Geopolitical Equilibria in the Gulf: The Role of Oman
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If the Strait of Hormuz is the door to the Persian Gulf, controlling it means assuming geographic, economic and political power through controlling two-thirds of global oil traffic. Iraq, Iran, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait all aim to control the Strait in front of Muscat, the capital of Oman. For decades the flexible foreign policy of Oman represented a fundamental pillar in the balance of power between the GGC, guided by Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Sultanate of Oman is, therefore, a particularly interesting case to study the subtle yet vital strategies in establishing geopolitical equilibria in the Arab Gulf. Departing from the historic isolationist policies, Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said developed pragmatic domestic and foreign policies that enhanced the unique Omani Status and its role in power balance and independence. The Omanization campaign and the conciliation approach of midway ground have allowed Oman to develop strategic ties with the Western powers such as the United States and United Kingdom. In a region highly charged with political and sectarian unrest, Oman plays an imperative role as the only Arab state maintaining diplomatic ties with the regional rivalries including Iran. In fact, Oman played a vital role in advocating for the Iran Nuclear Deal concluded in 2015, thereby helping the United States comprehend the Iranian perspective and vice versa. Today, the perspective of conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran through the so called proxy wars are challenging the ability of Oman to mediate and maintain the equilibria in the area. Sultan Qaboos called for a ‘non-interference’ policy in the current proxy wars especially in Yemen. Rathe, he is
advocating for the establishment of political dialogue in Oman confirming the Omani role in mediating conflict and balancing power concerns. However, this latent instability could exacerbate tension inside of Oman as well, in case the Sultan is not able to balance the proxy acts. These inner tensions are related to the uncertainty about potential successors of the Sultan and social protests against the lack of social justice and individual freedoms. This paper aims to investigate in detail how reforms and choices inside of Oman are likely to affect, and in what way, the delicate equilibria in the Arab Gulf region that is currently facing important socio-economic, socio-political and financial challenges.

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Third year Interfield PhD student in Economics and Political Science at Claremont Graduate University. His research focuses on Inequality and Poverty and how they are affected by factors like Crime and Gender Discrimination.
He previously earned his BA and MA at Università degli Studi di Pavia (Italy), with study experiences at Technische Universitaet Dresden (Germany) and Loyola University New Orleans (New Orleans, LA).
Giacomo served as a speaker in 2014 at the UNCTAD’s World Investment Forum in Geneva, with a presentation on Environmental Sustainability and in 2018 at APPAM and MPSA with a paper on State Capacity and Inequality in Latin America.
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References


