

WHITE, ANDREW K. 1997. *Still Seeing Red: How the Cold War Shapes the New American Politics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Davidson, Christopher M. 2008. *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*. London, UK: Hurst. 390 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0231700351, \$18.62 paperback.

To the casual observer, the emirate of Dubai, featuring superlatives on a breathtaking scale—from the world’s first seven-star hotel (*Burj Al Arab*) to the world’s tallest building (Burj Khalifa), to the world’s largest shopping mall (Dubai Mall), to extravagant real estate projects (*Palm Jumeirah*, *Palm Jebel Ali*, and *Palm Deira*)—depicts an almost perfect post-oil developmental success story, with a seemingly envious facility of fusing Arab culture and Western capitalism. And yet efforts to peer beyond Dubai’s façade to assess its phenomenal rise from a comprehensive, critical, and analytical perspective remain few and far between. With *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*, Christopher M. Davidson not only measurably enhances the contextual depth of knowledge and understanding of Dubai’s rise, but he does so by comparing and contrasting Dubai’s role and position within the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and, to a lesser degree, within the broader Gulf region. Combining historical, political, economic, security, social, cultural, and demographic perspectives, Davidson offers a powerful argument that any economic success story, no matter how compelling, must not invite complacency, arrogance, hubris, or overconfidence, lest a confluence of internalities and/or externalities put the sustainability of success at risk.

The book combines two main approaches—descriptive and analytical. The early chapters provide a strong contextual and historically descriptive foundation, tracing Dubai’s history from its “early struggles,” including efforts to escape political and economic dependence on Britain and reduce “economic marginalization” (32), through a federation and collective security agreement independent of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, to efforts at economic diversification that would see the emirate gradually emerge from behind the “shadow of Abu Dhabi” (103). On the surface, its successful post-oil diversification strategies, aimed specifically at reducing reliance on resource-oriented strategies, would indeed appear to have facilitated Dubai’s escape “from its former dependency and certainly gives the impression that it has succeeded in creating a self-sustaining, multi-component economy capable of generating vast wealth independently of the old oil industry” (135). Yet Davidson’s underlying argument is that, contrary to seemingly matter-of-fact depictions and perceptions of Dubai as “Middle Eastern Shangri-La” (Hari 2009), a confluence of situational factors—whether political, economic, security, social, cultural, or demographic—unless appropriately managed, carry

the distinct possibility of making Dubai's developmental model a mere "superficial success" (135).

From an analytical perspective, chapters 5 and 6—on the "Political Stability and Ruling Bargain" and "The Dubai Paradox," respectively—lay out compelling and substantive arguments in support of the "vulnerability of success" thesis. The preservation of overall political stability and the ruling bargain or "extensive rent-financed wealth distribution," as well as the maintaining of (neo)-patrimonial networks, are critical to sustaining Dubai's success amid evolving domestic and regional contexts. Against the backdrop of revolutionary dynamics unfolding in the broader Arab world, including in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, it is indeed hard to conceive of Dubai being able to combine economic success with mere "democratic 'window dressing'" (158) in the future. A second major vulnerability, the author contends, involves the developmental and policy conundrum of how to sustain modernization without unnecessarily weakening the "ideological, religious and cultural legitimacy" (67).

A third potential vulnerability flows from the demographic pressures resulting from the sociocultural effect of large-scale immigration waves throughout the emirate's history (71-91), and contemporary prospects of Dubai and other UAE nationals being increasingly "involuntarily unemployed" and remaining "spectators on the periphery of their country's development" (206-7). The author ties the latter trend to "rentier pathologies," arguing that the allocative state appears to have fostered a sense of entitlement, inactivity, and apathy that resulted in an "unproductive lifestyle" and nationals increasingly "unfit for meaningful work" (178-9). Combined with "diversification pathologies" (182-9) that did more to induce a "dual-core dependency" (7)—that is, seeing Dubai's fortunes and misfortunes ever more closely tied to a complex interdependence with foreign economies, companies, and investment on the one hand, and the broader regional security, crime, and terror realities (chapter 8) on the other—it becomes all too painfully obvious that Dubai's prospects of overall sociopolitical stability and, correspondingly, continued economic competitiveness, hinge on the ruling elite's political will and ability to mitigate, or at the very least manage, these lingering vulnerabilities.

With *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*, Davidson offers a trenchant analysis of the consequential challenges that will come to define Dubai's future. The powerful and timely message of the book, notwithstanding two shortcomings of the book, is worth emphasizing. First, considering the author's extensive referencing of key personalities in the history of Dubai specifically and the UAE generally, the reader would greatly benefit from a reference list of names, to be able to quickly differentiate between people's names, positions, roles, and periods of political influence, and thus appreciate the full extent of rich historical contextualization offered throughout the book. Second, the book ends rather abruptly with a chapter on security crime and terror (chapter 8), conveying an air of incompleteness. Given the importance of the subject matter

discussed in the book, it would have been, if not useful, then certainly welcome, to feature a concluding chapter where the author could have complemented his analysis with a few scenarios for the future of Dubai.

Even so, the wave of upheaval that has begun to engulf the Arab world, beginning in December 2010, goes a long way toward reinforcing the importance and consequential nature of Dubai's vulnerability of success even if Dubai has thus far escaped the turmoil that has gradually begun to spill over, if however tentatively, into the Gulf region in Oman and Bahrain. As such, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success* is a prescient work and offers an analytical blueprint for anticipating and understanding future challenges in modernizing Middle Eastern societies.

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Reference

HARI, JOHANN. 2009. "The Dark Side of Dubai." *The Independent*. Accessed on June 16, 2011. Available online at <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/johann-hari/the-dark-side-of-dubai-1664368.html>

Bale, Tim. 2010. *The Conservative Party: From Thatcher to Cameron*. Cambridge, UK: Polity. 446 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0745648583, \$15.56 paperback.

The self-proclaimed "natural party of government," many of whose members or supporters have traditionally subscribed to the view that Conservatives are "born to rule," spent 13 traumatic years in Opposition prior to the Party's partial victory in the May 2010 general election. Yet, as Tim Bale explains in this delightfully incisive and intelligently informative account, the Conservatives' travails predate the 1997 election defeat at the hands of Tony Blair and New Labour. Indeed, this was a symbol and signifier, rather than the cause or origin, of the Conservatives' recent tribulations, which Bale actually traces back to the November 1990 avulsion of Margaret Thatcher as Party leader and Prime Minister, although this itself was a consequence of increasing intraparty concern over the direction of policy by this time, coupled with her increasingly imperious style of leadership.

Yet having performed this act of regicide, many Conservative Members of Parliament seemed to be wracked with guilt at such apparent treachery, while the Party in general seemed utterly confused concerning its subsequent ideological orientation and political trajectory. Thatcher's immediate successor,