



**Government Defence
Integrity Index**



2020

Country Brief:

OMAN



OMAN

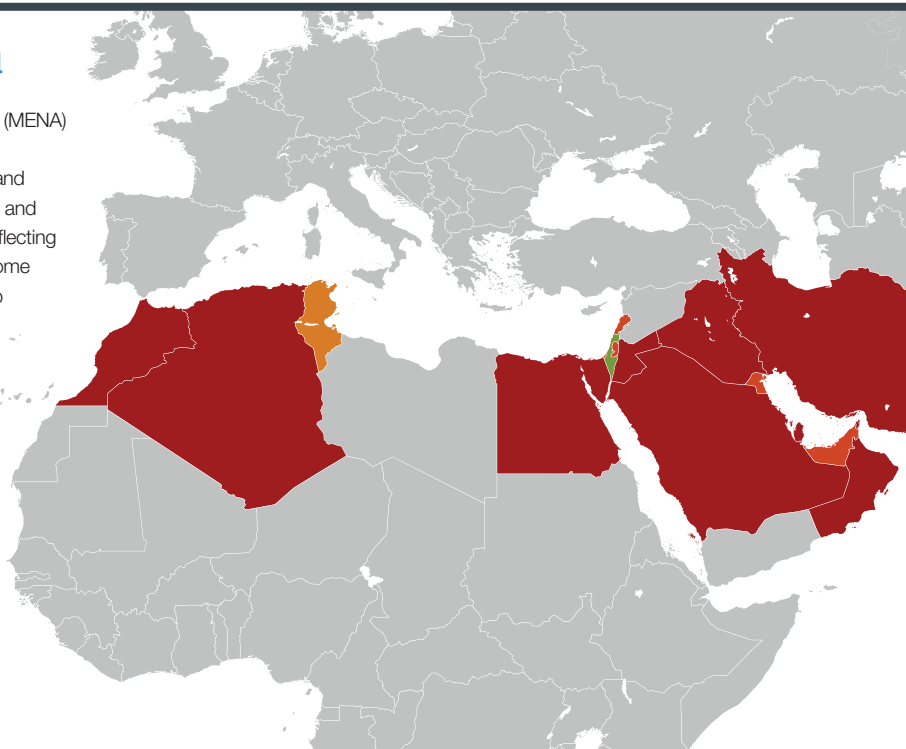
A key US and UK ally in the Gulf, Oman's strategic neutrality makes it a frequent regional mediator, for instance during the isolation of Qatar in 2017 and when brokering agreements between the US and Iran.¹ Oman has long been seen as a source of stability in a volatile region and has benefitted from strong political and military cooperation with the UK and the US.² However, the death of Sultan Qaboos after 50 years in power has shaken the country, and his inexperienced cousin, Sultan Haitham, succeeds him at a time of growing regional geopolitical rivalries where Oman may struggle to detach itself from the influences of its powerful neighbours. Alongside this, periodic unrest and growing demands for political reform, coupled with the economy's vulnerability to oil price fluctuations and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, mean that the sultanate must navigate a complicated period.³

Amidst this, the defence and security forces will play crucial role. Widely held to be some of the best trained in the region,⁴ they have received significant investment in recent years, with defence spending reaching 11% of GDP in 2020, the highest rate in the world.⁵ However, serious governance deficits within the defence sector risk fuelling corruption and the siphoning of public funds and international security assistance for private gain. Parliament is almost entirely excluded from dealing with defence matters and defence exceptionalism exempts institutions from standard transparency and reporting rules. Procurement is highly secretive and not subject to competition, while the public has virtually no access to defence information. Patronage and nepotism undermine personnel management systems and the military has no safeguards to corruption during operations.

Member of Open Government Partnership	No
UN Convention Against Corruption	Ratified in 2014.
Arms Trade Treaty	Has not signed.

Middle East & North Africa

Defence sectors across the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region continue to face a high risk of corruption. At the same time, protracted armed conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Yemen persist, while public protests against corruption and authoritarianism continue in a number of countries – reflecting an overall context of insecurity and fragility. Although some governments have publically committed to stepping up anti-corruption efforts, there remains a gap between existing legislation and implementation in practice. Military institutions in the region are characterised by a high degree of defence exceptionalism, resulting in a lack of transparency that precludes oversight actors from effectively scrutinising defence budgets and policies at a time when defence spending and arms imports continue to surge. These concerns are further compounded by authoritarian governance systems seen in many MENA countries. Resurgent protests and uprisings in the region after the 2011 Arab Spring demonstrate that corruption is a central and persistent public grievance.



¹ Kenneth Katzman, 'Oman: Politics, Security and US Policy', *Congressional Research Service*, RS21534, 17 June 2020, p. 9.

² Louisa Keeler, 'Can Oman Survive its Own Neighbourhood After the Death of Sultan Qaboos?', *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 21 January 2020.

³ Katzman, 'Oman'.

⁴ Austin G Commons, 'Revisiting Oman: A Model for Integrating Conventional and Special Operations Advisors in Security Force Assistance', *Small Wars Journal*, 11 August 2020.

⁵ Diego Lopes da Silva, Nan Tian, and Alexandra Marksteiner, 'Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2020'. SIPRI, April 2021



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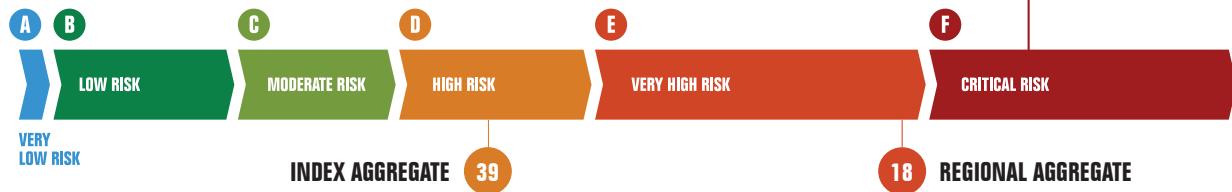
Overall scores

The size of the colour band corresponds to number of countries that fall into that category.

OMAN SCORE CRITICAL RISK

F

9



A > 83-100 VERY LOW

B > 67-82 LOW

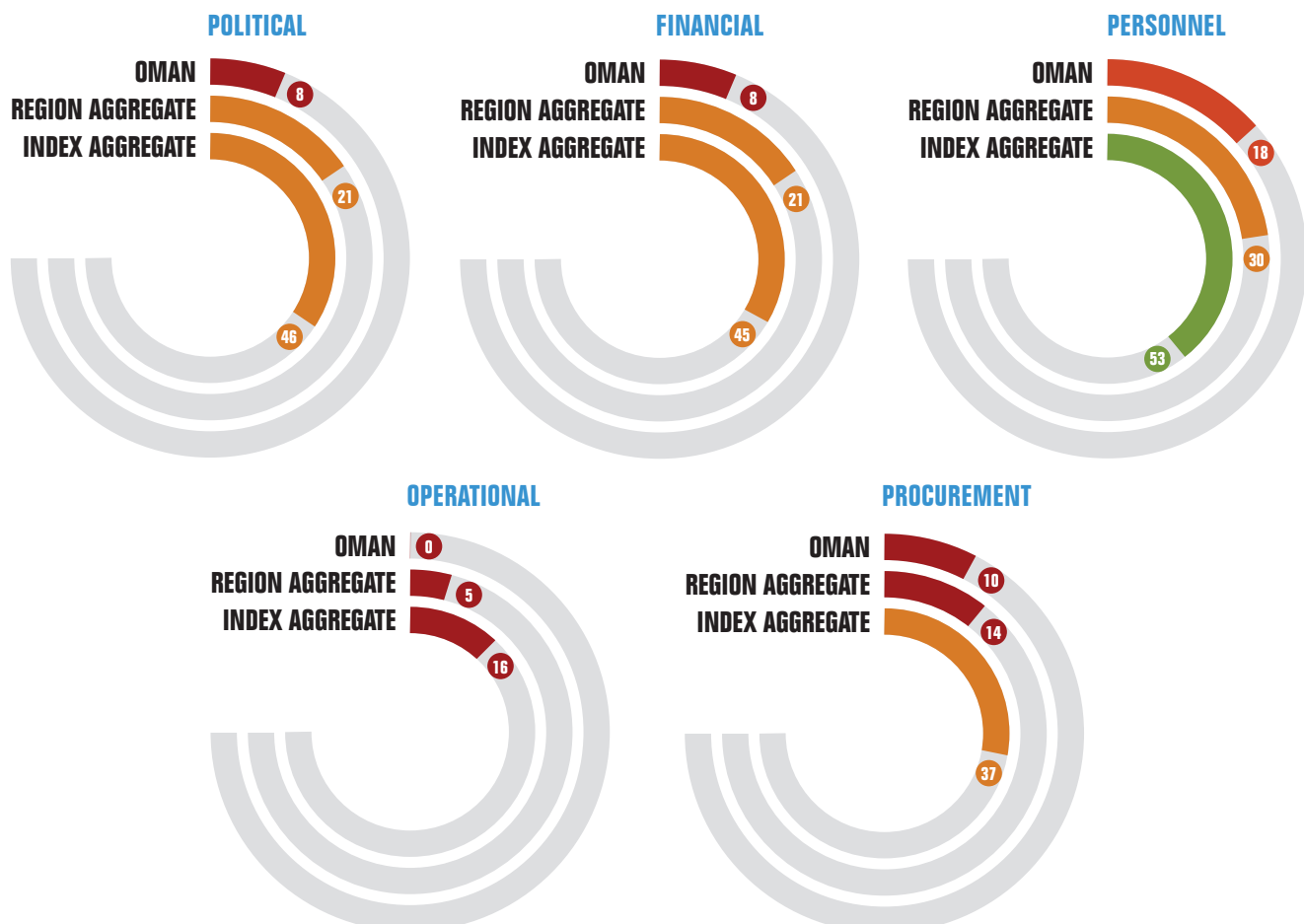
C > 50-66 MODERATE

D > 33-49 HIGH

E > 17-32 VERY HIGH

F > 0-16 CRITICAL

Risk Comparison





OMAN

Parliamentary Oversight

Legislative oversight of budget (Open Budget Survey, 2019)	Not ranked.
Military expenditure as a share of government spending (SIPRI, 2020)	21.9%
Committee members with defence expertise (%)	Data is not publicly available.
# of meetings/year	Data is not publicly available.
Last review of defence policy/strategy	No such strategy is publicly available.

As an absolute monarchy, political power in Oman is highly centralised, with the sultan enjoying absolute power.⁶ Some measure of gradual liberalization has occurred over the past few years guaranteeing Omanis representation through elections to the elected lower chamber, the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council).⁷ However, the measures have not limited Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's power as the main decision-maker and supreme authority, and the Council has already scaled back its demands to interrogate ministers and high ranking officials.⁸ Political parties are banned and the Sultan acts as the prime minister and minister of defence, finance and foreign affairs.⁹ Correspondingly, parliamentary powers over the defence sector are extremely limited. The Council is more of an advisory body than a legislature and has no power to approve or veto laws on defence and security policy.¹⁰ Its activities are restricted to reviewing government legislation and it cannot address important issues, such as defence and security.¹¹ The Council does not debate such issues and defence institutions are not required to provide it with any information. Though there is nominally a Defence, Security and Foreign Relations Affairs Committee, the body has no mandate and there is no information on its composition, making it highly unlikely that it is active. The royal family has also recently tightened control over defence policy, by amending the composition of the powerful Defence Council, the highest body responsible for defence affairs, and nominating family members to its leadership.¹² In addition to the absence of parliamentary oversight, auditing practices are virtually non-existent. There is no external auditing of defence spending, as the State Audit Institute's mandate does not extend to the defence sector. Though there is an internal audit unit within the Ministry of Defence, its assessments are irregular and superficial, and it has very little power.

Financial Transparency

Defence-related access to information response rates	(1) % granted full or partial access: None. (2) # subject to backlog: None.
Defence-related complaints to ombudsman/commissioner #	None.
Does the commissioner have authority over the MoD?	No such commissioner exists.
Audit reports on defence (2015-2020) #	None.
Open Budget Index (IBP, 2019)	Not ranked.
World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2021)	133rd out of 180

Government transparency is very poor in Oman. The hierarchical nature of the regime and concentration of power in the inner circle around the sultan means that there is very little openness in the decision-making process.¹³ Media censorship is ubiquitous, and authorities target anyone who speaks out against the sultan or the elite.¹⁴ The government treats virtually all defence information as classified, making the availability of budgetary, administrative, procurement, and expenditure data extremely limited. The published defence budget contains only a top-line figure with no breakdown by functions or areas and no justifications for expenditure. Media reports also omit Ministry of Defence allocations entirely, and beyond the overall figure,¹⁵ no further information is provided. Moreover, the al-Shura Council does not have the authority to discuss the defence budget, indicating that the legislature is not provided with additional figures other than the overall amount. The approved budget can change drastically by Sultani Decree, as has previously happened, meaning the figures provided are largely unreliable. The poor availability of reliable financial information is exacerbated by the absence of a legal framework around access to information rights on defence issues. In many cases, the practice is even criminalised. The Ministry of Information is empowered to restrict information access to the public, and the government's open data guidelines explicitly omit details on defence information, effectively putting it beyond reach of the media and civil society.¹⁶ Civil society groups must gain government approval to operate under strict parameters,¹⁷ and are restricted from working with defence institutions at all.

⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI Country Report 2020 – Oman*, Gutersloh, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020, p. 3.
⁷ Katzman, 'Oman'.

⁸ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI Oman*, p. 3 & p.5.

⁹ Phil Miller, 'Revealed: How the British Military Supplies 'Mercenary' Forces to a Gulf Dictatorship', Declassified UK, 20 July 2020.

¹⁰ Kenneth Katzman, 'Oman: Reform, Security, And U.S. Policy,' *Congressional Research Service*, 2018.

¹¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI Oman*, p. 14.

¹² Haitham El-Zobaidi, 'Sultan Haitham Introduces Major Changes in Defence & Security Establishment', *The Arab Weekly*, 26 January 2021.

¹³ Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2020 – Oman', C3.

¹⁴ Reporters Without Borders, 'Oman'.

¹⁵ Times of Oman, 'Budget 2018: Government Outlines Roadmap To The Future,' *Times of Oman*, 1 January 2018.

¹⁶ Sultanate of Oman, 'Open Government Data Policy,

¹⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI Oman*, p. 29.



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Personnel Ethics Framework

Whistleblowing legislation	None.
# defence-sector whistleblower cases	None.
# Code of conduct violations	Military: Data is not publicly available.
	Civilian: Data is not publicly available.
Financial disclosure system	# submitted: No such system exists.
	# of violations: No such system exists.

Though Oman's military is considered to be well-trained and supported by British and American seconded officers,¹⁸ serious corruption risks persist in the military's personnel management framework. Though military and civilian personnel are subject to codes of conduct that cover corruption issues, such as bribery, conflicts of interests and gifts, they are not widely known or distributed. The codes are seen as purely bureaucratic tools and lack credibility amongst personnel, resulting in very weak enforcement. Personnel are highly unlikely to be sanctioned for breaches and the code is not covered during training. Attempts to build integrity and an anti-corruption culture are also held back by the absence of whistleblowing legislation.¹⁹ There are no legal provisions for the protection of military personnel reporting corruption, which is generally not seen as a pressing issue. Restrictions over freedom of expression and military secrecy also act to deter potential whistleblowers from disclosing information through fear of repercussions. Further issues exist in military recruitment, promotion and payment systems. Pay rates are not published and are alleged to vary quite widely depending on units, and there is no separation between the chain of command and payment. In practice, this means that commanders have control over their soldiers' pay, increasing the risk of payments being diverted or siphoned off. In terms of recruitment and promotions, formal procedures are systematically superseded by political and tribal influences that skew the process towards well-connected personnel. No objective criteria for positions are published and decisions, especially at upper levels, are reliant on the sultan who assigns them as a form of patronage.²⁰

Operations

Total armed forces personnel (World Bank, 2018)	46,600
Troops deployed on operations #	None.

The Omani Royal Armed Forces are currently not deployed on any significant operations and do not contribute troops to multilateral organisations, such as the United Nations.²¹ This notwithstanding, Omani troops receive significant combat training from international partners and the armed forces have worked to increase their operational preparedness in recent years.²² However, a review of institutional safeguards to corruption during operations reveals significant issues that, left unaddressed, pose serious threats to operational effectiveness. At a strategic level, the military does not consider corruption a strategic issue for operations. Corruption is not included in the military doctrine, nor is it taken into consideration during the forward planning of military exercises or deployments. This lack of a strategic approach to corruption trickles down into troop training and monitoring and evaluation. There is no evidence that either commanders or soldiers receive training in corruption issues prior to deployments or as part of basic training, betraying a lack of readiness for addressing these issues should they arise. The military does not deploy personnel to monitor corruption risk, nor does it have strategies in place to identify, mitigate and counter corruption-related issues when troops are deployed.

¹⁸ Ian Cobain, 'British Military Operating in Scores of Locations across Middle-East', *Middle-East Eye*, 24 November 2020.

¹⁹ National Whistleblower Center, 'Oman', 2018.

²⁰ Marc Valeri 'Simmering Unrest And Succession Challenges In Oman', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2015.

²¹ United Nations Peacekeeping, 'Troop and Police Contributors'.

²² United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, 'Oman Provides Challenging Environment for British Army Exercise', 12 March 2019.



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Defence Procurement

Military expenditure (US\$ mil) (2019)	6,663
Open competition in defence procurement (%)	Data is not publicly available.
Main defence exports – to (SIPRI, 2016-20)	Cyprus
Main defence imports – from (SIPRI, 2016-20)	United Kingdom, United States, Turkey, Norway, Spain

Oman consistently allocates substantial public funds to the defence sector. In 2020, close to 22% of the government's total expenditure was dedicated to defence, a significant amount that puts it on par with Saudi Arabia.²³ Despite budget cuts announced in 2021, as a response to lower oil prices and the economic downturn of the COVID-19 pandemic,²⁴ the defence sector remains the most significant area of public spending. However, a complete lack of transparency throughout the procurement cycle risks seriously undermining the effectiveness of Oman's procurement efforts. The military's acquisition planning process is highly secretive and considered confidential, and there is no internal or external oversight of the process. The lack of clarity around the existence of an acquisition plan and the uncertainty surrounding the national defence strategy, mean that it is impossible to verify whether purchases respond to specific strategic

needs. In fact, defence purchases are considered state secrets and are never released to the public. This secrecy also extends to procurement management bodies within the defence sector. Oman has no legislation that covers defence purchases and the state tender board that oversees procurement and contracts has no jurisdiction over the Ministry of Defence.²⁵ Instead, the Ministry ostensibly has its own Directorate-General of Procurement and Contracts, yet no information can be found relating to its mandate or powers. The high levels of secrecy throughout the procurement process also underline how the vast majority of procurement is single-sourced, especially with regards to strategic deals for major arms and equipment, which are not subject to competition. Crucially, there is no oversight mechanism, either internally or externally, to scrutinise these procedures and there are virtually no restrictions on single-supplier procurement, allowing defence institutions to award tenders to preferred suppliers with almost no checks.

²³ SIPRI, 'Military Expenditure as a Share of Government Spending', *Military Expenditure Database*.

²⁴ Charles Forrester, 'Oman Releases 2021 Budget, Cuts Defence Spending', *Janes*, 11 January 2021.

²⁵ Sultanate of Oman, 'Open Government Data Policy,' Information Technology Authority, 2019.

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GDI data collection for **Oman** was conducted July 2018 to September 2019. The narrative discussion in this GDI brief was produced at a later time with the most recent information available for the country, which may not be reflected in the GDI country assessments or scores.



OMAN 2020 GDI Scorecard

Grade Score

Political Risk		F	8
Q1	Legislative Scrutiny	F	0
Q2	Defence Committee	F	0
Q3	Defence Policy Debate	F	0
Q4	CSO Engagement	F	0
Q5	Conventions: UNCAC / OECD	C	50
Q6	Public Debate	F	0
Q7	Anticorruption Policy	F	0
Q8	Compliance and Ethics Units	F	0
Q9	Public Trust in Institutions	NS	
Q10	Risk Assessments	F	0
Q11	Acquisition Planning	F	8
Q12	Budget Transparency & Detail	F	13
Q13	Budget Scrutiny	F	0
Q14	Budget Availability	F	8
Q15	Defence Income	F	0
Q16	Internal Audit	F	8
Q17	External Audit	F	0
Q18	Natural Resources	E	25
Q19	Organised Crime Links	B	75
Q20	Organised Crime Policing	F	0
Q21	Intelligence Services Oversight	F	0
Q22	Intelligence Services Recruitment	F	0
Q23	Export Controls (ATT)	F	0
Q76	Lobbying	F	0

Financial Risk		F	8
Q24	Asset Disposal Controls	E	25
Q25	Asset Disposal Scrutiny	F	0
Q26	Secret Spending	F	0
Q27	Legislative Access to Information	F	0
Q28	Secret Program Auditing	F	0
Q29	Off-budget Spending	E	17
Q30	Access to Information	F	0
Q31	Beneficial Ownership	F	0
Q32	Military-Owned Business Scrutiny	F	0
Q33	Unauthorised Private Enterprise	C	50
Q77	Defence Spending	F	0

Personnel Risk		E	18
Q34	Public Commitment to Integrity	F	0
Q35	Disciplinary Measures for Personnel	E	25
Q36	Whistleblowing	F	0
Q37	High-risk Positions	F	0
Q38	Numbers of Personnel	D	42
Q39	Pay Rates and Allowances	F	0
Q40	Payment System	B	67
Q41	Objective Appointments	F	8
Q42	Objective Promotions	F	8
Q43	Bribery to Avoid Conscription	NA	
Q44	Bribery for Preferred Postings	C	50
Q45	Chains of Command and Payment	F	0
Q46	Military Code of Conduct	E	19

OVERALL COUNTRY SCORE CRITICAL RISK



RISK GRADE

A • 83-100 **VERY LOW**
B • 67-82 **LOW**
C • 50-66 **MODERATE**
D • 33-49 **HIGH**
E • 17-32 **VERY HIGH**
F • 0-16 **CRITICAL**



Grade Score

Personnel Risk		E	18
Q47	Civilian Code of Conduct	E	25
Q48	Anticorruption Training	F	0
Q49	Corruption Prosecutions	F	0
Q50	Facilitation Payments	D	42

Operational Risk		F	0
Q51	Military Doctrine	F	0
Q52	Operational Training	F	0
Q53	Forward Planning	F	0
Q54	Corruption Monitoring in Operations	F	0
Q55	Controls in Contracting	F	0
Q56	Private Military Contractors	NS	

Procurement Risk		F	10
Q57	Procurement Legislation	F	0
Q58	Procurement Cycle	F	0
Q59	Procurement Oversight Mechanisms	F	0
Q60	Potential Purchases Disclosed	F	0
Q61	Actual Purchases Disclosed	F	0
Q62	Business Compliance Standards	F	0
Q63	Procurement Requirements	F	0
Q64	Competition in Procurement	F	0
Q65	Tender Board Controls	F	6
Q66	Anti-Collusion Controls	F	0
Q67	Contract Award / Delivery	E	25
Q68	Complaint Mechanisms	C	50
Q69	Supplier Sanctions	F	0
Q70	Offset Contracts	F	13
Q71	Offset Contract Monitoring	F	13
Q72	Offset Competition	F	0
Q73	Agents and Intermediaries	B	75
Q74	Financing Packages	F	0
Q75	Political Pressure in Acquisitions	NS	

KEY

NEI Not enough information to score indicator
NS Indicator is not scored for any country
NA Not applicable



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