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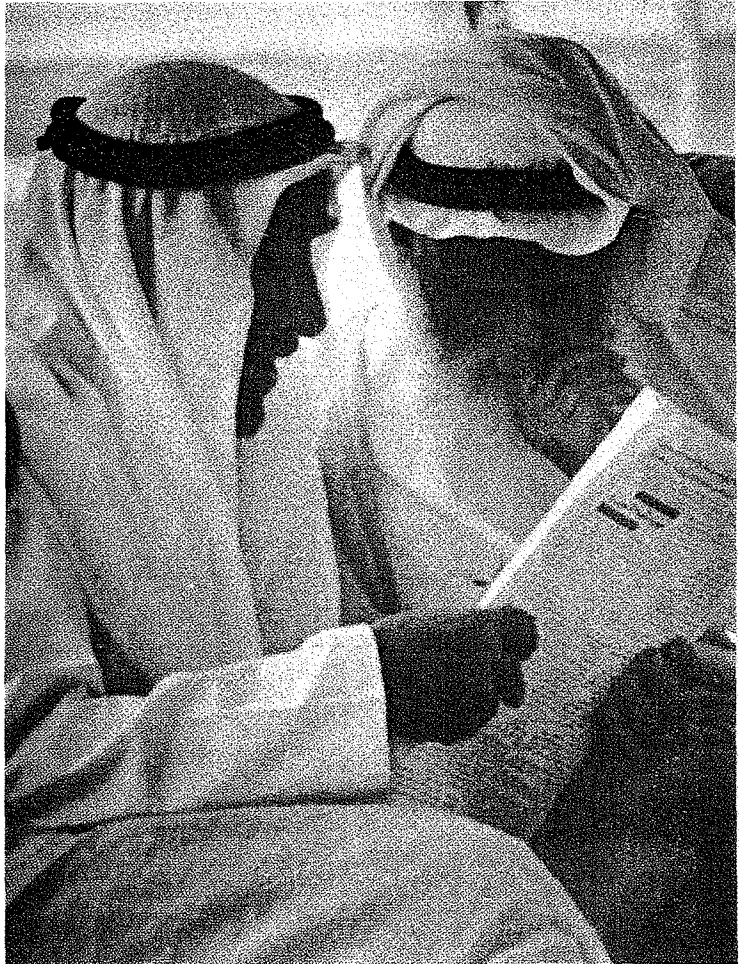
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# THE UNION OF ARAB AMIRATES

*John Duke Anthony*

ON DECEMBER 2, 1971, after nearly four years of protracted negotiations, the Union of Arab Emirates (UAE) was finally proclaimed as an independent state. Later the same day it signed a Treaty of Friendship with the United Kingdom to replace the treaties under which Britain had exercised defense and foreign affairs responsibilities for the emirates, thereby completing one of the most carefully orchestrated of British withdrawals from commitments east of Suez. Within a week, two other important milestones were passed: the UAE became the 132nd member of the UN and the 18th member of the Arab League. Its entry into the latter organization was of special significance, marking the achievement of a long-standing goal: national independence for all the Arab states.

Unlike other League members, however, the UAE is in reality not a country but a confederation of seven small entities, or shaykhdoms, formerly known as the Trucial States: Abū Dhabī (Abū Zabī), 'Ajmān, Dubayy, Fujayrah, Ra's al-Khaymah, Sharjah (al-Sharīqah) and Umm al-Qaywayn. The Union government has authority over foreign relations, defense and financial affairs, but domestic affairs remain largely in the hands of the individual member states. Although the UAE is not the first attempt at regional integration in the Arab world, nor probably the last, its development will undoubtedly be the subject of close observation for some time to come. The purpose of this article is to describe the structure and the political dynamics of the UAE at the end of its first half year with a view to assessing its prospects.

## *Formation and Structure*

After 1968, when negotiations started among all nine Lower Gulf emirates (including Bahrayn and Qatar), disagreement over the form of the federation and the allocation of its substantive powers impeded creation of the UAE. An important problem was the distribution of powers between the rulers and the Union government. Another was how the Union should operate. Would there be an elected or appointed assembly? Would the assembly have consultative or legislative powers? What would be the basis of representation: wealth? prestige? size of territory? proportional according to population? Other ancillary issues were: How would the Union be financed? Where would the permanent capital be located? How would defense and foreign affairs be

△ JOHN DUKE ANTHONY is Assistant Editor of *The Middle East Journal*. He spent the summer of 1971 in the then Trucial States gathering material used in this article.

controlled? What would be the division of the ministerial responsibilities among the amirates? In the end, Baḥrayn and Qaṭar decided not to join the federation and opted for separate independent statehood in August and September, 1971, respectively.

To a certain extent the polarization among the rulers over these issues reflected genuine differences of opinion, but in other ways it was the product of traditional rivalries along tribal and family lines. For example, the wealthy rulers of Baḥrayn, Qaṭar, Abū Dhabī and Dubayy—among whom competition in matters of wealth and prestige is a continuing feature of Lower Gulf politics—each favored his own amirate as the site for the permanent federal capital. To the disappointment of the first two shaykhdoms, Abū Dhabī was eventually chosen as the temporary capital for the first seven years, with the agreement that a permanent capital would be constructed on land donated by Abū Dhabī and Dubayy from both sides of their joint frontier at a place called al-Karamah.

The representational problem was more difficult to resolve. Relatively populous Baḥrayn (est. pop. 220,000) obviously favored a proportional formula which, had it been accepted, would have given it a dominant voice in federal assembly and ministerial affairs. The smaller amirates, for whom the Ruler of tiny 'Ajmān (est. pop. 4,200) was a spokesman, argued that representation should be equally apportioned by amirate. In part, agreement by a majority of the amirates with the latter position was what induced Baḥrayn to go its own way. In the end, however, a compromise form of modified proportional representation was written into the constitution. The distribution of seats among representatives to the 40-member Federal National Council (FNC), or assembly, is Abū Dhabī and Dubayy: 8 each; Ra's al-Khaymah and Sharjah: 6 each; and 'Ajmān, Fujayrah and Umm al-Qaywayn: 4 apiece.

As had been anticipated, federal financial arrangements were resolved without much difficulty. Abū Dhabī and Dubayy, with estimated incomes in 1971 of \$336 million and \$50.4 million respectively, agreed to absorb the major expenses, with the other five shaykhdoms—whose combined revenues in 1971 were estimated at a meager \$1.2 million—contributing nominal sums based on a formula proportionate to their state revenues. While this agreement reflected a realistic apportionment of the financial burden, it served to highlight the relative poverty of the five northernmost amirates and their dependence, particularly upon Abū Dhabī, for subsidies and other forms of support.

The Federal Supreme Council (FSC), composed of the seven rulers, is the highest organ in the federation. The FSC is in some ways the successor to the former Trucial States Council, essentially a consultative body established by Britain in 1952 to facilitate the cooperation of the rulers in matters concerning their common interests. Ideally, the spirit of collegiality is supposed to guide the rulers in their secret deliberations within the council; this, however, appears difficult to achieve in practice in view of the dominant rôles of Shaykh Zayd

bin Ṣultān al-Nuhayān of Abū Dhabī and Shaykh Rāshid bin Sa'id al-Maktūm of Dubayy. These two rulers possess veto powers—a power denied the other rulers—and their joint assent must be reflected in the five-out-of-seven votes required for council decisions to carry the force of law.

One of the most remarkable changes evolving during the negotiations related to the powers of the President of the Federation. Originally, in deference to the reluctance of the ruler group to institutionalize the primacy of one of its members over the rest, a presidency rotating regularly among all the rulers was proposed. It was also envisioned that the president's term of office would be two years. As to the first proposal, constitution drafters were doubtful whether such an arrangement would develop into the strong, centralized executive desired, and in addition other objections were made about the term of office. Qaṭar, for example, argued that it was unrealistic to expect a ruler to leave the administration of his own shaykhdom in the hands of someone else for the duration of his two-year term in the federal capital.

The provisional constitution finally accepted by six of the rulers at a meeting in Dubayy in July 1971 was therefore altered to permit a substantial concentration of authority in the presidency and between the two wealthiest shaykhdoms. Instead of a rotating presidency, it was agreed that Shaykh Zayd of Abū Dhabī would become the Union's first president, Shaykh Rāshid of Dubayy would be the first Vice-President, both would serve for five years and would be eligible for reappointment to the same positions upon the terms' expiration in 1976. Further to balance allocation of the presidency, as well as the foreign affairs and interior ministry portfolios to Abū Dhabī, Dubayy, in addition to the vice-presidency, was given equal voting power in the Supreme Council and the Federal National Council; Shaykh Rāshid's son, Maktūm, was made Prime Minister, another son, Hamdān, was named Deputy Premier for Industry, Finance and Economy, and a third son, Muḥammad, was appointed to the important post of Minister of National Defense in the first federal cabinet. The concentration of political power in Abū Dhabī and Dubayy was resented by the rulers of some of the poorer shaykhdoms, and was one of the factors which caused Ra's al-Khaymah not to join the federation until later.

The UAA executive authority is embodied in the Prime Minister and a Council of Ministers, or cabinet, composed of the following portfolios: foreign affairs; internal affairs; finance; economy and industry; justice; education; public health; public works and agriculture; communication; labor and social welfare; information; and planning. In the first cabinet announced on December 9, 1971, most of the ministers were either members of the various amirate ruling families or represented important interest groups allied with those families. Of much less significance than had once been envisaged is the Federal National Council (FNC), or assembly, composed of 40 delegates from the various amirates. With delegates nominated by the rulers for two-year terms,

the FNC, at its inaugural session in February 1972, elected from among the members its president from Dubayy and its two vice-presidents from Abū Dhābī. The council is required to convene in six-month sessions which are scheduled to begin on the third week of November of each year. Its powers are limited primarily to discussion and approval of the budget and draft legislation presented by the Council of Ministers.

In assisting the rulers during the negotiations leading to the federation, British advisers showed a basic concern (shared by most of the rulers) for the protection of British oil interests, including the uninterrupted flow of oil from the Gulf, continued British retention of important oil concessions in individual UAA states—particularly in Abū Dhābī, and also for the continuation of the rulers' practice of banking their oil revenues in London and spending substantial portions of these revenues on British exports. Accordingly, to ensure such continuity, provisions for federal defense were elaborated with great care. A primary objective from the outset was to establish a suitable administrative framework that would allow the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS), a British-trained and equipped mercenary force established in 1951, to become the nucleus of the Union's armed forces. This force, suitably renamed the Union Defense Force (UDF), was eventually incorporated into the Union's structure with little difficulty. In order to allay the fears of some rulers that the British officers might be withdrawn—fears that have thus far proved unfounded—provisions were also made to allow each of the amirates to develop its own separate forces.

Organized into five armored car companies, and led by approximately two dozen British officers and a hundred British noncommissioned officers, the 1700 strong UDF is responsible to the Federal Minister of Defense and a Higher Defense Council, the chairman of which is the President of the Federation, Shaykh Zayd. Additional members of the council are the Vice-President (Dubayy), the Prime Minister (Dubayy), the heads of the ministries of foreign affairs (Abū Dhābī), defense (Dubayy), finance (Dubayy) and interior (Abū Dhābī), and the commander-in-chief and chief of staff. With additional forces on call from the individual amirates, and particularly from the relatively powerful Abū Dhābī Defense Force, the activities of the UDF will probably be confined to performing police and paramilitary rôles in the course of patrolling village and desert regions and preventing incidents of tribal dissidence from escalating into intershaykdom warfare.

### *The UAA in Action*

Many critics, though impressed with various features of the governmental structure, doubted the UAA could actually function. They noted that attempts to establish federations in other parts of the world formerly under British control—Central Africa, the West Indies, Malaysia, *et al.*—had not been successful; nor, with the exception of Libya, had past Arab federations fared much



better. In the case of the UAA, however, several strong reasons for pessimism existed, among them the fact that the attempt to establish regional integration was to be undertaken in an area largely devoid of a tradition of regional cooperation.

In the UAA's first half year, steps toward functional integration—*e.g.* establishment of a common currency, abolition of customs barriers between the shaykhdoms, provision for a federal adjudicatory mechanism, approval of a national flag and anthem, *etc.*—proceeded under the aegis of the various government departments. It seemed logical to expect that additional major steps in these and related areas would be achieved very slowly and that, in any case, success would be difficult to measure for some time to come. At the level of foreign affairs and internal security, however, the situation was different and a degree of effective coordination was in fact achieved. In the course of dealing with problems in these two areas, the UAA decision-making machinery and the rulers' commitment to the federal idea was put to its first and, thus far, most severe test.

Immediately upon the establishment of the UAA the government was confronted with the problem of how to respond, if at all, to several territorial disputes involving individual UAA states and outside powers. One dispute centered on Iran's claim to sovereignty over three islands at the mouth of the Gulf also claimed by Ra's al-Khaymah and Sharjah; the other involved a long-standing boundary dispute between Abū Dhabī and Saudi Arabia. While the latter problem remained relatively dormant for the first half year, this was not the case with the islands.

In a dramatic move on the eve of Britain's termination of its treaties of protection with the amirates, Iran took control of the disputed islands: Abū Mūsā, claimed by Sharjah, and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs, claimed by Ra's al-Khaymah. In the case of Abū Mūsā, the occupation took place according to an eleventh hour agreement between Iran and Sharjah. The agreement provided, *inter alia*, that local revenues on the island would be divided equally between Sharjah and Iran, Sharjah would receive about \$3.5 million annually in Iranian aid over the next nine years, and Iran would be permitted to establish a military post on the island although Sharjah would retain control over the island's civil affairs.

In the case of the two Tunbs, Iran and Ra's al-Khaymah did not sign an agreement and there was no compensation. The occupation took place in the face of armed resistance by the local Arab police and resulted in loss of life on both sides. While it is difficult even now to foresee the long run effects of this display of Iranian military might, the resentment and reaction caused in the short run have probably exceeded what Iran had anticipated. Iraq severed diplomatic relations with both Great Britain and Iran over the issue, the Qadhdhāfi government expropriated the Libyan assets of the British Petro-

leum Company, the amirates experienced the worst scenes of violence and civil disorder since the 1967 Six Day War, the leader of Ra's al-Khaymah became deeply embittered, and communal relations between Arabs and Iranians, already strained through fears of Iranian expansionism, were heightened throughout the area.

In its first test in crisis management the UAA was fortunately provided with a convenient face-saving device, however, by the timing of the occupation which, in effect, allowed it to look the other way and take almost no action at all. The seizure of the Tunbs one day prior to the expiration of the treaty of protection meant that the legal burden of defending Ra's al-Khaymah was upon the British, not the UAA. On grounds that were technically and constitutionally unassailable, the Union government was able to claim not only that the federation was not in existence when the occupation took place, but also that the injured party, Ra's al-Khaymah, which did not join the union until three months later, would have failed to qualify for federal assistance in any case.

It was to the federation's advantage at this point also to treat the occupation of Abū Mūsā as a non-federal affair. Shortly after the UAA was officially proclaimed, its president, Shaykh Zayd, dispelled any doubts about the new state's involvement in either dispute. While condemning the forceful seizure of the Tunbs, Shaykh Zayd stated what was probably the desire of the majority of the rulers: that he hoped the UAA would be able to establish good relations with Iran. In limiting its response to one of rhetorical denunciation of Iran's conduct in occupying the Tunbs and in bypassing the controversy over the unpopular deal between Iran and Sharjah, the UAA was thus able to avoid a military confrontation with Iran—an event for which the Union Defense Force, even had it been bolstered by the ADDF, was by no means prepared.

Two months later, in a different dimension of the islands disputes, the federal decision-making apparatus was confronted with a more difficult problem: the choice of deploying military force to put down a major internal security threat in one of the shaykhdoms or risking the possibility that an important UAA member might attempt to secede. The crisis arose in late January 1972 in the course of an attempted coup in Sharjah, the background to which was exceedingly complicated but included widespread opposition to the manner in which the ruler had handled the Abū Mūsā affair. Accompanied by about two dozen armed supporters, Shaykh Ṣaqr bin Ṣultān al-Qāsimī, a former ruler of Sharjah who had been deposed in 1965, succeeded in entering the ruler's palace where the incumbent, Shaykh Khālīd, and other members of the ruling family were caught by surprise, taken hostage and the amir reportedly made to sign a document agreeing to abdicate.

In the interim, however, one of the Ruler's brothers managed to encircle the palace with loyalist forces while summoning help from the federal gov-



ernment. The Federal Higher Council promptly decided to intervene on behalf of Shaykh Khālid. When the federal forces arrived, the coup makers surrendered, but not before Shaykh Khālid and four members of his family were killed. Subsequent investigation into the affair indicated that had Shaykh Ṣaqr succeeded in the coup attempt, Sharjah would not only have abrogated the agreement with Iran, thereby forcing a showdown with the dominant power in the area, but quite possibly would also have attempted to withdraw from the UAA to join in a smaller union with Ra's al-Khaymah which, up until that point, had remained outside the federation. In the event, Sharjah chose instead to remain in the UAA and to uphold the Abū Mūsā agreement, and Ra's al-Khaymah asked to be admitted and was accepted as the Union's seventh member shortly afterward. In crushing the coup attempt the UAA was thus able to demonstrate its capacity successfully to survive the first major threat to its internal authority.

### *The Individual Amirates*

Because the rulers are determined to leave unchanged the management of their internal affairs, the political dynamics of the UAA occur not so much at the level of the federal government as within and among the individual shaykhdoms. With poorly defined boundaries and limited experience with a central government, these shaykhdoms share a number of common characteristics. The leadership of every shaykhdom, for example, is based on tribal and family allegiance to paramount clans, which over the years have become equivalent to hereditary dynasties. Moreover, with the exception of Abū Dhabī and Dubayy, the shaykhdoms are not viable economically and have long been dependent on outside sources of support.

In general, the shaykhdoms share a common history. For the 150 years during which Britain engaged in special treaty relationships with the rulers of this area, the shaykhdoms agreed not to cede parts of their territory to, or engage in communication with, other states without the approval of the British government. As a result, prior to 1971 none of the amirates had diplomatic or consular missions abroad. The special relationship also facilitated the placement of British advisors in key positions in the internal administration of some of these states. In return the rulers were supposed to receive military protection of their respective shaykhdoms in the case of external aggression.

Outside Abū Dhabī and Dubayy, and to a lesser extent the capital territory of Sharjah, the social and economic structure of the UAA area is among the least developed of any in the Arab world. While the discovery of petroleum in Abū Dhabī and the steady income in Dubayy from trade, smuggling and oil have resulted in relatively high living standards, a substantial number of people in the poorer shaykhdoms can still be found engaged in the more arduous tasks of pearling, boatbuilding, fishing, seafaring and subsistence agriculture. The

increasing amount of economic development in the area in recent years, however, has attracted many Baluchis, Pathans, Iranians, Pakistanis and Indians as well as northern Arabs in search of relatively high-paying jobs in petroleum, construction and related industries. As a result, the indigenous Arab inhabitants in Abū Dhabī and Dubayy, and allegedly also in Sharjah town, became the minority.

Except in Dubayy and tiny 'Ajmān and Umm al-Qaywayn, the shaykhdoms are still sparsely settled. In most of them, only the capital can be considered a town. As a result, highly developed administrative systems have not been necessary; even in Abū Dhabī and Dubayy the local bureaucracies are concerned primarily with relations between the ruler and foreign companies operating in the area and the provision of little more than the most basic of services to the local population.

As a group, the seven shaykhdoms lack an overall sense of brotherhood or common national identity. From Abū Dhabī in the southwest corner of the UAA to Fujayrah in the northeast, the rulers are less preoccupied with unity schemes than with maintaining political dominance in their respective shaykhdoms. Plagued collectively by a legacy of rivalries, few of these states have good relations with their neighbors; their good relations are usually with the shaykhdom immediately beyond. This leap frog pattern of inter-shaykhdom relations subjects the UAA to considerable internal stress not always apparent on the surface and does not augur well either for the long run prospects for UAA stability or for the security of the region as a whole. Of the seven UAA rulers, five came to power in a family coup. The absence of a peaceful and orderly means of rulership succession is a feature common to all the shaykhdoms, several of which are particularly vulnerable to the type of family squabble that displaced the rulers in Sharjah in January and in Qaṭar in February. In the case of 'Ajmān and Umm al-Qaywayn, a change in rulership may be expected to occur relatively soon, as the rulers in those shaykhdoms came to power in the late 1920s.

### *Abū Dhabī*

Abū Dhabī, by far the largest UAA member in terms of territory, is also the richest and the strongest militarily. Since 1958, when oil was first discovered, the economy has soared to an expected \$420 million in oil revenues in 1972. Based on an estimated population of 70,000, Abū Dhabī's inhabitants presently claim the highest annual per capita incomes in the world. As one of the two capital-surplus members in the federation, Abū Dhabī is easily the single largest financial contributor to the UAA. Moreover, in addition to providing the bulk of the money for the federal budget, it has for some time made available additional funds on a bilateral basis to nearly all the poorer shaykhdoms.

The transformation of Abū Dhabī from the sparsely populated traditional tribal society of a few years ago to the beginnings of a welfare state on the Kuwayt pattern dates largely from the assumption of political power in 1966 by the present ruler, Shaykh Zayd. A member of the Al Bū Falāh branch of the Bāni Yās tribe, he is one of the more aggressive and ambitious of the seven UAA rulers, and although still an absolute monarch like the others, has begun to develop a modern administration. In 1971, he broke new ground by permitting limited political participation in the form of a consultative assembly, the first such assembly to be established in a UAA state. The 50 assembly delegates, all of whom were appointed by Shaykh Zayd personally, are members of important tribes or influential families.

In recent years Shaykh Zayd has assigned high priority to the development of the Abū Dhabī Defense Force (ADDF). Unlike the UAA's Union Defense Force (UDF), the ADDF has both naval and supersonic jet air wings. Moreover, although a younger force than the UDF, ADDF personnel strength exceeds 6,000, most of whom are mercenaries commanded by British officers on secondment or contract, plus a smaller number of Jordanians. The basic rôle of the ADDF has remained unchanged: to guard against external attacks and threats to Abū Dhabī's internal security while providing important backup support for the UDF.

Like the other amirates, Abū Dhabī has a legacy of strained relations with some of its neighbors. Within the UAA, its most important rival has traditionally been its next door neighbor, Dubayy, its enemy in a war from 1946-1948. Although that dispute was largely over territory, the animosities between the two shaykhdoms have tribal overtones in that their respective ruling families represent splinter sections of the same Bāni Yās tribe and that, prior to the 1830s, Dubayy was under Abū Dhabī control.

The rivalry also has personal dimensions. Shaykh Zayd, proud of his long years as an administrator in the desert oasis of Buraymī and of his skill in dealing with Bedouin tribesmen, has little in common temperamentally with Shaykh Rāshid of Dubayy, who reflects the outlook and skills of an urban merchant concerned essentially with port life and international commerce. As evidence of their continuing rivalry for prestige, Shaykh Zayd has extended aid to the amirates beyond Dubayy partly in a genuine attempt to promote their economic development and partly also to counter the influence of Shaykh Rāshid. Conversely, the desire to avoid association with Abū Dhabī was a reason for Dubayy's procrastination during the negotiations for the UAA, and its notable lack of enthusiasm for the federal idea.

In addition to its problems with Dubayy, Abū Dhabī has difficulties with important states outside the federation. It has reasonably close ties with the Sultanate of Oman, but its relations with Saudi Arabia remain strained because of Saudi Arabia's claims to the entire Buraymī Oasis area as well as to large

portions of Abū Dhabī's western territory. This problem is an important factor behind Saudi Arabia's lukewarm support thus far for Abū Dhabī's leading rôle in the UAA. Here again, however, the issue in dispute is less one of territory than the outgrowth of a clash between the strong personalities of two men: Shaykh Zayd and King Fayṣal.

For Zayd, Buraymī is no ordinary oasis. It is the center of Abū Dhabī's Eastern Province where he spent many of his formative years and served for twenty years as the Abū Dhabī governor prior to becoming ruler. It is also a major source from which the UAA's temporary capital in Abū Dhabī town, though ninety miles away, draws much of its water supply. For Fayṣal equally, the dispute over Buraymī is of special significance. To him it is an issue of pride and honor, a reminder of past Wahhābī glories, and, more recently, of a stunning defeat inflicted by Zayd and the British when the Trucial Oman Scouts drove Saudi forces from the area in 1955. Since then Buraymī has continued to be administered partly by Abū Dhabī and partly by the Sultanate of Oman. At the end of the UAA's first half year, it seemed unlikely that Fayṣal would risk a military confrontation with Zayd, or *vice versa*, over the areas in dispute between them. Both rulers shared an overriding interest in the perpetuation of traditional rule in the area and in the establishment of a UAA capable of defending itself against external threats. In any case, with or without the enthusiastic support of the Saudis, as the wealthiest, strongest and most security conscious of the shaykhdoms, Abū Dhabī seemed destined to continue to play the dominant rôle in the UAA.

### *Dubayy*

In contrast to Abū Dhabī, Dubayy is distinguished principally by its development as the principal commercial center in the Lower Gulf during the past two decades. In the 1968 census of the six northern emirates, almost half the total estimated population of 130,000 reportedly lived in Dubayy. The majority of that number live on either side of the picturesque creek that runs through Dubayy town, where the seat of government and economic infrastructure are also situated, making Dubayy the UAA's only "city state" and the most developed of all the emirate capitals. The majority of Dubayy's inhabitants are of non-Arab origins and include many Baluchis, Iranians, Pakistanis, Pathans and Indians. The presence of this diverse foreign community reflects in part the economic orientation of Dubayy, which is directed less toward UAA states than toward countries on the opposite side of the Gulf.

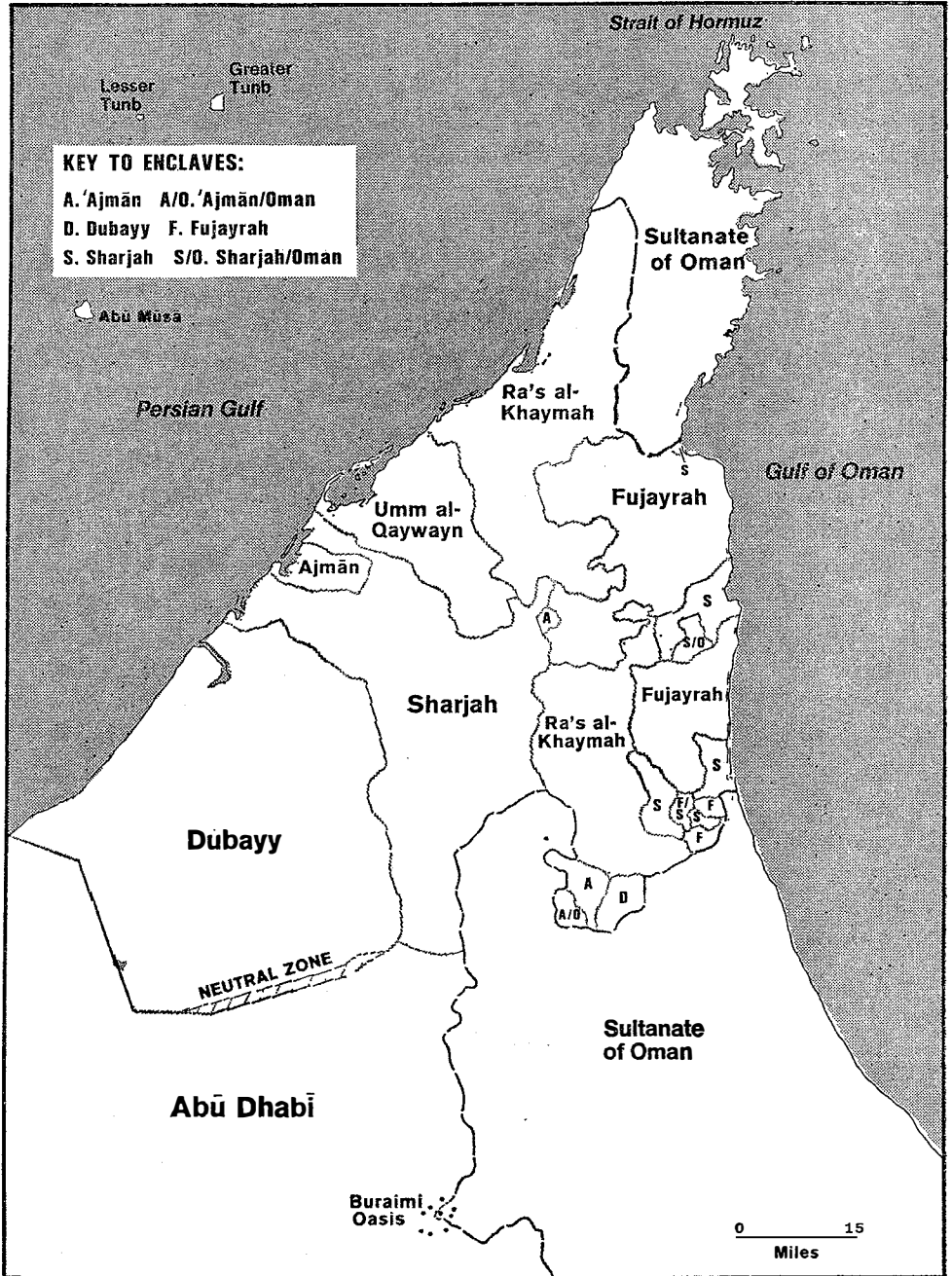
Dubayy is in many ways a total market place, its sophisticated and cosmopolitan merchants more interested in trade than politics. Since the ruling al-Maktūm family left Abū Dhabī in the 1830s and settled in Dubayy, the shaykhdom has steadily acquired a reputation for its liberal economic policies.

The present ruler, Shaykh Rāshid bin Sa'īd al-Maktūm—known to some as “The Merchant Prince” and to others as “The Fox”—is one of the most popular and capable of the federal rulers and remains the principal rival to Shaykh Zayd of Abū Dhabī for influence in amirate affairs. The economy of the shaykhdom as well as the politics of Shaykh Rāshid are based almost entirely on Dubayy's position as entrepôt, although oil has been exported in increasing amounts since 1969. The lively and extremely lucrative trade pattern includes the traditional re-export of goods to southern Iran and neighboring UAA states—principally Abū Dhabī; the clandestine shipment of high duty goods to Iran and the Indian subcontinent; and the smuggling of substantial quantities of gold—in 1971 reportedly more than 220 tons—into the same areas. In spite of increased vigilance by Iranian, Pakistani and Indian customs officials, gold shipped aboard dhows from Dubayy continues to find its way into these three countries and particularly into Pakistan and India, where the demand for the metal is apparently commensurate with any ability of Dubayy to supply.

Partly because of the amirate's economic and related ties with non-Arab states and the wish to avoid entanglement in the complicated tribal politics of the UAA interior, Shaykh Rāshid and the extensive Dubayyan merchant community grew increasingly cool to the federal idea during the early part of 1971. At that time, there were persistent reports that Dubayy, like Bahrayn—its principal rival outside the UAA area—might go it alone. Hindsight indicates that had viable alternatives existed, Dubayy would indeed have chosen to remain outside the Union. Pressure from its most important trading partner, Iran, however, is said to have been one reason for Dubayy's procrastination, as Iran opposed the establishment of any federation prior to the satisfactory resolution of its claims to Abū Mūsā and the Tunbs. However, although Iranian influence in Dubayy was and remains considerable, there were other factors involved, among them the possibility that Dubayy, with its favorable geographic location and the commercial acumen of its traders, might be able to develop separately as an Arab Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong analogy, while popular among some segments of the merchant community and even among advisors close to Shaykh Rāshid, has proved to be misleading. Dubayy lacks anything comparable to Hong Kong's industrial and manufacturing infrastructure, favorable export opportunities and sizeable tourist trade. When they finally agreed that their future seemed more assured inside rather than outside the federation, Dubayyans reckoned their position within the UAA as somewhat akin to Singapore within the Malaysian Federation. Dubayy's rôle in the UAA, in this sense, constitutes a major economic asset—the provision of a relatively free trade zone and an important service station for the international maritime trade of the Gulf. More importantly, Dubayy's membership has brought definite political assets to the UAA. Almost alone among the amirates, it claims good relations with all the regional

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powers outside the federation. In view of its unique resources, Dubayy's membership is of vital importance if the UAA is to succeed. Its continued support for the federal idea, however, depends to a large extent upon a satisfactory sharing in practice of political authority with Abū Dhabī and, at the personal level, upon the establishment of a reasonably amicable working relationship between Shaykh Rāshid and Shaykh Zayd.

### *Sharjah*

Because of its territorial fragmentation (see map) Sharjah presents more formidable problems of administration than most of the other amirates. The capital is on the west side of the Masandam Peninsula while three separate enclaves—Dibba, Khawr Fakkān and Kalba—are located on the east side along the Gulf of Oman. Formerly the site of a British army and Royal Air Force base and the headquarters for the TOS, Sharjah is presently the command center for the UDF. This arrangement would appear to be in the best interests of both the UAA and Sharjan governments because of traditional rivalries between Sharjah and Dubayy, and long-standing frontier disputes between Sharjah and Fujayrah, Umm al-Qaywayn and 'Ajmān.

Ruled by a shaykh of the Qāwāsīm, the leading tribe in the area, Sharjah's fortunes in the past have often been closely associated with those of neighboring Ra's al-Khaymah, also ruled by a Qāsimī shaykh, the two being cousins. Despite its former predominance, Sharjah has been confronted by a series of continuing misfortunes, beginning with the silting up of its creek (local terminology for estuary) and the resulting economic and political eclipse by neighboring Dubayy only ten miles away. The reluctance of the ruling Qāwāsīm to acknowledge the superior position achieved by the al-Maktūm family of Dubayy eventually led the government to negotiate foreign financing of development projects. While successful completion of such projects as the "international" airport and harbor undoubtedly gave a boost to Sharjan pride, the expenditures were of questionable economic value and in the final analysis failed to narrow the gap between Sharjah and Dubayy, especially since the discovery of oil in the latter. In fact the competition produced some negative results, namely Sharjah's increased dependence upon the benevolence of others—Kuwayt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Great Britain and, particularly, Abū Dhabī. Faced with the loss of British subsidies and troop expenditures at the end of 1971, few were surprised when Shaykh Khālid signed the agreement over Abū Mūsā which included provisions for substantial annual payments by Iran to Sharjah.

It is too early to predict whether Sharjah's future under its new ruler, formerly the Federal Minister of Education, will be any more promising than its recent past. Its resources for development, however, are not insignificant, and, even if oil were not discovered, would permit some optimism. They include: a

comparatively modern economic infrastructure in the capital territory; a modest agricultural and fishing potential; the oldest and most developed educational system among the amirates; the forthcoming annual revenue from Iran, and an equal share of revenues if oil is discovered off Abū Mūsā. In any case, the ruler thus far appears to share his predecessor's view that for Sharjah, a small amirate with no petroleum resources, little investment capital and perhaps more problems with its neighbors than any other amirate, UAA membership offers a protective umbrella which could enhance the shaykhdom's security and stability.

### *Ra's al-Khaymah*

The Shaykhdom of Ra's al-Khaymah, like the other shaykhdoms on the west coast of the Masandam Peninsula, is situated astride a small creek. With an estimated population of about 28,000, the shaykhdom has a reasonably balanced economy in comparison with some of the other small states. Its agriculture is relatively well developed, its fishing resources are fairly extensive, it has a modern rock-crushing plant and a number of its inhabitants prosper as seafarers. Imminent expectations of an important petroleum discovery, however, have thus far proved disappointing. As with Sharjah, its fellow Qāsimī state, Ra's al-Khaymah's relations with some of its neighbors are strained. There are disagreements with the ruling family of Fujayrah and, periodically, difficulties occur with Shihūh tribesmen who inhabit the mountains of a neighboring enclave belonging to the Sultanate of Oman.

The Ruler of Ra's al-Khaymah, Shaykh Ṣaqr bin Muḥammad al-Qāsimī, has long been acknowledged as one of the most independent of all the federal rulers. In power since he stormed the capital fort and ousted his uncle in 1948, Shaykh Ṣaqr's politics have often been controversial. Described by some local British political officers as being "surly, uncooperative, and stubborn," his support for British policies was believed to be unpredictable at best. During the negotiations for the federation he is perhaps best remembered for angrily walking out of a meeting of Lower Gulf rulers in October 1970 over alleged British interference in the discussions.

Like his cousin, who led the attempted coup in Sharjah in January 1972, Shaykh Ṣaqr has for some time favored closer relations between his amirate and some of the Arab nationalist states, particularly Egypt and Iraq, and, more recently, Libya. In the mid-1960s he supported the Arab League's proposal to establish an office in Sharjah; he also favored the participation of Egypt and other Arab states in the development of the amirates. In those days, however, the Egyptian army was deeply involved in the Yemen, Cairo's *Voice of the Arabs* radio was engaged in anti-British and anti-Iranian broadcasts and Britain was in the process of strengthening its base in Sharjah. The moment was thus

inopportune and Shaykh Ṣaqr's attempt to lessen his dependence on the British came to naught.

After the British government's withdrawal decision, Shaykh Ṣaqr, finding Egypt preoccupied with domestic affairs, cast about for other supporters in his dispute with Iran over control of the Tunbs. Although thirteen of the Arab League states were unwilling to become involved in this dispute, Iraq saw a diplomatic opening and seized the Ra's al-Khaymah cause. Although perhaps a losing cause—as Iran has subsequently given every indication of retaining control over the islands—both Iraq and Shaykh Ṣaqr appear to have benefitted from their relationship. Iraq, for example, has been able to claim that it supported Ra's al-Khaymah on an issue that pitted the Gulf's two nationalisms—Arab and Iranian—against one another. Shaykh Ṣaqr, for his part, has gained from propaganda portraying him as a quasi-martyr for refusing to the end to concede the right of Iran to occupy a part of the Arab homeland.

Although its belated entry into the UAA was a welcomed event by the other rulers, much of Ra's al-Khaymah's original resentment at the manner in which the UAA was structured in favor of Abū Dhabī and Dubayy has remained and it is difficult to predict whether its subsequent rôle in the Union government will be a positive one.

#### *The Three Smaller Amirates*

The disparities in terms of natural resources and economic development between Abū Dhabī, Dubayy, Sharjah and Ra's al-Khaymah and the three smaller amirates—'Ajmān, Umm al-Qaywayn and Fujayrah—could hardly be more pronounced. With estimated populations of 4,500, 4,000 and 10,000 respectively, these shaykhdoms are little more than "village states," their citizens eking out subsistence-level livings as fishermen, farmers, pearlmen and sailors. Despite the high hopes of imminent oil discoveries entertained by the rulers for more than two decades, no oil has yet been found. As a result, their revenues—aside from local fees, annual rental payments from petroleum concessionaires and a limited amount of income from sales of colorful postage stamps—remain minuscule, barely adequate to provide even the most rudimentary social services for their people.

Because each of the shaykhdoms has been and remains dependent on outside financial assistance, their orientation to the UAA—whose wealthier members are in a position to dispense this vital economic aid—is a positive one. Thus far, the rulers have found a willing source of funds particularly in Abū Dhabī, upon whom all three are dependent to some degree for financial support. Although they have little in the way of natural resources to offer the UAA, these shaykhdoms are nonetheless of some political importance to the UAA President, Shaykh Zayd, who can generally count on their votes in meetings of the Supreme and Federal Councils. Like all the others, however, these

three shaykhdoms have internal problems and are engaged in disputes with their neighbors. In this sense they constitute potential UAA trouble spots.

Shaykh Rāshid bin Humayd al-Na'imī of 'Ajmān, long embroiled in territorial disputes with Sharjah and Umm al-Qaywayn, fears his territory will become little more than a suburb of Sharjah. Umm al-Qaywayn's prospects for raising the living standards of its inhabitants are a little brighter with reports of potentially rich fishing resources giving some promise for increased economic strength. Its oil prospects, however, are less promising today than a year ago, since the Sharjah-Iran agreement over Abū Mūsā island in effect cancelled out an offshore concession dispute between Umm al-Qaywayn and Sharjah. This dispute is behind a growing rift between the two shaykhdoms and prompted a law suit by Umm al-Qaywayn against Sharjah in May 1972. Despite their poverty, the rulers of these two shaykhdoms are nonetheless relatively rich in character and reputation. The Ruler of 'Ajmān, in power since 1928, is regarded as the doyen of the federal rulers. Nearly a head taller in stature than all the other rulers, Shaykh Rāshid, with his silver dagger and long white beard, presents a striking figure. Shaykh Aḥmad bin Rāshid al-Mu'alla, the Ruler of Umm al-Qaywayn, is less imposing in outward manner and dress, but has been ruling almost as long, having come to power in 1929, at the age of eighteen, upon the murder of his uncle.

Fujayrah, the youngest of the amirates, has existed as a separate shaykhdom only since 1951, being previously part of Sharjah. Composed of two separate enclaves, it is the only amirate situated entirely on the eastern side of the Masandam Peninsula. Its ruler, Muḥammad bin Hamad al-Sharqī, paramount shaykh of the Sharqīyīn tribe, has the dubious distinction of reportedly being even poorer than the rulers of 'Ajmān and Umm al-Qaywayn. Fujayrah's geographic isolation is further emphasized by its ruler's political isolation from his neighbors. There are mutual antipathies of long standing between the Fujayran ruling family and the Qāsimī dynasts in Ra's al-Khaymah and Sharjah, and relations with the latter state are further compounded by numerous frontier disputes.

#### *Prospects and Problems*

Given the distinctive makeup and highly disparate stages of development among the seven amirates, six months of experience is perhaps too little to venture any major predictions of the future. Nevertheless, there is sufficient information to venture at least a preliminary assessment of the UAA's prospects, both externally and internally, in the light of events during this period.

Although there is continuing resentment against Iran over the three islands question, especially in Ra's al-Khaymah, and the territorial dispute between Abū Dhabī and Saudi Arabia still persists, the UAA faces no immediate external threat. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia, despite their strained relations with indi-

vidual UAA states, realize that a stable UAA is to their advantage. The common interests of these two largest Gulf powers in containing Iraq and in preventing the intrusion of radical movements surmount their differences. Moreover, other Arab states, even Iraq, appear to be too preoccupied with domestic issues and the Arab-Israeli problem to give a great deal of attention to the UAA beyond general statements of friendship. There has been some interest in the UAA by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, but so far, perhaps partially in deference to Saudi wishes, the Union government has been very cautious in its posture toward these states and has refused a Soviet request to open an embassy.

The greatest threat to the continued stability of the UAA and to the systems of authoritarian rule in the individual amirates is probably internal security. At present there are no trade unions, political parties, free presses or elected bodies in any of the amirates through which reformist or radical demands could be articulated effectively; nor are organizations of these types likely to emerge in the foreseeable future in a milieu where political power continues to be wielded mainly at the top by cousins, sons, brothers and uncles of semi-hereditary tribal rulers. So far, the level of political dissidence in the shaykhdoms has been fairly low, but as oil revenues and increasing contact with the outside world raise expectations and demands, and as discontent with the lack of popular participation in the governmental process develops, the level of discontent is likely to rise. The astute investment of oil revenues might succeed in controlling and diffusing this potential discontent for a while as it did in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Thus far, radical groups—at present weak in numbers, poorly organized and forced to live a clandestine existence—have been kept at bay by the UDF and the local security forces, but if the mercenary troops and British officers in the UDF and local security forces were compelled to leave, the UAA would probably be confronted with a major internal security problem.

Finally, there is the question of the rulers' desire for the survival of the UAA as a confederated state—its creation having been achieved through considerable bargaining among rulers, all jealous of their prerogatives. The traditional tribal and dynastic rivalries remain strong beneath the surface, and the inter-relationships of the seven rulers continue to be characterized more by cleavage than cooperation. Also present are the family, tribal, religious and class structures of a region-wide society that is still primarily traditional and in the majority of amirates is as yet barely supportive of even the most limited administrative machinery. Nevertheless, in spite of all these difficulties, the federation did come to life, and in its major tests to date it appears to have functioned effectively enough. Perhaps this fact bespeaks a good chance that it will continue.