

The United Arab Emirates A Study in Survival

by Christophe Davidson

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The United Arab Emirates (UAE) not only has more than 10 percent of the world's oil reserves, but it is also the home to Dubai, the world's most talked about city these days. From its indoor ski slope to its 7-star hotels and the world's tallest building, Dubai defines excess. The bid of Dubai Ports World, owned by the ruling family, to buy the firm running several U.S. ports ran into a buzz saw of opposition from those worried about Dubai's reliability as a counterterrorism partner. Meanwhile, the less glamorous city-state of Abu Dhabi is actually much richer than its splashy neighbor Dubai; for instance, Abu Dhabi's foreign investments, which run well over \$100 billion, may exceed those of Dubai by an order of magnitude.

Davidson's book, the most detailed introduction to the UAE, offers a place to start for those wishing to learn more about the country. Successive chapters cover the historical background, the survival of the monarchy, socioeconomic development, domestic politics, and the impact of globalization. His is not the definitive account on any of those areas; the historical chapter, for instance, draws heavily on Frauke Heard-Bey's masterly *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates*.^[1] Nor does he provide more than the sketchiest details about the less explored parts of UAE society, such as the social, economic, and political changes in the five smaller emirates other than Abu Dhabi and Dubai. But Davidson provides a readable and academically well-grounded survey. While he is a professor of political science at Sheikh Zayed University in the UAE, he does not shy away from the country's problems, such as its paralyzed legislature and tensions among the seven constituent emirates. He concludes on an optimistic note about the prospects that the UAE's modernizing monarchs will free up civic space from above, giving the country's subjects more say in running the country.

^[1] London: Longman, 1982.