

AL BU SA'ID, QABUS IBN SA'ID

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Ruler of Oman.

Qabus ibn Sa'id ibn Taymur Al Bu Sa'id became sultan of Oman in 1970 and is the fourteenth member of the Al Bu Sa'id dynasty to rule Oman. Qabus (also Qaboos) was born in Salala, in the southern Omani province of Dhufar, on 18 November 1940. His father was Sultan Sa'id ibn Taymur (r. 1932–1970) and his mother came from the Bayt Ma'shani tribe of the Dhufari mountains. In 1958, Qabus was sent to England for schooling, and he subsequently attended the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. His return to Oman in 1964 was followed by years of enforced inactivity in Salala under his father's watchful eye.

The late 1960s saw increasing unrest in Oman due to Sultan Sa'id's apparent refusal to spend his new oil revenues and because of a rebellion in Dhufar against the sultan's paternalistic rule. By mid-1970, the situation had worsened and Qabus joined forces with his friends in Salala and British and Omani backers in Muscat to organize a coup d'état against his father on 23 July 1970.

In contrast to his father, Qabus threw the country open to development and welcomed back the thousands of Omanis working abroad. Within a week of his accession, the country's first true Council of Ministers was formed with Qabus's uncle, Tariq ibn Taymur, as prime minister. Two weeks after the coup, Sultan Qabus arrived in Muscat for the first time and took charge of the new government. Differences between the two men forced Tariq's resignation in 1971; Sultan Qabus has served as his own prime minister since then.

From the beginning of his reign, Qabus faced two primary challenges: economically transforming

one of the world's most underdeveloped countries and dealing with the serious rebellion in Dhufar. In the early 1970s, development activity concentrated on providing education, healthcare, water, and electricity to the people and creating a modern infrastructure. At the same time, the course of the Dhufar rebellion was reversed with British, Jordanian, and Iranian assistance and through an intensive "hearts and minds" campaign. The sultan was able to declare the war over in 1975.

Sultan Qabus clearly stands at the apex of the political system of Oman. Decision-making tends to bypass the Council of Ministers and flow directly up to him. He also has steered the country to a moderate path in international affairs, establishing diplomatic relations with China and Russia while maintaining close political and security links with Britain and the United States. Sultan Qabus was one of the few Arab leaders not to break off relations with Egypt following the Camp David Accords. He was careful to keep channels open to both sides during the Iran–Iraq War (1988) and permitted Western powers to use Omani facilities during the hostilities against Iraq in 1990 and 1991. He also agreed to border treaties in the early 1990s with Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Sultan Qabus has no direct heirs. A marriage arranged by his father to the daughter of an important tribal shaykh never was finalized. A marriage in 1976 to his cousin Kamila, a daughter of Tariq ibn Taymur, ended in divorce.

See also AL BU SA'ID FAMILY AND TRIBE OF OMAN.

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