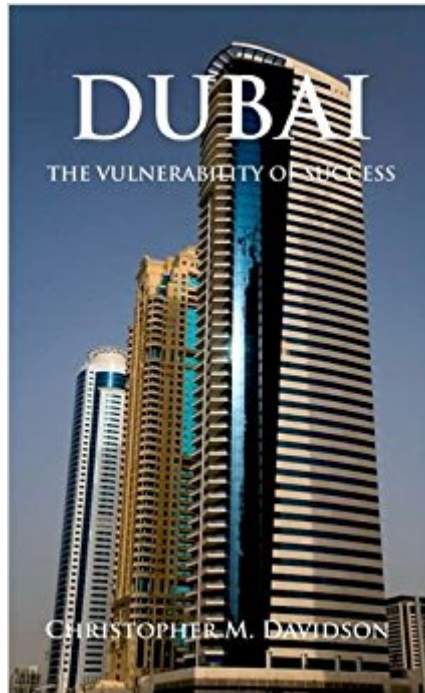




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Dubai: The Vulnerability Of Success



Synopsis

Dubai is a remarkable success story. From its origins as a small fishing and pearling community, the emirate has gone from strength to strength, having established itself as the premier trading entrepot of the Arabian Gulf and, in more recent years, having boomed into a massive metropolis of some two or more million people, most of whom are expatriates engaged in an increasingly diversified economy that has become synonymous with startling and innovative architecture. Following a detailed historical background, Davidson's in-depth study demonstrates how Dubai's pioneering post-oil development strategies were implemented against a carefully managed backdrop of near complete political stability, despite the lack of democratisation and genuine civil society. He then addresses the problems that may surface as the need for sustained foreign direct investment encourages far-reaching socio-economic reforms, many of which may affect the ideological, religious, and cultural legitimacy of the traditional monarchy. He also analyses Dubai's awkward relationship with its federal partners in the United Arab Emirates, before highlighting some of the hidden costs of being the region's most successful free port-namely its attractiveness to international criminal fraternities, the global black money economy and terrorist networks.

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Customer Reviews

"Nicely lays out this flashy emirate's astonishing ascent from tiny fishing and pearling village to global hub."--TheNew York Times "Traces Dubai's rise from sleepy Gulf port to player on the world scene."--Los Angeles Times "The definitive book on Dubai and is likely to become a classic in Gulf

studies."--Ray Hinnebusch, St Andrews University

Christopher Davidson is reader in Middle East politics at the School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University, a former visiting associate professor at Kyoto University, and a former assistant professor at Zayed University in the UAE. He is the author of several books on the politics and international affairs of the Gulf states, including *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*, and most recently *Persian Gulf and Pacific Asia: From Indifference to Interdependence*.

This book is for the serious reader; it reads like an academic treatise--dense, magnificently researched with fascinating subject matter. The first couple chapters succinctly cover the emirate's history. The following chapters detail the first free zone--Jebel Ali port--and the recent emergence of Dubai's diversified economy. Chapter five concentrates on the distributed-wealth principle and Dubai's reliance on its rentier nature. The next chapter speaks of the paradoxes embedded in present day Dubai (the mix of East-West). Dubai's relationships with the other emirates are explored in chapter seven, providing some really fascinating insights (who knew alcohol was legal in Sharjah until Suadi helped bail the emirate out of its banking crisis in 1989?). And the book concludes with a chapter on Dubai's naughty underbelly--gun running, terrorism, etc. Personally, I found it the least interesting chapter of the book. One warning: if I hadn't lived in Dubai for a year before reading this book, it would not have resonated as strongly. Frankly, if you don't have a baseline understanding of Dubai, you may not get much out of it; the book is too dense and specific for a cursory understanding.

Davidson takes the reader behind the scenes of Dubai. Roughly a third of the book is about the history of the UAE. The rest of the book covers such topics as economic diversification, organized crime, and the challenge of developing a federalist mentality. If there is a theme to the book, it is the dilemma of the "rentier pathology." In this term, Davidson is referring to a citizenry who are, in a word, spoiled. If they have jobs at all, they are no-show sinecures in the public sector. Many of these citizens have never had to work, have never had to pay taxes, and depend on imported temporary workers to do the grunt work. Such largess has allowed the emir to maintain power as an absolute monarch, but can this arrangement survive an economic downturn? Davidson is appropriately critical of the Dubai monarchy without being sensationalist. There are times when the professorial tone becomes annoying, as when names of numerous minor historical figures are

thrown at the reader. All in all, it's an excellent book for someone with a serious interest in Dubai. Those who have an interest in Dubai should also read Jim Krane's "City of Gold: Dubai and the Dream of Capitalism," which is lighter in style of writing and puts a greater emphasis on day-to-day life.

Although written by an academic authority on the subject this book was very readable, and in places I had to remind myself this was non-fiction, such is the scale and pace of Dubai's development. I ordered this quite some time ago, as a pre-release, and only received it this month, so there must have been some delays, but it was worth it. The history is fascinating and it is clear that the origins of the city still have a major influence on its current activities. I never understood before how the UAE and Dubai fitted together, along with many other questions I used to have in mind, but I now found explanations to this normally hidden and secretive part of the world. The information on the ruling families is incredible. Although it would have been good to have some color to the maps included, this book is absolutely invaluable and seems to be written by a genuinely neutral and constructively critical author, unlike most other books on the Persian Gulf.

Despite the myriad of articles and sound bites about the latest achievements of Dubai, works dedicated to an in depth analysis of the city state have been extremely sparse. Search Dubai in and nearly all the books published were travel guides, with the exception of the book *Dubai & Co.: Global Strategies for Doing Business in the Gulf States*. There is a smattering of outdated literature about the UAE, but this does not little to illuminate the underlying trends and contradictions of the Emirate. Therefore Christopher M Davidson's academic work is particularly interesting and timely. Titled the vulnerability of success, this book has become the 'go to' for a history of the Emirate and the ability to put the current achievements in context. Upon starting the book, I immediately skipped from the 19th century tribal histories to the last chapter on the eponymous 'Vulnerabilities of Success'. I was disappointed to find little that had not already been discussed in further detail elsewhere. For example, the subsection: 'Present threat of Terror' merited only 2 pages, and the dynamics of the economy in the last few years seems largely neglected. For those looking for an up to date picture of Dubai politics and economics, even *The Report Dubai 2007* contains more depth. But lacking any other reading material on Dubai, I flipped back to 19th century tribal politics. Despite his title, Davidson's work on the history of Dubai is the core of this book, and where he certainly has the most to contribute. Through his narrative it becomes clear how far back the tradition of capitalism and immigration extend, exemplified in the anecdote that "Some of the

earliest motorcars imported into Dubai were purchased for the expressed purpose of bringing Pakistanis across the mountains from Fujairah so they could work without the need for visas or time consuming paperwork." (91) Davidson also gives satisfactory answers to some of the most vexing questions about demographics, such as stating authoritatively that nationals account for only 4% of the population, and that 75% of the population is male. (168, 192) Finally, he manages to provide a complete picture of Dubai's role in the UAE and the gulf. One revelation is that the UAE actually convinced Saddam to leave power: The UAE also tried to head off the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq by offering Saddam Hussein and his family sanctuary on the condition that he respected Bush's ultimatum and left Iraq. Although it would appear that Saddam actually accepted this proposal, only for the Arab League to later force the UAE to withdraw it on the grounds that it represented interference in a fellow member's internal affairs. (p. 168 from Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed in 2005) Another is the recent integration of Dubai's forces into the UAE network, and the Unions attempts to cozy up to numerous western powers. In sum, this is the reference book that lays the groundwork for further research on Dubai's history. While weak in analyzing emerging trends, Davidson's is valuable due to a thorough and interesting investigation into the context of the phenomenon that is Dubai.

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