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The UAE in Perspective: How It Came to Be

By John Duke Anthony

Reviewed For GulfWire by Dr. Malcolm C. Peck

EDITORS NOTE:

GulfWire would like to congratulate our friends in the United Arab Emirates on the occasion of the 31st UAE National Day. To mark the occasion we are pleased to offer a review of Dr. John Duke Anthony's book "The United Arab Emirates: Dynamics Of State Formation" by Dr. Malcolm C. Peck.

Our readers will recall Dr. Anthony's earlier contribution to GulfWire, "Arabia Redeemed: The Legacy Of HH Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan." [GulfWire Special Report, February 20, 2001 - See below for Web Link] In his book, "The United Arab Emirates: Dynamics Of State Formation," Dr. Anthony shares his firsthand insight into the creation of one of the most remarkable political unions of the 20th century. As a preface to Dr. Peck's review of the work we offer some points for your consideration.

One, there are the dynamics of the UAE's founding, plus the extraordinary political compromises achieved in establishing this confederation of what were previously seven east Arabian principalities, and the immediate interplay of regional and larger international geo-politics in this final chapter of pax Britannica in the Gulf. These and other windows on the UAE's formation are all fascinating but little known phenomena among Gulf watchers outside the region other than the skilled cadre of British Foreign Office diplomats who assisted in its establishment.

Two, the work, "The United Arab Emirates: Dynamics Of State Formation," demonstrates how and why this particular experiment in fusing hitherto separate polities succeeded where so many other previous attempts at establishing viable unions or federations elsewhere came to naught. Examples cited by Dr. Anthony are the cooperative schemes attempted in South Arabia, the Hashemeite Federation between Iraq and Jordan, the Confederation of Arab Republics [of Egypt, Syria, and Libya], the Maghreb Permanent Consultative Committee [of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya], the former Federation of Singapore and Malaysia, the Federation of Nyasaland and Northern and Southern Rhodesia, and British efforts at forming a federation in the Caribbean.

Third, at the UAE's inception, many observers the world over predicted its early demise precisely because of the extended string of previous failed efforts to achieve lasting political amalgamations elsewhere. The UAE's subsequent survival, dynamism, and extended record of peace, stability, and prosperity confounded nearly everyone. The exceptions, of course, were those present at its creation and especially its visionary

founder, Abu Dhabi Ruler and UAE founding President HH Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan.

Dr. Anthony is unique among American scholars in having been the sole American allowed to be present on the ground for the purpose of observing the run-up to the UAE's creation more than three decades ago. He is not alone in remarking how few analysts at the time would have wagered that today, December 2, 2002, the UAE would be celebrating its 31st anniversary. Neither, as he also points out, could any have then foreseen how the UAE would evolve over time to what has been, and continues to be, envied by many but matched by none: it is the modern Arab world's single longest and most successful experiment in regional political cooperation and integration.

The book can be read with benefit by several kinds of generalists and specialists. Observers of the six member-state Gulf Cooperation Council founded in 1981 will recognize parallels in the nature, pace, and extent, as well as the limits, of regional cooperation and integration to date in Arabia and the Gulf as a whole. Newer analysts of intra-Arabian affairs and students of Iraqi domestic dynamics, as well as those who envision possible reconfigurations of Arab governmental structures in the future, will also find much of interest and value in this study. Particularly sobering to these and others engaged in assessing the region's near-term prospects is how one has little choice but to comprehend the complex interplay among a wide variety of local social, economic, and political constants and variables that, together with bold, decisive, and visionary leadership, on one hand, and a favorable external environment, on the other, will go far towards determining the prospects for any confederal experiment's success.

GulfWire commends the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research for bringing this study to print at this time. GulfWire is also pleased to print a review of it by Dr. Malcolm C. Peck, who in an earlier GulfWire Perspective, [see below for Web link] penned a penetrating assessment of UAE President Shaikh Zayed's leadership. Dr. Peck is also the author of *Venture in Unity: The United Arab Emirates* [see below for Web link].

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"THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: DYNAMICS OF STATE FORMATION"
BY JOHN DUKE ANTHONY
ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: THE EMIRATES CENTER FOR
STRATEGIC STUDIES
AND RESEARCH, 2002
REVIEWED BY MALCOLM C. PECK

This study appears appropriately as the United Arab Emirates, the first successful union of Arab states, celebrates its 31st anniversary. No one is better qualified than Dr. John Duke Anthony to tell the story of the UAE's formation. He was a close observer of the events that led to the country's creation, and provides here a masterful analysis of the factors that determined the manner of its birth.

British Labor Prime Minister Harold Wilson's January 1968 announcement of his government's intention to relinquish its security responsibilities east of Suez meant withdrawal of its protection from the Trucial States, Bahrain, and Qatar in the lower Arabian/Persian Gulf by the end of 1971. This alarmed the rulers of those states, who had found autonomy under British protection a congenial state of affairs. Anthony offers a detailed and nuanced analysis of the complex mix of regional and international influences that both favored and menaced the transition from protected to fully independent states. Of special interest is his review of efforts to group Bahrain and Qatar with the Trucial States in a federation of nine and why those efforts failed. He also provides a fascinating sketch of alternative paths that might have been followed to independence in 1971, with results that could have significantly altered the political and strategic situation in the Gulf. One intriguing "what-if" concerns Ras al-Khaimah, the small, poor emirate adjacent to the strategically critical Strait of Hormuz. Motivated by the desire to bring prosperity to his state and restore some of its former prestige, its ruler approached Washington to explore the grant of basing rights to the U.S. Navy in RAK in exchange for a U.S. recognition of the emirate's independence.

While, as Anthony explains, several aspects of the environment in which the UAE was born were favorable—notably a generally peaceful regional and international situation, the encouragement and support of the U.K. and the U.S., and the lack of the Nasserist Egyptian propaganda attack that had subverted the British sponsored South Arabian Federation on the opposite side of the Arabian Peninsula in 1967—it faced real dangers at its creation. Indeed, most pundits of the day predicted that the UAE had few prospects for survival.

The most obvious danger came from neighboring Oman, where a radical leftist rebellion, sponsored by the Marxist government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), posed a grave threat not only to the government of Sultan Qabus but to all the emiral rulers of the lower Gulf. The author's explanation of how this menace was surmounted is informed by impressive firsthand knowledge.

However, the study's most compelling sections are those that examine the domestic challenges that had to be overcome for the UAE to be born and survive. Here, Anthony makes it clear that the principal reason for success was the far-sighted statesmanship of Shaykh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, ruler of Abu Dhabi and first and only president of the UAE. Zayed had to draw on all his considerable political skills to persuade his fellow Trucial States rulers to accept his concept of union. This was notably the case in dealing with Sharjah, which had only recently enjoyed a leading position in the Trucial States. His perseverance in the face of discouragement and his spirit of generosity were most fully tested in his confrontation with the redoubtable Shaykh Rashid bin Maktoum, ruler of Dubai. The latter, a merchant prince, who feared the constraints of inclusion in a union on Dubai's hitherto unrestrained commercial activity and who, therefore, did not share Zayed's expansive view of the role that the UAE should play regionally and internationally, posed the greatest challenge of all. Anthony explains how Zayed was willing to grant Rashid and Dubai virtual parity in the new federation to ensure that it would come into being.

Perhaps the most interesting section is the one that deals with a central issue not adequately dealt with in other studies of the UAE's formation—the politics of tribe and family in Abu Dhabi. Anthony convincingly argues that upon the successful management of this political challenge, something arcane and esoteric to most outsiders, rested the success that Zayed achieved at the federal, regional, and international levels subsequently. Again, the author's analysis has the benefit of intimate knowledge of the subject.

There is little to criticize in this superb analytical essay. One might challenge the importance assigned to the accomplishment represented by the UAE's formation in terms of pan-Arab efforts to achieve unity (see pp. 68 and 120). There might have been a bit more said about the constitution, a flexible and deliberately ambiguous document that leaves room for political change in the future. Perhaps a little more emphasis could have been placed on the importance of Abu Dhabi's territorial preponderance (over 87% of the UAE's land mass) and commensurate oil wealth as factors that favored the establishment of a union under Zayed's leadership. Two geographical nit-picks might be added. Bahraini radical oppositionists in the mid 'fifties were exiled not to an island in the Mediterranean but to St. Helena in the South Atlantic, where they had been preceded by Napoleon Bonaparte. The Monroe Doctrine, interestingly compared to the British view of their exclusive position in the Gulf, applied not merely to the Caribbean, but to the whole Western Hemisphere. These are all minor cavils, however, which do not detract from Dr. Anthony's solid accomplishment in providing a compact but thorough analysis of the birth of the United Arab Emirates.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr. John Duke Anthony is President and CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, Secretary of the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee, and Publisher of GulfWire. All three are nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations dedicated to the education of Americans and others about the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

MALCOLM C. PECK (A.B. and A.M., Harvard University and M.A., M.A.L.D., and Ph.D., The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy) became a program officer at Meridian International Center in Washington, D.C. in 1984. He was made senior program officer in 2000. He arranges professional study tours for international visitors sponsored by the United States Department of State. He has taught at the University of Chattanooga (now the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga); was a post-doctoral fellow at the Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies; and, from 1970 to 1981, was assistant to the president and director of programs at the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C. He served as the Arabian Peninsula affairs analyst at the U.S. Department of State from 1981 to 1983. Peck has written on Persian/Arabian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula issues in chapters contributed to nine books and in a number of articles. He is the author of "The United Arab Emirates: A Venture in Unity" (1986) as well as the "Historical Dictionary of the Gulf Arab States" (1997) and is a contributor to "Arabies Trends, the Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East," "Microsoft Encarta," and "The World Book." Peck is a co-founder and secretary of the Society for Gulf Arab Studies.

BOOK INFORMATION:

[The United Arab Emirates: A Venture in Unity \(Profiles. Nations of the Contemporary Middle East\) by Malcolm C. Peck](#)

[Historical Dictionary of the Gulf Arab States, by Malcolm C. Peck](#)

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