



Sultan Qaboos of Oman Passes Away After Nearly 50 Years of Rule

The Middle East's longest-serving leader, Sultan Qaboos of Oman, passed away after nearly half a century of peaceful rule. Qaboos' cousin and the former Minister of Heritage and Culture, Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, was sworn in as Oman's new sultan after relatives opened a secret letter detailing Qaboos' choice of successor. Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970 after deposing his ultra-conservative father, and reformed Oman from a country with harsh laws and a lack of infrastructure into one of the most stable forces in the region. Under his reign, Oman also transitioned from an isolated state into an active member of the Arab League and the United Nations, and has played a major role as arbiter and peacekeeper in Middle Eastern diplomatic affairs.

In 1970 at the age of 29, Sultan Qaboos seized power from his father in a bloodless coup, with support from former colonial power Great Britain. Prior to his ascension to the throne, Oman was a secluded society which banned a variety of things including electricity, listening to the radio, and wearing sunglasses. Under his new leadership, Qaboos established a modern government in order to develop the country, which at the time lacked adequate infrastructure and schooling. He also pursued a policy of neutrality when it came to foreign affairs, allowing the nation to serve as a mediator between sparring actors in the region. Oman has been able to play a critical role in this respect due to its geographic positioning, which sees it share borders with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, while also sitting across the Gulf of Oman from Iran.

In addition to maintaining positive relations with its direct neighbors under Qaboos' rule, Oman has also done so with global superpowers like the United States as well. In fact, due to their friendly ties with both Iran and the United States, Oman was able to host the secret meetings that eventually resulted in the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal, known more formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Under Sultan Qaboos' rule, Oman was a key facilitator of other negotiations between the two countries, including helping to secure the release of American prisoners from Iran in 2011. The Omanis served as respected mediators in regional conflicts as well, organizing talks between the warring sides in the ongoing war in Yemen.

Leading up to his passing, Sultan Qaboos had been perceived to be ill for some time. He spent eight months in a hospital in Germany back in 2015 before returning to Oman. In December of last year, the royal court of Oman stated that Qaboos was in stable condition, shortly after traveling to Belgium for a week for what they described as "medical checks."

After being sworn in as the new sultan, Haitham bin Tariq Al Said emphasized that he was focused on maintaining Oman's long-standing role as a neutral party for peace in the region: "We will follow the same line as the late sultan and the principles that he asserted for the foreign policy of our country, of peaceful coexistence among nations and people, and good neighborly behavior of non-interference in the affairs of others."