



PERSPECTIVES

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Israel Will Miss Sultan Qaboos of Oman

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The late Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said of Oman was the rare Arab leader who did not let prevailing anti-Israel trends sway him, and who refused to be drawn into the Arab-Israeli conflict. His successor would be wise to follow his lead rather than cozy up to Iran and open his country to the predations that befell Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq as a result of Iranian interference.

Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said sadly passed away on January 10, 2020. He was 79, childless, and considered to be the longest-ruling Arab leader in modern history.

Sultan Qaboos rose to power in 1970 at the age of 29, the only child of his father, Sultan Said bin Taimur. He deposed his father with the help of the British after attending the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

He was known as a tolerant and peace-loving ruler who successfully mediated disputes between neighboring Arab states. He refused to be drawn into the Arab-Israeli conflict; nor would he get involved in disputes between Iran and its Arab neighbors. While the rest of the region squabbled and took sides, he maintained neutrality.

He did not try to protect the Palestinians or join the war against Israel. Instead, he engaged in long-term relationships with senior officials and even encouraged Israeli representation in his country for a time.

During his reign, Qaboos used Oman's oil resources to transform it into a modern state. He had no heir and never named a successor so as not to rouse conflict between rival tribes.

There are still no official diplomatic relations between Oman and Israel. But talks continue behind the scenes, as is the case with most Gulf states.

A main reason for the lack of official ties is the Palestinian issue. Most Arabs want to avoid being perceived as traitors on this matter. But when the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, the Gulf states felt they were now able to warm up to the Jewish state.

PM Yitzhak Rabin visited Oman in 1994, and two years later, the soft-spoken Sultan met with Shimon Peres. Immediately after that meeting, Israel opened an official mission in Muscat, the capital of Oman.

The mission operated only a few years, closing in 2000 with the outbreak of the so-called "Al-Aqsa Intifada." Reports and images of Palestinian suffering caused the Gulf states to sever relations with Israel so as not to be accused of betraying fellow Muslims.

However, the breach with Oman did not last long. Omani FM Imad Ben-Aloi visited Israel in 2008, then publicly met with Israeli FM Tzipi Livni in Qatar. The two countries continued talking behind the scenes until PM Benjamin Netanyahu surprised the world by [visiting](#) the Gulf state together with his wife Sarah and the head of the Mossad in October 2018. The Sultan claimed the meeting was intended to help negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

In recent months, the head of the Mossad announced that Israel would reopen the Israeli mission to Oman, but the future of that plan is uncertain in light of Qaboos's death. It is not clear how the new Sultan of Oman, Haitham bin Tariq, will act toward Israel. Will he try to normalize relations with Israel in the mold of his predecessor, or will he support the Palestinians? Will he cozy up to Iran or stay on the fence?

History teaches that any country that supports the Palestinian cause and sides with Tehran is likely to become an Iranian vassal inundated with radical Shiite militias. Examples are plentiful. Take Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. All three were once wealthy nations but are now failed states thanks to Iran's interference.

In order to maintain the welfare of his country and the legacy of Qaboos, the new Sultan would be wise to follow the path of his predecessor.

This is an edited version of an [article](#) that appeared in Israel Today on January 13, 2020.

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