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Oman – a model of democratic development in the Arabo-Islamic world?

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The West's years-long agenda of introducing democracy, pursued in the Near East and North Africa in particular, has proven daunting to implement and can patently not be accomplished by force. Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, Libya and Syria provide appalling and woeful proof of this.

One land in this region, though, The Sultanate of Oman, has since 1970 striven gradually and with respect for domestic social realities to cultivate an Omani national identity that transcends tribalism by promoting public participation in the country's administration and initiating citizens into political decision-making processes. This effort has achieved success in laying the foundation for the development of democratic structures and institutions. The approaches that have enabled the monarch, Sultan Qaboos, to accomplish this are both noteworthy and exemplary; they definitely deserve greater international approbation.

In addition to asserting its influence and reinforcing its supremacy, one of the aims of the military activities of the US in the Middle East – not just after “9-11” – has been to establish democratic systems of government there as a basis for economic and infrastructural development (Brzezinski 1999, 26f., 182ff.; Ganser 2017, 29ff.; Lüders 2015, 37ff.; Pitt/Ritter 2002, 13ff.). However, as recent events have shown, such an aim is not easy to achieve in ethnically, tribally and religiously segmented societies (Kermani 2003; Lüders 2017). Democracy cannot be ordered from outside, nor imposed by force, nor established through subtle external influence. As history has shown, building up democratic structures is a long process, and it is surprising that in its present attitude to the Middle East and North Africa, the West (and especially the US) has apparently learned nothing from its own past.

The Sultanate of Oman lies within this region. After 1970, a process was cautiously begun in Oman that would lead to the inclusion of the people in decisions regarding political and developmental matters, a process that was not without upheavals but which took local and regional social conditions into account. This process has effectively continued to this day; it has no equivalent in the region, and it may be regarded as an object lesson, a model of democratic development in tribally structured and hierarchical societies. In view of the fact that there is currently little