

OMAN



Oman U.S. foreign assistance to Oman, strategically located on a key naval chokepoint for more than 40 percent of the world's exported oil shipments, will help ensure that this critical sea lane remains open to naval vessels and commercial traffic. Assistance will also support operations in Afghanistan and Iraq by helping to retain vital access to Omani military facilities. Funding will further enhance Oman's ability to combat terrorism by strengthening its capability to monitor and enforce its land, sea and air borders, while also improving interoperability of the Omani military with U.S. forces.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

When Sultan Qaboos assumed power in 1970, Oman had limited contacts with the outside world, including neighboring Arab states. Only two countries, the United Kingdom and India, maintained a diplomatic presence in the country. A special treaty relationship permitted the United Kingdom close involvement in Oman's civil and military affairs. Ties with the United Kingdom have remained very close under Sultan Qaboos.

Since 1970, Oman has pursued a moderate foreign policy and expanded its diplomatic relations dramatically. It supported the 1979 Camp David accords and was one of three Arab League states, along with Somalia and Sudan, which did not break relations with Egypt after the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty in 1979. During the Iran-Iraq war, Oman maintained diplomatic relations with both sides while strongly backing UN Security Council resolutions calling for an end to the war. Oman has developed close ties to its neighbors; it joined the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council when it was established in 1981.

Oman has traditionally supported Middle East peace initiatives, as it did those in 1983. In April 1994, Oman hosted the plenary meeting of the Water Working Group of the peace process, the first Gulf state to do so. From 1996-2000, Oman and Israel exchanged trade offices. Oman closed the Israeli Trade Office in October 2000 in the wake of public demonstrations against Israel at the start of the second intifada.

During the Cold War period, Oman avoided relations with communist countries because of the communist support for the insurgency in Dhofar. In recent years, Oman has undertaken diplomatic initiatives in the Central Asian republics, particularly in Kazakhstan, where it is involved in a joint oil pipeline project. In addition, Oman maintains good relations with Iran, and the two countries regularly exchange delegations. Oman is an active member in international and regional organizations, notably the Arab League and the GCC.

U.S.-OMANI RELATIONS

The United States has maintained relations with the Sultanate since the early years of American independence. A treaty of friendship and navigation, one of the first agreements of its kind with an Arab state, was concluded between the United States and Muscat in 1833. This treaty was replaced by the Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights signed at Salalah on December 20, 1958.

A U.S. consulate was maintained in Muscat from 1880 until 1915. Thereafter, U.S. interests in Oman were handled by U.S. diplomats resident in other countries. In 1972, the U.S. ambassador in Kuwait was accredited also as the first U.S. ambassador to Oman, and the U.S. embassy, headed by a resident charge d'affaires, was opened. The first resident U.S. ambassador took up his post in July 1974. The Oman embassy was opened in Washington, DC, in 1973.

U.S.-Omani relations were deepened in 1980 by the conclusion of two important agreements. One provided access to Omani military facilities by U.S. forces under agreed-upon conditions. The other agreement established a Joint Commission for Economic and Technical Cooperation, located in Muscat, to provide U.S. economic assistance to Oman. The Joint Commission continued in existence until the mid-1990s. A Peace Corps program, which assisted Oman mainly in the fields of health and education, was initiated in 1973 and phased out in 1983. A team from the Federal Aviation Administration worked with Oman's Civil Aviation Department on a reimbursable basis but was phased out in 1992.

In March 2005, the U.S. and Oman launched negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement that were successfully concluded in October 2005. The FTA was signed on January 19, 2006, and is pending implementation.

In 1974 and April 1983, Sultan Qaboos made state visits to the United States. Vice President George H. Bush visited Oman in 1984 and 1986, and President Clinton visited briefly in March 2000. Vice President Cheney visited Oman in 2002, 2005, and 2006.

Peace and Security: U.S. foreign assistance will encourage continued cooperation in promoting regional stability while helping Oman maintain a credible defensive force able to operate with U.S. forces. Funds used for the acquisition of defense equipment and associated training will further increase Oman's ability to defend its sovereignty, participate effectively as part of a coalition, and combat transnational threats. Assistance will also support modernization of airbases and other military facilities to ensure their readiness of use by U.S. forces in case of future contingencies in the region and Southwest Asia. Funds will provide equipment and training to improve border and maritime surveillance, detection and interdiction, which will strengthen Oman's ability to protect its long and porous land borders and its two thousand-kilometer coastline, against potential terrorists and other criminals. Anti-terrorism assistance will also provide senior police managers with advanced counter-terrorism investigative skills and abilities, while regional training courses will promote multilateral cooperation. Programs in support of military education and training cover a broad range of areas including technical, maintenance, and logistics issues; English language instruction; and maritime operations. U.S.-funded training reinforces democratic principles of civilian control of the military, enhances interoperability and coordination with U.S. forces, increases Oman's value as a military partner and moderate Arab state, and highlights the importance of a strong, cooperative relationship with the United States. U.S. assistance will help prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, related technologies, and other weapons through a cooperative program to develop and strengthen an effective export control system in Oman. Funds will provide training and equipment for Omani police and customs to improve their enforcement and interdiction capabilities, assistance in developing a risk analysis center, and technical support for the development and implementation of a comprehensive export control list and related licensing regulations.

Focus on Performance: In FY 2009, the U.S. conducted three inter-agency, bilateral Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) events and six inter-agency, multilateral or bilateral exercises. This engagement schedule was specifically designed to bolster Omani military capacity and capabilities while concurrently ensuring optimized levels of interoperability between Omani and U.S. military forces.

Subject to approval at the 2009 U.S.-Oman Joint Military Commission, equipment and related training provided by U.S. foreign assistance will contribute to at least two additional JCETs/exercises in FY 2010 tailored to enhance capabilities in areas such as homeland defense, maritime domain awareness, counter-narcotics, and urban military operations. Requested U.S. assistance will increase the value of Oman as a sustainable partner in a region of vital importance to U.S. national interests. Given its long coastline and extensive land borders, Oman has been fortunate to have prevented infiltration of its territory by foreign terrorists planning to stage or conduct violent acts. As terrorists seek new and softer targets to strike in the region and look to increase their presence in neighboring Yemen, Oman will need U.S. counter-terrorism assistance to help patrol its frontiers and intercept infiltrators in order to remain free from terrorist acts. U.S. assistance will enhance Oman's counter-terrorism capability by providing equipment and related training to bolster coastal patrol efforts, modernize Oman's coastal surveillance system, improve the capabilities of the Sultan's Special Force, and monitor remote inland border areas.