remaining option for governance.[52] However, in a 2004 article "The Neoconservative Moment" criticizing Krauthammer's speech before the American Enterprise Institute, Fukuyama clearly stated his stance on the exportation of democracy, "Culture is not destiny, but culture plays an important role in making possible certain kinds of institutions, something that is usually taken to be a conservative insight. Though I, more than most people, am associated with the idea that history's arrow points to democracy, I have never believed that democracies can be created anywhere and everywhere through sheer political will". He went on to add observing that with specific regard to Iraq before the invasion, there were many reasons for thinking that building a democratic Iraq was a task of a complexity that would be nearly unmanageable. Among these reasons he included the society's propensity for violence, its tribal structure and the dominance of extended kin and patronage networks.[53]

In 2004, Henry Kissinger argued in his work Intervention with a vision that foreign policy to promote democracy needs to be adapted to local or regional realities, or it will fail. In the pursuit of democracy, politics as in other realms is the art of the

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[51] Charles Krauthammer (2004), "In Defence of Democratic Realism".

[52] Francis Fukuyama (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press.

[53] Francis Fukuyama (2004), "The Neoconservative Moment", *The National Interest*, Vol. 76; Academic Research Library, 57- 68

possible. What is possible in the business of exporting democracy is determined by the fact that democracy will thrive only where it reflects cultural, historical, and institutional backgrounds. Even though he allowed that democracy might be exported to some places, he believed that it was folly for the US to attempt to build from scratch in the span of a few years what normally takes centuries.[54]

Sequentialism Approach

Sequentialism can be explained as the theory that stresses certain conditions as prerequisites of democracy, specially economic development and state capacity followed be elections and democratic government. Fareed Zakaria explains what he believes are the necessary steps to be taken before a society makes the transition to democracy, and warns against holding elections before certain prerequisites are fulfilled. The most important prerequisite for Zakaria is capitalist economic development, which he calls the simplest explanation for a new democracy's political success. In order for such capitalist economic growth to be possible, there must a be a well- functioning state that can enforce rules, because without a government capable of protecting property rights and human rights, press freedoms and business contracts, antitrust laws and consumer demands, a society gets not the rule of law but the rule of the strong. Thus, the whole process that in the West or in the East Asia you have to go through to get to a modern society is bypassed in oil-rich countries like Iraq, which is why, he claims, no oil-rich country save Norway is a liberal democracy. Because he believed Iraq was unlikely to be able to diversify its economy and begin the process of modernization that he deemed necessary for democracy. Another reason why Zakaria was unwilling to support a rapid program of democratization in Iraq was his belief in the need for a stable political system to exist before people choose their leaders. Taken all together, Zakaria's prescribed sequence is clear: modernize the economy and consolidate state power, establish political system and rules, and then hold elections to choose leaders.[55]

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[54] Henry Kissinger (2005), " Intervention with a Vision", in Gary Rosen (ed.) *The Right War? The Conservative Debate on Iraq*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

[55] Fareed Zakaria (2003), *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, New York: W.W.Norton.

Larry Diamond sees economic modernization as a significant dynamic, but only as a potential influence on what he sees as the more important variable of political culture. In terms of sequence, Diamond is far more interested in is state formation. As he put it concisely "You cannot build a democratic state unless you first have a state". In previous writings on democratization, he has argued for a strong state for a variety of reasons, including the ability to maintain rule of law, the ability to form and executive effective economic policy, and the ability to maintain civilian control over the military.[56] Francis Fumuyama has underlined the importance of state building, by emphasizing state capacity above all other issues. Although, he is not explicit on the need for a strong state before democracy, he does attach great importance to state building for keeping countries from falling apart.[57] Scholar Noah Feldman, joins Fukuyama in this assessment of past democratization successes when he attribute the relative ease of the Eastern European democratic transitions to the maintenance of the same state structures that existed prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union which he pointed out. Thus, like Diamond, and to a lesser extent Kissinger, Fukuyama and Feldman strongly believe in the existence of a functional and sturdy state as a prerequisite for democracy.[58]

As is to be expected, the sequentialist approach has not been prevalent in the statements of Bush Administration officials. However, Paul Wolfowitz says in his article "Statesmanship in the New Century" that economic development is the key to democratic development. One should be wary of a policy that devotes equal effort to promoting democracy everywhere, regardless of the particular circumstances. In this view, the US is limited in its ability to promote democracy by economic circumstances on the ground. In the same article, Wolfwitz, like Fukuyama and Feldman has attributed the success of past US efforts at democracy building in

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[56] Larry Diamond (2005), "*Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy in Iraq*, New York: Times Book, Henry Hotl Company.

[57] Francis Fukuyama (2004), *State Building: Governance and World Order in the 21ˢᵗ Century*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

[58] Noah Feldman (2004), *What We Owe Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Germany and Japan to those countries' advanced level of economic development.[59] Like Wolfowitz, Richard Perle suggests that he believes there is a proper sequence of democratization. In his book *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* with David Frum, Perle has forcefully argued that, democracy is most apt to survive and flourish when the local economy is strong.[60]

Rational Choice Approach

Rational choice approach is the one that views the formation of the democratic system primarily as a collective action problem involving the interests and choices of rational political actors. This approach advocates constructing a democracy is a matter of satisfying the wants and needs of the actors involved and ensuring that their utility will be maximized in a democratic system. In other words, it is the interests of people involved, and not their values or norms that are most important in determining whether a society will have a democratic government.

In addition to Feldman and Diamond, neoconservatives like Charles Krauthammer, William Kristol, and Robert Kagan have shown similar support for the rational choice approach to democratic origins. Brendan O'Leary writes that if the present governing arrangement is not advantageous for a nation or other political community, then it will decide to exit.[61]

The policy of promoting democracy abroad has been emphasized by the leaders of the United States as a key elements of United States' international role for generations. At least, since the Presidency of Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921), the United States has articulated a doctrine of promoting democratic governments all over the world as a way of securing its basic national security objectives. President Woodrow Wilson had proclaimed that the US was fighting World War- "to make the world sale for democracy". According to him, it was necessary to democratize the

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[59] Paul Wolfowitz (2000), "Statesmanship in the New Century", in Kagan and Kristol (2000), *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*, San Francisco: Encounter Books.

[60] Richard Perle and David Frum (2004), *An End To Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*, New York: Ballantine.

[61] Bredan O'Leary et.al. (2005), "Iraq without Consensus, Democracy is Not the Answer", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,* March: 1-8, Accessed 27 October 2008, URL:http://www. carnegieendowment.org/files/ PB36.ottaway.FINAL.pdf.

world to the fullest possible extent so as to make international peace sustainable. In the 1920 and 1930s, the US leadership launched military interventions in the Caribbean and Central America to establish democracy. In World War-II, the US fought against Fascist regimes for the sake of 'freedom'.

The US policy-makers, in the post-World War period, emphasized on democracy promotion, as they formulated policy toward the vanquished Japan and Germany. In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy embraced the idea of fostering democracy in the developing world. Two decades later, President Ronald Reagan renewed the democracy theme by coating his anti-Soviet policy as a democracy crusade. The Marshall Plan, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the eventual emergence of the European Union, integration of democratic Japan into the world economy, rise of democratic governments in South Korea and Taiwan: all these significant developments are said to have their origin in the 'US liberal democratic internationalism'.

In the 1990s, President George Bush (Senior) and Bill Clinton asserted that democracy promotion was a key organizing principle of the US foreign policy after the Cold War Looking behind the long chain of impressive policy rhetoric, one sees a less consistent policy reality. Countervailing interests, both security-related and economic, have often outweighed or undermined the US interests in democracy. Throughout the Twentieth Centuries, the US maintained friendly relations with dictatorships intervened in other countries' internal affairs for purposes far removed from the promotion of democracy. Pro-democracy rhetoric has regularly exceeded reality and has sometimes been used deliberately to obscure a contrary reality. Nevertheless, 'democracy promotion' has been projected as an important part of America's international tradition, even if its application has been inconsistent and controversial.[62]

Despite the end of the Soviet threat, US relations toward the West Asia continued to be driven by Cold War calculations. Supporting and guaranteeing the security of friendly autocratic regimes to ensure access to the region's energy resources and favorable pricing mechanisms, containing the rise of regional powers

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[62] Thomas Carothers (1999), *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

with the potential to threaten US interests, deterring aspiring powers such as a revamped Russia, China, and even Europe from gaining a foothold in the region, supporting Israel as a surrogate of US power and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, nonproliferation, Islamic radicalism, and terrorism took precedence over all else. In contrast, Washington paid scant attention to the question of democracy in the region—or lack thereof—adopting a markedly different approach compared to its engagement of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Latin America, East Asia, and sub-Sahara Africa. This posture exemplifies the ongoing dilemma facing American Presidents of whether to subjugate realist-based interests to Washington's democratic ideals.[63]

The 9/11 tragedy forced Washington to reevaluate its posture toward the region. The attacks amplified the threat of international terrorism unlike ever before and highlighted the deep-seated anger, frustration, and resentment harbored by millions of Muslims and the extreme lengths to which a minority of radicals would to go to further their cause. Rooting out and killing terrorists everywhere emerged as a pillar of America's post-9/11 national security strategy.[64] Washington attributes the spread of Islamic radicalism to the persistence of authoritarianism in the West Asia. It acknowledges that the status quo in the region is illegitimate, unacceptable, and unsustainable, given the failure of incumbent autocratic regimes to address social and economic problems and meet the basic demands of their citizens. As a consequence, the issues of reform and democracy were elevated to a level of critical importance.[65] In doing so, the Administration reversed a pillar of American policy predicated on the notion that pro-US authoritarian regimes served to protect against radicalism and terrorism. Traditional US policy toward the region was meant to ensure stability and enhance American security. The 9/11 attacks proved the opposite. Indeed, promoting democracy has become a strategic imperative in the Bush Administration's war on terrorism.

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[63] Chris Zambelis (2005), "The Strategic Implications of Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Middle East", *Parameters*, Vol. 35, No 3, p 88.

[64] George W. Bush (2002), *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington: The White House.

[65] "President Bush's remarks on the importance of democracy in the Middle East", (4 February 2004), Accessed on 28 December 2009 http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/02/20040204-4.html.

During the George W. Bush period, promotion of democracy was put forward as a central objective of the US foreign policy. Since taking office about eight years ago, President George W. Bush often spoke of the need for the promotion of democracy which was central to his Administration's prosecution of both the war on terrorism and its overall grand strategy, in which it was assumed that the US' political and security interest were advanced by the spread of liberal political institutions and value abroad. The Bush Administration's national security policy was centered on the direct application of United States military and political power to promote democracy in strategic areas. In a speech at the 20th Anniversary of The National Endowment for Democracy on 6 November 2003 President Bush said "The US has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East. As in Europe, as in every region of the world, the advance of freedom leads to peace. Democracy and reform will make stronger and more stable, and make the world more secure by undermining terrorism at its source".[66] Although this democracy may be heartfelt, the other issues of concern in the US are access to oil, cooperation in assistance on counter-terrorism, fostering peace between Israel and its neighbors, stemming the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and preventing Islamist radicals from seizing power. Fighting Islamist militant and safeguarding oil compeled the US to cooperate with authoritarian regimes. People in the region have watched the US taking a tough line against Iran and Syria while failing to push Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Tunisia, or other friendly tyrants very hard.

The Bush Administration launched new diplomatic endeavors and aid programs to support positive change, such as the *"Middle East Partnership Initiative"* *(MEPI), the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI)* and *"Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative" (BMENA)*. These projects, however consist of mild gradual measures designed to promote democratic change without unduly challenging the authority of incumbent governments. President Bush unveiled the *US- Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)* in late 2003 to promote political, economic, and education reforms, women's rights, and support for civil society.[67] Former U.S.

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[66] United States Chamber of Commerce (Nov 6, 2003), *Remarks by President George W. Bush at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, National Endowment for Democracy*, Washington, D.C. Accessed on 23 December 2009 http://www.ned.org/george-w-bush/remarks-by-president-george-w-bush-at-the-20th-anniversary

[67] US Department of State (2004), *Middle East Partnership Initiative* (MEPI), http://mepi.state.gov.

Secretary of State Colin Powell introduced the "Middle East Partnership Initiative" at a talk to the Heritage Foundation in December 2002. President George Bush provided the ideological justification for MEPI in a speech to the National Endowment for Democracy in November 2003. MEPI has sought both impact and legitimacy by addressing the reform priorities identified by Arab scholars in the 2002 UN Arab Human Development Report. That report identified four deficits hindering developmental progress in the Arab world: deficits in political freedom, economic freedom, knowledge, and women's empowerment. MEPI is thus divided into four pillars: economic reform, political reform, educational reform, and women's empowerment.[68] Each pillar's goals are outlined in the chart below.

The professed aim of MEPI is to build a robust civil society in the Middle East. The U.S - Middle East Partnership Initiative provides the ideological cover of democracy building to the Administration's grand ambitions for changing commercial law throughout the "Great Middle East." MEPI has funded educational, economic, and political programs in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Yemen. Funding in the Women's Pillar has gone to literacy programs in Yemen and to bringing women from across the West Asia and North Africa involved in politics to the United States to witness elections in progress.[69]

The Bush administration's initiative for democratic reform in the Arab world, formally launched by the president in a November 6, 2003, speech and subsequently elaborated in the "Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) ". Washington went one step further with its GMEI in the run-up to the June 2004 G-8 summit.[70] The professed objectives are to open markets and export democracy to the Muslim World.[71] The

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[68] Sarah E. Yerkes (November 29, 2004), Research Assistant, "The Middle East Partnership Initiative: Progress, Problems, and Prospects", The Brookings Institution, Accessed on 17 April 2008 http: //www .brookings.edu/papers/2004/1129middleeast_wittes.aspx

[69] Christopher Candland (2007), "The Greater Middle East Initiative: Implications for Persian Gulf Economies and Polities", The Iranian Journal of International Affairs, Vol. XIX, No. 2

[70] Tamara Coffman Wittes (2004), "The New U.S. Proposal for a Greater Middle East Initiative: An Evaluation," Brookings Institution, Saban Center for Middle East Policy.

[71] Candland (2007), "The Greater Middle East Initiative: Implications for Persian Gulf Economies and Polities".

Greater Middle East Initiative is an ambiguously defined set of economic and political initiatives and policies. At the core of the Initiative are a series of bilateral free trade agreements and a program for the development of "civil society" in the Muslim World referred to as the Middle East Partnership Initiative. Informal parts of the Initiative include substantially increased funding for the West Asia through such organizations as the National Endowment for Democracy. The National Endowment for Democracy, for example, received an additional $US 40 million in 2004 targeted for the Middle East. The Millennial Challenge Account[72], which provides funds to governments that meet a series of political, economic, and human development criteria, a global initiative, does buttress the political goals of the Greater Middle East Initiative.

The GMEI was based on the idea that the pool of disenfranchised individuals in the Middle East threatens the G-8 by providing a base of recruits to terrorist organizations and fostering instability. In supporting its case, the plan drew from the much-publicized 2002 and 2003 United Nations Arab Human Development Reports.[73] The draft proposal drew skepticism in Europe and outrage in the Arab capitals. European and Arab leaders were concerned that the plan served to unilaterally impose Washington's will on the region.[74] "The Greater Middle East" Initiative is designed for United States consumption rather than for the results it professes to seek. Proper evaluation of the Initiative must recognize that the democracy, civil society, and women's empowerment programs that make up the Initiative are designed to capture the support of the American public and Washington D.C. insiders from both major political parties and to distract the American public and the political classes from focusing on the core of the Administration's Great Middle East Initiative: a free trade area that would protect corporations from democratically enacted national laws.

As a force for democracy in the region, the Initiative is inherently self-

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[72] The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), is run by the Millennium Challenge Corporation. The Millennium Challenge Account is a bilateral development fund announced by the Bush administration in 2002 and created in January 2004.

[73] *United Nations Development Program, Arab Human Development Report 2003 and 2004,* http://www.rbas.undp.org/ahdr.cfm.

[74] Zambelis (2005), "The Strategic Implications of Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Middle East", p. 91.

limiting– for two major reasons. First, the Initiative fails to take seriously U.S. support of authoritarian and dictatorial governments in the region. The military equipment that the U.S. government sells to the governments of the region do not promote peace. Rather they are themselves sources of violence. Second, the Initiative takes insufficient account of the dire educational and employment needs of the region.[75] The two major components of the "Greater Middle East Initiative" are incompatible. The economic component — a series of hastily negotiated bilateral free trade agreements intended to culminate in a Greater Middle East Free Trade Area — undermines the political component — the civil society building projects intended to promote democratic governance in the region. Nowhere is this clearer than in the fact that the bilateral agreements shelter foreign investors from domestic law. Foreign investors may take complaints directly to un-elected and unrepresentative dispute panels. The only antidote for the incursion of trade rules into laws that have been enacted by democratically elected representatives of the public to serve the public interest is to re-assert popular sovereignty.[76]

The Initiative has not been prepared with the attention to detail nor discussed in such a way with potential partners that would give it a reasonable reception in the region. The talk at which the President is said to have launched the initiative is a collection of generalizations about the importance of bringing democracy and civil society to the Arab world. No matter how well-intentioned many of the officials and professionals who are working to develop civil society in the Muslim World, the Initiative gives ideological cover to an agenda that is merely a collection of free trade agreements with friends of the United States.

Egyptian President Husni Mubarak resisted the plan: "We hear about these initiatives as if the region and its states do not exist, as if they had no sovereignty over their land."[77] A joint Egyptian-Saudi announcement declared that the Arab world is "progressing on the road to development, modernization, and reform, but in a way

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[75] Candland (2007), "The Greater Middle East Initiative: Implications for Persian Gulf Economies and Polities".

[76] ibid

[77] Gamal Essam El-Din (4-10 March 2004), "Asserting Home-Grown Reform," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue 680, Accessed on 12 August 2009, http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/680/eg1.htm

that is compatible with the needs, interests, values, and identities of their peoples."[78] The Jordanian Foreign Minister at the time, Marwan Muasher, Jordan's Foreign Minister, Marwan Muashar, on hearing of the initiative, publicly wishes that the Initiative would "never see the light of day." He echoed this stance by stressing the need for a local reform process instead of one imposed from abroad.[79] Arab League Secretary-General Amr Musa declared it "illogical to speak of an initiative which requires the cooperation of the Arab states without consulting those very states on the nature and details of such ideas."[80] Prince Saud al-Faisal, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, asserted that the Initiative "includes clear accusations against the Arab people and their governments that they are ignorant of their own affairs."[81]

Popular outrage toward the Administration's plans demonstrates the deep-rooted credibility problem the United States faces in the Middle East. Muslims are highly skeptical about Washington's ultimate intentions, given the long-standing US policy of supporting authoritarian regimes in the region. Arabs in particular find it hard to believe that the United States is serious about promoting freedom. They tend to view US support for self-determination and human rights as disingenuous in light of Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian land and continued expansion of settlements on territory that Palestinians and the international community envision as part of a future Palestinian state—an issue that resonates deeply among both Muslims and Christians in the Middle East and one that cannot be wished away.[82] Moreover, the US decision to oust Saddam Hussein by force confirmed regional perceptions of a militant America that is quick to use force against Arabs and Muslims to further its strategic objectives.

In response to the criticism by imputed West Asia partners and G-8 allies

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[78] ibid,

[79] Steven Weisman (2004), "U.S. Muffles Call to Democracy in Middle East," *The New York Times*, Accessed on 12 August 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/12/world/us-muffles-sweeping-call-to-democracy-in-mideast.html

[80] Al Jazeera (May 20, 2004), "In Pursuit of Arab Reform: The Greater Middle East Initiative," Accessed on 5 September 2010 http://english.aljazeera. net/NR/exeres/4D0D7F1E-0E20-4449-85F6-9A00F65C841C.htm

[81] Charles Recknagel (2004), "Washington's 'Greater Middle East Initiative' Stumbles Amid Charges It Imposes Change," Accessed on 3 September 2010, http://www.payvand.com/news/04/mar/1159.html

[82] Marc Lynch (2004), "Losing Hearts and Minds," *Foreign Affairs*; (2003) "Taking Arabs Seriously," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 82.

alike, the United States quietly changed the name of the Greater Middle East Initiative into the Partnership for Progress and a Common Future, now also known as the "Broader Middle East and North African Initiative (BMENAI)." Unlike the GMEI, this initiative highlighted the need for a "just, comprehensive, and lasting settlement" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in conjunction with a pledge of G-8 support for reform.[83] The Forum for the Future is a ministerial meeting of countries from the Group of Eight (G-8) and the Broader Middle East and North Africa to discuss ways to advance democracy and good governance, economic opportunity, and human development. The annual conference brings together leaders from government, civil society and the private sector to advance political, economic, and social reform in the region. The first Forum was in Rabat, Morocco, in 2004. Secretary Clinton's participation in the Seventh Forum for the Future, held in Doha, Qatar, on January 13, 2011, reaffirms U.S. support for reform and for civil society's essential role in advancing democracy and human development in BMENA.[84]

From the outset of his administration, President Barack Obama has emphasized basic respect for and understanding of the Middle East, as well as a desire to establish a new relationship with the region. In his January 2009 inaugural address, he declared to the Muslim world that the U.S. would seek "a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect," In his first television interview as president, Obama spoke with Hisham Melhem of al-Arabiyya about the need to restore "the same respect and partnership that America had with the Muslim world as recently as 20 or 30 years ago."[85] But many critics have noted the conspicuous absence of any explicit mention of the word "democracy" in administration speeches and statements during its first few months. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke often of the "three D's" of U.S engagement with the world – defense, diplomacy, and development – leaving many to ask where the fourth "D," democracy, would fit into the new administration's plans. Secretary Clinton took a first step toward correcting

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[83] Gary Gambill (2004), "Jumpstarting Arab Reform: The Bush Administration's Greater Middle East Initiative," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 6, No. 6-7.

[84] *U.S. Department of State* (January 13, 2011), *Civil Society and Democracy Promotion in the Broader Middle East and North Africa*, Washington:DC, Accessed on 24 February 2011 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/01/154626.htm

[85] Stephen McInerney (September 9, 2009), "Obama Administration Policy on Democracy and the Arab World", Accessed on 23 September 2010 http://carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa =show&article=23803

this when meeting with a group of Egyptian democracy activists in late May 2009 asserting "we always raise democracy and human rights. It is a core pillar of our foreign policy." This was followed by Obama's speech to the Muslim world in Cairo in June 2009, in which democracy was explicitly identified as one of seven key challenges, along with the related issues of women's rights and freedom of religion[86] and his July 2009 speech in Ghana more strongly emphasized the need to support democracy in Africa, and included many more specifics on addressing issues such as repression, government corruption, legislative and judicial checks on executive power, and the ability of opposition forces to organize politically.[87]

According to the American administration officials they are playing a long game when it comes to democracy and human rights, focusing on the international organizational and ideological infrastructure supporting these goals. One such goal is to encourage emerging international powers that are democracies (such as India, South Africa and Indonesia) to support democratic reform and human rights worldwide. The administration has also launched creative initiatives on internet freedom and entrepreneurship, each of which addresses core challenges facing private sector businesses as well as social and political reformers.[88] The administration has worked with Congress to make the necessary investments in democracy assistance. Despite cuts in technical assistance to civil society in Egypt and Jordan, overall levels of U.S funding for democracy, governance, and human rights in the Arab world has increased over the last two years. The administration has increased support to the National Endowment for Democracy (an independent, congressionally-funded body that supports civil society around the world) as well as to two bodies created during the Bush administration: the "Middle East Partnership Initiative" (a unit within the State Department's Near East Affairs Bureau that supports non-governmental drivers of socioeconomic reform) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (which awards economic development funds to states that meet certain standards of governance).

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[86] ibid

[87] ibid.

[88] Andrew Albertson (December 8, 2010), "The Obama Administration's Quiet Approach to Reform in the Arab world," Accessed on 3 January 2011 *http://carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa= show& article= 42099.*

The fruits of these efforts in the Arab world have been limited so far. Multilateral efforts have had some modest impact, but are undercut when individual states—especially the United States itself—fail to attach meaningful consequences to UN findings. This point has drawn much criticism, as observers fear that U.S. support for democracy may have shifted too far in favor of working with autocratic regimes on governance issues rather than directly engaging and supporting people, despite the promise of the Cairo address. Administration officials insist that democracy is a part of ongoing dialogue with autocratic allies, but in the absence of real progress on reform, Arab reformers view such claims with skepticism. Gamal Eid, the director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information said "We hope that Obama will seriously advocate for democracy and human rights in the Arab world, or at least stay silent."[89] To Obama's credit, there is now a subtle but important shift in the U.S. government's discourse on human rights. The Bush administration pushed a rather superficial structuralist view. It focused, for instance, on elections – which can easily be rigged and manipulated in many cases – in order to change certain governments for purposes of expanding U.S. power and influence. Obama has taken more of an agency view of human rights, emphasizing such rights as freedom of expression and the right to protest. This administration recognizes that human rights reform can only come from below and not imposed from above. Although this has largely been rhetorical and has not altered Washington's propensity to provide security assistance to repressive regimes, it is this very right of protest that is key to the promotion of democracy in Islamic countries.[90]

Impact on Oman

Oman has a long history of contacts and relations with countries both within and outside the Arab world. It was the first Arab nation to establish diplomatic contact with the United States of America in the first half of the 19th century, by which time it already had a treaty relationship with Great Britain and France. Oman's autocratic

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[89] Liam Stack (May 29, 2009), "Egyptian reform activists wary of Obama's visit to Cairo, The Christian Science Monitor", Accessed on 16 October 2010 http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2009/0529/p06s11-wome.html/(page)/2

[90] Stephen Zunes (January 21, 2011), "The United States and the Prospects for Democracy in Islamic Countries, Foreign Policy In Focus", Accessed on 3 March 2011 http://www.fpif.org/articles/the_united_states_and_the_prospects_for_democracy_in_islamic_countries

monarchy has long been one of the closest U.S. allies in the West Asia. In the years between the overthrow of the Shah in early 1979 and Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait (which led to an opening for U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia and other emirates further north), Oman was the country in the Persian Gulf that most welcomed U.S. forces. In subsequent years, the availability of Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait for U.S. forces has limited Oman's role to providing air bases for refueling, logistics, and storage. Despite its friendly relations with the United States, Oman has maintained better relations with Iran than other Arab countries of the Gulf and has thereby served at times as an intermediary.[91]

Like other close allies of the US, Oman was put in a delicate situation in the post-9/11 environment. These were countries regarded as preferred allies by Washington, i.e. ideally it would have liked them to be at the forefront, in the West Asia, in the war against terror. But the political reality on the ground was that none of these countries - Oman included - could publicly stand beside the US in this fight because public opinion tended to view these attacks with mixed emotions. In such an environment, Oman did not want to appear as being too close to the US, but nor did it want to project itself as being very far from the reality of perceptions among the Arab masses.[92]

In such an environment, Oman did not want to appear as being too close to the US, but nor did it want to project itself as being very far from the reality of perceptions among the Arab masses. Yet Oman will never fit very neatly into a "pan-Arab" profile because of its unique Islamic sectarian outlook. The current wave of Islamic radicalism is primarily of Sunni sectarian origin, whereas the Omanis are of the Ibadi sect. The sultanate's adherence to Ibadism has also contributed to the fact that there has been no major spillover effect from the Wahhabi radicalism affecting the region. For the US, the fact that Oman happens to have an Ibadi majority is a blessing in disguise in view of the fact that virtually all the other countries on the Arabian Peninsula have the Wahhabi sectarian outlook. Wahhabism provides the ideological/religious moorings that motivates groups like Al Qaida. From the US side,

[91] Stephen Zunes (March 7, 2011), Pro-Democracy Protests Spread to Oman, Foreign Policy In Focus. Accessed on 7 March 2011 http://www.fpif.org/articles/prodemocracy_protests_spread_to_oman

[92] "Oman - The US Alliance Will Strengthen," (2003), *APS Diplomat Fate of the Arabian Peninsula,* Accessed on 28 April 2011. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/ mi_hb6508/is_6_ 46/ai_n29051681/

the importance attached to the sultanate in the war against terror was clarified by US President Bush in a phone call made to Sultan Qaboos on Sept. 29, 2001. The fact that Oman was among the first countries to offer and provide assistance after 9/11 impressed the Bush administration.

Omani facilities were allegedly used fairly extensively in Operation Enduring Freedom, which was aimed at ousting the Taliban regime. There have been reports that US air and land forces were operating out of a secret base on Masirah Island, which the sultanate has allowed the American military forces to use. In March 2002 Vice President Dick Cheney toured the air base on Masirah Island, but neither country acknowledges US use of the base. Most observers believe that Omani military facilities are still being used as operational and logistical centres for the US forces still active in the Iraqi and Afghan theatres.[93]

As with other allied autocracies in the region, Oman's human rights record has been something of an embarrassment. Under the Clinton administration, the authors of the State Department annual human rights report, as a result of pressure from department superiors, changed the description of the Sultanate of Oman to downplay the authoritarian nature of the regime. Although the 1991 report described Oman as "an absolute monarchy," subsequent reports simply referred to the sultanate as "a monarchy without popularly elected representative institutions." The sultan's speeches, justifying his country's lack of democracy as a reflection of its cultural traditions, have been first written in English by Western advisers and then translated into Arabic.[94]

Obama's continuation of the Bush administration's policy of arming and training security forces in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Egypt, Jordan, and other dictatorial regimes in the region is much harder to defend. Indeed, President Barack Obama's understandable skepticism of externally mandated, top-down approaches to democratization through "regime change" is no excuse for his policy of further arming these regimes, which then use these instruments of repression to subjugate popular indigenous bottom-up struggles for democratization. (Ironically, this

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[93] ibid

[94] Zunes (March 7, 2011), "Pro-Democracy Protests Spread to Oman", *Foreign Policy In Focus.*

authoritarianism is then used to justify the large-scale, unconditional support of Israel on the grounds that it's "the sole democracy in the Middle East.")[95]

In fact, the sweeping changes that the country has experienced in its political life since the introduction of the universal suffrage in 2003 could be attributed to the two major developments: Oman's entry into the WTO, and the pro-democracy campaign of the US in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. While the former can influence the dynamics of political liberalisation in a variety of ways,[96] Oman's dependence on the US as the key security guarantor of the region and the free flow of oil to international markets has exposed the regime to external pressures unleashed by the latter's new democratising mission in the region.[97] To sum up, political transition in Oman is the result of the Sultan's conscious actions in response to the emerging realities in the external arena, not to the challenges emanating from within.[98]

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[95] Stephen Zunes (January 21, 2011), "The United States and the Prospects for Democracy in Islamic Countries", *Foreign Policy In Focus*.

[96] For an analysis of relationship between multilateral organisations like the WTO and domestic transition, see John C. Pevehouse (2002), "Democracy from the Outside-In?: International Organisations and Democratisation", *International Organisation*, Vol. 56, No. 3.

[97] On Oman's defense ties with the United States, *Centre for Defense Information (CDI)(2007): Oman, 2007* Accessed on 12 February 2010 http://www.cdi.org/PGFs/oman.pgf

[98] Aswini K Mohapatra (2007), "The Sultanate of Oman- Liberalised Autocracy", *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies,* Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 90.

Conclusion

Democracy is a human and cultural value. Everywhere today, it is proving contagious. It may be spreading faster in some regions than in others, but it is spreading. However, when the question of democracy is raised, the model that most often springs to mind is western parliamentary democracy. It has been defined theoretically as 'government of the people, by the people and for the people'. Still others have seen democracy as the rule of the majority over the minority, although this simplistic definition has been firmly refuted, for it is undeniably the case that the majority of the people never rules the minority, even in modern democratic systems.[1] The question then arises whether, outside the strict framework of modern political theory, there exists a democracy of a different order, a democracy that differs from the western model. If the criterion of a democracy is the transfer of power by peaceful means, that is, by elections considered free, fair, perfectly transparent, and indisputably and irrefutably incontestable—in a word, honest—then not a single GCC States is democratic today. The oil rich monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula are frequently dismissed as having no democratic systems as compared to most other regions of the world. With few exceptions, Western-style democratic institutions have failed to make significant inroads within West Asian societies, even if Arab and Muslim visionaries have long affirmed democratic ideals as desirable.

One of the important reasons for the slow process of political reforms in the Gulf States is *the absence of a culture imbued with democratic values*. This relates to the fact that the structure of the political and social systems is a patriarchal and traditional one, with a propensity towards authoritarianism. In such systems, the power to bind and to release belongs to the head of the family, tribe or state. For instance, in Kuwait, the state with the oldest experience of parliament and elected municipal councils in the Gulf, tribal and sectarian polarization is reflected in the structure of the representative democratic institutions (the National Assembly and the municipal councils), where elections do not involve modern political groups, but traditional coalitions.

The Arab world's *"freedom deficit"* remained the key obstacle to real reform throughout the region. Moreover, they emphasized the link between plurality and

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[1] Hussein Ghubash (2006), *Oman – The Islamic Democratic Tradition,* Translated from French by Mary Turton, London and New York: Routledge, p. 2.

prosperity that, irrespective of the Gulf's limited wealth, was still in high demand.[2] The World Bank has also lamented what it calls a "governance gap".[3] Despite the slow pace of change, laws in many Arab Gulf countries that restrict nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the closure of associations and newspapers, continuing human rights violations, and the enactment of emergency laws, civil-society activity and demands for liberal reforms are on the increase. Thousands of private organizations have, however, survived government attempts to thwart their activities and reduce their influence. Civil-society groups are breaking new ground and finding loopholes in current legislation that enables them to operate and develop despite the restrictions. Local groups have linked up with regional and international networks, produced and distributed a wide range of publications, promoted human rights, called for a free and open press, disseminated democratic values, and advocated women's rights.[4]

Pressures for changes are growing throughout the GCC States. Demographic pressures and rising unemployment threaten to alienate youth in most GCC countries. Corruption and abuses by measures of ruling families are causes of complaint in every country. The GCC countries are suffering from serious problems- some inherited and left unattended, and others, a product of recent political developments. Insecurity, social, political, and economic setbacks, uneven development, corruption, violation of human rights, and failure of democracy are only a few examples of the problems. Liberals criticize regimes for not permitting participation in decision-making and more personnel freedoms. While islamists attack corruption and deviance from Islamic values and precepts.[5]

In the era of globalization, information and communication technologies has worked as a vehicle for institutionalising and consolidating democratic practices in

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[2] UNDP (2003), *Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society,* New York: United Nations Development Program.

[3] *Better Governance for Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Enhancing Inclusiveness and Accountability,* (2003), Washington DC: World Bank.

[4] Laith Kubba (2003), "The Awakening of Civil Society in Islam and Democracy in the Middle East" in Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg, *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East* London: The Johns Hopkins University Press Baltimore, p.31

[5] J.E Peterson (2009), "Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf", in Joshua Teitelbaum (ed.), *Political Liberalisation in Persian Gulf,* London: Hurst & Company, p. 183

the GCC States.[6] The ability to communicate freely with the outside world is having a variety of effects on the views of the people, reinforcing some and changing others. The high-speed flow of information and the constant exposure to different cultures and belief systems is reshaping the opinion, values, concepts, and perceptions of citizens in formerly closed societies. At the same time it is important, Arab Gulf states are losing one of the most effective instruments of authoritarian rule: control over the flow of information. Over the past few decades, progress has been made on the social and educational fronts, with the achievement of high literacy and education rates, gains for women in terms of equal opportunities and political participation, and the modernizing of public administration. Incremental gains in education, urbanization, and industrialization have changed the structures of conservative tribal societies. The GCC states now have a critical mass of highly educated people with considerable experience in advocacy and organizing as well as the ability and willingness to express their ideas openly.

Transition to democracy has become so widespread all over the world since the mid-1980s that have left mark even on the apparently impervious GCC. In the early 1990s the signs and indications were so nebulous and uncertain that many predicted that they can be early reversed, and some believe that will never be able to become self- sustaining. Recently, however, GCC States have been undergoing a transition that threatens to erode dictatorships, which have lasted for many decades. Although the region remains stable, there is a widespread anticipation of change and a growing public discourse on issues previously considered taboo. Violations of human and civil rights are being publicized, as are the demands of minorities, debates on reform, and promises from leaders to implement transparency and anticorruption measures. The transition is evident every day in the news and in the lively discourse in the Arab media. In addition, GCC States are under international pressure to relax their strict controls over their respective societies. The World Bank, the European Union, the United States, and other international actors often make foreign aid, trade, and investment in GCC States contingent upon the implementation of market reforms, which, in turn, requires a more open economic system grounded in a sound legislative

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[6] Joseph A. Kéchichian (2004), "Democratization in Gulf Monarchies: A New Challenge to the GCC," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 11, No.4.

frame- work and free access to information. In the long term, social and economic reforms cannot be separated from political liberalization.[7]

With the end of Cold War, a wave of political reforms swept over much of the Arab world, including the member countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC)—Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. While some of these reforms were cosmetic and intended to cover up regime failure to perform the distributive functions, they opened up the outlets for free expression of opinion and democratic representation. Today, political reforms in the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain have not produced a substantive shift in power relationships between governing elites and society. The necessity of reform lies in the elites desire to safeguard their position of power through enhanced legitimacy and the incorporation of new segments of the population within the polity. Gulf leaders have used political reform as a tool to strengthen their regimes stability. Moreover, it is noteworthy that liberalization initiatives have helped new leaders to bolster their relative power within the ruling families: the Hamads of Bahrain and Qatar, as well as Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyah in the UAE used political reform and the co-opting process of new groups within the political sector to build up autonomous political space for their own. Political reform in the Gulf is mostly seen as a way to reinforce the authoritarian character of these regimes.[8]

The nature, content and type of political reforms that the GCC states have initiated may appear similar, but they differ in terms of pace and intensity. In the case of Oman, for instance, there was no great public demand for political reforms akin to that appeared in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. Nor has the Sultanate confronted any extremist threats since the termination of the ten year-long Dhufar War in the mid-1970s. There are also significant variations in the level of social and political control. Bahrain is for instance, usually regarded as the most socially liberal (with a number of women working, relatively open entertainment, etc.), while Kuwait is usually regarded, comparatively speaking, as the most open politically (with the parliament- admittedly covering only a

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[7] Laith Kubba (2003), "The Awakening of Civil Society, *in* Islam and Democracy in the Middle East", p.32

[8] Democratization and Political Reforms in the Middle East: uncertainty, constraints and legitimacy : The Democratic Marketing of the Arab Gulf States, Paper for presentation in the panel: 49th ISA Convention (March 26-29, 2008), "Democratization and Security in the Middle East," San Francisco.

small proportion of the people of Kuwait- reconvening, and with a reasonably liberal press, etc.). On the other hand, Oman has the reputation for being the most oppressive politically, while Saudi Arabia is said to be the most repressive socially. The divergence in the GCC states experience in political liberalization establishes the first hypothesis, *the progress of political liberalisation in the GCC countries has not been uniform.*

Over the past two decades, the West Asia has witnessed a transition away from—and then back towards—authoritarianism in general and GCC countries in particular. This dynamic began with tactical political openings whose goal was to sustain rather than transform autocracies. The resilience of the Gulf autocracies makes full democratization a distant prospect, but there is a silver lining of sorts to this: monarchical stability lowers the risks of partial democratization in the form of free elections for a parliament of limited authority.[9] Although most governments fear the loss of control and see civil- society organizations and pro-democracy groups as threats that must be curtailed, they also acknowledge that there is a need for reform. They are aware of the changes in the global environment that will force their hand on the economy and make it impossible for them to control the flow of information. Thus, they cannot block the space for civil-society groups to operate. Currently, only a narrow margin of freedom is permitted for privately owned media organizations, independent trade union movements, and public policy forums, but even this restricted space offers real opportunities for democratic development. It is now clear that liberalised autocracy has proven far more durable than once imagined.[10] The trademark mixture of guided pluralism, controlled elections, and selective repression is not just a *"survival strategy"* adopted by authoritarian regimes, but rather a type of political system whose institutions, rules, and logic defy any linear model of democratization.[11]

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[9] Michael Herb (2003), "Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf, in Islam and Democracy in the Middle East", p.85

[10] Thomas Carothers (2002), "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy,* Vol, 13, No. 1: 5–21. Carothers notes that "of the nearly 100 countries considered as 'transitional' in recent years, only a relatively small number—probably fewer than 20—are clearly en route to becoming successful, well-functioning democracies or at least have made some democratic progress and still enjoy a positive dynamic of democratization."

[11] Larry Diamond, Andreas Schedler, and Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2002), "Elections Without Democracy?", *Journal of Democracy,*

The trick, of course, is to ensure that such political openings never get out of hand. The proliferation of civil society groups, a somewhat open press, and access to the internet and satellite television can create a feeling of virtual democracy without opening the doors to dramatic reforms. State-monitored political parties and even state-managed elections can also serve these purposes, so long as the key "ministries of sovereignty" remain under regime control. Political liberalization without popular sovereignty or political accountability is thus the essence of liberalized autocracy—a form of hybrid regime that produces "elections without democracy."

The real crux of the system of politics in the Gulf is whether ruling families will gradually loosen their control and acquiesce in the eventual emergence of constitutional monarchies. In recent years, the Gulf States have instituted practical moves to answer domestic demands and international pressure. However, moves toward liberalization and greater participation essentially are presented as "gifts" of the rulers. In no cases have rulers given up total authority over finances, defence, the media, and the interior.[12] In all GCC countries expect Kuwait, political activities and reforms were mainly introduced from their upper layer, that is, ruling elite class. The process of democratization is missing in most Arab Gulf countries because the values and principles of democracy are not fully inculcated by their citizens. In greater part, ruling elites have controlled the whole cycle of reforms in such a way that they do not threaten their power. In the era of globalization and liberalization no country can escape from its impacts. Thus, the change is inevitable but the pace of change in terms of restructuring of the polity depends on the strength of the civil society, institutions and degree of willingness on the part of ruling elite to adopt such changes.

Even though the question of reform has become a prominent feature of political life in the region, it has remained a top-down, controlled process, initiated by the elites themselves. As the civil society simply does not have the ability to force additional reforms, the ruling elites remain the firm masters of the political domain and are able to control the pace and direction of reform.[13] For all these reasons, the reform process in the Gulf has the character of controlled liberalization rather than a

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[12] J.E Peterson (2009), "Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf", in Joshua Teitelbaum (ed.), *Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf*, London: Hurst & Company, p 183

[13] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Steven Wright (2007), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*, London: Ithaca Press, p.929-931.

process of leading to pluralist and liberal democracy.[14] As a matter of fact, instead of democracy (*demouqrata*), Gulf leaders talk almost exclusively to their fellow citizens of reform (*islah*), changes (*taghayyurat*), stability (*istiqrar*), and opening (*infitah*).[15]

The time seems ripe for a sober assessment of the possibility for, if not democratization, then political liberalization in the Gulf States. Liberalism here does not mean democracy in the western sense but does mean that the Gulf regimes will have to take into account the growing demands of its educated class who want to participate in the decision-making process and share in responsibility. They want to be consulted and not told. It must be emphasized that the demand for a share in the decision-making process does not mean a share in government. The intelligentsia and the educated middle class do not seek to topple regimes. They are neither competing with their ruling families nor threatening to replace them. The regimes will turn to a neo-patriarchy and create a new system of participation for its opinions and feeling that although the Gulf rulers have been aware of both the need to keep in regular touch with all strands of opinion and the necessity for gradual movement towards appropriate forms of popular participation in government.

The governments of the Gulf have learned how to respond skillfully to calls for liberalization. To a great extent, these are *"liberalized autocracies,"* to use Daniel Brumberg's term.[16] They know how to maneuver, how to give just enough and take just enough, in order to remain in power. So these systems work to the benefit of the rulers. They are not committed ideologically to democracy, and their programs of liberalization are simply instrumental, sophisticated ways of remaining in power. In the same sequence of the theory, Sultan Qaboos mapped out this strategy 40 years ago and it is remarkable how gradually and methodically it has unfolded, with each election being more democratic and participatory than the last. Oman is different because it really does not have factions and groups, which could be a reflection of lack of sectarian divisions. At the political level, the introduction of limited or formal

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[14] Daniel Brumberg (2002), "Democratization in the Arab World?: The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.10, No. 4.

[15] Laurence Louër (2005), "Changez ou vous serez changés : démocratisation et consolidation de l"autoritarisme dans le Golfe" , *Politique étrangère,* p.769-780

[16] Daniel Brumberg (2002), "Democratization in the Arab World?: The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 59.

institutional reform in the best scenario, for a system of controlled and limited representation of the social groups that have benefited from economic reform. Such a system temporarily eases internal tensions and bolsters the international legitimacy of the regime while most of the population remains excluded from significant political processes, as demonstrated by the lack of social constituencies of most opposition parties and groups.[17] The stated Oman polity reveals that, *Political liberalisation in Oman has so far created a liberalised autocracy rather than a liberal democracy.*

The Gulf States have influenced each other. Kuwait's example certainly made it easier for reformers in other states. Qatar and Bahrain have competed in political liberalization as they have in other arenas. Their extension of suffrage to women put pressure on Kuwait to do the same. The smaller states' experience in political liberalization has had a much more muted impact on Saudi Arabia which, having learned to lie with pro-democratic experiments it initially found suspect, found little reason to emulate them. Only when political violence at home became untenable did the Saudis cautiously consider political liberalization.[18]

It is noteworthy that the common denominator for political liberalization in the Gulf since the first Gulf War is the process of institution building such as setting up of formal political institutions and/or institutionalized mechanism for political participation. This process of institutionalization creates favorable conditions for the establishment of a political pact, which, in turn, encourages the emergence of a process of democratic opening. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness among important members of the Gulf ruling families that the survival of their regimes requires the introduction of some real –and sometimes painful- reform. Indeed, as the Gulf ruling family's remarkable ability to mobilize external and internal sources of power seems to have reached its limits, further steps towards political participation are supposedly needed. As a result, the six GCC States have embarked on some level of reforms, offering increased electoral participation, albeit within tight limits.

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[17] Laura Guazzone and Daniela Pioppi (2009), "Interpreting Change in the Arab World", in Laura Guazzone and Daniela Pioppi, *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalization: The Restructuring of State Power in the Middle East*, UK: Ithaca Press, p. 5

[18] Ibid, p. 53.

While outside dangers have often allowed rulers to postpone political reforms in the interest of national security, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait produced the opposite effect. The Iraqi threat was a factor prompting Kuwait's Amir to summon the body initially, and to reconstitute it after the 1990 invasion. It may be argued that the impact of external forces and developments needs to be addressed in accounting for the initiation of political reforms in Oman the early 1990s. The post-Cold War global changes, notably the ideological hegemony of the West and the political fall-out of the Kuwaiti crisis are, for example, as much significant as the 'neighborhood effects' of the democratic experiment in Kuwait encouraged Omani Sultan Qabus bin Sa'id to set off the process of reform in 1991.

Wary of risks involved in implanting Western-style parliamentary democracy, the Omani ruler has opted for a gradualist course, which began with the dissolution of the 10-year-old State Consultative Council (SCC) and its replacement by a 59-member body known as the Consultative Council (*majlis al- shura*). In 2000, the Shura Council began its march towards becoming an elected parliament, although voting right was limited to one-quarter of the total population. Finally in early 2003, the sultan granted universal suffrage to all Omanis aged above 21. Unlike its predecessor, the new *majlis* is not an advisory body of experts nor is it is simply a rubber stamp. Apart from ensuring some degree of ministerial accountability, it also performs certain legislative responsibilities, notably reviewing and recommending amendments to the draft legislation pertaining to economic development and social services before its becoming law. In addition, a new Council of State (*majlis al-dawla*) established in 1997 serves as an advisory body that reviews draft laws proposed by the government, and presents its opinions to the sultan and his ministers in cooperation with the Shura Council. The line between US support for democratization and US interference in domestic politics for its own ends is often blurry. Thus, the Bush administration's announcement of a US Middle East Partnership Initiative in 2002, and continuing efforts to push a democratization initiative in the region as well as Oman.[19] The Omani experience in the advance of political liberalisation cannot be attributable to domestic factors, such as the civic

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[19] Jill Crystal (2009), "Economic and Political Liberalization: Views From The Business Community", in Joshua Teitelbaum (ed.), *Political Liberalisation in the Persian Gulf*, Hurst & Company: London, p.53

pressure, street politics (strikes/demonstrations or riots)[20] and division in the regime. Even after the recent popular protest there is no sign of any significant change in the political structure of Oman. Despite the recent revolutions against autocratic regimes in the Arab world have toppled the presidents of Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and spread into Libya, Kuwait and Bahrain, Protests have taken place in the Gulf sultanate of Oman, following a wave of pro-democracy demonstrations across the Arab world, the anti-government sentiment in Oman differs from the rest of the region's turmoil, as there has been much less violence and more support for the country's leader. "*We are making this to support the sultan, not to face against the sultan. We are just facing the corruption here*," Yousef al-Zadjali, a protest spokesman in the city of Sohar told Al Jazeera.[21] This genuinely establishes the third hypothesis that *the reform process in Oman is the result of the Sultan's conscious actions in response to the emerging realities in external arena rather than the challenges emanating from within.*

The global wave of democratization is helping the process of opening up Arab polities, as is the prominent role being played by international and Arab human rights advocates such as Amnesty International, Middle East Watch, and the Arab Organization for Human Rights. These organizations are making it more and more difficult for Arab elites to draw upon their traditional coercive impulse and apparatus. Economic globalization and technological change (including, variously, such things as fax machines, television satellite dishes, and the global computer Internet) are generally held to have accelerated this process by breaking down international barriers, loosening the authoritarian grips of governments over the free flow of information, and empowering grassroots democratic activists. Among them are steady, even if modest, economic development, and a greater measure of social equity. Without these, the roads to democracy will be quiet rocky and reversals likely.

Although the recent pro-democracy movement across the Arab world by all account is home-grown, the external factors and forces such as the globalization trend, the development of information and communication technology, the democratic

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[20] Reports of peaceful pro-Palestinian protests following the *intifada* in 2000 and anti-American demonstrations in 2003 are the first examples of political activism in Oman's recent history. They were not directed against the regime as such.

[21] "Oman's ruler dismisses ministers," (5 March 2011), Al-Jazeera English, Accessed on 6 March 2011 http://english.aljazeera.net/video/middleeast/2011/03/20113565533194678.html

discourse, unleashed played no small role in creating conditions for such popular upsurge across the Arab world. Following the over through Tunisian and Egyptian president the movement has already triggered mass protest even in the GCC States, notably Bahrain in February 2011.[22] Oman is the latest country to be hit by the wave of popular protests that has rattled several Arab states and swept from power the leaders of Tunisia, Egypt and Yamen.

But the anti-government sentiment in Oman, however, differs from the rest of the region's turmoil, as there has been much less violence and more support for the country's leader. Inspired by the recent revolutions, Protests have taken place in the Gulf sultanate of Oman, following a wave of pro-democracy demonstrations across the Arab world. About 200 protesters marched on 17 January 2011 demanding salary increases and lower costs of living."[23] On next day 18 January 350 people marched, demanding an end to corruption and better distribution of oil revenue. As is customary in Oman, the marchers wore traditional dress. Protesters carried signs that read, "No to Expensive Prices, No to Corruption," "Where Is Democracy?" and "Wasta [Cronyism] Kills Competence."[24] Protesters demanded cabinet ministers not serve more than four years. "The cabinet must be appointed from the Shura Council because the members are elected. We can't have ministers serving 10 to 20 years. It is encouraging corruption," said one protester.[25] Unlike protests in Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Tunisia and Bahrain, the Oman demonstrations have so far been peaceful. Demonstrators carried signs with slogans of support for Oman's Sultan Qaboos, but asked for reforms, including lower prices and better pay.[26] On 20 February 2011,

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[22] Charles Snow (21 Feb, 2011), *MEES,* Accessed on 2 March 2011, at http://www. mees. com/en/articles/464-political-coment-21-dot-02-dot-201

[23] Claire Ferris-Lay (18 January, 2011), "Oman protestors call for fight against corruption - Culture & Society", Arabian Business, Accessed on 23 January 2011 http://www.arabianbusiness.com/oman-protestors-call-for-fight-against-corruption--374524.html.

[24] Jackie Spinner (18 February, 2011), "Elsewhere in the Arabian Gulf, A peaceful anti-corruption protest in Oman." Slate Magazine, Muscat,. Accessed on 3 March 2011. http://www.slate.com/id/2285656/.

[25] Saleh Shaibany Al (Feb 19, 2011), "Oman protesters call for political reform, pay rise". Reuters. Accessed on 26 February 2011 http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/19/us-oman-protests-idUSTRE71I0V920110219

[26] "Oman protests peaceful so far", (19 January, 2011), United Press International, Accessed on 23 January 2011http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World- News/ 2011/02/19/Oman-protests-peaceful-so-far/UPI-96551298131400/

protesters welcomed a move by the government to increase the minimum wage. The wage increase targets Omani workers in the private sector. A cabinet reshuffle has also seen the replacement of six ministers - though long-serving ministers were not affected.

Even as the government announced some measures to ease citizens' hardships in response to recent peaceful protests. On 26 February 2011, nearly 500 protesters gathered around a shopping mall in the industrial city of Sohar they stopped traffic and shoppers around the mall premises. The shops in the area including the mall remained closed on 27 February as well.[27] Two people have been reported killed in clashes between security forces and protesters. On 28 February, protesters looted and burned a hypermarket in Sohar.[28] On 1 March 2011 protests continued for a fourth day as crowds in Sohar congregated at the Globe Roundabout. Eventually, the Omani Army in tanks peacefully dispersed protesters blocking the Sohar port and cleared them from the main coastal highway linking Muscat to Sohar.[29] The army issued a red alert to vacate the area or threatened action. Some people had organised community policing groups to prevent more damage. The 'Sohar Citizen Committee' as its called has started giving out numbers of its core members to people who can call upon it in case of an emergency or riots attack.[30]

In the end, the path to democracy in the Gulf is far more tortuous and uncertain than is often considered. Political liberalization and the wheels of democratization have started moving ahead but still there is a long way to go. It has been evident nearly everyday, but often with such slow progress that it seems imperceptible. Western economic pressure is a key force pushing the ruling elites to

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[27] Sunil K. Vaidya (February 26, 2011), "Sit-in in Sohar town forces hypermarkets to close down", *Gulf news*, Muscat. Accessed on 5 March 2011 http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/sit-in-in-sohar-town-forces-hypermarkets-to-close-down-1.768284.

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adopt reforms conducive to good governance.[31] Economic openness implies a greater political transparency in decision-making. In the era of globalization, pressure for economic reform holds the potential to change business culture in the long term, which, in turn, will lead to pressure for changes in the traditional system of governance.[32] For the GCC states, the unanswerable question is whether this slow advance will suffice to mollify increasingly impatient citizens. The answer lies more in the resilience of and modifications to the relationship between ruler and ruled than in strategies imposed form the outside.

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Appendix

Oman- The Basic law of the State

The Basic law of the State promulgated on 6th November 1996 and comprising 81 articles lays down a legal framework of reference governing the functions of the different authorities and separating their powers. It also affords safeguards to guarantee the freedom, dignity and rights of the individual. This historic document sets out Oman's system of government and the guiding principles behind the state's policies and also details public rights and duties. It contains specific principles covering the Head of State, the Council of Ministers and the judiciary.

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

THE WHITE BOOK

THE BASIC LAW OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

Royal Decree No. 101/96

On the Issue of the Basic Law of the State

I'm Qaboos bin Said, Sultan of Oman, in confirmation of the principles which have guided State policy in various fields during the past period, and in asserting our determination to continue efforts to create a better future characterised by further achievements which will bring benefits to the Country and its Citizens.

And in our determination to strengthen Oman's international position and its role in establishing the foundations of peace, security, justice and co-operation between different States and Peoples.

And in accordance with the exigencies of the public interest, have decreed the following:

- Article (1) The issue of the Basic Law of the State in accordance with the attached form of words.

- Article (2) This Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall come into force with effect from its date of issue. (Issued on:24 Jumada al Akhira 1417, 6 November 1996, QABOOS BIN SAID SULTAN)

Basic Law of the State (Part I)

The State and the system of Government:

Article (1) The Sultanate of Oman is an independent, Arab, Islamic, fully sovereign state with Muscat as its capital.

Article (2) The religion of the State is Islam and the Islamic Shariah is the basis of legislation.

Article (3) Arabic is the official language of the State.

Article (4) The law shall determine the State's Flag, its Emblem, its decorations and medals and its National Anthem.

Article (5) The system of government is an hereditary Sultanate in which succession passes to a male descendant of Sayyid Turki bin Said bin Sultan. It is a condition that the male who is chosen to rule should be an adult Muslim of sound mind and a legitimate son of Omani Muslim parents.

Article (6) Within three days of the position of Sultan becoming vacant, the Ruling Family Council shall determine upon who will succeed to the Throne.

If the Ruling Family Council does not agree upon a successor, the Defence Council shall confirm the appointment of the person designated by the Sultan in his letter to the Family Council.

Article (7) Before exercising his powers the Sultan shall swear the following oath at a joint session of the Oman and Defense Councils:

"I swear by Almighty God to respect the Basic Law of the State and the Laws, to fully protect the interests and freedoms of the citizens, and to preserve the independence of the country and its territorial integrity."

Article (8) The Government shall continue to conduct its business as usual until the Sultan is chosen and begins to exercise his powers.

Article (9) Rule in the Sultanate shall be based on justice, Shura Consultation and equality. Citizens shall have the right to take part in public affairs - in accordance with this Basic Law and the conditions and

Principles Guiding State Policy (Part II)

Article (10) Political principles:

- Preserving the State's independence and sovereignty, protecting its security and stability, and defending it against all forms of aggression.

- Reinforcing co-operation and reaffirming ties of friendship with all States and peoples on a basis of mutual respect, common interest, non-interference in internal affairs, compliance with international and regional charters and treaties, and the generally recognised principles of international law, in a manner conducive to the promotion of peace and security between States and Peoples.

- Laying suitable foundations for the establishment of the pillars of genuine Shura Consultation, based on the national heritage, its values and its Islamic Shariah, and on pride in its history, while incorporating such contemporary manifestations as are appropriate.

- Establishing a sound administrative system that guarantees justice, tranquillity and equality for citizens, ensures respect for public order and safeguards the higher interests of the country.

Article (11) Economic principles:

- The basis of the national economy is justice and the principles of a free economy. Its chief pillar is constructive, fruitful co-operation between public and private activity. Its aim is to achieve economic and social development that will lead to increased production and a higher standard of living for citizens, in accordance with the State's general plan and within the limits of the Law.

- Freedom of economic activity is guaranteed within the limits of the Law and the public interest, in a manner that will ensure the well-being of the national economy.

- The State encourages saving and oversees the regulation of credit.

- All natural resources are the property of the State, which safeguards them and ensures that they are properly utilised while taking into account the

requirements of State security and the interests of the national economy. No concession may be granted, nor may any of the country's public resources be exploited, except in accordance with the Law and for a limited period of time, and in such a manner as to preserve national interests.

- Public property is inviolable. The State shall protect it, and citizens and all other persons shall preserve it.

- Private property is protected. No-one shall be prevented from disposing of his property within the limits of the Law. Nor shall anyone's property be expropriated, except for the public benefit in those cases defined by the Law and in the manner stipulated by the Law, and on condition that the person whose property is expropriated receives just compensation for it.

- Inheritance is a right governed by the Shariah of Islam.

- Confiscation of property is prohibited and the penalty of specific confiscation shall only be imposed by judicial order in circumstances defined by the Law.

- The basis of taxes and public dues shall be justice and the development of the national economy.

- The institution, adjustment and cancellation of public taxes shall be by virtue of the Law. No one may be exempted from payment of all or part of such taxes except in circumstances defined in the Law.

- No tax, fee or other entitlement of any kind may be applied retrospectively.

Article (12) Social Principles:

- Justice, equality and equality of opportunity between Omanis are the pillars of society, guaranteed by the State.

- Co-operation, compassion, strong ties between citizens, and the reinforcement of national unity are a duty. The State shall prevent anything that could lead to division, discord, or the disruption of national unity.

- The family is the basis of society, and the Law regulates the means of protecting it, safeguarding its legal structure, reinforcing its ties and values,

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providing care for its members, and creating suitable conditions for the development of their aptitudes and capabilities.

- The State guarantees assistance for the citizen and his family in cases of emergency, sickness, incapacity and old age in accordance with the social security system. It also encourages society to share the burdens of dealing with the effects of public disasters and calamities.

- The State cares for public health and for the prevention and treatment of diseases and epidemics. It endeavours to provide health care for every citizen and to encourage the establishment of private hospitals, clinics and other medical institutions under State supervision and in accordance with the rules laid down by Law. It also works to conserve and protect the environment and prevent pollution.

- The State enacts laws to protect the employee and the employer, and regulates relations between them. Every citizen has the right to engage in the work of his choice within the limits of the Law. It is not permitted to impose any compulsory work on anyone except in accordance with the Law and for the performance of public service, and for a fair wage.

- Public employment is a national service entrusted to those who carry it out. The State employees while performing their work shall seek to serve the public interest and society. Citizens are considered equal in taking up public employment according to the provisions of the Law.

Article (13) Cultural Principles:

- Education is a fundamental element for the progress of society which the State fosters and endeavours to make available to all.

- Education aims to raise and develop general cultural standards, promote scientific thought, kindle the spirit of enquiry, meet the needs of the economic and social plans, and create a generation strong in body and moral fibre, proud of its nation, country and heritage, and committed to safeguarding their achievements.

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- The State provides public education, combats illiteracy and encourages the establishment of private schools and institutes under State supervision and in accordance with the provisions of the Law.

- The State fosters and conserves the national heritage, and encourages and promotes the sciences, literature, and scientific research.

Article (14) Security Principles

- The State's goal is peace, and safeguarding the country's security is a duty entrusted to every citizen.

- The Defence Council studies matters concerning the maintenance of the Sultanate's security and its defence.

- It is the State alone that establishes the Armed Forces, public security organisations and any other forces. They are all the property of the nation and their task is to protect the State, safeguard the safety of its territories and ensure security and tranquillity for its citizens. No institution or group may set up military or paramilitary organisations. The Law regulates military services, general or partial mobilisation and the rights, duties and disciplinary rules of the Armed Forces, the public security organisations and any other forces the State decides to establish. circumstances defined in the Law.

Public Rights and Duties (Part III)

Article (15) Nationality is regulated by the Law. It may not be forfeited or withdrawn except within the limits of the Law.

Article (16) It is not permitted to deport or exile citizens, or prevent them from returning to the Sultanate.

Article (17) All citizens are equal before the Law, and they are equal in public rights and duties. There shall be no discrimination between them on the grounds of gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile or social status.

Article (18) Personal freedom is guaranteed in accordance with the Law. No person may be arrested, searched, detained or imprisoned, or have his residence or movement curtailed, except in accordance with the provisions of the Law.

Article (19) Detention or imprisonment is not permitted, except in the places designated for that purpose in the prison laws, which provide for health care and social welfare.

Article (20) No person shall be subjected to physical or psychological torture, enticement or humiliating treatment, and the Law lays down the punishment for anyone who is guilty of such actions. No statement shall be valid if it is established that it has been obtained as a result of torture, enticement or humiliating treatment, or threats of such measures.

Article (21) There shall be no crime and no punishment except in accordance with the criteria of a Law, and there shall be no punishment except for actions cognisable in Law. Punishment is personal not transferable.

Article (22) An accused person is innocent until proven guilty in a legal trial which ensures him the essential guarantee to exercise his right of defence according to the Law. It is prohibited to harm the accused either bodily or mentally.

Article (23) The accused has the right to appoint a person who has the ability to defend him during the trial. The Law defines the circumstances which require the presence of a lawyer on behalf of the accused and guarantees those without the financial capacity, the means to resort to justice and the defence of their rights.

Article (24) Anyone who is arrested shall be notified of the causes of his arrest immediately and he shall have the right to contact whoever he sees fit, to inform them of what has taken place or seek their assistance, in the manner regulated by the Law. He must be informed promptly of the charges against him, and he and his representative shall have the right to appeal before the judicial authorities against the measure which has restricted his personal freedom. The Law regulates his right of appeal in a manner which ensures that a judgement will be issued on it within a specified period, failing which he must be released.

Article (25) The right to litigation is sacrosanct and guaranteed to all people. The Law defines the procedures and circumstances required for exercising this right and the State guarantees, as far as possible, that the judicial authorities will reconcile the litigants and settle cases promptly.

Article (26) It is not permitted to perform any medical or scientific experiment on any person without his freely given consent.

Article (27) Dwellings are inviolable and it is not permitted to enter them without the permission of the owner or legal occupant, except in the circumstances specified by the Law and in the manner stipulated therein.

Article (28) The freedom to practice religious rites in accordance with recognised customs is guaranteed provided that it does not disrupt public order or conflict with accepted standards of behaviour.

Article (29) Freedom of opinion and expression, whether spoken, written or in other forms, is guaranteed within the limits of the Law.

Article (30) Freedom of postal, telegraphic, telephonic and other forms of communication is sacrosanct and their confidentiality is guaranteed. Hence, it is not permitted to monitor or inspect them, reveal their contents, or delay or confiscate them except in circumstances defined by the Law and in accordance with the procedures laid down therein.

Article (31) Freedom of the press, printing and publication is guaranteed in accordance with the conditions and circumstances defined by the Law. It is prohibited to print or publish material that leads to public discord, violates the security of the State or abuses a person's dignity and his rights.

Article (32) Citizens have the right of assembly within the limits of the Law.

Article (33) The freedom to form associations on a national basis for legitimate objectives and in a proper manner, in a way that does not conflict with the stipulations and aims of this Basic Law, is guaranteed under the conditions and in the circumstances defined by the Law. It is forbidden to establish associations whose activities are inimical to social order, or are secret, or of a military nature. It is not permitted to force anyone to join any association.

Article (34) Citizens have the right to address the public authorities on personal matters or on matters related to public affairs, in the manner and on the conditions laid down by the Law.

Article (35) Every foreigner who is legally resident in the Sultanate shall have the right to protection of his person and his property in accordance with the Law. Foreigners shall have regard for society's values and respect its traditions and customs.

Article (36) Extradition of political refugees is prohibited. Extradition of criminals is subject to the provisions of international laws and agreements.

Article (37) Defence of the homeland is a sacred duty, and rendering service in the Armed Forces is an honour for citizens regulated by the Law.

Article (38) Preserving national unity and safeguarding State secrets is a duty incumbent upon every citizen.

Article (39) Payment of taxes and public dues is a duty in accordance with the Law.

Article (40) Respect for the Basic Law of the State and the laws and ordinances issued by the public authorities, as well as observance of public order and public morals, is a duty incumbent upon all residents of the Sultanate.

The Head of State (Part IV)

Article (41) The Sultan is the Head of State and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. His person is inviolable and must be respected and his orders must be obeyed. The Sultan is the symbol of national unity as well as its guardian and defender.

Article (42) The Sultan discharges the following functions:

- Preserving the country's independence and territorial integrity and assuring its internal and external security, maintaining the rights and freedoms of its citizens, guaranteeing the rule of law, and guiding the general policy of the State.

- Taking prompt measures to counter any threat to the safety of the State or its territorial integrity, the security and interests of its people, or the smooth running of its institutions.

- Representing the State both internally and externally in all international relations.

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- Presiding over the Council of Ministers or appointing a person to serve in that position.

- Presiding over the Specialised Councils or appointing chairmen for them.

- Appointing and dismissing Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers and those of their rank.

- Appointing and dismissing Under-Secretaries, General Secretaries and those of their rank.

- Appointing and dismissing senior judges.

- Declaring a state of emergency, general mobilisation, or war, and making peace in accordance with the provisions of the Law.

- Issuing and ratifying laws.

- Signing international treaties and agreements in accordance with the provisions of the Law (or authorising a signatory to sign them) and issuing decrees ratifying them.

- Appointing and dismissing political representatives to other States and international organisations according to the limits and circumstances laid down by the Law. Accepting accreditation of representatives of States and international organisations.

- Waiving or commuting punishments

- Conferring honours, decorations and military ranks.

Article (43) The Sultan shall be assisted in drafting and implementing the general policy of the State by a Council of Ministers and Specialised Councils.

The Council of Ministers

Article (44) The Council of Ministers is the body entrusted with implementing general State policies. In particular it shall :

- Submit recommendations to the Sultan on economic, political and social, as well as executive and administrative matters of concern to the Government, and propose draft laws and decrees.

- Foster the welfare of citizens and ensure the provision of health and other essential services in order to improve the quality of their life socially and culturally as well as economically.

- Formulate aims and general policies for economic, social, and administrative development and propose methods of implementing these policies which will make the best use of financial, economic and human resources.

- Discuss developmental plans prepared by the relevant departments, submit them to the Sultan for approval, and follow up their implementation.

- Discuss proposals by Ministries in their fields of executive jurisdiction and make appropriate recommendations and decisions in this regard.

- Oversee the smooth running of the State's administrative apparatus, follow up its performance of its duties, and co-ordinate the activities of its different departments.

- Monitor the implementation of all laws, decrees, ordinances and decisions, as well as treaties and agreements and court judgements, in a manner that will ensure that they are complied with.

- Discharge any other competencies vested in it by the Sultan or conferred upon it by the provisions of the Law.

Article (45) The Head of the Council of Ministers shall preside over the Council's sessions and has the right to entrust the chairmanship of sessions, which he does not attend, to one of the Deputy Prime Ministers. If the Prime Minister and his Deputies are absent, the Sultan will authorise whoever he sees fit to chair the sessions.

Article (46) Meetings of the Council shall be quorate with the attendance of a majority of its members. Its deliberations are secret and its decisions are issued with the approval of a majority of those present.

Article (47) The Council of Ministers shall draw up Standing Orders including its Rules of Procedure. The Council shall have a General Secretariat which will be provided with a sufficient number of staff to assist it in carrying out its work.

The Prime Minister, His Deputies and Ministers

Article (48) If the Sultan appoints a Prime Minister, his competencies and powers shall be specified in the Decree appointing him.

Article (49) It is a prerequisite that whoever is appointed as Prime Minister, his Deputy, or a Minister :

a. Shall be originally of Omani nationality in accordance with the Law

b. Shall be aged not less than 30 years of the Gregorian calendar.

Article (50) Before assuming their powers the Prime Minister, his Deputies, and Ministers shall swear the following oath in the presence of the Sultan:

" I swear by Almighty God that I shall be faithful to my Sultan and my Country, that I shall respect the Basic Law of the State and its implementing regulations; that I shall uphold at all times the integrity of the State and the security of its territories, and shall work to promote fully its interests and the interests of its citizens, and that I shall discharge my duties truly and honestly."

Article (51) Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers shall supervise the affairs of their Ministries and Organisations, and implement the general policy of the Government therein, as well as drawing up future guidelines for their Ministries and Organisations and following up their implementation.

Article (52) Members of the Council of Ministers are politically collectively responsible before the Sultan for carrying out the general policies of the State, and each is individually responsible before the Sultan for the discharge of his duties and the exercise of his powers.

Article (53) Members of the Council of Ministers shall not combine their Ministerial position with the chairmanship or membership of the Board of any joint stock company. Nor may the Government departments of which they are in charge have dealings with any company or organisation in which they have an interest, whether direct or indirect. They should be guided in all their actions by considerations of national interest and public welfare and should not exploit their official positions in any way for their own benefit or for the benefit of those with whom they have special relations.

Article (54) The emoluments of Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers, during their term of office and after their retirement, shall be determined in accordance with the directives of the Sultan.

Article (55) The provisions of Articles 49, 50, 51, 52, 53 and 54 shall apply to all those with the rank of Minister.

Specialised Councils

Article (56) The Specialised Councils shall be established, their powers defined and their members appointed in accordance with Royal Decrees.

Financial Affairs

Article (57) The Law specifies the provisions concerning the following matters and the bodies responsible for them:

- Collection of taxes, revenues and other public monies, and measures for their disbursement.

- Maintenance and administration of State property, the conditions of its disposal, and the limits within which a part of this property may be assigned.

- The general State budget and the final account

- The autonomous and supplementary budgets and their final accounts

- Control of State finances

- Loans extended by or obtained by the State

- Currency and banking , standards, weights and measures

- Salaries, pensions, indemnities, subsidies and gratuities charged to the State Treasury

The Oman Council (Part V)

- The Shura Council

- The Council of State

The Law shall specify the powers of each of these Councils, the length of their terms, the frequency of their sessions, and their rules of procedure. It shall also specify the

number of members of each Council, the conditions which they must fulfill, the method of their selection and appointment, the reasons for their dismissal, and other regulatory provisions.

The Judiciary (Part VI)

Article (59) The sovereignty of the Law is the basis of governance in the State. Rights and freedoms are guaranteed by the dignity of the judiciary and the probity and impartiality of the judges.

Article (60) Judicial power is independent and vested in the Courts of Law, of whatever type or status, which issue judgements in accordance with the Law.

Article (61) There is no power over the judges in their rulings except the Law. Judges can only be dismissed in cases specified by the Law. No party may interfere in a law suit or in matters of justice; such interference shall be a crime punishable by law. The Law shall specify the conditions to be fulfilled for those administering justice, the conditions and procedures for the appointment of judges, their transfer and promotion, the security offered to them, the cases in which they are not liable for dismissal, and other relevant provisions.

Article (62) The Law shall regulate the Law Courts of whatever type or status and shall specify their functions and competencies. The jurisdiction of Military Courts shall be restricted to military crimes committed by members of the Armed Forces and the security forces and shall only extend to others in the case of martial law and then within the limits laid down by the Law.

Article (63) Court hearings are public except when the Law Court decides to hold the case in camera in the interests of public order or public morals. In all cases pronouncement of finding and sentence shall be in open session.

Article (64) The public prosecution shall conduct legal proceedings on behalf of the community, shall oversee matters of judicial prosecution and shall be vigilant in the application of the penal code, the pursuit of the guilty and the execution of court judgements. The Law shall regulate the public prosecution and its competencies and shall specify the conditions and security applicable to those who discharge its functions. In exceptional cases, Public Security departments may be legally

empowered to conduct proceedings in cases involving misdemeanours, in accordance with the conditions laid down by the Law.

Article (65) The legal profession shall be regulated by the Law.

Article (66) The judiciary shall have a Higher Council, which shall oversee the smooth running of the Law Courts and auxiliary bodies. The Law shall specify the powers of this Council with regard to the functions of the judges and the public prosecutor.

Article (67) The Law shall adjudicate in administrative disputes through a Special Administrative Causes Court or Department, whose organisation and mode of procedure shall be specified in Law.

Article (68) The Law shall adjudicate in disputes over jurisdiction between judicial departments and in cases of conflict of judgements.

Article (69) The Law shall define the competencies of the department which expresses legal opinions to Ministries and other Government departments and formulates and revises draft laws, regulations and decisions. The Law shall also specify the mode of representation of the State and other public bodies and organisations before the Departments of Justice.

Article (70) The Law shall stipulate the judicial department concerned with settling disputes arising from the incompatibility of laws and regulations with the Basic Law of the State and ensuring that the latter's provisions are not contravened, and shall define that department's powers and procedures.

Article (71) Judgements shall be issued and executed in the name of His Majesty the Sultan. Failure or delay in executing these judgements on the part of the concerned public officials shall be a crime

General Provisions (Part VII)

Article (72) The application of this Basic Law shall not infringe the treaties and agreements concluded between the Sultanate of Oman and other States and international bodies and organisations.

Article (73) None of the provisions of this Basic Law shall be suspended except in the case of martial law and within the limits laid down by the Law.

Article (74) Laws shall be published in the Official Gazette within two weeks of the day of their issuance. Laws will come into force from their date of publication unless they stipulate another date.

Article (75) Provisions of laws shall only apply from the date of their coming into force; whatever happens before that date is of no consequence, unless the text specifies otherwise. Excluded from this exception are penal laws and laws concerning taxes and financial dues.

Article (76) Treaties and agreements shall not have the force of law until they have been ratified. In no case may a treaty or an agreement contain secret conditions which contradict its declared conditions.

Article (77) Everything stipulated by laws, regulations, decrees, directives and decisions in force on the date of this Basic Law becoming effective shall remain in force, provided that they do not conflict with any of its provisions.

Article (78) Laws which are not yet in existence but are necessitated by this Basic Law shall be promulgated by the competent departments within two years of its coming into force.

Article (79) Laws and procedures which have the force of law must conform to the provisions of the Basic Law of the State.

Article (80) No body in the State may issue rules, regulations, decisions or instructions which contravene the provisions of laws and decrees in force, or international treaties and agreements which constitute part of the law of the country.

Article (81) This Basic Law can only be amended in the same manner in which it was promulgated. punishable by law. In such a case the judgement beneficiary has the right to bring a criminal action directly to the court concerned.

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