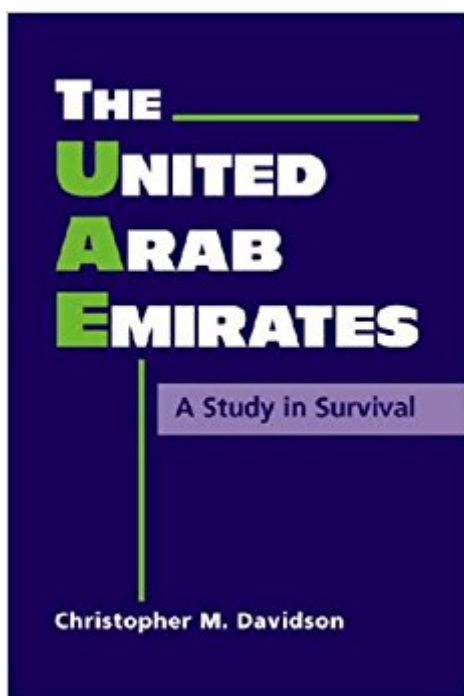


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The United Arab Emirates: A Study In Survival (Middle East In The International System)



Synopsis

The United Arab Emirates has remained a mainstay of stability in an increasingly volatile Middle East, managing to maintain a traditional polity despite the impact of rapid modernization and globalization. This in-depth study explores the many contradictions that characterize the UAE and its position within the international system. Davidson first provides a detailed historical background, tracing the recent history of the lower Gulf region, the British involvement in the area, and the establishment of the federation of emirates. He then turns his attention to the UAE's seemingly anachronistic political structure and its socioeconomic development. His astute analysis highlights the UAE's achievements, as well as the problems that have persistently undermined its development objectives.

Book Information

Series: Middle East in the International System

Hardcover: 333 pages

Publisher: Lynne Rienner Pub (January 31, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 158826274X

ISBN-13: 978-1588262745

Product Dimensions: 1 x 6.2 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.4 out of 5 stars 11 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #888,137 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #13 in Books > History > Middle East > United Arab Emirates #1718 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics &

Government > International & World Politics > Middle Eastern #1885 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Globalization

Customer Reviews

Overall I thought the book was very well put together and achieves what the author set out to achieve. Based on my knowledge (personal and professional) it is an accurate reflection on the UAE. However, two points I would like to make in relation to the book. First, while Davidson discusses the role Indians played in the early days of the UAE unfortunately they have been left out of modern developments. At the commercial level, expatriate Indians have been a very significant force in the overall development of the UAE. Second, Davidson wants to use quantity as an (almost) measure of quality. When he refers to the various public services available (notably hospitals and

public schools) there are some questions about the quality of the services being provided, especially in some of the Emirates outside of Dubai and Abu Dhabi. But he does manage to capture and convey the dynamic and rapidly changing nature of the UAE.

Davidson's book may appear to be a useful guide to those unacquainted with the region. But, for those who are from the Gulf and know enough to question his information and assertions we find names that are misspelled or confused with others, we find events relating to the succession of rulers made up, quotes misinterpreted, vagueness in describing time periods and the text riddled with gossip. This is not unique to his book, as similar errors can be found in his article on the politics of succession that was published in the Middle East Policy Council Journal. Two examples readily available from his article that was published this summer (2006) are 1) his description of Sheikh Abdullah as the Minister of Information & Culture, when as of January 2006 he has been Minister of Foreign Affairs. 2) Where he explains that the 'best informed locals and veteran expatriates' predicted a succession that bypassed the two eldest sons of Sheikh Zayed. Davidson's (incorrect) sequence of imparting information jeopardises his analysis of events and their importance. Hence, while it may make for interesting reading of fiction, it can hardly be taken seriously. If you take a look at his acknowledgements, he thanks his students for contributing information.

As an Emarati national living in Abu-Dhabi (Capital city) I found this book to have a lot of questions that need to be answered. Certain statements the author made about the politics of the country had either no sources or the source was not good enough to make any just assumptions (most people interviewed were either from another city in the Emirates or people who were originally from Iran). I think to make it fair Dr. Chris should have spoken to UAE nationals from the UAE and taken their perspective. Overall I would rate it as average and most of its contents are not well sourced.

As a researcher at a major New York financial firm I needed to quickly find information to help me begin to assess the risks of doing business in the U.A.E. Fortunately I came across a reference to this volume. I found it extremely useful for my work, providing me with substantial up-to-date information on the politics and economics of a country quite different from most I have studied. In particular, Dr. Davidson provided some answers to one of my initial questions about the U.A.E.--what holds this group of seven monarchies together? While the book could have benefited from more editing (it still reads like a doctoral dissertation) it is full of information and easy to use.

This is a very well put together book, and after reading it all the way through I realised it's the first time I have been able to fully understand why democracy has not taken root and, in the western sense at least, is unlikely to take root in the near future. The book is also very useful for showing how the rulers have desperately tried to diversify their economic base, and although most of the statistics only go up to 2004, this is easily the best book I have seen of the development of a Gulf state.

It is heartening to see this book is selling well. It is a much needed open and frank discussion of one of the world's least understood countries and few remaining pure autocracies. The research is undoubtedly encyclopedic in its extent. Hopefully it will be a respectful jolt for many of the region's overprivileged and undereducated hero worshippers. Unlike the regular history books and some of the sycophantic rubbish produced by others, this book provides the first real and readily understandable outline of how the country got itself to where it is today, and, perhaps more importantly, what it needs to do in order to continue surviving both domestically and in the international system.

This is easy to follow and has some very good diagrams. It shows that independent research can be done in countries like the UAE which most people seem to assume are still far too sensitive. There is a huge list of sources including interviews and government documents, and at the end is probably the most extensive bibliography (in English and Arabic) on this part of the world. Saudi Arabia could use a similar book.

The author has combined history with political science to make for something of a cutting edge book on one of the Gulf's most interesting countries. I just finished reading this, and being a veteran of the UAE for many years I found it to be very well researched with some extremely clever and original analysis, and in a completely different league to all previous books on the country.

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