

Oman's new billion dollar fleet

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The recent naming of the fourth and final **Al Ofouq patrol vessel** destined for the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) represents the end phase of one of the most comprehensive fleet rejuvenation programmes in the GCC region.

From a 1960s fleet of wooden dhows and the odd patrol vessel, the pre-rejuvenated Omani navy (pictured above) sourced its naval assets mainly from the West in order to meet its requirements. Fast forward to 2016 and surface assets are coming from all corners, at an expense of approximately \$1.4 billion and counting.

What is noticeable is the increase in capability provided as a result, giving the strategically-located country better control over its national waters and EEZ.

Tony Beitinger, VP Market Intelligence at AMI International, said the RNO's surface vessel modernisation programme is a 'significant milestone'.

'The RNO will have a modern surface force that will be in service until the 2040s and one of the most capable in the Persian Gulf area. The RNO has the increased capability to operate further from home port for extended periods,' he said.

'This significantly improves the RNO's ability to control the nation's EEZ and coastline in a high-threat environment. The future Al Khareef-2 frigate programme will further augment the surface fleet with more advanced systems supporting anti-air, anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare protection, longer range surveillance capabilities and interoperability with regional navies.'

The Al Ofouqs are a 75m variant of the smaller Fearless patrol boats weight in around 1,100t and look likely to be used for patrolling Oman's 487,356km² EEZ. Based on the Fearless patrol vessel design, the \$700 million deal sees the class replace the ageing 1980s Al Seeb patrol vessels operated by the RNO.

BAE Systems, meanwhile, inherited the £400 million (approx. \$575 million) **Khareef corvette** contract from Vosper Thornycraft (VT) Shipbuilding during a company merger in 2008. It is thought, however, that some financial penalties were accrued by BAE as a result of construction and delivery delays.

The *Al Shamikh*, *Al Rahmani* and *Al Rasikh* displace around 2,600t and are equipped with SAM and SSM systems. The third and final corvette, *Al Rasikh*, was delivered to the RNO in 2014.

At 99m in length, they will be the largest warships in the RNO fleet and the first new class of corvettes to enter service since the Qahir class in 1996, built by VT Shipbuilding. The class have an endurance of around 21 days.

In March 2014 shipbuilder Austal was awarded a \$124.9 million contract for the design, construction and integrated logistics support of two 72m High Speed Support Vessels (**HSSV**). Construction began in August 2014, with **the future RNOV Al Mubshir launched in October 2015**, ahead of an expected delivery early this year following final fitting out.

The second HSSV at an advanced stage of construction for its planned completion in mid-2016, according to Austal.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) coast guard department is also benefiting from this maritime focus, with the announcement last year they will procure five 35m patrol boats from Spanish Shipbuilder Rodman Polyships.

The €42 million (approx. \$45 million) contract will see the five Rodman 111s delivered to Muscat within 24 months. These patrol vessels were designed exclusively for the Oman deal and are able to reach up to 40kts at full displacement, ideal for hunting smugglers and assisting littoral security.

The company previously delivered three units of the Rodman 101 fast patrol vessel to the ROP coast guard in 2013.

The ROP has signed a contract in 2015 to buy **14 Watercat K13 Fast Interceptor Craft** from Finnish shipbuilder Marine Alutech Oy Ab, also for their coast guard unit. These patrol interceptors are also capable of more than 40kts.

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