

Small Nation Diplomacy: Oman in the Age of Globalisation

Speaker: His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood Al-Busaidi, Undersecretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman
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In a lecture on small nation diplomacy, Mr. Sayyid Badr explained how small nations can contribute to international relations in the age of globalisation. He made an abstract of the particular experience of Oman.

Discussing foreign policy of small nations in terms of relations of dependency is not an adequate basis to understand their diplomacy. Small nations can exercise a considerable freedom of action in a number of ways. In Oman's case, the external environment is strongly shaped by both the historical conflict between Arab states and Israel and the projection of American power and interest in the region. These factors do not determine Oman's actions, but they certainly define the field of action. Crucial is that in the space between big nations, small nations have the possibility to conduct diplomacy discretely.

According to Mr. Sayyid Badr there are four areas in which it is important that small nations share experiences and work together:

- a) Good neighbour policy. Oman applies an important principle: treat neighbours with respect and consideration so that this contributes to the development of a harmonious regional environment.
- b) Support for regional associations.
- c) Respect for the rule of law. In a world of complex interdependency, the more the system is governed by the rule of law rather than by force, the better it will be for the world. The strengthening of the rule of law is connected to the practice of multilateralism.
- d) Ethics. In consideration of the supposedly universal values, small nations may have a distinctive contribution to make. Their particular historical experience that shed a different light on typical ethic and legal problems, might offer a new approach to the management of international situations.

The speaker stressed that the strength of small nations, like Oman, lies in making the rule of law the element of coordination in the regional approach. Thus it is important to uphold the rule of law and to remind everyone of the importance of respect for that rule of law, thus for the international system.

Mr. Sayyid Badr concluded by referring to the globalised world. It does not make sense to think about dependency as alternative condition to independence. Small nations are to some degree interdependent. In building new models to understand relations between nations - both large and small - a complex set of interaction between external and internal factors, regional and global stages, needs to be taken into account.

Report by X. Vanlauwe