

## THE OMANI-PORTUGUESE CONFLICT (1692-1711): A MODEL OF OMANI FOREIGN POLICY UNDER IMAM SAIF BIN SULTAN AL-YA'ARABI

Habib Marhoon Al Hadi<sup>1\*</sup> and Mohd Syakir Mohd Rosdi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Islamic Development Management Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Malaysia,  
(E-mail: habeeb45@student.usm.my, habeeb45@moe.om)

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Islamic Development Management Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Malaysia,  
(E-mail: mohdsyakir@usm.my)

### Article history

**Received date** : 1-8-2021  
**Revised date** : 2-8-2021  
**Accepted date** : 14-9-2021  
**Published date** : 26-9-2021

### To cite this document:

Al-Hadi, H. M. & Mohd Rosdi, M. S. (2021). Omani Foreign Policy Under Imam Saif bin Sultan al-Ya'arabi (1692-1711): The Omani-Portuguese Conflict as A Model. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 6(39), 237 - 244.

---

**Abstract:** *In the early modern eras, the Muslim world confronted colonialism because some European powers started an international struggle for wealth overwhelming which included the old and new continents of the world. Here, we specify the west region of the Indian Ocean which encompassed the Arabian Gulf ' coasts, the Arabian Peninsula, and the coasts of the west of India and East Africa coasts, which most of them was under Portuguese dominations for a period of more than 100 years, until Allah brought by his willingness the imams of Oman. They had the ability to face colonialism and managed to drive it away from all those coasts spreading security and peacefulness on all trade routes of this dynamic region. The aim of this paper is to highlight the efforts of the foreign policy of Oman as well as its global relationships with the great powers. It also tackles the Omani-Portuguese conflict during the reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan (1692–1711). This study depends on the analytical descriptive approach which paves the way to deal with the political situation in the Western Indian Ocean region at the beginning of modern eras and addressing the policy of Saif bin Sultan's which can be outlined in spreading security and peacefulness in all of the Western Indian Ocean region. The researcher expects that this research will provide a comprehensive picture of Oman's efforts under the reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan who managed to spread peace in the Western Indian Ocean region in the 17th century and also provided the benefits which may help in achieving peace in this region in the future.*

**Keywords:** *Omani-Portuguese Conflict, 1692-1711, Model Omani Foreign Policy, Imam Saif bin Sultan al-Ya'arabi,*

---

### Introduction

In the era of Ya'araba, there were a number of powerful imams who had a great influence on the Omani power outside Oman including Imam Nasir bin Murshid (1624-1649 AD), Imam Sultan bin Saif (1649-1680 AD), and Imam Saif bin Sultan (1692-1711 AD) entitled as land controller. Imam Saif bin Sultan had great military power, as the Omani fleet became powerful during his rule so that the fleet roamed the Western Indian Ocean region.

Consequently, the European fleets did not have the ability to face or object it. During his rule, the Omani navy fleet accomplished incredible military triumphs in the West Indian Ocean which resulted in the Oman's foreign relations with the multiple powers in the region. Therefore, we can see that Oman was the one that gave this area a great reputation in the modern era. The efforts made by Omanis to make Oman more widespread and to get rid their country of the domination of the Portuguese, were the key because that made Ya'ariba family protruding (Saad, 2010). In the second half of the seventeenth century, Omanis had the ability to drive away the Portuguese from the coast of Oman and searched for to institute a powerful marine fleet so that they limited the presence of the Portuguese in the Indian West Ocean (Al-Ajami, 2017).

### **Research Methodology**

In this study, research methodology has depended on the descriptive analytical method, where we are provided a full description and common theories about the events that happened in period from 1692 to 1711 AD which can explained the most main documents and maps that can provided an important indication to analyze interpretation the events and can high spot the results. This study used a primary qualitative framework. The kind of this study was chosen because the collected data focused mainly on secondary data. Depending on the nature of the study in order to collect the secondary data, the method of document study that accords with this study was selected since this type of data of this research are found in letters, newspaper articles, books, and magazines. Relying on the methodology of this research, content analysis method was used to analyze the data found in both incoming documents and the accompanying maps. This approach was appropriated to find objective and methodological analysis of this research.

### **Theoretical framework**

#### **Foreign Policy**

There have different definitions about the concept of foreign policy. The most important definition is foreign policy is deemed the plan that summaries the foreign relationships of a country with others (Zaki, 1975). Another definition related to the principle of peace in which foreign policy is the behaviors of a country towards other countries that aim to achieve peaceably the finest possible situation for the country (Macridis, 1958). Therefore, we can infer that foreign policy can be a constant, dynamic procedure intended to bring national interests by engaging numerous political, economic, military, cultural tools, and others (Akkar, 2021 AD). Generally, foreign policy is the procedures engaged by the country in its foreign relationships to bring peaceably interests. The peaceful foreign policy of Oman during the reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan with its neighbors and international powers was dynamic at the end of the seventeenth century as well as at the beginning of the eighteenth century AD. Consequently, many researchers were urged to study the consequences of that historical era as well as its several political issues during the reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan.

The coast of Oman lived under the Portuguese occupation for about a century and a half. Then, Allah brought that imams led the Omani renaissance movement at the beginning of modern times to unite Oman under the Ya'ariba, who made their way to put fixed the name of their country in the history, defending the region in the East (Al-Barashdi, 2019). They managed to protect Islam and the peoples of the region from the Portuguese colonialism as they had the ability to keep it away the region, particularly during the reign of Imam Saif bin

Sultan, who managed to defeat the Portuguese and destroy their overwhelming the Indian Ocean.

### **Findings of Literature Reviews**

The reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan is deemed a rich one which witnessed a lot of foreign political actions. Consequently, multiple researches analyzing were written to highlight Omani outdoor power that was amassing significantly coincided with the appearance of European colonial powers in the Indian Ocean. Al-Sudais (1993) has referred to the attempts of the European powers altogether to face the rise of the Omani military power that had been a challenge against the prevailing of European powers in the west of Indian Ocean. Consequently, in 1700 AD Britain, the Netherlands and France sign up a treaty to face piracy in the Arabian Gulf. Al-Ajmi, (2019 AD) has explained that European historians measured the rising Omani power as an upcoming hazard against the desire of European colonialism to increase in the Indian Ocean. Depending on the English historian "Copeland" regarding the extension the Arabs in the Indian Ocean, Al-Sayyar (2018 AD) has confirmed , that the power of the Arabs of Oman had been greater to any other marine power so that the English and Dutch fleets feared of that power. Neven, (2010) has stated that the power of the Omani empire was attributed to the maritime empire that the Ya'arubis intended to build, which might be equal to the European power and thus, Oman had been a prosperous state for a century.

### **Imam Saif bin Sultan (1692 - 1711 AD)**

Imam Saif bin Sultan is deemed the most famous Ya'ariba imam in outward political power. He was called because of the increase of his power to varied states and vast lands, controlling the kingdoms and states from far away, his capabilities, his firmness, his authority, his justice and his control over the kingdoms, as well as his plentiful victories in all his conquests as stated by Al-Salmi (2017) and Ma'shi, (2010). He was the son of Imam Sultan bin Saif (1649-1680) and the grandson of Imam Nasir bin Murshid (1624-1649). He ruled Oman in 1104 H /1692AD. Al-Hashimi (2013) after taking the rule from his brother Belarab bin Sultan explained this action that it was due to the failure of his brother to deal with regional issues, leaning to local politics neglecting the foreign policy Al-Sudais (1993), and finally he was not able to behave properly in foreign relationships with European countries, particularly the relation with the Portuguese who had before taken control of some of the cities on the coast of Oman after they had driven away from some Indian coasts and East Africa in the reign of his father, Imam Sultan bin Saif. The Portuguese again ambushed the Omani fleet and took some of those liberated lands in the reign of Belarab bin Sultan (1680-1692) the brother of Imam Saif bin Sultan. Imam Saif bin Salta struggled to face the Portuguese growth, and attempt to achieve advancements to his country to become a regional power that could return to Oman its history and glory. Oman was a state that had civilization as well as position in the region because of its geographical site and control of straits and seas that had commercial significance, Imam Saif bin Sultan decided to face the Portuguese during their existence in the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. In his reign, the Omanis became sovereign over the Indian Ocean (Saad, 2011).

It can be said that the historians have consistently agreed that Imam Saif bin Sultan Al Yarubi was a man of war, peace, politics and the state. He ruled Oman for 19 years through which the Oman reputation had raised up in the international filed. The European historians have

described his foreign power as he had a marine fleet encompassing twenty warships, equipped with the most modern weapons.

### Omani-Portuguese conflict in the west of the Indian Ocean

Al-Ghailani (2017) Al-Ya'aribah led forty-one marine combats against the Portuguese in the west of the Indian Ocean beginning from the Persian Gulf. The Persian port of Kanj was the last Portuguese stronghold in the Arabian Gulf. Imam Saif bin Sultan managed to drive them away from it everlastingly in 1696. He similarly launched an assault against the most Portuguese strongholds in India, beginning from their main center in Diu to the port of Bassin, as in the latter is deemed the greatest defeat of the fleet of the Portuguese. The decisive defeat in the Portuguese's history was when the Omani fleet entered Jesus' Castle in the port of Mombasa which was located on the eastern coast of Africa in 1698 AD (Al-Sudais, 1993 AD). In the battle, we can say that the power of the Portuguese in the East weakened after the Portuguese had had a significant part in converting the trading scheme in the Indian Ocean to their favor for long.



Figure 1: The map of trade routes and the influence of Oman during the era of Imam Saif bin Sultan (Ministry of Education, 2004 AD)

### Data Analysis

The political condition in the west of the Indian Ocean when Imam Saif bin Sultan received the reign witnessed a fierce political conflict because the European battled for the wealth and commerce of the East. Some European powers wanted to control the region to put their hands on land overlooking the Gulf, including Persia (Al-Sayyar, 2018). There were two powers. Firstly, local powers overlooking the Arabian Gulf; and secondly, international marine powers.

The Kingdom of Portugal was the strongest world power that was on a constant military conflict with Oman. Imam Saif bin Sultan had the ability to limit the power of the Portuguese and sieged them so that limiting of power encouraged trade across the Indian Ocean securely and peaceably. On the other hand, pilgrimage and trade fleets sailing between East and West

Indian Ocean were exposed to piracy and brutal acts in the region before that. Peoples of the Indian Ocean had also suffered a lot from them over two centuries.



Figure 2: The campaigns of Imam Saif bin Sultan against the Portuguese on the west coast of India and the coasts of East Africa (Ministry of Information, 2015 AD)

Imam Saif bin Sultan depended on power balance approach in his foreign policy based on the constant armed conflict in the west of the Indian Ocean. he endeavors to establish a great marine fleet which was capable of confronting the European fleets Al-Tobi, 2017).

Fig (2) shows obviously the results of the Omani tracking to the Portuguese during the reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan it demonstrates the dismissal of the Portuguese from all their points in the Arabian Gulf as well as the majority of the strongholds on the coasts of East Africa, particularly when the Omanis overwhelmed Jesus Castle in Mombasa for a long period of about 33 months. Al Tobi (2019) said the Omani forces overmastered it in a unusual heroic battle. Consequently, the Omani forces destroyed the power of the Portuguese; in their major center which was in Mombasa, East Africa in 1698. Therefore, Imam Sheikh Nasser Al-Mazrouei was appointed as the governor of Mombasa, and then he was appointed to include Zanzibar in the south (currently Tanzania) and to Lamu in the north (Kenya) nowadays (Al-Barashdi, 2016). Regarding the external power in the era of Ya'arabi, Kelly (1979) has praised the Omani fleet saying “Oman became the largest non-European marine power in the waters of the East.



Figure 3: A Sample of the Documents of Political Events During the Era of Imam Saif bin Sultan

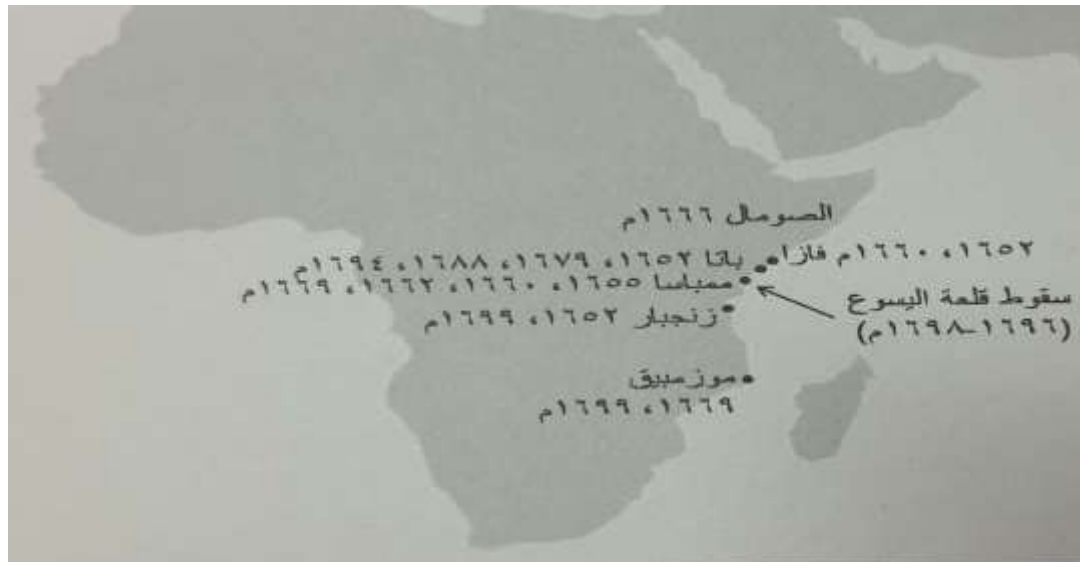


Figure 4: Omani Campaigns Against the Portuguese on the Coast of East Africa (Al Tobi, 2017 AD)

The essential role of the Omani marine fleet in securing the coasts of the Indian Ocean as well as western coasts can be obviously observed from maps showing the political power of Imam Saif bin Sultan and his foreign policy towards the Portuguese as well as the documents showing the desire of the Omani regime and people face and seize the Portuguese colonialism. The maps and the documents also illustrate the Omani expansion in the Arab Gulf as well as the East Africa regions against the Persian and European threatening. The

research also focused on the significant role of Oman at the time of the reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan in the region and in the Indian Ocean, as well as international powers.

### **Recommendations**

In conclusion, it is clear that the Imam of Oman Saif bin Sultan had an excellent political character who had significant qualifications of leadership because he had the ability to confront the European powers in the west of Indian Ocean. He managed to decline their power by launching expedition against them to protect the Islamic peoples on coasts of the ocean. His fleet was constantly struck the strongholds of the Portuguese in the coasts of India, the Arabian Gulf, the coasts of south of the Arabian Peninsula and east of Africa.

By tackling the Omani foreign policy during the reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan, it has been manifested the size of the political and military success and victories of the Omani marine power to deter the Portuguese colonialism and other European powers into four matters are foreign aids, pivotal Omani role at regional level, commercial and military fleet and trade routes and its important geostrategic location.

Firstly, Oman provided foreign aids by helping the peoples on the west coasts of the Indian Ocean against the dangers of the Portuguese. During the reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan, Oman provided many foreign aid, as it was helping the peoples on the western coasts of the Indian Ocean against the threats of the Portuguese.

Secondly, the research highlighted the core role of Oman in that era in region of the west coast of the Indian Ocean. It also showed his ability to deal with the regional as well as the European powers. The study concluded the pivotal Omani role during the reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan at the regional level in the west of the Indian Ocean, and his ability to deal with European and regional powers.

Thirdly, the trade and military fleet prospered during his reign as it could roam the west of the Indian Ocean. The Omani commercial and military fleet flourished during the reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan and became free to roam the western Indian Ocean.

Fourth, as a state situated on the Indian Ocean with its significant strategic position, Oman must build its marine fleet to cope with this strategic significance. Oman, as a country located on the Indian Ocean, its trade routes and its important geostrategic location, must activate its naval fleet to keep pace with this strategic importance.

### **Acknowledgement**

Heartfelt appreciation and thanks to Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) for their unwavering support, motivation and trust in the researchers who are responsible for implementing the Bridging Grant with entitled *Post-Conflict Survival of Islamic Movement Members in Malaysia: A Study of Political Economy (Survival Pengikut Gerakan Islam Di Malaysia Pasca-Konflik: Satu Kajian Ekonomi Politik)* by USM reference number (304/CISDEV/6316210). This article is also related to one of the studies that aims to further elaborate on research pertinent to this grant.

## References

- Akkar, Wissam Hadi (2021 AD) Japanese Foreign Policy (1868-1922) A Historical Study (Volume 1), Berlin, Arab Democratic Center.
- Al-Ajmi, Khalil bin Abdullah (2019 AD) The growth of Oman's naval power and its role in pushing the British to establish a political and commercial alliance with the early rulers of the Ya'ariba State (1650-1700 AD), Journal of Studies of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, No. 22, Morocco.
- Al-Barashdi, Musa bin Salem (2016 AD) Administrative Organization in Oman at the Time of Al-Ya'ariba, Research Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo.
- Al-Barashdi, Musa bin Salem (2019 AD) Political Role of Omani Scholars from 1624 to 1749 AD, 1st Edition, Omani Society of Writers, and Sultanate of Oman.
- Al-Hashimi, Saeed bin Mohammed (2013) Studies in Omani History (Volume 1) Muscat, The Cultural Club, Sultanate of Oman.
- al-Saleem, Abd al-Rahim Salem (1988). The foundations of the foreign policy of the Sultanate of Oman, A thesis to obtain a license in law, Morocco, Mohammed V University.
- Al-Salmi, Abdullah bin Humaid (2017) Masterpiece of Notables in the Biography of the People of Oman, Muscat Library, Sultanate of Oman.
- Al-Sayyar, Aisha (2018 AD) The State of Al-Ya'ariba, 1st Edition, Kuttab House, United Arab Emirates
- Al-Sudais, Abdul Rahman Ali (1993 AD) Omanis and the Islamic Jihad in East Africa, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah Al-Mukarramah.
- Al-Toubi, Ahmed bin Humaid (2019 AD) Castle of Jesus, 1st Edition, Bait Al-Ghasham, Sultanate of Oman
- Al-Tubi, Ahmed bin Humaid (2017) Omani Resistance to the Portuguese Presence in the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, Bait Al Ghasham, Sultanate of Oman
- Kayyali, Abdel Wahab (1983) Encyclopedia of Politics, Volume 3 (Volume I 1), Beirut, The Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing.
- Kelly, John. B. (1979) Britain and the Gulf, T: Muhammad Amin Abdullah, Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Muscat.
- Ma'shi, Jamila bint Abdo bin Musa (2014 AD) The Efforts of the Propagation of Islam in East Africa (1110 - 1313 AH / 1698 - 1895 AD), a historical and civilization study, thesis of Master degree, History department, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah Al-Mukarramah. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- Ministry of Education (2004 AD) School Atlas of the Sultanate of Oman and the World, 1st Edition, S
- Ministry of Information (2015 AD) Oman in History, 3rd Edition, Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman.
- Mohamed, Fadel Zaki. (1975) Foreign policy and its significances in international politics, Damascus, Shafiq Press.
- Nevin Mustafa Hassan Saad (2010) Ya'ariba Jihad Against Portuguese Colonialism 1033-1131 / 1624-1718 AD (Volume 1) Menoufia, Egypt, Journal of Middle East Research.