

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

a new perspective

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First published as *Perspectives on the United Arab Emirates* 1997, edited by Edmund Ghareeb and Ibrahim Al Abed. (ISBN 1-900724-04-9)

This edition, with four new chapters and eleven original chapters revised and updated, published as *United Arab Emirates: A New Perspective*, 2001.

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Layout and design © 1997, 2001 Trident Press Ltd

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Printed at Bookcraft, UK

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Published with the cooperation of the Ministry of Information and Culture, PO Box 17, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

The views expressed by the contributing authors are entirely their own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the publishers or the UAE Government.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Trident Press Ltd, Empire House,
175 Piccadilly, London W1V 0TB
Tel: 0207 4918770; Fax: 0207 4918664
E-mail: admin@tridentpress.ie
Website: www.tridentpress.com

ISBN 1-900724-47-2

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Introduction

At the end of 2001, the United Arab Emirates celebrates the completion of its first 30 years as an independent federal state. Over the period since its formal creation on 2 December 1971, the country has witnessed dramatic changes as the revenues from its oil and gas production have been put to good use in the building of a modern infrastructure, while its population has grown by over ten fold.

That process of change has taken place against a backdrop of social stability and political continuity that is all the more remarkable because of the upheavals and conflicts that have affected other parts of the Arabian Gulf region.

Prior to the establishment of the UAE, few outside the region knew much of the seven emirates of which it is comprised, and fewer still had visited the area. Although oil production and export had commenced a few years earlier, the process of modern development had still to get properly under way. Many observers felt, indeed, that the new state had little chance of surviving as a viable entity.

Yet, 30 years later, the United Arab Emirates is the longest surviving successful experiment in federation anywhere in the Arab world, and has matured to become a country which not only offers its population a modern lifestyle but also is widely recognized as having a significant role to play within the global community of nations.

Parallel with the development that has taken place since 1971, there has been an explosion in academic research on the country, as scholars both from within the UAE and abroad have studied a wide range of aspects of the state, including not only its recent history and development, but also its past and the nature of country itself.

This book brings together a collection of papers by leading scholars and is designed to provide a broad introduction to the UAE, its origins, environment, people and development. It seeks, thereby, to provide an outline of the country and, for those eager to learn more, to offer a starting point for further reading and research.

An earlier collection of papers, entitled *Perspectives on the United Arab Emirates*, was published in early 1997, to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the state. Since then, much has happened, not only in terms of the development of the country, but also in terms of research. While some chapters from that book are included in the present volume, several new chapters have been written, on foreign policy, industrialization, oil and gas, the environment and poetry, and other chapters have been extensively rewritten and updated to incorporate the results of new research as well as recent developments. This second collection of papers, with a new title, seeks to present, therefore, an overview of the country at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The emergence of the landscape of the country is well described by Kenneth Glennie, who has undertaken extensive research into the geology of the Emirates, including the formation of the oil and gas bearing rock strata which today provide the major source of national revenues. He also examines the impact of global changes in climate and in the moving of the world's continental plates to explain how the country was formed.

The origins of the people of the Emirates are discussed in two chapters by Daniel Potts and Geoffrey King, who trace the prehistory and history of the UAE from the dawn of human settlement in the country around 7500 years ago. Through their own research, as well as that by other archaeologists and historians, it is now plain that, although the UAE may be a small country with an unfavourable climate, it has played a significant role in the evolution of civilization in the region for many thousands of years.

Frauke Heard Bey provides two chapters on the traditional lifestyle of the Emirati people, including the important tribal structure, and on the history of the twentieth century evolution from a collection of disparate sheikhdoms on the periphery of the British Empire into the federation of today.

The nature of the federation itself, and the way in which a successful sharing of authority between the federal government and those of the individual emirates has emerged, is examined by Ibrahim Al Abed, who provides an authoritative background to the discussions that led up to the formation of the federation and to the adoption of the national constitution.

The circumstances under which the federation was formed and the institutions of the federation are also discussed by Malcolm Peck, who studies the operation of those institutions, and also reviews the way in which modern governmental structures have been able to co-exist with the traditional, and still relevant, forms of local and tribal authority.

The way in which the country has earned itself respect in the global arena is analysed in a chapter on foreign policy by Peter Hellyer, who reviews the basic elements of the country's foreign policy and the way in which it has evolved over the three decades since the formation of the federation, moving from a focus on purely regional issues to a more global approach.

A second chapter on foreign policy issues, by Mohammed Al Roken, examines the dispute with Iran over the three UAE islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb, occupied by Iran since just before the federation was established. This chapter reviews the historical status of the islands and legal issues arising out of the Iranian occupation, going on to record the attempts made by the United Arab Emirates to achieve a peaceful resolution to the dispute.

Turning back to internal affairs, and, in particular, the modern development of the country, Ali Al Sadik investigates the process of economic development in the oil era, providing a useful array of statistics that show the contrasting growth of the oil and non oil sectors in the UAE Gross Domestic Product. He also deals with the economic aspects of the dependence upon a largely expatriate labour force and with the widely recognized need for a further diversification of the national economy.

The oil and gas industry itself is examined by Gerald Butt, who traces its evolution from the early days of exploration in the 1950s to the major role it plays today as a source of revenues and of employment for the people of the Emirates. Without these revenues, the development of the UAE could not have taken place in the same way, and this chapter shows clearly how the country's hydrocarbon reserves have provided the fuel for growth.

Mohammed Shihab enumerates and analyses the factors that have led to the socio-economic transformation of the country since 1971. He notes, *inter alia*, that the accessibility to revenues from the oil and gas industry has permitted the UAE to compress decades of economic growth into a relatively short period.

That has been made possible in part by the way in which the UAE has developed its industrial sector, first as a downstream sector of the oil and gas industry, and then, increasingly, in the non-oil sector. The achievements and problems of this process are scrutinized by Shihab M. Ghanem.

Simon Aspinall looks at the wildlife and environment of the Emirates, providing data to challenge the common misconception that deserts have little to offer in the way of Nature, and examining the way in which conservation of wildlife and the environment has become a key priority of Government policy over the course of the last three decades.

Finally, taking a look at an aspect of the cultural development of the country, Shihab M. Ghanem, himself a prominent local poet, traces the evolution of the country's poets and poetry.

In the nature of books such as this, it is impossible to provide an exhaustive review of the culture, history, heritage, development and landscape of the United Arab Emirates. Moreover, the process of scholarly study into a wide range of topics is continuing to produce valuable new data. It is our hope, however, that this new collection of papers will not only provide a useful introduction to the United Arab Emirates, but will also prompt further study. Through such a process, not only can researchers, and others, learn more about the country, but also citizens and residents of the UAE can come to know the country better. That, in turn, will be of benefit for the process of further development.

The Editors