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The Omani National Counterterrorism Policies and Forces

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Abstract

Collective security and international cooperation are an integral and inseparable system where the state must give and support in exchange for requesting and getting back based on reciprocity. Although parts of the approach may seem offensive, the principles and motives of the state are defensive. The data collected for this research were extracted from interviews conducted in a semi-structured style and from policy analyses achieved through observing procedures, reviewing related legislation, and a detailed review of all previously associated policies. Based on the methods used in this policy, the Sultanate of Oman has integrated collective security within its national security strategy by adopting international efforts within its guidelines. This has occurred through ratification and taking the necessary measures to implement them as part of its legislation and applying internationally agreed standards in its policies. These methods are proactive and aim to intervene and stop the terrorist attacks before they happen, eliminating the terrorist threat.

Keywords: Oman, Counterterrorism, Policies, Forces

Introduction:

The national counter-terrorism strategy is a government plan by which the instruments of national power are used to neutralize terrorists, their organizations, and their affiliates, aiming to render them incapable of using violence to spread fear and to force the government or its people to act following the terrorist's will (Stigall, et al, (2019). And the elements of any

national counter-terrorism strategy are threefold: the planner and executor of the strategy, the instruments of the strategy, and the purpose of the strategy. Based on this, the Omani national counter-terrorism strategy should include state policies seen through laws and regulations, enacted, and implemented by the government through its different bodies and officials, all aiming at counterterrorism. This paper explores the elements of the Omani counter-terrorism strategy. And while some methods and measures are used to detect and prevent terrorism; such as intensifying and accelerating the information exchange with other states, denying the transport of weapons and material through Omani territories, and prohibiting the creation or establishment of an organization, agency, political party or association that opposes the fundamental regulations of the Sultanate of Oman or other states (Alfarsi, 2019), other methods of collective security and international cooperation are offensive. Some of the offensive methods are preventing terrorists from acting against other states from within Omani territory, freezing the bank and financial institution accounts and assets of suspected terrorists or terrorist groups, preventing the commission of any terrorist acts through an early warning mechanism, assisting in areas of investigations, proceedings and facilitating legal procedures (Harmon, et al., 2010).

Counter Terrorism Policies:

Before exploring the Omani counter-terrorism policies, it is crucial to distinguish between states' defensive and offensive approaches to counterterrorism. Different policies reflect the realist approach that the government adopts, whether offensive realism or defensive realism. The defensive realism approach considers responding to attacks and detecting and preventing threats in the state itself. Whereas the offensive realism approach is more proactive, using

force and military doctrines against the threats in its stronghold. Regarding the methods related to each approach, the offensive realism approach adopts confrontational methods that are likely to involve preemptive and preventive strikes. The defensive realism approach leans towards more non-confrontational methods. Regarding states' security stability, those states that adopt an offensive realism approach frequently encounter security crises due to their aggressive policies (Chandio, 2015). However, the states that adopt a defensive realism approach are mostly peaceful and enjoy security stability through their non-aggressive policies. Regarding the military display of the state's capabilities, states that adopt an offensive realism approach tend to conceal their military capabilities to hide their vulnerabilities (Buzan, 1996). In contrast, the countries that adopt a defensive realism approach tend to display their military capabilities to deter others.

The main principles of defensive realism are that the state should aim to maintain its status quo, safeguard and defend its territory and resources to maintain its security stability, that the state should consider the constant possibility of a terrorist threat, and should counter any potential threat using as little aggression as possible (Walt, 1987). The main principles of offensive realism are that the state should seek to expand its control using force and reply with aggression to any threat that might affect the state (Toft & Mearsheimer, 2005). The following table summarizes the main differences between the defensive and offensive policies for easier reference while analyzing Omani policies.

Table 1: Comparison between offensive and defensive realism (Author, 2020)

		Offensive	**Defensive**
Approach	Approach	Force proactive and military	Responding, detective, and preventive

	Methods	Confrontation and strikes	Non-confrontational
	Military capabilities	Conceal	Display
Principles	Aim	Increase power	Security stability
	Expansion	Expand	Maintain status quo
	Aggression	More aggression	Less aggression
	Threat	Must be eliminated	Always around
Security Stability		Peaceful and stable	Crises

Counter Terrorism Policies in Oman:

Having compared the defensive and offensive perspectives on counter-terrorism based on their basic approach and the principles they support, we can analyze the approach that the Sultanate of Oman adopts after exploring Omani policies on counter terrorism which include restrictions to the entrance to the state territories, border, and port control, social integration, collective security, and international cooperation.

First: Restrictions to Entrance to the State Territories

According to the Omani Foreign Residence Law (1995), a person is considered a foreigner if he does not hold Omani nationality. Therefore, he does not have free entrance to Omani territories. A foreigner is denied entry to Omani territories unless he has a valid passport or

travel document. The passport or travel documents should be valid and issued by a competent authority and should allow the holder to return to the state that gave them (Alfarsi, 2019). A foreigner should also obtain a visa before entering Omani state territories, either from the Omani embassy or the Omani consulate or from the authority responsible for Omani nationals' interests abroad (Albahlani, 2019). Furthermore, the entry to and exit from Omani territories should only be through the border checkpoint specified by the General Inspector of Police and Customs. After obtaining proper permission from the officer in charge through stamping the passport or travel documents (Royal Oman Police, 2017).

These policies are generally applied to foreigners for entry into the Omani territories. Still, the Omani Foreign Residence Law (1995) gave exceptions to the following groups of people for political, diplomatic, or humanitarian reasons: nationals of the Gulf Cooperation Council member states; heads of foreign states, their families and retinue; heads and members of foreign diplomatic and consulate missions, and their administrators and technicians, and their families; heads and members of international bodies, and their administrators and technicians, and their families; and the shipmaster, pilots and crew members of civil ships and planes holding a permit to land at the Sultanate of Oman. In the case of an emergency or other compelling reason, passengers of ships and aircraft that land in the territories of the Sultanate of Oman are permitted to stay if the ship or plane stays (Albahlani, 2019). In such cases, the shipmaster or pilot should inform the authorities if any passengers have left the ship or aircraft and hand over their passports. Notwithstanding the above exceptions, the General Inspector of Police and Customs has the discretion to decide to exclude any other case for humanitarian or international courtesy reasons and have the authority to issue decisions regarding administrative deportation of foreigners in other cases (Royal Decree no.16., 1995).

Having looked at Omani policies controlling the entrance to Omani territories, the policies can be summarized and analyzed about the two types of approaches that states adopt to

counter-terrorism, defensive and offensive, as per the comparison in Table 1. The approach that was adopted in these policies prevents terrorists from entering Omani territories through non-confrontational methods. The state believes any foreign entrance to state territories may pose a threat of terrorism entering the state, threatening state security stability. Therefore, controlling the Omani territories entrance is a general policy that holds no aggression towards terrorists specifically. The perspective of Table 1 concludes that controlling the Omani territories entrance is a defensive policy for countering terrorism.

Secord: Border and Port Control

The Sultanate of Oman is a coastal state located in the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula, with approximately 309,500 square kilometers (Ministry of Information, 2000). It shares land borders with three Arabian Peninsula states, the United Arab Emirates at the northwest, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the west, and the Republic of Yemen at the southwest Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Map of the Sultanate of Oman (World Atlas, 2019)

As is clear from Figure 1, Oman has a long coastline that extends to 3,165km from the Strait of Hormuz in the north to the border of the Republic of Yemen, overlooking the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Arabian Sea (World Atlas, 2019).

Land Border Control

The Sultanate of Oman has established thirteen land border checkpoints to facilitate entry to the state territories over land as per information provided by the Ministry of Tourism (2016) and the National Center for Statistics and Information (2019). Any entry from other border

points is denied, rejected, and punishable by the state (Royal Decree no.16, 1995). The Sultanate of Oman shares ten border checkpoints with the United Arab Emirates, all within a borderline of 410km. The Sultanate of Oman transmits only one border checkpoint with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at Ramlat Khelah border checkpoint with the Governorate of Dhahirah within a borderline of 676km. The final two border checkpoints are shared with the Republic of Yemen at Almazyoonah and Sarfait border checkpoints with the Governorate of Dhofar within a borderline of 288km. According to the United States Department of State (2018), despite the significant challenges facing the Sultanate of Oman with its borders, the Omani authorities continued their success in preventing illegal entry through different means. One of these means is constructing a security fence along the border, such as the fence along the borderline with the Republic of Yemen. Another is collective security; through frequently engaging with other states in border security training, such as the mutual training related to border security with the United States of America (United States Department of State, 2018), as well as signing border agreements with neighboring states which incorporate different aspects of preventing smuggling, infiltration and other border security issues.

The force in charge of securing the Sultanate of Oman land borders and all its facilities, including border checkpoints, is the Royal Oman Police and the Border Guard Brigade of the Royal Army of Oman. The role of the Royal Oman Police is to oversee and manage immigration through the border checkpoints on a day-to-day basis through inspecting all the arrivals using the checkpoints and ensuring that they are authorized and hold sufficient approval to enter the state territories. Besides, incoming vehicles and their cargo are inspected to ensure that no unauthorized material or equipment is imported into the Sultanate of Oman. Moreover, the Royal Oman Police is responsible for registering and keeping a record of the names and details of everyone entering the state through the border checkpoints (Albahlani, 2019). The Border Guard brigade at the Royal Army of Oman is a special brigade

that protects borderlines' operational and training fields. Its members boast a high level of permanent readiness and high combat competence to perform their duties (Ministry of Defence, 2014). Alfarsi (2019) states that the role of the Border Guard Brigade is to guard and control the long land borders between the Sultanate of Oman and its neighbor states to prevent any movement from or entrance to the territories of the Sultanate of Oman from any place along the borders, other than the border checkpoints, as well as protecting the checkpoints and their facilities against attack and deterring any threat.

Port Control

Regarding maritime checkpoints, according to the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Tourism (2016), and the National Center for Statistics and Information (2019), the Sultanate of Oman currently has six ports that are used on an international level and receive international vessels. These are Sultan Qaboos Port in Matrah in the Governorate of Muscat, Salalah Port in the Governorate of Dhofar, Suhar Port in the Governorate of North Albatina, Khasab Port in the Governorate of Musandam, Shinas Port in the Governorate of North Albatina, and Duqum Port in the Governorate of Alwosta. These six ports are the passage to enter the Sultanate of Oman through its maritime borders, locations foreigners can use to enter state territories, and local people to import all types of goods and materials. Any entry from other maritime points is denied, rejected, and punishable by the state (Royal Oman Police, 2017). Other ports operate on a domestic level and are currently used for fishing and tourism but are planned to be expanded to start running on an international level; these include Suwaiq Port in the Governorate of North Albatina and Masira Port in the Government of South Alsharqiya.

The forces in charge of securing the Sultanate of Oman maritime borders and its facilities - including the ports - to prevent illegal immigration and importation to the state, are the Coast Guard Police Command of the Royal Oman Police (Royal Oman Police, 2017) and the

Maritime Security Center of the Ministry of Defence (Ministry of Defence, 2014). The Coast Guard Police Command is one of the specialized Commands of the Royal Oman Police. According to the Royal Oman Police (2017), the Coast Guard Command was established in 1972 as a unit with limited capabilities and equipment in the workforce and boats. The principal objective of the Coast Guard Unit was to secure the maritime borders of the Governorate of Muscat only. However, the unit was reformed in 2003 and developed into the Coast Guard Police Command. The new Command introduced an increased workforce and modern and sophisticated boats. The Command's role is to protect the Omani regional sea, conduct search operations, combat smuggling, and piracy, prevent illegal infiltration and immigration from maintaining the state security, and ensure intruders and unauthorized goods and materials are kept away from the state territories (Alfarsi, 2019). In addition to maintaining security and order inside the ports and harbors along the Omani coasts. The Coast Guard Police Command includes several specialized departments such as the Maritime Rescue Department and the Operations Department (Royal Oman Police, 2017).

Due to the importance and significance of securing the ports and operations, a special department concerned with port security was established within the Coast Guard Command in 2013 (Alfarsi, 2019). The Port Security Department has stations at Sultan Qaboos Port, Salalah Port, Sohar Port, and Duqm Port. The Port Security Department’s main roles are to protect and guard the ports, harbors, important installations and vital facilities, to issue security permits to enter ports, to prepare studies and provide security consultations regarding port security, important installations, and vital facilities, to develop and implement security plans related to the security of ports, individuals and establishments, and to regulate the entry and exit operations to and from the Sultanate through maritime ports (Royal Oman Police, 2017).

The Maritime Security Center was established in 2013 by the Royal Navy of Oman (Alfarsi, 2019). The Center's main objectives are managing and controlling the maritime domain of the Sultanate of Oman and securing and protecting the ports and facilities from the seaside (Alfarsi, 2019). According to the Ministry of Defence (2014), the role of the Maritime Security Center is manifold: to unite efforts among all the forces and agencies concerned in maritime security; to provide the necessary capabilities and facilities of equipment, devices, reconnaissance aircraft, ships and boats required to maintain security stability and counter any criminal acts from the sea; to develop the necessary procedures and plans to combat terrorist activities and all forms of organized maritime crime in ports, facilities and coasts; to participate in the assessment of the marine risks and plan the management of marine crises, and to follow-up and control the movement of shipping lines to ensure that the ships stay in safe spaces from the coasts and ports. The Maritime Security Center is responsible for enhancing cooperation and exchanging knowledge with neighbor states, regional and international organizations, and other bodies related to maritime security (Alfarsi, 2019).

Airport Control

According to the Public Authority for Civil Aviation, the Ministry of Tourism (2016), and the National Center for Statistics and Information (2019), the Sultanate of Oman has three airports that are used for international flights: Muscat International Airport in Seeb in the Government of Muscat, Salalah Airport in the Government of Dhofar and Suhar airport in the Government of North Albatina. These three airports are the route to enter the Sultanate of Oman through its airspace and require special security attention as they could be used to enter the state by unwanted or unauthorized persons or to import unauthorized goods and materials or could be targeted by terrorists for being vital facilities containing lots of civilians (Coaffee, 2010).

The forces in charge of securing the airports in the Sultanate of Oman are the General Directorate of Airport Security of the Royal Oman Police (Royal Oman Police, 2017) and the Royal Air Force of Oman (Alfarsi, 2019). The General Directorate of Airport Security is responsible for maintaining the airports and surrounding areas' security, protecting facilities, ensuring the safety of aircraft and passengers through strict aircraft escorts, conducting inspections, guarding external entrances, and guarding passengers' lounges (Royal Oman Police, 2017). The primary role of the Royal Air Force of Oman in airport security is controlling the air domain of the Sultanate of Oman, protecting the airports and facilities from the air and ensuring the safety of the airplanes in the air against ant attack and deterring any planes or threat from the air (Alfarsi, 2019). The Royal Air Force of Oman has a military base near every international airport that is always ready to intervene in a time of need.

There are two types of approaches that states adopt to counter-terrorism regarding border and port control, defensive and offensive. The process that has been adopted in these policies was designed to fit the nature of the Sultanate of Oman's long land and maritime borders, the state's need for data and information, to control the entry to and exit from state territories, and to defend the country from any attack. The need to control those borders arises from the state's need to secure its territories from terrorist intruders that could enter without being noticed or may want to import unauthorized material, goods, or equipment to be used for terrorist purposes. The border and port control policies include:

- Regulating and managing the entrance and exit of people and things through the border checkpoints, ports, and airports of the Sultanate of Oman
- Registering and keeping a record of the names and details of everyone entering the state through the border checkpoints, ports, and airports

- Guarding and controlling the extensive land borders between the Sultanate of Oman and its neighbor states that are exhibited in (Figure 1), the Omani regional sea and air domain
- Defending the checkpoints, ports and airports and their facilities, installations, and surroundings against any attacks
- Providing a deterrent against any threat
- Preventing smuggling and piracy, illegal infiltration and immigration and ensuring that intruders and unauthorized goods and materials are kept away from state territories
- Preparing studies and providing security consultations regarding the border, airports, and port security
- Developing state security policies related to the security of borders, airports and ports, individuals, and establishments
- Uniting the state efforts among all the authorities and forces working in the security field
- Enhancing international cooperation and exchange of experiences with neighbor states, regional and international organizations, and bodies related to border and port security
- Ensuring the safety of aircraft, ships, and passengers from the moment they enter Omani territories

Therefore, the border and port control policies are designed to detect and prevent terrorist threats by regulating and managing the entrance to Omani territories through non-confrontational and preventive means and deterring terrorist activity via the military display of its forces every borderline, checkpoint, port, and airport. The policies are designed to defend the state at its land and maritime borders and its checkpoints, airports, ports, and

establishments related to them against any terrorist attack. Analyzing these policies in Table 1 shows that Oman's border and port control policies adopt a defensive approach to countering terrorism.

Third: Social Integration

Partnership with citizens is an integral part of any national counter-terrorism strategy, as stated by RAND Europe. Alhamadani (2019) also argues that terrorist threats arise from a terrorist ideology that typically accompanies communities suffering discrimination for social, racial, religious, or other reasons, leading to violent personality traits. Therefore, the threat of terrorism may arise from sectarianism due to the religious nature of the Omani social fabric, as the Sultanate of Oman embraces three Muslim sectors within its social fabric, which are the Ibadi, the Sunni, and the Shia. Despite this, the Sultanate of Oman has created a society where people can embrace all three different thoughts and live together in harmony without suffering persecution, discrimination, or any pressure, either from the government or from the people of other sects (Peterson J. E., 2019).

On the social level, the Sultanate of Oman has worked towards social equity, an important social principle in its constitution (1996) which stated that justice, equality and equal opportunities for Omanis are pillars of society, and are guaranteed by the state and that strengthening national unity is a duty for all people. Based on those principles, the state prohibits everything that could lead to division, strife, or national unity infringement. One of the biggest social challenges that the Sultanate of Oman faced, which could cause a terrorist threat if not attended to, was tribalism. This was denounced by the state when it declared equality between all Omanis without consideration of race and tribe, building a state of institutions and law as part of its effort to achieve social integration and prevent terrorist ideology and division within its fabric society (Alhamadani, 2019).

The Omani social integration policy consists of five methods of counter terrorism. The first method is promoting and maintaining multi-ethnicism to prevent terrorism ideology from spreading within the Omani social fabric. Omanis from different faiths, tribes, races, and colors are all integrated within Omani society, and they interact with each other and coexist without disputes (Ministry of Information, 2000). Peterson's (2004) article suggests that Oman's different ethnic identities seem to fade as all the other communities mix increasingly in the military, education, social functions, residential areas, and workplaces. This interaction has resulted in immunizing the Omanis against external influences and led to the rejection of discriminatory and racist thoughts that could infiltrate the society from the outside, and ultimately resulted in the refusal to become part of any terrorist group, movement or cell outside of Oman, despite seeing how followers of the same faith or members of the same tribe are suffering in neighboring states, such as Iraq and Yemen. And this multi-ethnic nature of the Omani fabric is due to its long history of exposure to others (Peterson J., 2004). The Omani empire ruled large territories from Africa to East Asia and was historically an important international port that merchants sought and resided through centuries. All that resulted in exposing the Omani society to different cultures and developed a sense of acceptance of others.

The second method for countering terrorism is maintaining a unified society and preventing external influences from reaching society. The state has achieved this by providing religious and social freedom throughout society, spreading a sense of belonging among the people, thereby obviating the population from seeking help or integration with others from outside (Alhamadani, 2019). Besides, the state has taken required measures, which could be extreme at times, against anyone affected by radical ideologies to the point that could lead him to adopt a terrorist ideology for religious or social reasons (United States Department of State, 2018).

As per the National Center for Statistics and Information, foreigners are an essential part of the Omani population.

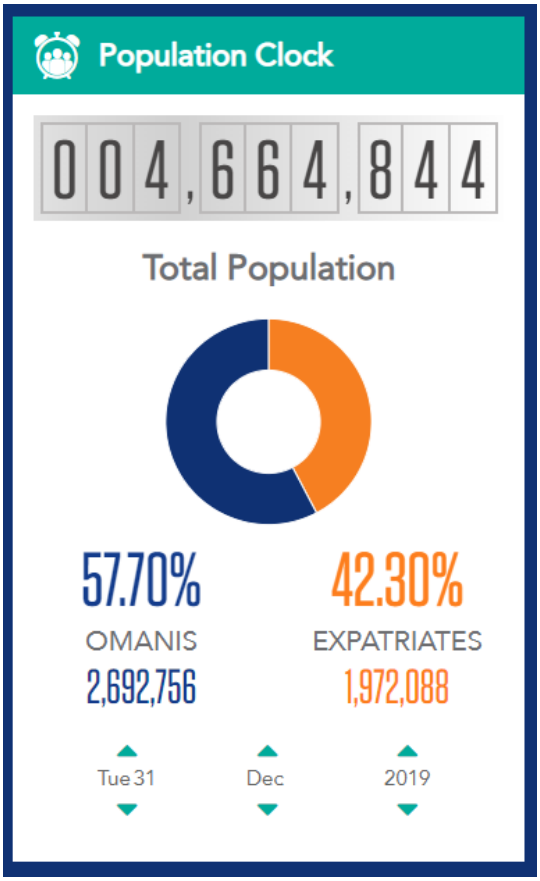


Figure 2: Population of the Sultanate of Oman (National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020)

As Figure 2 indicates, the population of the Sultanate of Oman by the end of 2019 was 4,664,844, out of which 1,972,088 were foreigners, making foreigners 42.3 % of the total Omani population. This large percentage makes foreigners influential in Omani society. Therefore, the third Omani method of countering terrorism is by integrating foreigners into society and ensuring that they benefit from security stability and a terrorism-free environment present in the state, encouraging them to help maintain this status. The Sultanate of Oman has worked on providing foreigners with their own space to freely practice their different

religions and customs, or share their practices with the Omani population, without harm or prejudice. Given that most foreigners are in the Sultanate of Oman for work and business, both categories prefer being securely safe and stable. Therefore, they will have no interest in spreading terrorist ideology and diminishing the state's security stability if they are enjoying that stability (Alhamadani, 2019).

The fourth method of countering terrorism involves using the media, ensuring that the media does not popularize terrorism or give it much importance not to attract attention to the subject. Frequently discussing terrorism from different angles could encourage people to search more on the subject and reach out to undesirable groups or individuals. This would unintentionally spread ideological terrorism among the population (Alfarsi, 2019). On an international level, the Sultanate of Oman continued promoting a global campaign under the title "The Message of Islam in Oman" specially designed to promote social tolerance and preferred Islamic practices. The campaign highlights the commonalities between the different Islamic sects on the one hand, and the commonalities between Islam and other religions, on the other hand, in a governmental effort to enhance interfaith dialogue (Alhamadani, 2019).

The Sultanate of Oman also relies on influential figures to help counter ideological terrorism - the fifth method of countering terrorism. Knowing that some religious and social models have many followers within the population, the Sultanate of Oman encourages those figures to publicize the state’s social tolerance (Alfarsi, 2019). In this regard, the Sultanate Grand Mufti Sheikh Ahmed AlKhalili has a widely broadcasted television program. He calls for the rejection of ideological terrorism and the promotion of tolerance (Alhamadani, 2019).

The Omani policies regarding social integration of the Omani society and population can be summarized and analyzed about the two types of approaches that states adopt to counter terrorism, defensive and offensive, as per the comparison in Table 1. The system that has been adopted in these policies aims to promote social integration and raise public awareness

on the dangers of terrorist ideology that may be seen through extremism, fanaticism, and sectarianism, since the spreading of extremism, fanaticism, and sectarianism is associated with violent personality traits. Violence is the main factor of terrorism. Therefore, the spread of violence increases the threat of terrorism that may arise within the population from the spread of the terrorist ideology, making the Sultanate of Oman a fertile environment for the growth of terrorism. Therefore, a preventive policy is put in place by the state to spread a culture of human development, justice, peace, and ethnic and religious tolerance within the society. Regarding the methods used, they could be seen through the non-confrontational methods of promoting and maintaining multi-ethnicism, keeping a unified social fabric and preventing external influences from reaching the society, integrating foreigners, using the media and influential figures at the time of security stability when the Sultanate of Oman is not facing terrorist attacks. This approach and the methods used reflect the state's perception of the continuous existence of terrorist threats and its need to prevent them through non-aggressive means to maintain its security stability.

The United States Department of State (2018) indicated that Oman used aggressive methods by taking extreme measures against those affected by radical ideologies and may pose a terrorist threat to state security. However, the report was not empirically grounded, nor were the actual methods revealed, so it is impossible to assess whether they were defensive or offensive. Nevertheless, even if it was evident, which it is not, that the state uses one offensive method amongst its social integration policies does not make it an offensive policy, since the state has used four other defensive methods in that same policy. Overall, having analyzed this policy through the lens of (Table 1), it can be concluded that the Omani policy of social integration is a defensive policy for countering terrorism.

Fourth: Collective Security and International Cooperation

According to RAND Europe, international cooperation needs to exist within all national government levels, the private sector, law enforcement agencies and communities, and states need to develop an integrated approach to cooperating with other countries. Allies are essential for success in countering terrorism (Posen, 2001) since terrorism is transnational. Members of any terrorist group can be of different nationalities and backgrounds and are not always gathered in the same place or state (Lashin, 2012). The different stages of the planning, training, and execution of a terrorist attack are not always carried out in one location. Still, they could be performed in different locations around the world. Moreover, terrorist groups usually have several hideouts, training camps, and refugees in various locations worldwide, and need to move around or transport weapons and equipment between states (Bakker & Veldhuis, 2012). Therefore, the need for international allies arises to enable countries to counter-terrorism. International partners could be utilized through collective security, international cooperation, or bilateral cooperation to counter terrorism (Bourquin, 1936).

Collective security is a type of coalition-building strategy in which a group of nations agrees not to attack each other but rather to defend each other against an attack from one of the others if such an attack is made (Kupchan & Kupchan, 1995). The main principle of collective security is that an attack against one state is an attack against all the coalition states (Jervis, 1978). Both Posen (2001) and Yari (2018) believe that the need for collective security is because the threat is not always known in advance, nor is the threat's target; a state is best capable of collecting and sharing the required data about terrorism from its territories. Additionally, in facing transnational terrorist threats, the national forces of each state are in the best position to deal with the threat or attack as they are most aware of the territory and

people of their state, as well as being able to best deal with any collateral damage that might occur at the outset of a terrorist attack (Posen, 2001).

In cooperating internationally with other states to counter terrorism, the Sultanate of Oman has condemned terrorist operations and attacks that have taken place around the world as well as condemning all forms of terrorism. The Sultanate of Oman always assures its complete commitment to maintaining international peace and security, the implementation of international provisions and resolutions, the respecting of international legitimacy, and all other relevant international solutions (United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, 2002). It has repeatedly expressed its willingness to cooperate with the United Nations in any way possible to counter international terrorism. All within the "rules of the international law and the basic axioms of national sovereignty, foremost among which is the distinction between terrorism, on the one hand, and resistance to foreign occupation and the constant striving to realize the principles of right and justice, on the other" (United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, 2002, p. 3.).

In the same context of international cooperation, the Sultanate of Oman has taken part in international efforts that aim to counter terrorism through adopting different measures such as intensifying and accelerating the information exchange, freezing the bank and financial institutions accounts and assets, preventing the commission of any terrorist acts through an early warning mechanism that allows information exchange with other states, denying transport of weapons and material through the Omani territories, preventing terrorists from acting against other states from the Omani territory, assisting in areas of investigations, proceedings and facilitating legal procedures, prohibiting the creation or establishment, of an organization, agency, political party or association, that opposes the fundamental regulations of the Sultanate of Oman or other states as stated in the report submitted by the Sultanate of Oman to United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (2002).

The Sultanate of Oman has achieved these measures through cooperation with other states regionally or internationally. This cooperation is usually seen through participating in the organization and ratification of the Convention. The most outstanding collective security efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman for countering terrorism were:

- Ratification of the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism (Royal Decree No.55, 1999) and its amendment (Royal Decree no.14, 2010).
- Ratification of the Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on Combating International Terrorism (Royal Decree no.22, 2002).
- Ratification of the Gulf Cooperation Council Convention to Counter Terrorism (Royal Decree no.105, 2005).
- Ratification of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (Royal Decree no.104, 2011).
- Ratification of the Arab Convention for Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (Royal Decree no.27, 2014).
- Ratification of the Agreement on Legal and Judicial Cooperation in Penal Matters between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of India (Royal Decree no.2, 2015)
- Participating as a partner in the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh (The Global Coalition against Daesh, 2019).
- Participating as a member state in different international coalitions to counter-terrorism such as the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition, The Terrorist Finance Targeting Center, and the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (United States Department of State, 2018).

The Sultanate of Oman also relies on bilateral cooperation with other states that share a common interest in preventing and defending the country against terrorism. That cooperation

is enacted through meetings, visits, and the signing of bilateral agreements (Alhamadani, 2019). Some of the bilateral efforts for countering terrorism between the Sultanate of Oman and other states are the ratification of the Cooperation Agreement against International Terrorism, Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances, and Organized Crime between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Turkey (Royal Decree no.43, 2005), collaborating with the United States of America to improve its counter-terrorism tactics and procedures and participating in the program for Export Control and Related Border Security that was designed to enhance the Sultanate of Oman's interdiction capabilities at official ports of entry, and participating in the United States of America's Antiterrorism Assistance program (United States Department of State, 2018).

The Omani policies regarding collective security and international cooperation show counter-terrorism, the policies can be summarized and analyzed about the two types of approaches that states adopt to counter-terrorism, defensive and offensive, as per the comparison in (Table 1). The Sultanate of Oman relies on collective security as an essential part of its national strategy to countering terrorism since collective security and international and bilateral cooperation fit with the state's need to safeguard its status quo and maintain its security stability against any potential threat, and to best defend itself in the event of a terrorist attack.

The Omani Counter Terrorism Authorities and Forces:

The second element of any national counter-terrorism strategy is the government that plans and executes the strategy through its different bodies (Stigall, Miller, & Donatucci, 2019). Counter-terrorism bodies are the state's planning, defending, and responding authorities and forces that deal directly with the subject of state security in the field of counter terrorism

(Coaffee, 2010). The authorities are the administrative bodies that plan the policies, gather the information required, and oversee the implementation of the forces' policies. On the other hand, the forces are the practical and operational executing bodies that engage with terrorists to prevent terrorist threats, respond in the event of a terrorist attack taking place and manage the situation, reduce the losses, arrest the terrorists and present them for judgment (Alfarsi, 2019). Counter terrorism bodies operate on an internal level inside state territories alone without extending to other states' territories, unless in the case of collective security and international cooperation (Xhambazi, 2017).

The efficiency of counter-terrorism authorities and forces depends highly on both the human factor and military equipment. Accurate analyses and progressive policies of the authorities, combined with effectiveness and coordination between forces and the use of appropriate equipment, result in a better response to a terrorist threat or attack and better management of the situation and also, therefore, result in fewer or no losses as the case may be (Alfarsi, 2019).

First: Sovereign Counter Terrorism Authorities and Forces

The Omani sovereign counter terrorism authorities and forces are those state authorities and forces which work in the field of counter terrorism. They are part of or operate under the state executive branch.

The National Security Council

The National Security Council is the executive authority responsible for looking into all national security matters. It was first established following royal instructions by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said as the National Security Committee but was later restructured and renamed on 23rd September 2003 to become the National Security Council (Royal Decree

no.63, 2003). The National Security Council is headed by the Minister of the Royal Office, with the General Inspector of Police and Customs' membership, the Head of the Internal Security Agency, and the Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces. In exceptional circumstances, the Sultan may call for an extraordinary meeting of the National Security Council, and he chairs those meetings himself (Royal Decree no.63, 2003). In 2007 the then existing National Committee for Countering Terrorism, which was operating under council ministers, was restructured and relocated to operate under the National Security Council (Royal Decree no.8, 2007) as one of its specialized committees.

The National Committee for Countering Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism

The National Committee for Countering Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism is a specialized authority operating in countering the financing of terrorism. In 2010 a previous National Committee for Countering Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism was established according to Royal Decree no. 79 under the supervision of the Minister of National Economic (Royal Decree no.79, 2010). The current National Committee for Countering Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism was established in 2016 following Royal Decree no. 30, which also dissolved the previous committee (Royal Decree no.30, 2016). The current Committee is headed by the Chief Executive Officer of the Central Bank of Oman and the membership of competent authorities to be determined by the Council of Ministers' decision. The roles of the current Committee are to:

- “Coordinate with the National Committee for Countering Terrorism in the National Security Council on implementing policies to counter the financing of terrorism.
- Plan and develop a national strategy to prevent and combat the financing of terrorism in coordination with the competent authorities and follow up on their implementation.
- Identify and assess the risks associated with the financing of terrorism at the national level.

- Request, collect and analyze statistics and other information from the competent authorities to assess the system's effectiveness designed to counter the financing of terrorism.
- Ensure effective mechanisms for cooperation and coordination between competent authorities about developing and implementing measures for countering the financing of terrorism and following up with the implementation of such mechanisms.
- Study international treaties and conventions related to countering the financing of terrorism and submit recommendations thereon to the Council of Ministers.
- Follow up international and regional developments in countering the financing of terrorism, presenting recommendations for the development of state policies and procedures regarding the funding of terrorism, and proposing appropriate amendments to related legislation.
- Develop programs for the rehabilitation and training of persons working in the field of countering the financing of terrorism.
- Promote awareness regarding the risks associated with the financing of terrorism among financial institutions, businesses, non-financial professions and organizations, and non-profit organizations.
- Determine the countries that are considered high risk in financing terrorism and the measures to be taken against them" (Royal Decree no.30, 2016).

The National Center for Financial Information

The National Center for Financial Information was first established in 2010 as a specialized unit in the Royal Oman Police called the Financial Investigation Unit, following Royal Decree no.79, which is related to the issuing of the Countering Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism Law (Royal Decree no.79, 2010). The Financial Investigation Unit was restructured in 2016 to become the National Center for Financial Information and was

given a judiciary persona and financial and administrative independence. It operates under the General Inspector of Police and Customs. It is run by a Chief Executive Officer appointed by the General Inspector of Police and Customs after obtaining the approval of the Council of Ministers (Royal Decree no.30, 2016). The roles of the National Center for Financial Information are, in accordance with Royal Decree no.30 (2016), are:

- Receiving, requesting, and analyzing reports and information suspected of being related to financing terrorism such as cash transactions, electronic transfers, and cross-border financial declarations.
- Providing the necessary guidance and instructions on the methods of reporting suspicious financing of terrorism transactions.
- Sharing the information and the analysis results with the competent authority to take necessary actions against it.

Furthermore, the National Center for Financial Information is authorized to suspend any transaction execution until completing its analysis procedures in case of suspicion of financing terrorism (Alfarsi, 2019).

The Internal Security Service

The Internal Security Service is the sovereign security agency in the Sultanate of Oman that is "assigned the responsibility to protect the State, ensure its stability and integrity and secure tranquility and peace for both the citizens and residents. This is achieved by collecting and disseminating accurate and timely intelligence, which is submitted to decision-makers" (Internal Security Service, 2019). Until lately, not much was known about the operating of the Internal Security Service except that it plays a major role in collecting intelligence and data, maintaining security stability, protecting the national culture and identity, identifying and confronting any potential terrorist threat to the Sultanate of Oman (Alfarsi, 2019). However, in 2020, Royal Decree no.4, related to the issuing of the Internal Security Service

Law, was issued to highlight the Internal Security Service's independency, its aims and roles, its management, and its financing. According to the Decree, the Internal Security Service has its judiciary persona and financial and administrative independence and operates directly under His Majesty, the Sultan of Oman. The Internal Security Service aims to combat terrorism – among other aims - through the following:

- Collecting, analyzing, and evaluating information related to terrorism and conducting the necessary research and investigation to uncover any facts, activities or elements related to terrorism that may affect the security stability of the Sultanate of Oman.
- Supporting the National Security Council in exercising its tasks by studying the terrorism-related issues to be presented to it, expressing opinions on these issues, and working to implement the decisions of the Council related to countering terrorism.
- Implementing the Omani national counter-terrorism strategy.
- Providing support and conducting necessary security coordination with the military and security authorities and forces in the Sultanate of Oman to counter-terrorism.
- Cooperating and exchanging information with the authorities of other states to counter terrorism.
- Providing opinions and advice to other state bodies on best practices with regards to countering terrorism.
- Preparing research and studies related to terrorism and countering terrorism.

Given the important role of the Internal Security Service in countering terrorism, members of the Internal Security Agency have judicial arrest authority in connection to terrorism, and all evidence that they collect and provide in related cases is confidential and should not be disclosed except with an order from the court after obtaining the approval of the head of the Internal Security Service (Royal Decree no.4/2020, 2020).

The Sultan's Armed Forces

The Sultan's Armed Forces are the sovereign military forces in the Sultanate of Oman that aim to protect the state and defend it against any armed threat. The Sultan's Armed Forces consist of three branches, the Royal Army of Oman, the Royal Air Force of Oman, and the Royal Navy of Oman. Being part of the Ministry of Defense, the Sultan's Armed Forces jointly fall administratively under the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces. Still, the operationally are each independent of the others (Alfarsi, 2019).

The Royal Army of Oman is the most senior military force in the Sultanate of Oman. According to the Ministry of Defense (2014), the Royal Army of Oman was first formed in 1907 under the name of the Muscat garrison and was responsible for protecting only the Muscat region. Later in 1921 was expanded and renamed the Infantry of Muscat and remained the only military force in Oman until the early fifties. It then continued its expansion and organizational development until June 1990 when it was given the Royal Army of Oman's name.

The Royal Air Force of Oman was the second military armed force formed in the Sultanate of Oman. According to the Ministry of Defense (2014), the Royal Air Force of Oman was first created on the first of March 1959, with only five aircraft operating from a small airstrip in Beit Al Falaj. It was later expanded in 1961 and 1967 with sixteen more aircraft and has continued its expansion and organizational development since then.

The Royal Navy of Oman was a marine wing known as the Oman Gendarmerie's coastal patrol unit. According to the Ministry of Defense (2014), the coastal patrol unit's pillar was several traditional wooden boats in 1960 which carried out coastal patrol missions along the Batinah coast to combat arms smuggling and illegal immigration. Later, in June 1971, the expanded coastal patrol unit was reformed to become the Sultan of Oman's Navy, and it joined the Sultan's armed forces. On June 16, 1990, the Sultan of Oman's Navy has renamed the Royal Navy of Oman.

Alfarsi (2019) explained the role of each of the branches of the armed forces. The Royal Army of Oman is responsible for protecting all Omani lands and borders from any armed threat, defending it against any armed attack, and fulfilling a military role during wars and battles. The Royal Air Force of Oman performs its function through protecting and securing the air domain of the Omani territory from any threat and defending it against any attack as well as fulfilling a military role during wars and battles and supporting the other branches of the royal armed forces during the implementation of operational tasks. The Royal Navy of Oman performs its function by protecting and securing the Omani territory's maritime domain from any threat, defending it against any attack, and fulfilling a military role during wars and battles.

Second: Judicial Counter Terrorism Authorities and Forces

The judicial counter terrorism authorities and forces are the state authorities and forces that work in the field of counter terrorism and enjoy judicial authorities; they are part of or operate under, the state executive or judiciary branch.

Oman Public Prosecution

The Oman Public Prosecution was first established in 1984 in accordance with Royal Decree no.25, organizing the criminal judiciary, and the role of public prosecution was given

exclusively to the Royal Omani Police (Royal Decree no.25, 1984). The current Oman Public Prosecution was established in November 1999, according to Royal Decree no.29 (1999) as an independent judicial authority. The principal aims of the Oman Public Prosecution are to defend public rights through conducting preliminary investigations into crimes, initiating criminal case proceedings, and implementing all judgments issued by the various courts in the criminal cases (Albalushi, 2019).

The Public Prosecution consists of general administrations divided regionally in the Sultanate of Oman, and specialized administrations. The specialized administrations are the Public Administration for Cybercrimes, Public Administration for Drugs, Public Administration for Juveniles, Public Administration for Traffic, Public Administration for Consumer Protection, Public Administration for Muscat Municipality, and the Public Administration for Economic Crimes (Oman Public Prosecution, 2019). A particular administration called the Administration for State Security Crimes was established in 2003 about the State Security Court (Royal Decree no.64, 2003). The Administration for State Security Crimes was to handle investigation and prosecution on cases under the jurisdiction of the State Security Court. However, the administration was dissolved along with the State Security Court in 2010 (Alismaili, 2018).

Royal Oman Police

The Royal Oman Police is an independent force established in 1970 at the beginning of the reign of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The main aim of the Royal Oman Police is to maintain public order and security through protecting lives, money, and facilities and preventing crimes or gathering evidence in case of crimes committed (Directorate of Public Relations, 2017). The Royal Oman Police consists of general commands divided regionally throughout the Sultanate of Oman, and specialized commands. The specialized commands

are the Coastguard command, Special Task Force command, and the petroleum facilities security (Directorate of Public Relations, 2017). Both the general and specialized commands have jurisdiction and authority over terrorism cases (Alismaili, 2018). This authority of the Royal Oman Police over terrorism cases was emphasized by the United States Department of State (2018), which stated that the Royal Oman Police Special Task Force is one of the Sultanate of Oman's primary counter terrorism response forces (United States Department of State, 2018).

The State Security Court

The State Security Court was an independent judicial authority established in 2003 by Royal Decree no.21. It had exclusive jurisdiction over all the terrorism cases committed against state security, or any issues referred to it by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said based on a recommendation by the National Security Council (Alismaili, 2018). The State Security Court consisted of two panels, the misdemeanors panel, and the felonies panel. The judges of the State Security Court were judges from the Supreme Court in addition to any military or security personnel. The State Security Court had its statutes which stipulated that the investigation and prosecution procedures regarding cases referred to the court could be handled by security personnel instead of the Royal Oman Police and the Public Prosecution and that the judgments of the State Security Court were final with no opportunity for appeal (Royal Decree no.64, 2003). However, the State Security Court was abolished in 2010, according to Royal Decree no.102. It can be noted that the Court was abolished in conjunction with the start of the Arab Spring uprisings.

The Judiciary Courts

Following the State Security Court's dissolution, the Judiciary Courts regained jurisdiction over all cases relating to terrorism (Alismaili, 2018). The General Courts are part of the state's judiciary authority and consist of three-level litigation. Issues are seen and awarded by

primary misdemeanor courts consisting of a sole criminal judge. Following the issuance of the prior court judgment, the case could be appealed before an appeal felony court composed of three criminal judges who would pass the final judgment on the case. The appeal court's final judgments may be subject to challenge before the Supreme Court in some cases and can be canceled through a judgment of the Supreme Court ruled by five experienced criminal judges (Albalushi, 2019). The Judiciary Courts are established and divided among the different Wilayat of the Sultanate of Oman. Regional jurisdiction over criminal cases depends on how the crime was committed (Alismaili, 2018). The Judiciary Courts apply the Omani Penal Law provisions and other special penal laws, including the Omani Counter-Terrorism Law (Royal Decree no.97, 1999).

Conclusion:

The counter-terrorism methods are essential to maintain the state's security and stability and do not by themselves aim to increase the state’s powers or expand its territory. Yet, the government does not use upfront aggression to eliminate terrorist threats but does only what it must do to prevent and defend itself against the threat. This research has explored the elements of the Omani national counter-terrorism strategy and shown that the Sultanate of Oman has adopted a defensive approach to formulate its strategy, which includes the use of mostly defensive policies in addition to the necessary offensive policies to counter terrorism and maintain the security stability of the state. Omani counter-terrorism policies are executed by a collection of authorities and forces that work side by side to fulfill their roles in planning systems, protecting and preventing to deter threats, or responding and defending in the event of a terrorist attack. Oman has adopted a defensive approach in its collective security and international cooperation policy to counter-terrorism, even though its methods are offensive. The aim and principles of the Sultanate of Oman remain defensive. Therefore, it can be

concluded that collective security and international cooperation is an efficient defensive policy for countering terrorism.

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