The United Arab Emirates: A Pioneer in Political Engineering

John Duke Anthony

This paper describes and analyzes what enabled the UAE to emerge as the most successful experiment in Arab regional integration in modern history. It provides context, background, and perspective as to why the UAE is the foremost example of effective political engineering in the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world.

Global Factors

The formation of the UAE was substantially the result of an unusual convergence of Great Power, regional, and local politics at the time of its founding. Among the most salient aspects of the prevailing international arena factors favoring the UAE's establishment was Great Britain's whole-hearted support for creating as stable and effective a governmental structure and system of political dynamics as possible. An important feature of the British effort in this regard was its determination to implement successfully the fall 1967 British domestic political decision to peacefully abrogate its longstanding treaties with nine east Arabian emirates through which Great Britain had administered the emirates' external defense and international relations.

The importance of this circumstance cannot be underestimated. In essence, it meant that the formation of one or more successor governments to Britain's long imperial rule in the region was unique: it was not the result of an indigenous independence movement, nor a series of demonstrations and general strikes that were associated with other transformations from imperial rule to national sovereignty. Indeed, in contrast to that which had been the norm for the manner in which most other Arab, Middle Eastern and Islamic countries obtained their independence in the twentieth century – by way of actual or potential violent uprisings elsewhere, e.g. in Arab North Africa, the Nile Valley, the Levant, and the Fertile Crescent -- amicable relations between the Arab Gulf emirates' rulers, their indigenous systems of governance, and their Great Power protectors had for nearly 400 years been the norm, not the exception.

A second contributing dimension to this dynamic was that the process of establishing independence among these east Arabian polities came closely on the heels of Britain's withdrawal and transformation from colonial status to national sovereignty in November 1967 in South Arabia. More specifically, the frame of reference was Britain's retreat from its preeminent role in having established and sustained the Federation of South Arabia. The Federation was comprised of the Crown Colony of Aden, Britain's first and only colony in the history of its relations with the Arab world, and the Western and Eastern Aden Protectorates. The latter were in turn comprised of a disparate assortment of tribally-based shaikhdoms, sultanates, and sharifdoms that extended from the Red Sea coast all the way to the southernmost boundary of the Omani province of Dhofar.

In contrast to what would transpire in the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar, Great Britain's withdrawal from South Arabia, a region governed domestically by individuals and institutions having much in common structurally and politically with their Arab neighbors on the other side of Saudi Arabia to the north and east, was disastrous. In the wake of the British withdrawal, there was ushered in a series of pan-Arab nationalist and socialist governments situated in the former Crown Colony of Aden that would rapidly come to constitute the only Marxist-Leninist government in Arab or Islamic history. As such the successor government to the British came to constitute not only a strategic and geopolitical beachhead for the Soviet Union, other members of the socialist Eastern Bloc of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, and Poland. It simultaneously also became a strategic ideological outpost for Cuba and, in time, pro-Soviet regimes in Ethiopia, Libya, Syria, and Iraq as well as pro-Moscow national liberation movements in neighboring Oman, Angola, Mozambique, and elsewhere in the developing world.

If only symbolically and politically, Britain's withdrawal from Aden and the West and East Aden Protectorates was in many ways the closest thing there was to a distant eastern Arabian echo of France's bloody withdrawal from Algeria. Indeed, as in Algeria, in South Arabia friends turned against friends. Families fought families. Politicians turned against other politicians. Tribes confronted other tribes. Even non-violent civil groups such as industrial units within South Arabia's internationally renowned trade union movement locked horns in the battle for control of Aden, the storied port that had long ranked annually in the top five of the world's harbors in terms of numbers of ships as well as tonnage handled.

From the many mistakes made in South Arabia, Great Britain derived lessons it was determined to apply in the case of a different federation it intended to leave behind in the Gulf. One of the greatest lessons was the need to be assured that whatever post-imperial structure emerged, whether a confederation or something different, it would be capable of standing on its own economically and financially. Such was never the case with regard to the South Arabian Federation. That this was so was indeed one of the core reasons for its failure. Another lesson was agreement on the need for a local, well-respected, strategic leader around whom the process of forging a federation comprised of the Gulf emirates could pivot. In this case that person was Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi.

The failure of so many previous attempts by Great Britain to bequeath its imperial dominions a structure and system of government that would long endure was hardly encouraging. In this context, an overarching consideration of the would-be architects of a successful Arab confederation in eastern Arabia was to spare no effort to ensure that this one last Arab-British experiment in political engineering would stand in marked positive contrast to all the previous British efforts elsewhere. The cases in point included the ill-fated British attempts to establish the Federation of Singapore and Malaysia; the Federation of Northern and Southern and Rhodesia and Nyasaland; and similar configurations of governmental system and political dynamics in Great Britain's dominions in the Caribbean. A further consideration at work among the powers that be in the British Foreign Office in London was the perceived need to proceed in close cooperation with Washington in these regards. This was only prudent and logical given

that the proverbial baton for ensuring the Gulf's defense would be passed inevitably and unavoidably to the United States, itself an example of two earlier failed experiments in confederation.

The first of the unsuccessful American efforts to establish a viable and enduring confederation of states was the original confederation of the former 13 American colonies that lasted from 1781 to1789. The second failed attempt transpired during the American Civil War that commenced seventy years later and took the form of the establishment of the Confederate States of America from 1861-1865. The former experiment was unable to succeed for a two-fold reason: the 13 participant polities could not agree on matters pertaining either to their respective responsibilities and obligations with respect to the common defense or the means by which they could cooperate effectively with regard to interstate commerce. The latter of these unsuccessful American experiments at political engineering was plagued by centrifugal phenomena similar to the ones that plagued the first confederation. In addition, it failed due not only to the overriding fact that it was defeated militarily but also because of its inability to garner sufficient international recognition and diplomatic support in its quest to secede from the United States of America and establish a separate and independent country.

In the case of the situation leading to the formation of the United Arab Emirates, two countries that were ideologically and geopolitically opposed to the United States, Great Britain, and the shaikhdoms of east Arabia and their governments, namely the Soviet Union and Communist China, can be credited with having contributed indirectly to the formation of the UAE. The fact that each of these Great Powers were Communist and opposed not only Great Britain and the United States but also the countries and governments in the developing world aligned to them was not without significance. The situation gave added urgency to the necessity of ensuring that the transformation of the Gulf emirates from protected-state dominance by Great Britain to national sovereignty and political independence be as smooth as possible so as to safeguard the domestic governmental and political status quo.

To be sure, the Marxist-inspired rebellion underway at the time in Dhofar, the southernmost province of neighboring Oman, made the need for the Gulf Arab emirates and Great Britain to proceed with all due deliberation amidst caution being at once challenging and urgent. To the UAE's ultimate near term benefit, the situation in Oman changed dramatically for the better in July 1970, when Oman's Sandhurst-trained Sultan Qaboos Bin Said acceded to the rulership of Oman. The sultanate was thereafter able to register increasing progress towards defeating the Dhofar rebels. In so doing, it brought an end to the threat the rebels had posed to Oman and its fellow Arab Gulf states for the better part of a decade.

Regional Factors

Egypt

During the period 1967-1971 when the formative steps to establish the post-British imperial reign in the Gulf took place, the dynamics of several circumstances in play

proved extraordinarily propitious for the birthing of the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar. One of the most dramatic was the abruptly altered status of Egypt vis-à-vis the history of its long previous service as a bastion of support for other Arab countries seeking their independence from imperial rule. As a case in point, until June 1967 Cairo had been the foremost regional strategic and political backer of Arab independence movements.

Egypt's defeat by Israel in the June 1967 war, however, had far-reaching consequences that resonate to this day. But one among other lasting effects was that it brought an abrupt end to Egypt's previous longstanding and unstinting assistance to Arab resistance movements everywhere. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Cairo was especially active in assisting aspiring leaders and political movements it considered well-situated to replace the kinds of governments represented by the traditional rulers of Bahrain, Qatar, and the seven entities that would come to form the United Arab Emirates. The means through which Egypt pursued its radical, pan-Arab, nationalist and socialist agendas were formidable. On one hand, they included numerous Egyptian expatriate schoolteachers and other skilled workers in practically every Arab country, including most of the Gulf emirates. On the other, Egypt was able at times to work through some of the vast numbers of graduates from its universities who were in many instances strategically positioned and potentially predisposed to do Egypt's bidding – as Egypt's agents, sympathizers, and supporters -- should they be so inclined, which many were.

The impact of Egypt's 1967 military defeat on its national strategic interests and key foreign policy objectives, however, was as unexpected as it was profound and far-reaching. In a meeting in Cairo with this writer in late December 1969, then League of Arab States Assistant Secretary General Sayyid Ali Nawfal, an Egyptian, explained one of the reasons. In briefing me on the status of Egypt's longstanding support for radical groups in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf, he said in effect that, "The situation is deeply troubling. One of the reasons is that we have long supported so many of our friends in the region through education and training both here and in their own countries. They have looked to us for leadership and assistance in transforming their societies for the better. In truth, we encouraged them to do so. Indeed, in 1965 I went to meet with the shaikhs of the northern Trucial Coast because they invited me. It was clear they were in great need of help in developing their educational systems and social services such as clinics and basic health care. I promised them we would do everything we could to assist. The situation we now face in Egypt, however, is totally different than it was then. For reasons that should be obvious, we have made a strategic decision to concentrate all of our geopolitical and national security efforts and resources on one overriding objective: recovering the lands and resources we lost in June 1967. Unfortunately, this has meant turning our back on those in Arabia and the Gulf whose expectations we had raised. From a strategic perspective, regrettable as this is and has been, we really had no other choice."

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait

Like the circumstances with regard to Egypt, the regional situation pertaining to the prospects for establishing the UAE successfully insofar as Saudi Arabia was concerned

were also fortuitous. To be sure, there were lingering differences between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi regarding where the border between them lay, but the tensions associated with them were largely dormant at the time the successor state to the British system was being devised and negotiated. In addition, the relations between Saudi Arabia and all the emirates other than Abu Dhabi were largely correct and positive.

Indeed, not only Saudi Arabia but also Kuwait entertained hopes that the eventual arrangement would combine all nine emirates into a single unitary state. To that envisioned end, they lent their respective diplomatic services whenever requested. From the perspective of Kuwait and Riyadh, which corresponded with that of Abu Dhabi's Shaikh Zayed as well, it was envisioned that a state that combined the territorial, demographic and natural resources of all nine entities would compose a country with extraordinary potential to make major contributions to regional peace, security, and development.

As for Kuwait individually, it was guided by the fact that it had obtained its own independence from Great Britain a decade earlier, in 1961, and that it had enjoyed a substantial revenue stream from its earlier oil production and exports. Kuwait proceeded also from an awareness that it had pioneered before anyone else in the Arab world in providing economic and social development services to less privileged or developed Arab countries through its generous assistance program, launched even before Kuwait obtained its own independence. It came to the challenge of helping to facilitate as smooth a transition from British imperial rule to independent state status as peacefully and effectively as possible from yet another perspective: namely, having provided the initial financing for the extraordinary expansion of Dubai's port services as well as having maintained an office in Dubai from which it extended developmental assistance locally and to the northern emirates.

Iraq

Had Egypt not removed itself from what would otherwise have been an assertive campaign to enhance its influence among the soon-to-be-independent Arab Gulf emirates, there is little question that the following would have ensued. In the first instance, Iraq would almost certainly have been more aggressive in pursuing what its foreign policy strategists considered were Baghdad's legitimate needs to expand its regional position and role in association with the Arab entities south and east of Iraq that would soon gain their independence from Great Britain. Indeed, Iraq, unlike Egypt, with which Baghdad had competed since time immemorial for positions of regional political prominence and influence, could argue, as some of its spokespeople indeed did, that the history of Iraq's own modern-day formation and administration bore certain resemblances, however imperfect, limited, and in some ways superficial, to what Great Britain and its Trucial Shaikhdoms' Arab treaty partners were seeking to accomplish along the western shores of the Gulf.

A difference, of course, was that the British Mandate imposed on Iraq after World War I, which granted London the last word in terms of Iraq's defense and foreign relations, was essentially laminated onto the administrative structure put into place

and administered by the Ottoman Empire. It is true that the Ottomans had maintained a presence in Qatar and in portions of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, but they never established either a garrison or other administrative offices in the region encompassed by the seven Trucial States.

Among the traditional rulers in the emirates, moreover, there were valid grounds for suspicion and distrust regarding Iraq's perceived regional strategic interests and foreign policy objectives. These, in essence, were not unlike Egypt's in the sense that, since the Iraqi Revolution of 1958, Baghdad's political and ideological leanings had become ardently Arab nationalist and socialist in spirit following the violent overthrow that year of the very same form of dynastic government in place in each of the emirates. Deepening the emirates' concerns regarding Iraq was the fact that the Shi'a elements among their local citizenries were deeply oriented religiously towards the Iraqi Shi'a holy cities of Karbala and Najaf to which they periodically made pilgrimage, sent their children to school, and where many purchased burial plots for their families.

Iran

Iran, while initially affecting to be nonplussed upon hearing of the decision by Great Britain to abrogate its treaties for defense and foreign relations in east Arabia, would ultimately become increasingly problematic near the very end of the negotiations leading to the establishment of the UAE. For the first two years following the British decision to terminate its privileged treaty relationships with the emirates, Iran was focused most heavily on only one of the nine emirates: Bahrain. In that regard, the Shah of Iran took the position that with the impending passing of the torch from Great Britain's previous status as the paramount power in the Gulf, Bahrain, alone among the then nine Gulf emirates, should revert to Iran, under whose suzerainty Bahrain had existed in the distant past and for the additional reason that the majority of Bahrain's citizens were Shi'a, as were Iran's.

There was a problem with Iran, however, with regard to its claims to Bahrain. The British and the United States were on balance strongly opposed to aiding and abetting what they jointly perceived as Iran's imperial ambitions at Arab expense. With a view to reconciling the disparate views by Tehran, on the one hand, and London and Washington on the other, the British, supported by the Americans, successfully persuaded the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General to send a representative to Bahrain to ascertain the wishes of the Bahraini people.

In May of 1970, the United Nations representative, after having interviewed numerous Bahrainis in the island state's sports, social, and literary associations, issued a report. In it he declared that the overwhelming aspiration of Bahrainis with whom he had met was indisputably to become a nationally sovereign, politically independent, and territorially intact Arab country pursuant to becoming a full-fledged member of the League of Arab States and the United Nations.

The matter did not end there, however. The impact of the Shah of Iran failing in his quest to have his way with regard to Bahrain had domestic repercussions. The effect made the Shah look weak in the eyes of Iranian nationalists, among whom were many

who sought then as they have ever since, to regain what they perceive as Iran' rightful and natural role in Gulf affairs and beyond. In what amounted to a compensatory move to restore his nationalist credentials, the Shah switched his focus southward to three islands situated near the main international shipping lanes north of the strategically vital Hormuz Strait.

What became increasingly apparent as the final abrogation of Britain's treaties to defend the emirates neared was that the Iranian monarch was bound and determined not to be rebuffed again in his quest for an augmented status for Iran in the Gulf. As the three islands in question – Abu Musa, belonging to the Emirate of Sharjah, and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs, belonging to the Emirate of Ra's al-Khaimah – lacked the means to defend themselves, it was a foregone conclusion that, if Iran did attack them, it would be practically impossible for Sharjah and Ra's al-Khaimah, unassisted by others far more powerful than they, to prevent their invasion and occupation. This indeed is what transpired on December 1, 1971, the very last day that the British treaties to defend them were in effect.

In retrospect it can be said that the ever-looming specter of what Iran at the time was likely to do by way of using force against three ill-defended islands, Arab-populated lands that had been administered by the emirates of Ra's al-Khaimah and Sharjah for as long as anyone could remember, was not without effect. Indeed, it compelled the emirates' rulers not to procrastinate unduly long in reaching an agreement on the form and extent of governance by which they would henceforth conduct their national and international affairs. The need to reach an agreement was paramount, for in no other way would they be able to signal how they would thenceforth relate not only to their citizenries and all of their neighbors but also the world beyond in the post-British Imperial era.

That Bahrain and Qatar eventually decided to chart a different course was not the easiest consequence or preferred outcomes to finesse among the proponents of as large a unitary state among the nine emirates as possible. On the other hand, the fact that those emirates opted not to join the UAE, and decided instead to establish their own separate independent countries, proved far more manageable and in many ways propitious as well as beneficial than many might have imagined.

Certainly hindsight provides ample evidence that Bahrain and Qatar, however uncertain their prospects for success were when they began, have each succeeded beyond their wildest imaginations in the course of being able, in association with their respective American and British Great Power partners, to chart their separate destinies. If anything, the coming into existence of three separate countries during the same compressed time frame practically guaranteed that a two-fold series of developments would follow from the implications of their small territorial size, limited populations, and embryonic bureaucracies, traits which they all shared, albeit in different degrees.

The reality of these traits present at the time of the UAE's formation had its own far-reaching political and policy implications. For example, the weaknesses occasioned by these realities in matters pertaining to national defense in particular made it imperative that the emirates individually and as a group continue to rely upon Great Britain and to an increasing extent the United States from that point forward for the perpetuation of

their external protection against larger regional states and Great Powers alike. Indeed, to this end they and all the other emirates had little choice then as now but to continue cooperating with the British armed forces and the many British advisers and other expatriates who remained in the region.

The views of critics who concluded to the contrary notwithstanding, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE would predictably evolve not only cooperatively but also competitively. With regard to the latter context, each of the constellations of independent emirates would soon begin to play to their respective comparative geographic, economic, and demographic strengths. Indeed, shortly after the civil war in Lebanon commenced in 1975, Bahrain replaced Beirut as the region's offshore banking center. Qatar, in time, would become renowned for possessing the world's largest offshore field of unassociated natural gas. The UAE confederation itself would become the Arab world's most successful experiment in regional political integration. The sum effect of these trends and developments has on balance been of benefit to all three.

Local

With Bahrain and Qatar providing increasing signs of evidence that they would not join the UAE, this did not automatically mean that the road ahead for the seven remaining emirates would be bereft of obstacles. To the contrary, at least three emirates other than Abu Dhabi approached the impending reality of their becoming independent of British control over their defense and foreign relations with their own versions of what would constitute an appropriate post-independence paradigm. These three emirates were respectively Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, and Dubai.

Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, and Dubai
Sharjah

The situation with regard to the Emirate of Sharjah was most prominently rooted in the history of the early twentieth century. At that time, a dramatic illustration of its standing vis-à-vis all of the Gulf emirates under British protection spanning the area from Kuwait to Oman was the convening of a major international meeting in Sharjah in 1906. Great Britain's Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, was keen then to defend against growing international interest in the Gulf expressed by Tsarist Russia, Prussia, and other countries. To that end, he instructed all the emirate rulers then under British protection to convene in Sharjah to witness Britain's reaffirmation of its pledge to assure the continuation of their defense as well as Britain's exclusive administration of their foreign relations with any and all powers.

As often transpires in the wake of a major international meeting of heads of state convened anywhere, the venue itself typically gains increased statue from recognition of its logistical, operational, and administrative capacities. Certainly this proved to be case in terms of Sharjah. Indeed, the emirate had successfully hosted an assemblage of Arab potentates in a region of the world that, in time, would be recognized for its role in husbanding, producing, and exporting a finite and depleting hydrocarbon

energy resource that would become the engine of world economic growth.

Indeed, in consecutive order, the Emirate of Sharjah would become the Lower Gulf region's preeminent port of call for British ships of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company; site for the primary British Political Agency tasked with dealing with the Trucial States as a whole; a major refueling station for the Royal Air Force; headquarters for the Trucial Oman Scouts, the principal armed force responsible for maintaining domestic security among the emirates, and center of the Trucial States Development Council. Servicing the needs of all these administrative functions entailed that the British provide basic education and training for Sharjah's citizens. This, over time, propelled Sharjah to the forefront of the Trucial Coast's indigenous inhabitants in terms of their professional and technical skills. The cumulative effect of these signature decisions by Great Britain to put its faith and trust in Sharjah to administer effectively a range of major British logistical and operational functions was a source of enormous pride to the people of Sharjah and their leaders.

By the time of the British decision to abrogate its protected-state treaty relations with all nine of the emirates, however, Sharjah's pre-eminent position had been eclipsed by Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The reasons were as much geological as political in the case of each of these emirates. Both, for example, had come into increasingly considerable new streams of revenue from the production and export of their hydrocarbon resources; the British decision to transfer the Political Agency from Sharjah to Dubai; and the additional decision to establish a separate Political Agency in Abu Dhabi. In this light there was neither British nor other international or regional support in favor of Sharjah regaining its past glories.

Ras al-Khaimah

The situation in Ra's al-Khaimah was similar to that of Sharjah in terms of the Ruler's desire to restore an earlier era in which his emirate had been far and away the most prominent among the coastal and seafaring communities in all of eastern Arabia. However, there was an important difference. Ra's al-Khaimah's claims for a regional position and role within the UAE befitting its stature dated from a time considerably earlier than that of Sharjah. Indeed, it was an indisputable fact that the British Navy entered the Gulf in 1819 with the specific purpose of destroying the entire maritime fleet of Ra's al-Khaimah. In so doing, it defeated the emirate in a battle from which its geopolitical and economic fortunes to this day have never recovered.

What ensued in the near-term aftermath of the burning of Ra's al-Khaimah's regionally renowned maritime force in 1819 was to have profound long term repercussions. In short order, after securing the defeat of Ra's al-Khaimah's forces, the British imposed upon its ruler a treaty in which he foreswore any subsequent use of force against not only the British but all other commercial actors in the Gulf regardless of their nationality. The British took advantage of the fact that they were in the region in force to lay the groundwork for a broader network that would assure unfettered seaborne commerce in the Gulf from that point forward. To that end, they entered into similar treaty arrangements with all the other Arab Gulf emirates. In exchange for the emirates'

acquiescing to British protection from foreign attack, as well as allowing Britain control over their international relations, the emirates gained British recognition of the de-facto governmental status quo among the rulers then in power.

The first treaties guaranteeing a maritime truce in the region were regularly renewed with the Arab signatories or their successors at annual intervals by representatives of the British government in India. In the late 1840s, given the treaties' success in helping to maintain a record of unbroken maritime peace over the previous two decades, the British decided to insert a provision that would make the treaties perpetual. Hence, the colloquial nomenclature for the arrangement thereafter became the Perpetual Maritime Truce. In this manner the seeds were sown for a system of defense and international relations among the treaties' signatories that, with few exceptions, would remain the bulwark of British efforts to maintain regional peace and order until the emirates obtained their independence in 1971.

In 1971, the situation was one in which it seemed that, with appropriate planning, circumstance, and the requisite international assistance, albeit not from either Great Britain or the United States, the Ruler of Ra's al-Khaimah, Shaikh Saqr bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, might be able to right an historical wrong inflicted upon his forebears more than a century and a half earlier. Now that the British were set to abrogate their protected-state treaties, he reasoned, it would be only just for the local power configuration to revert to what it was before the British imposed their restrictions on his Ra's Al-Khaiman ancestors and their counterparts among all the other Arab emirates' ruling families. In his mind, his demands for a minimum of parity with the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai were eminently reasonable and rooted in the history of the region prior to the arrival there of the British.

In addition, Shaikh Saqr emphasized that Ra's al-Khaimah was undeniably the one emirate with more indigenous Arab inhabitants than any of the others. In a meeting with this author in July 1971, he raised the question rhetorically, "This is supposed to be a union of Arab emirates, isn't it? If so, oughtn't the emirate with the largest number of Arabs among its citizens be granted a seat at the head of the table?"   It was for reasons related to these two factors in addition to his strongly held belief that subsequent potentially imminent discoveries of oil in Ra's al-Khaimah would warrant a political status for Ra's al-Khaimah equal to that of Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the UAE that Shaikh Saqr held back from his colleagues when the UAE formally came into existence on December 2, 1971.   However, such was not to be. In the end, although it declined to be a founding member of the Union, Ra's al-Khaimah acceded to the confederation in March of 1972 but without succeeding in his quest to be granted parity with the Rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai..

Dubai

Dubai's position throughout all of the discussions and negotiations leading to the formation of the UAE was as strongly felt as those of Sharjah and Ra's al-Khaimah. The reasons, however, were entirely different. For the most part, Dubai's reservations about joining the Union were based on commercial considerations. The lifeblood

of Dubai's economy, which benefited from limited amounts of oil and gas albeit but slightly in comparison with Abu Dhabi, centered on a robust business community's prowess in imports and re-exports to such non-Arab economies as those of India, Iran, and Pakistan.

This had been the case for at least three quarters of a century. One result was that Dubai society was a mosaic of interests that included but was not limited to those of its indigenous inhabitants, who numerically were in the distinct minority. Numerous consequences stemmed from Dubai's self-perceived position and role as the Lower Gulf region's preeminent trading capital. One was a widespread belief among its merchants that that the emirate's paramount interest lay in strengthened and expanded relations not with its fellow and neighboring Arab emirates but, rather, its non-Arab business partners and potential customers further afield. Heightening Dubai's sense of distinctiveness was its vision of being ideally positioned to evolve to a point where it would rival Singapore, Hong Kong, Macau, Colombo, and Gibraltar among the world's city states that excelled in trade, investment, and the establishment of lucrative joint commercial ventures.

Given the context of Dubai's self-proclaimed overriding needs, concerns, and interests as well as key policy objectives, it is hard to imagine Shaikh Zayed taking on a greater task than seeking to convince Dubai's leaders that their future lay in close association less with lands east and more with their fellow citizens in the Arabian emirates. It was of course not a matter of Zayed being inexperienced in such matters or not having been successful at bridging differences among parties to disputes before. His leadership record up to that point, developed over an eighteen-year period as Governor of the Al-Ain oasis constellation of six villages in eastern Abu Dhabi from 1928-1966, and as Ruler of Abu Dhabi itself from 1966 onwards, reflected both these facets. However, try as he did with all his skills in political mediation and compromise, he was at a loss as to how he could persuade Dubai to join the UAE. What Zayed eventually ended up having to do reads to outsiders and non-specialists as Utopian pipe dreams.

The nature and extent of concessions that Zayed agreed to accept in order to ensure Dubai's decision to join Abu Dhabi in co-founding the UAE defies the imagination. To begin with, Zayed acceded to the demand by Dubai's Ruler, Shaikh Rashid bin Said Al-Maktum, that he be granted absolute parity with Shaikh Zayed in terms of the political powers that each would have in administering the Union. More specifically, Rashid insisted that he and Zayed alone possess veto power over each others' and their fellow emirate leaders' decisions with which they might not agree. Despite the fact that Zayed was aware that he was expected to assume the lion's share of the government's expenses and administrative burden as well, and that Dubai's contributions would at best be minimal and nominal, Zayed acquiesced to what many would have regarded as a deal-breaker.

Dubai's list continued. A second demand by Rashid was that he be made Vice President of the Union, with powers equal to those of Shaikh Zayed, who was to assume to role of President. Third, he insisted that Zayid agree to accept Rashid's eldest son, Shaikh Maktum, as the UAE's Prime Minister. Fourth, he stated that his second eldest son, Shaikh Hamdan, should be the Union's Minister of Finance, a preference for which,

again as before, Zayed, from whom most of the financing would emanate, acquiesced. Fifth, Rashid insisted and Zayed agreed that Rashid's third son, Shaikh Muhammad, serve as the Union's Minister of Defense. Clearly, Dubai's generations of business dealings with some of the world's most accomplished merchants and traders had produced not only a commercial acumen second to none, but negotiating skills that had few peers and almost no rivals in eastern Arabia as a whole.

Abu Dhabi

There is no question that Shaikh Zayed's resolute dealings with the competing challenges and priorities of Sharjah, Ra's al-Khaimah, and Dubai provided compelling evidence of not just a strong and forceful leader not opposed to wheeling, dealing, and compromise, but a rarity in most countries: namely, a statesman. However, an even greater challenge to Zayed was the need for him to secure the sine qua non: namely, the requisite degree of support from his own people in Abu Dhabi for his vision of linking their destinies with those of six other emirates. Making this part of his challenge difficult in the extreme was that these other emirates were headed by rulers just as determined as he was to advance the interests of their citizens as best they could.

Additionally, Zayed labored under another disadvantage. This was that the male adult members of his branch of the Abu Dhabi ruling family, the Al-Nahyan of the Al Bu Falah section of the paramount Ban Yas tribe, were considerably fewer in number than those of a collateral branch, namely the descendents of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa bin Zayed The Great. This collateral branch of Abu Dhabi's ruling family had been superseded in 1928 when the British recognized the Al-Nahyan branch, which was headed first by Shaikh Zayed's older brother, Shaikh Shakhbut bin Sultan, prior to Zayed himself acceding to the Rulership in 1966.

Although he was Abu Dhabi's uncontested head of state and a major east Arabian tribal leader and paramount shaikh in his own right, Shaikh Zayed's male progeny at the time were fewer than those of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, commonly referred to as the Bani Khalifa. It was to the UAE's and Abu Dhabi's great fortune that Zayed was astute enough to build and maintain throughout his entire life the closest possible relationship of respect and deference to Shaikh Muhammad. One of the fruits of this relationship was Shaikh Muhammad's blessing of Shaikh Zayed's accession to the Rulership in 1966. Another was his willingness to support Zayed in his quest to build the strongest possible government to succeed the departing British. Zayed in turn made certain to ensure that Shaikh Muhammad's own male sons were incorporated to the greatest extent possible in the administrative structure of Abu Dhabi to an even greater extent than was the case with his own sons.

Zayed was no less effective in his dealings with the numerous sub-sections of the Bani Yas tribe, of which his Al Bu Falah branch was but one among 11 others. In addition, he took care to ensure that the basic interests of two other Abu Dhabi tribes in the eastern reaches of the emirate, the Daramak and the Dhawahir, as well as the Bani Murrah in the emirate's western reaches, were secured and advanced to the extent

possible. In so doing, he succeeded in avoiding the mistakes of many another aspiring head of state in the international arena that placed the perceived need to curry favor with foreign principals over and above the domestic requirements embedded in the adage that "all politics are local."

Conclusion

In conclusion it is clear that the circumstances in which the UAE was forged were characterized by a range of traditional and transforming forces that happened to align at an especially auspicious juncture in east Arabian history. The circumstances that this auspicious alignment provided were such that the atmosphere for pioneering new structures for governance and the parameters for policymaking and decision-making were unusually receptive for the reasons indicated. Certainly in retrospect, there is no question that the moment for doing so was not only extraordinarily fortuitous but politically propitious over and beyond what Zayed and others who were centrally involved in forging the UAE could have believed would be possible when they began.

What is more, in Shaikh Zayed's decision to anchor the confederation in a setting that would be as much in keeping as possible with the member states' society, culture, and traditions, he managed to create something entirely new without the need to destroy most of what had gone before. In the process of acceding to most of the legitimate needs, concerns, and interests of his fellow UAE founders, Zayed also managed to configure the confederation arrangement in such a way as to validate the age-old political maxim of, "That government is best that governs least." To be sure, most political theorists are familiar with the sentiments that underpin this precept. Yet few if any could cite another country than the UAE as an Arab or Islamic example of its contemporary application.

Furthermore, as the UAE in 2009 nears completion of its 38th year, it is incontestable to note that no other Arab country, or for that matter, any other polities in the developing world that counts among its members 140 nations, can rival, let alone match or surpass, the UAE in terms of the relative viability and overall success of its system of governance. Certainly, it is undeniable that the UAE has acquitted itself well in terms of the five most oft-cited criteria for national success, these being evidence of having assured the country's unity together with the citizenry's domestic safety, external defense, material well-being, and overall effectiveness in administering a civil and peaceful system of justice. As if this were not enough to validate the UAE's experiment in bold and innovative political engineering, the UAE has simultaneously manifested successfully the three essential criteria for membership in the United Nations, namely, the perpetuation of its national sovereignty, political independence, and -- notwithstanding Iran's continued occupation of three of the UAE member-states' islands dating from literally 24 hours prior to the British defense treaties' expiration -- its territorial integrity.

Having observed firsthand some of the final meetings in which the arrangements for the UAE's governance and the member states' main priorities and challenges were agreed in 1971, this author can attest to the tinier than minuscule number of analysts

present then who did not believe strongly that the experiment would be fortunate indeed were it to last longer than a few months. None then present can claim to have predicted that, situated as it was in one of the most forgotten corners of Arabia, the UAE would become so rapidly a country with one of the highest levels of income per capita and national standards of living in the world.

As other countries ponder the needs to consider the potential reconfiguration of their governmental structures and systems of political dynamics – Iraq, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and potentially parts of Pakistan and newly-formed nations in the Caucuses, the Caspian Sea basin, and elsewhere in Central Asia come to mind – much stands to be gained from the study of the formation and prolongation of the UAE as a living laboratory of politics as the art of compromise.

Not least among the additional examples of the potentially positive effect that the history of the UAE to date has had and may yet have on the dynamics of state formation and political engineering elsewhere can be found in the immediate region itself: the six-state Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). It is no coincidence that the GCC, which was established in 1981, and appropriately had its founding meeting in the UAE capital of Abu Dhabi, has important structural, governance, leadership, and political dynamics characteristics that strongly resemble those of the UAE.

Finally, the UAE is further distinguished in the following ways. It has thus far answered successfully a perennial question posed by many political theorists: namely, whether the nature and substance of a government forged on the anvil of the skills of a charismatic leader, blessed with strategic vision and tactical brilliance such as many agree that Zayed exhibited, can endure in quite the same dynamic, productive, and effective way once that leader dies or is succeeded by another. Certainly it is difficult to see how anyone could seriously question the fact that such a simultaneously successful transformation and prolongation has been accomplished thus far in the UAE. That nation has indeed prospered even after the loss of its bold, innovative, and extraordinarily prescient founding president. If nothing else, Shaikh Zayed's legacy is the UAE itself, the single-longest and most successful experiment in Arab political engineering and inter-state integration in modern history.