



Dissenting from the Inevitable? Understanding Omani Approaches to Israel and the Abraham Accords

James Worrall

To cite this article: James Worrall (2025) Dissenting from the Inevitable? Understanding Omani Approaches to Israel and the Abraham Accords, Middle Eastern Studies, 61:3, 371-386, DOI: [10.1080/00263206.2025.2455376](https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2025.2455376)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2025.2455376>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 03 Mar 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 435



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Dissenting from the Inevitable? Understanding Omani Approaches to Israel and the Abraham Accords

James Worrall 

School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom

In January 2023 the Omani *majlis al-shura* voted to criminalise individuals for having ties with the State of Israel.¹ *Majlis* Deputy Chairman Yaqoob Al-Harathi, stated that the amendment, which expands the scope of the existing boycott stipulated in Article 1 of a pre-existing Royal Decree, ‘includes a ban on any sports, cultural and economic contact between Oman and Israel, as well as the criminalisation of interacting with Israelis in person and online’. This came shortly after news that US guided talks between the two states on opening Omani airspace to Israeli planes flying to Asia had failed.²

Only two years prior to these events there had been feverish speculation in some corners that Oman would be the next state to join the Abraham Accords. This was never likely. Despite the fact that Oman and Israel have long had covert contacts, including Muscat having openly hosted three Israeli Prime Ministers over the years: Yitzhak Rabin in 1994, Shimon Peres in 1996 and Benjamin Netanyahu in a much-photographed 2018 visit. Indeed, Rabin’s visit to Oman was the first by an Israeli prime minister to *any* Gulf nation. From 1994 until the outbreak of the second *intifada* in 2000, Oman’s relations with Israel had been steadily warming, albeit falling some way short of full recognition.³ Given these facts, one could perhaps forgive the excited voices and the speculation around Oman being the next country to join the Accords. After all, the track record of contacts, co-operation and relationships certainly did resemble elements of the wider tacit security regime which had been emerging for more than a decade between Gulf States and Israel which had led directly to the Accords.⁴

Oman, however, has crafted its foreign policy more carefully than this. Jealous of its sovereignty and knowing that maintaining an independent foreign policy best enables its objectives, under Sultans Qaboos and Haitham, Muscat has created a role as an ‘Interlocutor State’⁵ and seeks to neither bandwagon nor balance in the classical sense. There has been plenty of speculation about why Oman did not join the Accords, and has in contradistinction recently taken actions seemingly so hostile to Israel. It remains important however to tie together the threads influencing Omani decision-making across different levels of analysis to produce a more nuanced picture of the Omani position on: (a) joining the Accords; (b) its stance towards the Accords themselves as a key regional development; and (c) its continuing relations with Israel despite a lack of recognition.

This article therefore not only traces the dynamics of the Omani-Israeli relationship over time, but frames the opportunity costs of participating in the new security and trading relationships created by the Accords in the wider context of Muscat’s network of relationships with other states in the region, with its own citizens and with its own vision for itself as a regional actor. It argues that Oman had nothing to gain and everything to lose by participating directly in the

CONTACT James Worrall  j.e.worrall@leeds.ac.uk

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Accords, not least because the benefits will still largely accrue to Muscat anyway, and the downsides can be avoided. The soundness of this position has since been vindicated in the wake of Israel's destruction of Gaza and the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe there in the aftermath of the 7 October 2023 massacre of Israelis by Hamas and other groups. Oman has been in a stronger position to be able to take pro-Palestinian stances and call repeatedly for a ceasefire and a long-term just settlement to the Israel-Palestine conflict. As such, Oman has actually secured for itself a more fluid position within the rapidly evolving regional security environment, which best suits both its short-term and long-term policy objectives.

Understanding Omani Foreign Policy: Theoretical Debates

There is a small but important body of scholarly work on Oman's approaches to foreign policy, much of this is concentrated in monographs⁶ with some journal articles.⁷ This also links up with the small states subfield in International Relations (IR) theory⁸ which has received much attention over the past decade, since it is through this prism Omani foreign policy is usually understood. The endless debate about whether such states bandwagon or balance⁹ and how they might even do so with Israel¹⁰ has been more recently supplemented with ideas of hedging¹¹ or strategic hedging,¹² although many have noticed that traditional small state theory does not generally fit too well with the Gulf States.¹³

In 1998 Marc O'Reilly published a classic article applying the idea of omnibalancing, pioneered by Steven David in 1991,¹⁴ to the Sultanate, terming it instead 'Omanibalancing'.¹⁵ What was especially useful about this contribution was that it focused more on threats to the leadership of the state than on threats to the existence of the state itself. This broadening to include the internal, matched with similar work at the time which examined the 'internal-external security dilemma'.¹⁶ The increased enmeshment of states in the region, which (often) meddle in the internal affairs of their neighbours is apt and important but does not quite capture the ways in which regime legitimacy internally is also important. This can be influenced not only by foreign state interference but also by the reaction of citizens to their own state's foreign policy decisions and actions. The continued existence of trans-border solidarities and sympathies remains of importance for the region and constructivist interpretations have considerable value in capturing this.¹⁷

Given the nature of the occupation and the drift of Israeli politics towards the extreme right, which has accelerated in recent years, leading to inclusion in senior positions within the Israeli government, it is not hard to see why the Omani government might wish to proceed cautiously even when other neighbours make different calculations. The internal dimension of foreign policy is also connected to the need to maintain the ruling bargain and maintain economic growth to further reduce the chance of dissent. Oman's long-term building of networks, relations of trust and practices of engagement might well be seen as a pragmatic form of hedging but it is one that emerges from a conviction which is connected to a foreign policy 'role' which is seen by many to emerge from internal practices¹⁸ and conceptions,¹⁹ almost as much as from more external security threats. Yet if this kind of diffusion and hedging, of having relations with everyone, were really enough of a protection either for the state or the regime²⁰ then why would the Sultanate feel the need to have built deep and enduring military (and other) partnerships with the US and UK in particular?

If the early literature on small states created a false picture by presenting a choice for these countries between balancing and bandwagoning,²¹ more recently the literature has begun to move towards a more permanent condition of hedging and to take more nuanced approaches towards the space for agency within the international system for small states.²² Oman has been a useful case for broadening conceptions and complexifying these theoretical assumptions.²³ Muscat's ability to engage²⁴ with states like Iran,²⁵ while retaining what are, to all intents and purposes, formal security arrangements with the US and UK, looks like more than simply hedging. They are instead, key in enabling it to maintain a large degree of foreign policy

independence, based on more than calculation alone. Put simply, Oman has been able to embark on a different path, what has been termed that of an ‘interlocutor state’. That is to say a country, ‘which develops a reputation for trustworthiness and uses these assets to become a trusted go-between for other states, thus securing a more secure and independent niche in an otherwise contested system.’²⁶

This position might to some degree have been enabled by the particular circumstances of the region, whereby the specific dispersal of power enables a higher than usual amount of room for manoeuvre for smaller states. To some degree this position has been advanced by Kristina Kausch and Silvia Colombo who utilise the concept of the ‘swing state,’ which feels rather like a return to the choice between bandwagoning and balancing of before.²⁷ However, it certainly does not seem that Oman swings between positions or friendships, indeed this would create unpredictability and uncertainty, where Muscat has instead built a strong reputation in recent decades for the exact opposite – a reputation for calm, predictable, peaceful interactions based on trust, with mediation as a key role, with the purpose of creating greater stability in the wider region.²⁸ Trying to advance peace is something which Oman has worked at ever more intensively, the more unstable the region has become after the Arab Spring. Even if the power dynamics in the region can be said to have opened space for action by small states, those states still have to have the agency and vision to seize that opportunity and to craft their role within it. This would seem to require principle *as well as* pragmatism, caution *and* boldness, strategy *and* tactics, and thus something more than ‘in the moment’ calculation or hedging alone.

On critical issues of sovereignty, Muscat has a clear record of voting at the United Nations (UN) to uphold the core of the UN Charter, for example voting to denounce the Russian invasion of Ukraine,²⁹ despite maintaining generally cordial relations with Moscow.³⁰ In this sense Oman acts more as a pluralist in an English School sense, believing firmly in the core institutions of International Society such as sovereignty, diplomacy and non-intervention³¹ a form which is particularly pronounced in the Middle East.³²

All of this has deep roots, thus during the development of Omani foreign policy in the decade or so after 1970, as Uzi Rabi remarks, ‘it seems that the guiding rule for Oman’s foreign policy was as follows: the more moderate the actor, such as Egypt or Jordan, the closer the relations with Muscat. That was why Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), traditionally members of the Arab “radical” camp, saw their contacts with the sultanate develop more slowly.’³³ Muscat for example, did not have full diplomatic relations with Damascus until December 1987, indicating at least a degree of caution. Although the seeds of a pragmatic foreign policy based on engagement and good relations were visible in multiple ways from the outset, they took some time to become fully systematised into the foreign policy we have seen in recent years, which is focused on solving mutual concerns and reaching common positions, i.e. Oman as an ‘Interlocutor State.’³⁴

Omani Foreign Policy: Working for the Long Term

It is important to recognise that while Omani foreign policy can sometimes be seen to be ‘unprincipled,’ its stance – in common with much of the rest of the Arab and Muslim world – in not condemning Beijing’s systematic oppression and cultural genocide of the Uighurs, demonstrates a degree of circumspection when dealing with powerful actors.³⁵ Omani foreign policy is pragmatic, in that it avoids grandstanding and futile gestures in favour of long-term engagements and dialogue. This makes it easy to point to a number of occasions whereby Muscat seemingly ignores gross human rights violations, welcoming President Assad to Muscat and helping organise Syria’s return to the Arab League being a relatively recent high-profile example.³⁶ This is a policy which, while consistent with its approach, seems to badly misread both the stability and durability of the Assad regime, and the extent of the crimes committed against its people. It might also make the Sultanate less welcome in Damascus as new rulers rise to power. Oman’s

foreign policy, however, is not without principle, instead it tries to focus on building relationships and maintaining dialogue to achieve peaceful or de-escalatory outcomes. Indeed, sometimes principle can be pragmatic in itself, thus by setting the condition for normalisation with Israel as nothing less than a full Palestinian state, with (East) Jerusalem as its capital, Muscat is able to create a space which is both clearly principled and which puts the ball in Israel's court in terms of whether they can fulfil that condition. It also means that Oman does not need to endlessly condemn every Israeli action in the occupied territories.³⁷ In this way Muscat can create a clear frame which resonates with its wider foreign policy practice. In sticking with the Arab Peace Initiative³⁸ the Sultanate remains consonant with the wider Arab World, and fits with its own foreign policy principles.

The position of the 'reasonable actor' is important, both from an Omani perspective and as a frame through which the rest of the world can view and interact with the Sultanate. Being reasonable means being consistent, open to dialogue, focused on issues of mutual concern and being discreet. Not being viewed as a bandwagoner or a balancer is actually a strength because it builds predictability and trust. Other states may not like the fact that Muscat is not explicitly supporting their position but it is not going to come as a surprise that the Omanis are not deviating from their usual behaviour. This position however does not mean that Oman will not join in collective security mechanisms such as the coalition to liberate Kuwait,³⁹ or in trying to create the Gulf Co-operation Council⁴⁰ and its Peninsula Shield Force.⁴¹

It is all too easy to forget with the hype surrounding the Abraham Accords that similar momentum had been built during the 1990s. As an Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs guide called 'The Fruits of Peace', published in 2000, put it,

The most dramatic change in Israel's international standing can be seen in our growing relations with the Arab world. In addition to full diplomatic relations with two of its neighbors, Egypt and Jordan, an Israeli liaison office is functioning in Morocco, an interest office has been opened in Tunisia, and trade offices in Oman and Qatar. With the resumption of the peace initiative by Prime Minister Barak, there is talk of upgrading these relations. The first expression of this was the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Israel and Mauritania on October 28, 1999.⁴²

That this momentum fell apart with the onset of the *al-Aqsa Intifada* demonstrates that engagements with Israel have always been non-linear and given Oman's avoidance of jumping on bandwagons, in either the IR or everyday sense of the term, it is unsurprising that the Abraham Accords, representing something of a cliché of the latest trend, would be something that Muscat would be cautious of joining.

Omani-Israeli Relations Over Time

Muscat's public approach to Israel largely matched that of the wider Arab world during the 1970s, openly hostile, participating in the boycott and matching the rhetoric. The voting pattern continues to this day with the UN Watch Record Database showing a 100 per cent Omani record of voting against Israel in UN General Assembly resolutions since 2015.⁴³

The optimism surrounding the Oslo Accords in the 1990s led to a considerable change in engagement with a number of states in the region; in the Gulf both Oman and Qatar allowed Tel Aviv to open trade offices in their countries, which while falling short of formal recognition still represented a significant step forward.⁴⁴ This was prefaced by visits from Israeli Prime Ministers Yitzhak Rabin in 1994, and Shimon Peres in 1996. At Rabin's funeral on 4 November 1995, Oman, along with several other regional states without formal relations with Tel Aviv, including Qatar and Morocco, sent a representative. Yusuf bin Alawi its then Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, the *de facto* Foreign Minister because Sultan Qaboos formally held the ministerial portfolio, attended; this mirrored the level of seniority of those Arab states without full diplomatic relations.⁴⁵

As a result of the Middle East Peace Process an international organisation focused on finding solutions to fresh water scarcity in the Middle East, which included Israel, was established in Muscat.⁴⁶ The Middle East Desalination Research Centre (MEDRC), this centre survived the closing of the Israeli trade office at the time of the *Al Aqsa intifada*, enabling Israel to still have a form of representation permanently in Oman.⁴⁷ At a special dinner in New York in 2007 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the centre, then Israeli Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni stated, 'The fact that MEDRC has survived the political ups and downs of the last years is evidence that what unites us can be stronger than what divides us. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Omani Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sayyid Bader bin Hamad AlbuSaid who, under the wise guidance of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, has made MEDRC a success story.'⁴⁸ The continuing existence of this body demonstrates how seriously Muscat takes both the peace process and remaining open to dialogue despite differences. Indeed, MDRC's approach and remit has widened considerably from highly technical to a deeper conflict resolution focus captured by its new branding, MEDRC: Water – Environment – Peace.⁴⁹

As the *Al Aqsa intifada* cooled down, especially after 2006, even high-level engagements between Oman and Israel recommenced. In 2008, Israel's Tzipi Livni was photographed in Qatar meeting her Omani counterpart Yusuf bin Alawi.⁵⁰ Yet, while the more overt roster of visits and semi-formal ties of the 1990s took up much of the limelight, it is really the longstanding covert linkages which form the foundation of the relationship between the two states, the most important of which has been directly with the Mossad. This relationship emerged out of the Yemeni civil war in the 1960s⁵¹ through Jim Johnson⁵² in which Israel sent assistance to the royalist forces which bogged down Nasser's Egypt in a protracted conflict.

In the mid 1970s during the Dhofar War,⁵³ Oman received some assistance from the Mossad who sent military advisors which were co-ordinated by Mossad operative Efraim Halevy, who would later go on to become its ninth director between 1998 and 2002.⁵⁴ This foundational assistance to Muscat was clearly valuable and valued by Qaboos. Indeed, it is clear that these personal relationships and back channels, with intelligence as a key currency, have been important in building trust and foundations for other initiatives across the Gulf;⁵⁵ this has continued importance for the Muscat-Tel Aviv relationship. In an interview with the *Times of Israel* in 2020 Halevy was asked if we should assume that Oman would be joining the normalisation process; he replied, 'I think so, yes. It will take time, but yes.'⁵⁶ Given his instrumental role in bringing about the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty Halevy's voice is not one to be easily dismissed.

The October 2018 visit of Benjamin Netanyahu to Muscat, and especially its attendant photographs, marked a very public and highly symbolic engagement with an Israeli leader who, importantly, clearly lacked the peace credentials of Rabin and Peres. The visit was also accompanied by a statement from Yusuf bin Alawi the following day in which he said, 'Israel is a state present in the region, and we all understand this... The world is also aware of this fact. Maybe it is time for Israel to be treated the same [as other states] and also bear the same obligations.' It is important to note that Netanyahu's fleeting one day visit was prefaced by a three day long visit by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.⁵⁷ This is a classic example of Muscat demonstrating that it is acting with the consent of the Palestinians, preparing the ground carefully, and sending careful signals regarding the importance of peace and efforts towards peace.⁵⁸

This centring of moves towards peace does not always bear fruit but appears to be a consistent behaviour for Muscat. In early 2020, Israeli Channel 13's diplomatic correspondent Barak Ravid broke the story of an unexpected and highly ambitious Omani attempt to mediate direct talks between Iran and Israel just a few weeks after Hassan Rouhani had won the presidential election in the early summer of 2013. The then Mossad director Tamir Pardo said the offer was 'serious and worth considering,' but after discussion Netanyahu dismissed the idea.⁵⁹ It should be noted that the claims in the report have not been officially confirmed by any government but

the report does appear credible and demonstrates a very significant move by Muscat which must have been convinced of Tehran's willingness to engage.

In July 2019, the then director of Mossad, Yossi Cohen, declared at the annual Herzliya Conference that Israel was renewing its ties with Oman. He said, 'Just recently, renewal of formal relations with Oman was declared and the establishment of a representative office of the foreign ministry in that country... We do not yet have with them official peace treaties but there is already a communality of interests, broad cooperation and open channels of communication.'⁶⁰ The Omani Foreign Ministry actually issued a rare statement the next day denying Cohen's statement. Stating that the claims of the 'establishment of diplomatic relations between the Sultanate and Israel are baseless... The sultanate is keen to create diplomatic conditions to restore communication between all international and regional parties to work on achieving peace between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, resulting in an independent Palestinian state.'⁶¹

This all happened in the context of Oman announcing at the end of June 2019 that it would open an embassy in Ramallah in support of the Palestinian people, the statement read, 'In line with the Sultanate's support for the brotherly Palestinian people, it has decided to open a new diplomatic mission for Palestine at the level of embassy.'⁶² The *Times of Israel* reported on the response of Hanan Ashrawi of the PLO, 'if this has a political price attached then certainly there will be ramifications', seeming to warn the Omanis not to use the Embassy in Ramallah as a step towards formal relations with Israel. According to Reuters she went on to say, 'I hope the embassy will help in educating the Omani government on the real nature of the Israeli occupation'. The official Palestinian statement however was rather more welcoming of the move.⁶³

With the US as a crucial ally though, the Omanis certainly wanted to remain connected and engaged with Washington, and also to be seen to support any momentum in the peace process generally. The Trump administration clearly attached much importance to trying to create some kind of symbolic moves in the Middle East. Jared Kushner's peace proposals were unveiled at the end of January 2020 in a ceremony at the White House attended only by the ambassadors of Bahrain, the UAE and Oman.⁶⁴ There was some speculation later that this may have been connected to the announcement of Trump opening a golf resort in Oman built in conjunction with Saudi investors.⁶⁵

With Qaboos's death in January 2020, there were few immediate changes in Oman's positions.⁶⁶ Indeed, Sultan Haitham publicly declared that there would be continuity in foreign policy, stating, 'We will remain as the world has known us.'⁶⁷ While some had clearly expected there to be more moves towards normalisation, Haitham's policy remains the same as Qaboos's, a careful, stable engagement. As Oman declared its airspace open in February 2023 it also explicitly promised not to normalise relations with Israel. Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi stated, 'As regards Israel we are content so far with the level of our current relations and dialogue, which involves the appropriate channels of communication.'⁶⁸ In an interview with the pan-Arab daily *Asharq Al-Awsat* in the summer of 2021, Sayyid Badr further expressed the Omani position, 'Oman believes in the principle of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of the two-state solution,' adding that, 'We are with the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, and we respect the sovereign decisions of states, just as we expect others to respect our sovereign decisions.'⁶⁹ This is a classic Omani position, reasonable, consistent and clear, allowing continuing engagement with both sides and firmly upholding the principle of sovereignty.

At the domestic level, much like elsewhere in the Arab world, there is little real appetite for normalisation with Israel. While Omanis are invariably polite and welcoming to a fault. As a number of stories in the Israeli media⁷⁰ and my own discussions with Israelis who have visited Oman with Western passports demonstrate. These stories are, to an extent, self-selecting and while personal relations with Israelis might be considered to be acceptable by segments of Omani society, full recognition and diplomatic relations is a very different matter. The example of an Israeli kite surfer who competed in Oman and won a gold medal who claimed that the Omani organisers tried to keep her win quiet, clearly demonstrates that not all is smooth sailing.⁷¹ Likewise, an

Omani blogger living in Dubai who travelled to Israel and documented her travels on Instagram was the subject of significant vitriol for having made the trip.⁷²

The January 2023 vote in the *majlis* to further strengthen the boycott of Israel is important in a number of regards. It is a very visible symbol of reticence which went against the grain of movement of the years since Netanyahu's visit. It is however important to note that the *majlis* does not officially deal with issues of foreign affairs which are usually reserved entirely to the Sultan. It is thus vanishingly unlikely that this vote would have been called, let alone passed, without official sanction.⁷³ Given the timing of the vote, in the wake of the Israeli elections on 1 November 2022 and the formation of an Israeli government including some of the most extremist Kahanist figures who had long been beyond the pale, the vote and the public refusal to allow Israeli commercial overflight rights does not seem like a coincidence. It thus allows Muscat to clearly signal concerns with the direction of travel and to assert a clear reason for stepping back from further moves to strengthen ties. This may of course sound like feverish speculation but it is not only significant from a foreign policy perspective; it also matters from a domestic perspective as well.

Domestic Concerns

While the Palestinian cause is somewhat distant from Omani citizens' lives it still matters. Despite its modernisation, the Sultanate remains a broadly conservative society and in recent years it has been noticeable that Islamic causes have become more popular, and have certainly been more vocally articulated than previously. This has expressed itself in a number of ways. In December 2014, for example, 84 per cent of *majlis al shura* members voted for a complete ban on alcohol in the Sultanate. The fact that the bill needed approval both from the council of ministers and Qaboos's formal assent meant that the law was never going to be changed but the vote, although largely ignored by most analysts at the time, was highly significant. As indeed was some of the informal polling conducted by websites such as that of the *Times of Oman* which saw 90 per cent approval of the motion. *Majlis* members themselves justified their votes with reference to the significant demand for this move from their constituents.⁷⁴

Also of note is the voice of the Grand Mufti, Ahmed al-Khalili, in post since 1975 and thus a well-established figure in the country, who has made a number of important public pronouncements on a range of policy issues in recent years, including supporting the ban on alcohol in the Sultanate. This is a significant departure from the more apolitical positions of previous years when he had cultivated a reputation for tolerance and interfaith dialogue. In an interview with *Al Jazeera* on 19 June 2022, he stated in reference to the Taliban victory in Afghanistan of the previous year, 'This is one of the miracles of Allah. The American rock shattered when confronted with the faith of the mujahideen who fight to elevate the word of Allah. This is an indication of the path to victory.'⁷⁵ On 18 October 2020, in the wake of the Abraham Accords, the Grand Mufti issued a statement via Twitter which said, 'A new negative phenomenon has appeared in the *umma*, which is wooing the enemy whom God Almighty has commanded us to be against, and bragging about it without shame or concealment.'⁷⁶ If the tweet itself was somewhat veiled, the required audience certainly understood exactly what it was in reference to if their replies are anything to go by. This was not an isolated incident either, he has issued many statements in support of the Palestinians. Most of these are formulated using the same kinds of language in reference to the Israelis that are seen in Hamas and Hezbollah political discourse. On 30 December 2022 the Grand Mufti issued a statement supporting the strengthening of the boycott law. 'We forcefully support the proposal of the respected Shura Council of Oman, which is the absolute boycott of the Zionist entity in relation to trade and other issues, for its continued aggression on the oppressed Palestinian people and disregard of their rights.'⁷⁷ In the aftermath of the announcement of Muscat opening its skies to Israeli commercial air traffic, the Grand Mufti released a statement on Twitter: 'We were surprised by the decision to open the airspace – in a way that

enables the Zionist entity's aviation to use it, and we hoped that the steadfast stance would continue, rejecting any relationship with that entity from our proud authority. How proud we were of that, and we fear that this step will be followed by other steps. So please review this account.⁷⁸

One perspective on these views being aired might be that they are useful to the government because they demonstrate to Tel Aviv that full normalisation is not possible. In a country where public dissent is a rare occurrence, such vehemence against government policy from a high-profile figure is striking. Allowing the Grand Mufti to make such statements certainly attracted comment among the diplomatic community in Muscat, with one interviewee stating, 'The more he gets away with, the more he seems to say, and the more extreme it can be.'⁷⁹

Given the significant upheavals which have faced the Sultanate over the past decade, including the Arab Spring-related protests of 2011, the oil price plunge and financial crises since 2014, the death of Sultan Qaboos in early January 2020 immediately followed by the COVID pandemic, the uncertainty has been unsettling.⁸⁰ While Haitham is legitimate and broadly popular, with the transition having gone well, recognising that there are dissenting views is important when it comes to government policy. In a sense therefore, allowing the *majlis* to vote on the boycott law and the Grand Mufti to reflect public discontent is important in a country in which religious voices are becoming louder. This helps the Sultan to maintain a degree of balance between different interest groups and shows that he is listening and governing for all.

It is noticeable that Israel made no comment on the *majlis* vote or the announcements by key figures that normalisation will not proceed, and Oman would not be recognising Israel. This seems to speak to a respect and understanding of Oman's position, its utility to Israel, and the fact that it has not opposed the wider normalisation of other Arab States through the Abraham Accords.

Omani Approaches to the Accords

Initially at least, much of the early analysis around the Accords framed them as an anti-Iranian initiative, or at least one enabled and inspired by a shared animus against the perceived and actual threats which emanated from Tehran.

Even without this perception becoming the dominant lens used to explain the sudden transformation of a tacit security regime⁸¹ into an extremely high-profile global event, joining the Accords would have been a big stretch for Muscat. With the very obvious anti-Iranian framing, Muscat's participation would have been difficult for both its general reputation as an independent, relatively non-aligned actor, as an interlocutor state and in particular for its unique relationship with Iran⁸² which is both symbolic and of great practical value.⁸³ Not least also because of the existence of Oman's exclave of the Musandam Peninsula, and thus the vital need to co-operate with Tehran over the Straits of Hormuz.⁸⁴

At the same time though, Muscat clearly assisted in many ways with the laying of at least the contextual groundwork for diplomatic normalisation between Abu Dhabi, Manama, Rabat, Khartoum and Tel Aviv. Although rather unremarked upon at the time, Oman's ambassador was one of the three Arab envoys to the US (along with those of the UAE and Bahrain) who attended the unveiling of the Abraham Accords on the lawn of the White House.⁸⁵ Indeed, Netanyahu actually publically thanked Oman for their support of the Abraham Accords deal.⁸⁶ Muscat also issued a public statement welcoming the Accords broadcast on state television, 'The Sultanate hopes that this new strategic direction, chosen by some Arab countries, will be a practical tributary toward achieving peace based on ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and establishing an independent Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem.'⁸⁷ The Omani public is rather more sceptical of the Accords. There was considerable furore in the country when Asma Al-Shehhi, an Omani blogger based in the UAE, made a trip to Israel which she publicised on social media.⁸⁸ This fuelled some of the demands for a stronger boycott law. Despite this, it

should also be noted that there are many examples of Israelis, and Jews more generally, who have received a warm welcome from individual Omanis when they have visited the country.⁸⁹ This however seems to be less likely to be the case now, given Israeli actions in Gaza since 7 October and those more recently in Lebanon.

The wider, and longstanding, context here is that Oman has always recognised the right of other Arab and Muslim countries to have relations with Israel. Even back in the heyday of Arab Nationalist anti-Israel rhetoric, and the storm created when Egypt recognised Israel and established full diplomatic relations as a result of the Camp David process, Oman refused to sanction Cairo or cut its diplomatic presence.⁹⁰ This might be seen as more of a pro-American rather than a pro-Israel stance but in reality it is more of a pro-Omani stance in being able to both keep lines of communication open and demonstrate to all actors its credentials as a country which has a certain kind of non-interventionist foreign policy.

Muscat has never cut diplomatic ties with any government, although it has on rare occasions downgraded them, as with Syria in 2012 during the revolution, just as all Gulf States either closed their missions or downgraded their representation. It was also noticeable that Muscat was the first Gulf State to reinstate its Ambassador in Damascus in October 2020.⁹¹

As the formula goes, and the principle stands, Muscat has consistently made it clear that it will not recognise Israel until full Palestinian statehood is achieved. This remains the case even as relations between the two states have waxed and waned over time. Oman places significant importance on Palestinian rights to statehood, recognising that there is a degree of leverage in its careful approach to normalisation with Israel. Even today with widespread and profound anger in the Sultanate surrounding Israeli actions in Gaza, Muscat retains the same stance that recognition would be possible with full Palestinian statehood.

Even setting aside the usual trajectory of Omani foreign policy and its underpinning logics, which mitigates strongly against a rush to formal recognition of Israel and full diplomatic relations, it remains important to examine the likely costs and benefits which are likely to accrue were Muscat to join the Abraham Accords process.

As far as potential identifiable benefits these seem small and can be divided into two elements: wider diplomatic inclusion and greater investment, perhaps the latter coming from more than just Israeli sources, but also in the form of some kind of 'peace fund' delivered by Washington. Certainly, between Netanyahu's visit in 2018 and Hamas's attack in October 2023, Oman experienced hard economic times with low oil prices, ballooning deficits and the desperate need for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to cover its diversification efforts.⁹² The chance of inclusion in the new Quad, and in the Negev forum might have been likely in addition, but as yet, these new meeting points have generated relatively little traction anyway, so seem to be of little more than limited symbolic value. As we can see, it is difficult to identify what tangible benefits to recognition there would be for Oman that are not already present in its current relationship with Israel. Perhaps the most significant benefit might actually be in terms of its relationship with the US. Given the bipartisan popularity of the Abraham Accords in Washington, coupled with President Biden's ongoing attempts at normalisation with Saudi Arabia, and especially the possibility of rewards through side-deals and relationships with Congress, which itself can possibly give Oman additional protection despite the changing occupants of the White House.⁹³

When viewed from the opposite perspective what are the likely benefits to Israel from full normalisation with Muscat? While any moves in this regard might have an immediate public relations benefit for Netanyahu and might demonstrate renewed momentum, especially around election time, this is a fleeting and short-term result which could undermine both a potential backchannel to Tehran and reduce the quality of the conversation around Iran which Muscat would not be able to provide given Tehran's likely reaction to formal Omani recognition.

While any normalisation would generate goodwill in Washington, it is not clear that Muscat is in particular need of being more in favour there. Given its important role as an interlocutor state, particularly in Yemen, and with Iran, Oman's reputation as an increasingly indispensable regional

actor for de-escalation, problem-solving and peace is extremely high at present.⁹⁴ This means that for Muscat, any benefit must clearly be not only be enduring, but would also have to make up for the likely loss of utility in foreign policy terms (especially for the US with Iran)⁹⁵ that any reduction of networks, and in its central stature as an interlocutor, would likely bring as a result of normalisation.

Conclusion

In an address to a Ministry of Foreign Affairs conference of Israeli Ambassadors on 11 December 2018, Netanyahu said, 'When I was in Oman, I spoke with Sultan Qaboos who confirmed for me that El Al would be able to overfly Oman';⁹⁶ it seemed that Qaboos did not tell him when that would be, because it took until 23 February 2023 for this to happen, not un-coincidentally at the same time as Saudi Arabia.⁹⁷ The fact that the collapse of the talks on this issue in early January, alongside the new boycott law, did not prevent an agreement the following month speaks to the pragmatism in Muscat.

Throughout 2023 there was increased speculation that Riyadh might recognise Israel as part of a grand bargain with Washington which would extract significant concessions. The disproportionate Israeli response to Hamas's unprecedented atrocities after 7 October and the increasingly hostile global environment towards Israel⁹⁸ led to some quite vocal Omani calls for a ceasefire.⁹⁹ Some even speculated that the Hamas attack was calculated to prevent what was seemingly an inevitable Saudi-US-Israeli 'grand deal' with potentially significant regional consequences. A clear cooling on normalisation over the following months ended with the Saudi Foreign Ministry issuing a formal statement stating that recognition depended upon Israel recognising 'an independent Palestinian state... on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital'.¹⁰⁰ Somewhat ironically therefore it mirrors Muscat's long-term position, and is based on the 2002 Saudi-initiated Arab Peace Initiative itself.

Oman has been increasing its public condemnation of Israeli actions and demanding an immediate ceasefire. On 9 December 2023 the Omani Foreign Minister, Sayyid Badr Albusaidi, reacted angrily on Twitter to a failure to deliver for the Palestinians:

The use of the veto at Security Council is a shameful insult to humanitarian norms. I deeply regret that the United States should sacrifice the lives of innocent civilians for the cause of Zionism. Long after we are gone the world will look back on today with shame.¹⁰¹

Open denunciation of Washington of this kind is exceptional and speaks to a real anger domestically, but also among the elite about the gravity of the situation. It is clearly the final nail in the coffin of any chance of Muscat recognising Israel without a radical transformation in the circumstances of the Palestinians. And yet, despite this anger the Omanis are still working towards a solution. At a lecture on 15 February 2024 in Oxford, Sayyid Badr made a call for an emergency conference on the recognition of Palestine; he said,

The world has deferred the question of Palestinian statehood for far too long. Too many of those who speak today in favour of a two-state solution regard this as an objective to be achieved in the distant future. It has to be done on an urgent basis. The world can't afford any more violence and we need a Palestinian state.¹⁰²

Not only do the current circumstances rule out Omani recognition of Israel, but this has been the case anyway since the Abraham Accords. Any normalisation agreement would likely be painted by others as, at the very least, being correlated with the Accords and likely perceived as such by the general public.¹⁰³ This carries domestic and regional risk and would undermine both the central plank of Muscat's foreign policy and the very significant investment of time, money

and personal reputation which has gone into nurturing the networks and outcomes associated with its mediation efforts of the past two decades and its focus on becoming an interlocutor state.¹⁰⁴

Those that frame events such as Netanyahu's visit to Muscat in 2018 as a dramatic change, heralding a realignment in Omani foreign policy are latching onto individual events and often linking them to wider trends.¹⁰⁵ Qaboos's welcome of Netanyahu was undoubtedly a bold move but it was not out of character. Bold moves do not have to herald radical change, they can in fact be a form of continuity. They are also careful adjustments within a complex foreign policy which requires some calibration and the preservation of independence.¹⁰⁶

In this case, moves such as this also represent a form of balance, not in the IR theory sense of the term whereby a state aligns with another to change the balance of power, but instead as a way to maintain relationships, to express independence, to listen and learn, to attract other benefits outside of the immediate foreign policy sphere, and importantly, to enable the very foreign policy that has stood Muscat in such good stead in recent decades. None of this means that Oman does not have more fundamental relationships with some states over others, it is more that Oman is both more useful to others *and* best serves its own interests by maintaining good relations with actors on all sides, and in therefore being useful to all sides through the construction of a role as an interlocutor state.

Clearly Omani approaches to the Abraham Accords and its bilateral relations with Israel cannot be divorced from its wider foreign policy. By maintaining, distancing, and even at times deepening relations with Israel, it can take a pragmatic stance while also maintaining a principled position on a Palestinian state.¹⁰⁷ Often the literature on small state foreign policy focuses far too intently on what small states do, and does not focus enough on how other states not only seek to influence or coerce them, but also how they aim to listen to and respect them. For Oman, dialogue, respect and listening to interlocutors are important; this has a conditioning effect on others – maintaining independence in foreign policy also means that other states begin to expect this of you. In the long term this creates respect, even more so when other states appreciate the benefits of your independence in foreign policy. Thus, one could see the establishment of the U.S.-Oman Strategic Dialogue in February 2023¹⁰⁸ not as a forum for pressure to be applied to Muscat¹⁰⁹ but as an improved channel and a sign of respect. The creation of this new forum, both publicly and privately, gives Muscat a prestigious platform and recognition for its role. It can be seen as a kind of compensation for Oman as a highly valued partner who is not taking part in the Negev Forum or the Quad. For the Omanis, this policy stance works, as has been amply evidenced by its ability to maintain clear distance from Israel, and to condemn Israeli actions in Gaza. This has generated a much more assertive form of Omani diplomacy. As the destruction of infrastructure, loss of life and immense human suffering in Gaza has grown, the more the Omanis have spoken out for a just settlement and the permanent end of the conflict.¹¹⁰

Acknowledgments

This article was first presented as a working paper at the workshop titled 'Israel and the Gulf Monarchies: A New Regional Security Complex or Just Complex Regional Security?'; held at the annual Gulf Research Meeting in Cambridge, from 11 to 13 July 2023. Many thanks to the workshop organisers, Clive Jones and Elie Podeh, discussants and participants for comments and feedback on the draft. Thanks also to the two anonymous peer reviewers at *Middle Eastern Studies* who offered useful suggestions to amplify some points, and to the editorial team at *MES* for their efficient and thorough processes. Finally, a particular thanks to many Israeli and Omani friends and colleagues who have been discussing this relationship with me over several years now for helpfully testing my thinking on these issues.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

James Worrall  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5229-5152>

Notes

1. The *majlis al shura*, the consultative council, is the democratically elected lower chamber of parliament (*majlis uman*); the upper chamber (*majlis al dawla*), the state council, is entirely appointed by the Sultan.
2. Omani airspace was in fact opened to Israel just a month later, in February 2023.
3. Uzi Rabi, 'Oman and the Arab–Israeli Conflict: The Reflection of a Pragmatic Foreign Policy', *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2005), pp.535–51; Uzi Rabi and Chelsi Mueller, 'The Gulf Arab States and Israel Since 1967: From "No Negotiation" to Tacit Cooperation', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2017), pp.576–92.
4. Clive Jones and Yoel Guzansky, 'Israel's Relations with the Gulf States: Toward the Emergence of a Tacit Security Regime?', *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2017), pp.398–419; Clive Jones and Yoel Guzansky, *Fraternal Enemies: Israel and the Gulf Monarchies* (London: Hurst, 2020).
5. James Worrall, "'Switzerland of Arabia": Omani Foreign Policy and Mediation Efforts in the Middle East', *The International Spectator*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (2021), pp.134–50.
6. Joseph Kéchichian, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* (Santa Barbara: Rand, 1995); Joseph Kéchichian, *A Sultanate that Endures: Oman in the World from Qaboos bin Sa'īd to Haitham bin Tariq* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023); Majid Al-Khalili, *Oman's Foreign Policy: Foundation and Practice* (Westport: Praeger, 2009); Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout, *Oman: Culture and Diplomacy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).
7. Gawdat Bahgat, 'Security in the Gulf: The View from Oman', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (1999), pp.445–58; Rabi, 'Oman and the Arab–Israeli Conflict'; Jeffrey Lefebvre, 'Oman's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2010), pp.99–114; Michael Bishku, 'Oman and the Indian Ocean Rim', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2014), pp.46–62; Sigurd Neubauer, 'Maritime Security in Oman', in Khalid Bichou, Joseph S. Szylowicz and Luca Zamparini (eds), *Maritime Transport Security* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2014); Worrall, "'Switzerland of Arabia'"(2021).
8. Abdullah Baaboud, 'Oman's Independent Foreign Policy', in Almezaini and Rickli (eds), *The Small Gulf States: Foreign and Security Policies Before and After the Arab Spring* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp.107–22.
9. Randall Schweller, 'Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In', *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1994), p.72; David Priess, 'Balance of Threat Theory and the Genesis of the Gulf Cooperation Council: An Interpretative Case Study', *Security Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1996), pp.143–71; Brittnee Carter, 'Revisiting the Bandwagoning Hypothesis: A Statistical Analysis of the Alliance Dynamics of Small States', *International Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (2022), pp.7–27.
10. Elisheva Rosman-Stollman, 'Balancing Acts: The Gulf States and Israel', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (2004), pp.185–208.
11. Mohammed Binhuwaidin, 'Oman's Response to a Rising Iran: A Case of Strategic Hedging', *Journal of Arabian Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2019), pp.1–12; Sofie Hamdi and Mohammad Salman, 'The Hedging Strategy of Small Arab Gulf States', *Asian Politics & Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2020), pp.127–52; Rory Miller and Harry Verhoeven, 'Overcoming Smallness: Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Strategic Realignment in the Gulf', *International Politics*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (2020), pp.1–20.
12. Yoel Guzansky, 'The Foreign-Policy Tools of Small Powers: Strategic Hedging in the Persian Gulf', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2015), pp.112–22.
13. Máté Szalai, 'Small Regimes in the Middle East: A Conceptual and Theoretical Alternative to Small States in a Non-Western Region', *International Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (2022), pp.167–86.
14. Steven David, 'Explaining Third World Alignment', *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (1991), pp.233–56.
15. Marc O'Reilly, 'Omanibalancing: Oman Confronts an Uncertain Future', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (1998), pp.70–84.
16. Clive Jones, 'Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War: The Internal-External Security Dilemma', *International Relations*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (1995), pp.31–51.
17. Michael Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
18. Victoria Dauletova, Saba al Rawas, Eram al Rawas et al., 'This Is How They Do It: A Conflict Management Model in Oman', *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2024), pp.507–24.
19. Jones and Ridout, *Oman: Culture and Diplomacy* (2012).
20. Szalai, 'Small Regimes in the Middle East' (2022).
21. Giorgi Gvalia, David Siroky, Bidzina Lebanidze et al., 'Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States', *Security Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2013), pp.98–131.
22. Máté Szalai, *The Foreign Policy of Smaller Gulf States: Size, Power and Regime Stability in the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2021).

23. Baaboud, 'Oman's Independent Foreign Policy' (2017).
24. Binhuwaidin, 'Oman's Response to a Rising Iran' (2019).
25. Maryam Al-Bolushi, 'The Effect of Omani-Iranian Relations on the Security of the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries after the Arab Spring', *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2016), pp.383–99.
26. Worrall, "Switzerland of Arabia" (2021), p.141.
27. Kristina Kausch, 'The Promise of Middle Eastern Swing States', *Carnegie Europe*, 12 May 2016: <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/05/12/promise-of-middle-eastern-swing-states/iy77>; Silvia Colombo, 'Foreign Policy Activism in Saudi Arabia and Oman. Diverging Narratives and Stances towards the Syrian and Yemeni Conflicts', *The International Spectator*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2017), pp.54–70.
28. Worrall, "Switzerland of Arabia" (2021).
29. For Oman's complex stance on Ukraine see: 'The UN Resolution on Ukraine: How Did the Middle East Vote?', Policy Watch 3586, *The Washington Institute*, 2 March 2022: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/un-resolution-ukraine-how-did-middle-east-vote>; Giorgio Cafiero, 'Understanding Oman's Stance on the Ukraine War', *Gulf International Forum*: <https://gulfig.org/understanding-omans-stance-on-the-ukraine-war/>; 'Inside Story: The Emerging Iran-Ukraine Dialogue in Oman', *Amwaj Media*, 15 February 2023: <https://amwaj.media/article/inside-story-the-emerging-iran-ukraine-dialogue-in-oman>; 'Ukraine Conflict and Oman's Mediator Role in the Middle East', *Special Eurasia*, 20 February 2023: <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2023/02/20/oman-mediator-iran-ukraine/>.
30. Samuel Ramani, 'The Growing Strength of Russian-Omani Ties', *Middle East Institute*, 10 March 2020: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/growing-strength-russian-omani-ties>.
31. Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations: The Societal Approach* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014).
32. Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez, *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level* (Basingstroke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
33. Rabi, 'Oman and the Arab-Israeli Conflict' (2005), p.539.
34. Worrall, "Switzerland of Arabia" (2021).
35. For Oman and the wider Middle East's bypassing of the Uigur genocide see: 'China: UN Uyghur Report Met With Silence in Middle East', *Middle East Eye*, 1 September 2022: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/china-uyghur-un-report-middle-east-silence>; 'China Urges Omanis to Invest in Xinjiang Despite 'Genocide'', *New Arab*, 21 April 2022: <https://www.newarab.com/news/china-urges-omanis-invest-xinjiang-despite-genocide>.
36. 'Syria's Assad Visits Oman in First Post-Earthquake Trip', *Reuters*, 20 February 2023: [https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/syrias-assad-visits-oman-first-post-earthquake-trip-2023-02-20/#:~:text=BEIRUT%2C%20Feb%2020%20\(Reuters\),12%20years%20of%20civil%20war](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/syrias-assad-visits-oman-first-post-earthquake-trip-2023-02-20/#:~:text=BEIRUT%2C%20Feb%2020%20(Reuters),12%20years%20of%20civil%20war); Robert Mason, 'Oman's Diplomacy-First Approach on Syria Gains Wider Support', *ISPI*, 6 March 2023: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/omans-diplomacy-first-approach-on-syria-gains-wider-support-119592>.
37. When it does of course it sends a stronger signal, as it did in January 2023 after Israeli incursions into Jenin. 'Oman Condemns Israel's Aggression against Palestinian People', Foreign Ministry of Oman, 26 January 2023: <https://www.fm.gov.om/oman-condemns-israels-aggression-against-palestinian-people/>; 'Oman condemns Israeli aggression against Gaza Strip and West Bank', Foreign Ministry of Oman, 10 May 2023: <https://fm.gov.om/oman-condemns-aggression-by-israeli-forces-against-gaza-strip/>. The current Gaza situation and the scale of the catastrophe has of course been exceptional and required much stronger and more frequent condemnation.
38. Elie Podeh, 'Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative, 2002–2014: A Plausible Missed Opportunity', *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 4, (2014), pp.584–603; Rabi and Mueller, 'The Gulf Arab States and Israel Since 1967' (2017).
39. Judith Miller, 'Creating Modern Oman: An Interview with Sultan Qabus', *Foreign Affairs*, (1997): <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/oman/1997-05-01/creating-modern-oman-interview-sultan-qabus>; Bahgat, 'Security in the Gulf: The View from Oman' (1999).
40. James Worrall, *International Institutions of the Middle East: The GCC, Arab League, and Arab Maghreb Union* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp.100-03.
41. Robert Mason, 'The Omani Pursuit of a Large Peninsula Shield Force: A Case Study of a Small State's Search for Security', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2014), pp.355–67.
42. 'The Fruits of Peace', Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 August 2000: <https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/the-fruits-of-peace>.
43. 'Oman – UN Watch Database': <https://unwatch.org/database/country/oman/>.
44. On Oman, see Rabi, 'Oman and the Arab-Israeli Conflict'; on Qatar, see Uzi Rabi, 'Qatar's Relations with Israel: Challenging Arab and Gulf Norms', *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (2009), pp.443–59; Ariel Admoni, 'Peace Is Relative: Qatar and Agreements with Israel', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 28, Nos. 3–4 (2021), pp.72–87.
45. 'Fostering A Better Future', Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 June 2009: <https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/fostering-a-better-future>.
46. See Middle East Desalination Research Centre: <https://www.medrc.org/>.
47. Katariina Simonen, *Ancient Water Agreements, Tribal Law and Ibadism: Sources of Inspiration for the Middle East Desalination Research Centre – and Beyond?* (Cham: Switzerland: Springer, 2021).

48. 'Remarks by FM Livni - Middle East Desalination Research Center', *Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 24 September 2007: <https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/news/remarks-by-fm-livni-middle-east-desalination-research-center-24-sep-2007>.
49. Ciarán Cuinn, 'Muscat, Madrid, Ulster, and the Holy Land: The MEDRC Model of Environmental Peacebuilding in a Revived Middle East Peace Process', *New England Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2024), Article 10.
50. 'Israeli and Omani Ministers Meet', *BBC News*, 14 April 2008: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7346344.stm. The two clearly retained cordial relations even after Livni finished her career as a minister, and were photographed talking on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in 2019. See also Barak Ravid on Twitter: 'Tzipi Livni with Omani foreign minister Yusuf Bin Alawi in Munich', 15 February 2019: <https://t.co/IMbDXSDEva>.
51. Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965: Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins: Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).
52. James Worrall, 'Johnson, Henry James [Jim]', in H.C.G. Matthew, B. Harrison and L. Goldman (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
53. James Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman: Political, Military and Diplomatic Relations at the End of Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).
54. In a 2018 interview with the author, Halevy talked about his time in Oman during the 1970s.
55. Jones and Guzansky, *Fraternal Enemies*, p.51.
56. David Horovitz, 'Smiley & Me? No, No, No, No! Ex-Mossad Chief on His Non-Link to Le Carré's Antihero', *The Times of Israel*, 14 December 2020: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/smiley-me-no-no-no-ex-mossad-chief-on-his-non-link-to-le-carres-antihero/>.
57. 'Oman Says It's Time to Accept Israel in Region', *Voice of America News*, 27 October 2018: <https://www.voanews.com/a/oman-says-time-to-accept-israel-in-region/4631559.html>.
58. Adam Rasgon, 'Omani FM visits Ramallah after Netanyahu's visit to Muscat', *The Times of Israel*, 31 October 2018: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/omani-fm-visits-ramallah-after-netanyahus-visit-to-muscat/#:~:text=Omani%20Foreign%20Minister%20Yusuf%20bin%20Alawi%20met%20Palestinian%20Authority%20President,PA%20news%20site%20Wafa%20reported>.
59. 'TV Report: Oman Sought to Broker Israel-Iran Talks in 2013; Netanyahu Said No', *The Times of Israel*, 2 February 2020: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/tv-report-oman-sought-to-broker-israel-iran-talks-in-2013-netanyahu-said-no/>.
60. 'Mossad Chief Declares Israel Renewing Oman Ties; Foreign Ministry Won't Comment', *The Times of Israel*, 2 July 2019: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-renewing-oman-ties-says-mossad-chief/>.
61. 'Oman Denies Diplomatic Ties Agreed with Israel', *France 24*, 2 July 2019: <https://www.france24.com/en/20190702-oman-denies-diplomatic-ties-agreed-with-israel>.
62. 'Oman to Open Embassy in Palestinian Territories' West Bank - Foreign Ministry', *Reuters*, 26 June 2019: <https://www.reuters.com/article/markets/commodities/oman-to-open-embassy-in-palestinian-territories-west-bank-foreign-ministry-idUSL8N23X298/>.
63. 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates: Welcomes the Decision of the Sultanate of Oman to Open an Embassy in the State of Palestine', Statement, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Palestine*, 27 June 2019: <https://www.mofa.pna.ps/ps/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-expatriates-welcomes-the-decision-of-the-sultanate-of-oman-to-open-an-embassy-in-the-state-of-palestine>.
64. Joseph Hincks, 'How the Middle East Responded to Trump's Peace Plan', *Time*, 29 January 2020: <https://time.com/5773814/middle-east-peace-plan-response/>.
65. Varun Godinho, 'Plans Unveiled for Trump Golf Resort in Oman', *Business Traveller*, 22 November 2022: <https://www.businesstraveller.com/business-travel/2022/11/22/plans-unveiled-for-trump-golf-resort-in-oman/>.
66. Sebastian Castelier, 'Oman's Foreign Policy After Sultan Qaboos', *Al-Monitor*, 13 March 2020: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/03/oman-foreign-policy-gulf-sultan-qaboos-haitham.html>.
67. 'Video: First speech of HM Sultan Haitham', *Oman Observer*, 19 February 2020: <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/16336/Main-video-first-speech-of-hm-sultan-haitham>.
68. 'Oman Content with Current Israel Relationship, Foreign Minister Says', *Reuters*, 11 February 2021: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/oman-content-with-current-israel-relationship-foreign-minister-says-idUSKBN2AB1XA/>.
69. 'Oman Pledges Not to Normalise Relations with Israel', *Middle East Monitor*, 25 February 2021: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230225-oman-pledges-not-to-normalise-relations-with-israel/>; 'Interview with Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi with the *Asharq Al-Awsat* Newspaper', Press Release, *Foreign Ministry of Oman*, 10 July 2021: <https://www.fm.gov.om/interview-with-his-excellency-foreign-minister-badr-albusaidi-with-asharq-al-awsat-newspaper/>.
70. Yoav Liomor, 'An Overlooked Powerhouse: The Fascinating Sultanate That Israelis Would Love to Visit', *Israel Hayom*, 11 September 2022: <https://www.israelhayom.com/2022/09/11/an-overlooked-powerhouse-the-fascinating-sultanate-that-israelis-would-love-to-visit/>.

71. 'Israeli Kiteboarder Who Won Gold Medal in Oman Says Organizers Hushed Up Her Win', *The Times of Israel*, 25 December 2021: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-kiteboarder-who-won-gold-medal-in-oman-says-organizers-hushed-her-win/>.
72. 'Oman Blogger Criticised Over Visit to Israel', *Middle East Monitor*, 6 February 2023: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230206-oman-blogger-criticised-over-visit-to-israel/>.
73. I am grateful to Abdullah Baaboud for discussing this point with me.
74. Aarti Nagraj, 'Majority Of Oman's Shura Council Votes To Ban Alcohol In Country', *Gulf Business*, 10 December 2014: <https://gulfbusiness.com/majority-omans-shura-council-votes-ban-alcohol-country/>.
75. 'Oman Grand Mufti on Aljazeera: Taliban Victory is a "Miracle"', *MEMRI*, 27 June 2022: <https://www.memri.org/reports/grand-mufti-oman-ahmed-bin-hamad-al-khalili-al-jazeera-talibans-victory-over-us-miracle>.
76. Ahmed al Khalili, @AhmadbinHamidAlkhalilii on Twitter: "'zaharat" fi al'umat zahirat salbiat jadidat wahi al-tawadud 'iilaa aleadui aladhi 'amarana allah taealaa bieadawatihi, waltabahi bidhalik min ghayr aistihya' wala aistikhfai'n, waqad tasarae 'iilaa hadha baed rumuz al'umat aladhin kunaa naeiduhum laha awtadan wqlaeen, fa'iidha bihim yatakhalawn ean madihim almushriqa, wayarfaeun min alshiearat ma yuqaribuhum zulfaa 'iilaa sadatihim', *Twitter*, 18 October 2020: <https://t.co/tNDqTL3Qmu>. See also, 'Oman Grand Mufti Slams Arabs "Wooing" Enemy', *New Arab*, 19 October 2020: <https://www.newarab.com/news/oman-grand-mufti-slams-arabs-wooing-enemy>.
77. 'Oman: Arabs Hail Mufti's Anti-Normalisation Stance', *Middle East Monitor*, 31 December 2022: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20221231-oman-arabs-hail-muftis-anti-normalisation-stance/>.
78. Ahmed al Khalili, @AhmadbinHamidAlkhalilii, on Twitter: 'fujina mufaja'atan lam takhtur minaa ealaa albal biqarar fath almajal aljawiyyi -bima yumakin tayaran alkian alsahyunii min aistiemalihi-, wakunaa narju 'an yastamira almaqif alsaamid alraafid li'ayi ealaqat bidhalik alkian min saltanatina al'abiati. kam kunaa nae-tazu bidhalika, wanakhshaa 'an tali hadhih alkhatwat khatawat 'ukhraa. lidhalika; narju murajaeat alhisab fi hadha', *Twitter*, 24 February 2023: <https://t.co/Pygx5nggi5>.
79. Interview with a senior European diplomat, Muscat, September 2022.
80. James Worrall, 'Oman: The "Forgotten" Corner of the Arab Spring', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2012), pp.98–115.
81. Jones and Guzansky, 'Israel's Relations with the Gulf States' (2017).
82. Al-Bolushi, 'The Effect of Omani-Iranian Relations on the Security of the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries after the Arab Spring' (2016); Marc Valeri, 'Iran-Oman Relations Since the 1970s: A Mutually Beneficial Modus Vivendi', in Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Neil Quilliam and Gawdat Bahgat (eds), *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and Its Arab Neighbours* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), pp.149–66; Cinzia Bianco, 'The GCC Monarchies: Perceptions of the Iranian Threat Amid Shifting Geopolitics', *The International Spectator* Vol. 55, No. 2 (2020), pp.92–107.
83. Giorgio Cafero, 'A Diplomatic Bridge: Oman's Relations With Iran', *New Arab*, 9 January 2023: <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/diplomatic-bridge-omans-relations-iran/>; Issam Yahya Al Zadjali, 'Oman-Iran: A relationship with the foundation of culture', *Tehran Times*, 26 May 2023: <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/485132/Oman-Iran-A-relationship-with-the-foundation-of-culture/>; 'Omani-Iranian Relations Witness Remarkable Growth', *Oman Observer*, 25 May 2023: <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1137698/oman/omani-iranian-relations-witness-remarkable-growth>.
84. I am grateful to a GRM workshop participant for reminding me to emphasise this important geographical point here.
85. Lahav Harkov, 'Bahrain, UAE, Oman Envoys at White House Unveiling of Trump Peace Deal', *The Jerusalem Post*, 29 January 2020: <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/bahrain-uae-envoys-come-to-white-house-for-trump-deal-of-the-century-615706>.
86. 'PM Netanyahu Thanks Egyptian President al-Sisi and the Governments of Oman and Bahrain', *Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 14 August 2020: <https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/news/pm-netanyahu-thanks-egyptian-president-al-sisi-and-the-governments-of-oman-and-bahrain-14-august-2020>.
87. 'Oman Welcomes Normalization of Ties Between Israel and Bahrain', *The Times of Israel*, 13 September 2020: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/oman-welcomes-normalization-of-ties-between-israel-and-bahrain/>.
88. 'UAE-Based Omani Blogger Sparks Fury with Trip to Israel', *New Arab*, 5 February 2023: <https://www.newarab.com/news/uae-based-omani-blogger-sparks-fury-trip-israel>.
89. For example, Ari Zivotofsky and Ari Greenspan, 'Shifting Sands', 9 August 2022: <https://mishpacha.com/shifting-sands/>.
90. Uzi Rabi, 'Oman and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Reflection of a Pragmatic Foreign Policy', *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2005), p.538; Christopher Wren, 'Sudan Reappraising Close Ties to Egypt' *New York Times*, 7 December 1979: <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/12/07/archives/sudan-reappraising-close-ties-to-egypt-implics-a-curtailement-if.html>.
91. 'Oman Becomes First Gulf State to Reinstate Ambassador in Syria', *Al Jazeera*, 5 October 2020: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/5/oman-becomes-first-gulf-state-to-reinstate-ambassador-in-syria>.

92. Crystal Ennis and Said Al-Saqri, 'Oil Price Collapse and the Political Economy of Post-2014 Economic Adjustment in the Sultanate of Oman', in Martin Beck and Thomas Richter (eds), *Oil and the Political Economy in the Middle East* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), pp.79–101.
93. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers who suggested the potential importance of the Congressional dimension in the relationship.
94. Worrall, "Switzerland of Arabia" (2021).
95. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, 'Oman Has a Crucial Role in Diplomacy Between Iran and the US', *UPI*, 18 April 2024: <https://www.upi.com/Voices/2024/04/18/Oman-has-a-crucial-role-in-diplomacy-between-Iran-and-the-US/8041713446376/>.
96. 'PM Netanyahu Addresses MFA Conference of Israeli Ambassadors to North America, Europe, International Organizations, the Middle East and Eurasia', *Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 10 December 2018: <https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/news/pm-netanyahu-addresses-mfa-conference-of-israeli-ambassadors-to-north-america-europe-international-organizations-the-middle-east-and-eurasia>.
97. 'Oman Joins Saudi in Opening its Airspace for Israeli Carriers', *Al Jazeera*, 23 February 2023: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/23/oman-joins-saudi-in-opening-its-airspace-for-israeli-carriers#:~:text=Israeli%20airlines%20can%20now%20fly,its%20airspace%20for%20all%20carriers.&text=23%20Feb%202023-,Israeli%20airlines%20can%20now%20fly%20over%20Oman%20after%20the%20Gulf,the%20civil%20aviation%20authority%27s%20requirements>.
98. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, 'GCC States and the War on Gaza: Positions, Perceptions, and Interests', *Arab Center DC*, 22 November 2023: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/gcc-states-and-the-war-on-gaza-positions-perceptions-and-interests/>.
99. The Omani Foreign Minister has been especially active and explicit in wanting talks to include Hamas and others in seeking not just a ceasefire but a solution to the conflict. Sayyid Badr Albusaidi, 'Oman's Foreign Minister Calls for an Emergency Peace Conference', *The Economist*, 21 February 2024: <https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2024/02/21/omans-foreign-minister-calls-for-an-emergency-peace-conference>.
100. 'Saudi Arabia: No Israel Ties Without Recognition of Palestinian State', *Reuters*, 2 February 2024: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-says-there-will-be-no-diplomatic-relations-with-israel-without-an-2024-02-07/>.
101. Badr Albusaidi, 'The use of the veto at Security Council is a shameful insult to humanitarian norms. I deeply regret that the United States should sacrifice the lives of innocent civilians for the cause of Zionism. Long after we are gone the world will look back on today with shame', *Twitter*, 9 December 2023: <https://x.com/badrbusaidi/status/1733374636513964348>.
102. Lemma Shehadi, 'Oman's Foreign minister Calls For urgent Conference To Recognise Palestine', *The National*, 16 February 2024: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2024/02/16/omans-foreign-minister-call-s-for-urgent-conference-to-recognise-palestine/>.
103. Guy Azriel, 'Israel's FM Cohen Holds Rare Phone Call With Omani Counterpart', *I24News*, 16 March 2023: <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/diplomacy/1678880260-i24news-exclusive-israel-s-fm-cohen-holds-rare-phone-call-with-omani-counterpart>.
104. Worrall, "Switzerland of Arabia" (2021).
105. Imad Harb, 'Walking a Tightrope: Oman and Normalization with Israel', *Arab Center DC*, 7 March 2023: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/walking-a-tightrope-oman-and-normalization-with-israel/>.
106. Worrall, "Switzerland of Arabia" (2021), p.146.
107. Edwin Tran, 'The Israeli Connection: Oman's Foreign Policy, Part 4', *International Review*, 16 December 2019: <https://international-review.org/the-israeli-connection-omans-foreign-policy-part-4/>.
108. 'Joint Statement on the U.S.-Oman Strategic Dialogue', Press Release, *United States Department of State*, 23 February 2023: <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-u-s-oman-strategic-dialogue-2/>. See also the 2024 statement on the second round of this new forum, 24 April 2024: <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-second-u-s-oman-strategic-dialogue/>.
109. Imad Harb, 'Walking a Tightrope: Oman and Normalization with Israel', *Arab Center DC*, 7 March 2023: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/walking-a-tightrope-oman-and-normalization-with-israel/>.
110. James Worrall, 'Oman, "Assertive Diplomacy" and the Gaza Crisis', *RUSI Commentary*, 5 March 2024: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/oman-assertive-diplomacy-and-gaza-crisis>.