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MIDDLE EAST POLICY, VOL. VI, NO. 4, JUNE 1999

gardener would say to the man who owned the yard – he said, "You know, that tree won't flower for 100 years." The man who owned the yard said, "Well, then, plant it today, plant it this afternoon."

The tree planted in the UAE's year of independence has already borne fruit in just 30 years. And there's a lot more work that we can do together and a lot more work that you're planning to do – a lot more trees to plant, if you will. And it's through sessions like these that we plant the seeds. I look forward to seeing the trees grow.

**"Diversity in Unity: Political Institutions and Civil Society"**

**FATMA AL-SAYEGH, Associate Professor of History, University of the UAE, Al-Ain**

I am going to concentrate on political institutions and civil society in the United Arab Emirates. In the last three decades, the UAE, despite its small size and population, has become more well-known worldwide due, in large part, to its abundant oil reserves but also to its role as a force for peace in the war-torn Middle East.

Prior to December 2, 1971, the situation was vastly different. Not only did the UAE not exist as a country on any world map, but its history, culture and people were unknown to all but a select few. Under the federation, the seven sheikhdoms retained local government, but a federal government oversaw national affairs. The transition from tribal loyalties to loyalty to the new country took a lot of effort, but eventually it was achieved.

The period from February 1968 to July 1971 witnessed an intensive and extensive series of negotiations between the rulers of the seven Trucial sheikhdoms, along with Bahrain and Qatar, to form a federation. The outcome was the establishment of a federation comprising only the six sheikhdoms. It was not until February 10, 1972, that the seventh sheikhdom, Ras al-Khaimah, joined the union.

To better explain the political process of UAE development, I have divided the study into three stages. The first stage, 1971-76, I have called "stabilizing the federation." This era started with the birth of the UAE. Sheikh Zayed of Abu Dhabi, the president of the UAE, and Sheikh Rashid, the vice president, were the most important rulers in the former Trucial sheikhdoms. Yet, they held different views of the federation. Zayed saw federalism as the only way to build a modern state, whereas Rashid wanted the local governments to have greater power. The rulers of the other emirates also wanted to protect their autonomy.

Building a proposal to which all the rulers could agree proved challenging. Sheikh Zayed and the rulers of other emirates worked closely together to form a unique federal government that united and, at the same time, protected the autonomy of each individual emirate. The new federal government also had to be restructured to better meet the needs of the fledgling federation, while local governments had barely established their own system before the whole exercise began once more.

In the early days, the main obstacle to development was the lack of human resources. In fact, until very recently, the UAE had to cope with a shortage of trained and educated local people. The country lacked the skills required to make the newly federated state successful. The need was acute for highly skilled and informed nationals to take on jobs

as ministers, ambassadors and high-ranking officials representing not only their own local governments, but also the newly created federal government.

There was also a need to establish additional ministries, departments and affiliated sections to coordinate and implement all the work that needed to be done. Considering the enormity of the task and the tools available at that time, the federation succeeded quite admirably.

There are four political bodies at the federal level: the Supreme Federal Council, the president and vice president, the Federal Council of Ministers, and the Federal National Council. The Supreme Federal Council consists of the rulers of the seven emirates, according to the constitution. The Supreme Federal Council elects the UAE president and vice president from among the seven rulers. In 1971, it elected Sheikh Zayed as the federation's first president and Sheikh Rashid as its first vice president and established Abu Dhabi as its temporary capital. The Supreme Federal Council also represents the highest political authority. It charts the general policy of the federation, elects the president and vice president, and ratifies a federal budget.

The second is the president, the head of the government. The president's executive powers are both exclusive and shared. In his own right, he performs numerous ceremonial and procedural functions, such as convening the Supreme Federal Council and presiding over its meetings. He represents the UAE in its foreign relations and functions.

The third is the Federal Council of Ministers, the seat of legislative authority. It is a federal cabinet, made up of the prime minister, a deputy prime minister, a number of ministers who are the heads of federal departments, and a minister of state.

The fourth element is the Federal National Council, an advisory body whose members are appointed by the rulers. It consists of 40 members drawn from the seven emirates, each according to its size and contribution to the federal budget. The FNC resembles a parliament or legislature. Its members are supposed to be representatives of the people of the UAE. They are chosen from the seven emirates according to a weighted formula reflecting the population and influence of each. Thus, Abu Dhabi and Dubai are each allocated eight seats; Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, six each; and the remaining emirates of Ajman, Fujairah and Umm al-Qaiwain, four each. Members serve two-year terms, renewable without limit. The FNC meets in annual sessions of not less than six months beginning in November.

The second stage, "accepting the federation," started in 1979 and ended in 1986. Until 1976, Abu Dhabi was the only contributor to the federal budget. But the demand on financial resources was greater than its vast oil wells could sustain. According to the constitution, each emirate should contribute to the federal budget in accordance with its national resources. After a heated debate in the National Federal Council, the national interest prevailed. It is believed that since 1979, Dubai has been contributing 2-3 billion dirhams annually to the federal budget. Sharjah also promised to contribute 50 percent of its oil income to the 1986 federal budget, as did Ras al-Khaimah. The move towards total unification ensued, as steps were taken to unify the armed forces and create a central bank.

The most serious issue to threaten the stability of the federation occurred in 1979. Abu Dhabi was pressing for centralization, but Dubai preferred a loose federation with economic autonomy for each individual emirate. The crisis was soon solved, and a memorandum to strengthen the federation was submitted. Meanwhile, external events, such as Iranian revolution, the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran War in 1980 and its aftermath, persuaded the emirates to show greater unity to preserve its federal system.

The third stage, 1986-99, I call the "maturity of the federation." During this stage, the federation moved toward a period of greater unity, understanding and acceptance of union as the only form of government. Since 1986, all of the emirates have been contributing to the federal budget, each according to its national income. Regular meetings of the National Federal Council meant that issues of general interest would be discussed regularly. Issues relating to internal boundary disputes were also discussed.

This period also witnessed the rise of civil society, brought about by oil wealth and its social impact as well as a new political way of thinking. Civil society started before independence; in 1967, the first female society was established in Ras al-Khaimah. Arab communities also were established before independence, and in 1978, there were 17 of them. During the 1980s, many other civil societies appeared, all of which are dependent on government support. Political parties, however, were seen not only as unwanted institutions, but also as a threat to national solidarity and political unity. But the weakness of civil society in the UAE does not mean it is absent. It is connected to a great extent to the new middle class, although its development has been dependent largely on the development of the legal and executive bodies of the society itself.

### **"Socio-Political Origins of Emirati Leaders"**

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Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan is indeed a unique leader. Any objective assessment of his accomplishments during the past five decades indicates that, while many people spoke, Zayed acted. He had vision, but he was and is a man who is very much in a hurry. Still, as His Excellency Sheikh Fahim stated in his opening remarks, the UAE leadership has been healthy in more ways than one. What was accomplished was done against immense odds, and Sheikh Zayed and his fellow rulers solidified, as well as earned, their legitimacy.

The seven emirates of the UAE boast rich historical backgrounds, although little of their past glories have survived into the first half of the twentieth century. The destruction of the Qawasim by British forces in 1819, for example, and the forced sedentarization of the remaining tribes after that date essentially meant that the entire coast would be subjugated until the early 1960s. Remarkably, however, throughout this period of British rule, no single emirati leader conceded his authority, perceived or otherwise, to successive British political residents, even if reality required them to cooperate with London.

The 1971 experiment jelled well for a variety of reasons, including, as I've said, Sheikh Zayed's unique attributes ranging from foresight to generosity. And as is frankly acknowledged by senior UAE officials, unification was not easy. Few anticipated the