



H.E. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Albusaidi Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sultanate of Oman

Gulf Affairs: Oman’s foreign policy has often been described as independent and pragmatic. How would you define Oman’s approach to international relations?

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Albusaidi: Our approach is pragmatic because we have to focus on what is achievable. We are collaborative and inclusive because international problems require multilateral solutions—no country large or small can solve the world’s problems alone. We are guided by humanitarian ideals of tolerance and mutual respect. Finally, we attach great importance to the principle of non-interference.

Gulf Affairs: What are the main security challenges facing Oman today? How is Omani diplomacy mobilized to address them?

Albusaidi: Regrettably, our region of the world is troubled at this present time, and in particular the war in Yemen is a matter of great concern. The focus of our diplomacy is always to keep talking with all parties, to keep lines of communication open. You may have noticed, for instance, that the Sultanate of Oman did not take sides during the 1980–1988 Iraq-Iran war, but equally, we kept our Embassy in Baghdad open during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990.

Gulf Affairs: What is Oman’s position on the war in Yemen? What does Oman see as the solution to the conflict?

Albusaidi: Oman supports peace and a peaceful solution to this conflict. The key first step is a ceasefire. This would create the necessary positive momentum to allow dialogue to gain traction—we have supported a number of initiatives that have so far been unsuccessful. No doubt Omani diplomacy will continue to support all efforts directed at bringing about peace in Yemen. We will also continue to do whatever we can to address the many serious humanitarian issues that arise—whether it is providing medical help, other forms of aid or seeking the release of hostages.

Gulf Affairs: In which areas does Oman want to see greater cooperation with its fellow GCC countries? Does Oman want to see an expansion of the GCC’s mandate?

Albusaidi: In the early 1990s, Oman tried to get agreement for greater defense cooperation, but the moment had already passed. So, no, Oman does not see an expansion in the GCC’s mandate at this time. Of course, it is easy to be wise after the event, yet it is worth noting that had we succeeded back in the early 1990s to build a collective and inclusive regional security structure, then the war in Iraq in 2003 would probably never have happened. So much human suffering and many of the region’s current problems would have been avoided. A few years ago, there was talk of a GCC union and also of a single currency. We don’t view these suggestions as practical and we would not participate in the event that they materialized.

Gulf Affairs: Compared to other GCC countries, Oman has enjoyed more cordial relations with Iran. How would you explain this difference?

Albusaidi: We Omanis have enjoyed good relations with Iran for a very long time—whether it has been the Iran of the Shah or the Islamic Republic makes no difference. There are important geostrategic factors: we share responsibility with Iran for the security of the Strait of Hormuz and in maintaining extensive and direct access to the Indian Ocean. We look to Iran, but also East Africa, South and Central Asia, and our GCC brothers as partners. We have also long ago settled all territorial issues with our neighbors.

Gulf Affairs: The Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC) is a rare example of cooperation between Arabs and Israelis. Can you explain the Center’s rationale and its main achievements?

Albusaidi: Water is a critical issue for everyone in the region. In the 1990s, when the peace process was on track, we identified the cost of desalination as a major impediment to achieving sustainable water security. We hosted the Water Working Group in Muscat in 1994, and MEDRC was set up soon after in what was called the multilateral phase of the Oslo process. It was a good issue around which all parties could collaborate constructively.

The main achievement has been to keep pressing on in a positive spirit, with all parties concentrating on the technical mission of research, training and capacity building, and refraining from embroiling MEDRC in negative politics. Crucially, despite the deterioration in the peace process, MEDRC is supported by all sides. I should add that Oman, as always, supported peace efforts all the way back to the first Camp David agreement negotiated in 1978.