



## Sultan In Arabia: A Private Life

*John Beasant, Christopher Ling*

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At a time when the influence of Islam and the Arab world dominate newspaper headlines as a result of bloodshed and terrorist threats, it will come as a welcome relief to learn of Sultan Qaboos. The very term 'Sultan' conjures up shades of peacock thrones and riches beyond the dreams of avarice. This incredible scene has almost vanished . . . but not quite. In today's oil-rich Arabia, one Sultan remains. He is one of the world's very last absolute rulers and presides over daily rituals the Ottomans of old Istanbul would recognise immediately. Arabia's sole surviving Sultan is, however, an arch exponent of the very British practice of discretion and reserve, which is far from surprising given that he owes his throne to the machinations of a very British coup. Indeed, so wide ranging is the cloak of Sultan Qaboos's reticence that his country has been described as the world's most secretive state. It would be quite impossible to divorce the man from the land which he has ruled for the past 33 years, so immediate is his authority, so absolute is his exercise of unfettered power. But who exactly is Qaboos bin Said Al Said? What of the journey without maps which led him to be complicit in the betrayal and overthrow of his own father? What role did he personally take in the Dhofar war of the 1970s, when he became the first Arab monarch to defeat the armed exponents of Marx and Lenin? And what of his hitherto secret connections with Margaret Thatcher and the incident that became known as the 'Thatcher necklace affair'?

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