

the *ulema* sympathetic to opposition views. He then poses the question: which political tendency best represents the future political direction of Iran, the reformism of Khatami or the self-proclaimed 'principle-ism' of Ahmadinejad? In a key sentence, Ansari says that in the long term 'it is difficult to see how a government defined by a religious absolutism whose prerogatives far exceed anything to which even the pre-constitutional monarchs of the country aspired can manage and control a society that has long moved on' (p. 107). This goes to the heart of the matter.

Less felicitous are some remarks on western responses to the first-term elections of Khatami and Ahmadinejad respectively (p. 92). To the former, this reviewer thinks, the British attitude at least was more positive than described, while the latter created tension from the start. Western policy-makers continue to wrestle with the problem of how to deal with a fractious Iran. While recognizing the complexity of the problem, Ansari sensibly recommends engagement rather than confrontation. He considers that if the political turmoil in the aftermath of the election has taught us anything, it is that 'Ahmadinejad' is not 'Iran' (p. 101).

This book, written in a flowing style, is a valuable guide to the election and its aftermath.

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Abu Dhabi: oil and beyond. By Christopher M. Davidson. London: Hurst. 2009. 276pp. £30.00. ISBN 978 1 85065 978 5.

Christopher Davidson published a very successful and insightful presentation of Dubai three years ago and now offers an in-depth review of the leading United Arab Emirates (UAE) state of Abu Dhabi.

Davidson's book is a *tour de force*. His presentation of the ruling families and especially of the royal family, Al-Nahyan, is detailed, thorough and, as far as this reviewer can vouch, accurate. The author introduces an understanding of family politics, which no one has done until now, to the discussion of who's who in the Emirates. It is interesting that Davidson shows the importance of the line of Bani Fatima and its growing power in the Emirate, as well as in the country as a whole; however, unlike many observers, he points out that Sheikh Khalifah, the president of the Federation and ruler of Abu Dhabi, is still the leading figure. Davidson's book shows that the present wealth and stability of the UAE is in great part due to the founder of the Emirate, Sheikh Zayed al Maktoum, and to the ability and wisdom of his successors in limiting the competition for power which had undermined previous dynasties.

Davidson dissects the major financial, industrial and military institutions. He shows how each clan within the royal family controls one or more of these institutions. His analysis enlightens us on how the royal family manages to keep the economy running for the benefit of the population and of themselves without having to share political power.

Most readers familiar with the UAE may quibble about some of the figures presented as facts. For example on page 70, Davidson quotes an Oxford Business Group report on Abu Dhabi, stating that in 2008 oil exports were over US\$260 billion. It should be pointed out that the income of Abu Dhabi, like that of the other Gulf states, reflects a discount for heavy crude mixes and thus today at about US\$70 per barrel, it amounts to no more than US\$60 billion. Of course, in 2008, the price of crude oil went as high as US\$147, but on average it was less than US\$100 for the year, which would have amounted to US\$88 billion. Similar exaggerations translate into the estimate of funds held by ADIA, the large Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund. Many money managers were saying that ADIA had

over US\$1 trillion in assets in 2008, which by employing any kind of logical calculation on oil incomes since 1975 or using normal rates of returns on investment would not possibly amount to more than US\$500 billion in 2008.

Davidson's reliance on this consulting group's report leads me to the only criticism that can be laid on his master work. The book has 153 pages but contains close to 1,100 footnotes, yet the notes do not always illuminate or provide satisfactory sources. Indeed, there are very few experts on Abu Dhabi and most of the sources quoted by Davidson get their information from these very few sources. Hence, it would seem that exaggerations merely get passed down the line a number of times, and when repeated often enough transform the original exaggeration into truth. Using hundreds of sources, books, articles and unnamed informants does not really add to the analysis. Furthermore, many of the informants are trying to manipulate the facts to their own ends, and thus all information has to be taken with a pinch of salt. Consultant reports tend to be even more unreliable since their writers are already biased through their informants; in turn, the consulting publishers themselves further manipulate their analysis to obtain contracts from the local governments or from foreign companies impressed by their 'vast' knowledge. On the other hand, and in credit to Davidson, it is impossible to write about the Gulf without extensive contacts and discussions with unnamed sources. The very large pool of people he interviewed allows him to compare and contrast. In this book, comparing and contrasting sources seem to have been used with great effectiveness in the historical parts as well as on the description of the families and their relations to each other and the economic portion of the book would have benefited.

In his last chapter, Davidson makes a credible presentation of the risks inherent in the socio-political structure of Abu Dhabi. Davidson prescribes an increase in political liberalization and participation, an improvement in human rights, and a major effort to improve the education system as ways to lessen the overwhelming dependence on foreign labour and expertise. Many of these prescriptions could be viewed as mere western liberal thought, but Davidson knows the country well, and whether or not one is convinced by his prescriptions, one must take them seriously.

Altogether, no student, business person, firm or government entity should consider learning about Abu Dhabi and the UAE without reading this book and underlining its key passages. As is the case with all other works by Davidson, the narrative is excellent, the style is highly readable and the information by and large is priceless.

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Regime and periphery in northern Yemen: the Huthi phenomenon. By Barak A. Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt and Madeleine Wells. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. 2010. 410pp. Index. Pb.: £36.00. ISBN 978 0 83304 933 9.

Traditionally, academic literature on Yemen has largely focused on the country's history and socio-cultural heritage, and is still comparatively scarce. Some book-lengths studies on tribes in northern Yemen exist, such as Sheilagh Weir's *A tribal order* (University of Texas Press, 2007), recently followed up by myriad reports on the current situation in Yemen, and increased prominence in the media with stories reporting on the problems the country faces with regard to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. *Regime and periphery in Northern Yemen* focuses solely on the situation in the north of the country without neglecting external influences. The book perfectly fills the gap in today's literature by combining a thorough study of Yemen's socio-cultural heritage and the historical events underlying the situation