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The Making Of The Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, The United Arab Emirates And Oman



Synopsis

When Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in August 1990, the Gulf states became the focus of frenzied international interest for the second time in a decade, the first having been during the Iraq-Iran war, 1980-8. Both events posed major threats to the regional state system which had evolved over almost two centuries. This book is based on a wide range of primary materials, including declassified documents used here for the first time. It defines and describes the geopolitical framework of the region and the state system which emanated from it. It explains how the Gulf states owe their creation and survival, sometimes against many odds, to forces well beyond the waters of the Gulf. Rosemarie Said Zahlan tells the story of the formation of the states, their evolution from colonial dependency to statehood, their socio-economic transformation by oil, and their stability in the midst of change. She illuminates their relationships with each other, with the wider Arab world, and with the major world powers. The result is an informed and balanced picture of the political, economic, religious and cultural character of the region. It is also a story of the powerful families and their shaikhs who have had to lead their countries so rapidly into the modern world, all the while preserving their own socio-political traditions.

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Customer Reviews

Zahlan covers the history of the Gulf states with special emphasis on the history of the various monarchical families. Sadly, her attitude is unflinchingly fawning; she seems afraid to say one negative thing about these countries and their economic and political challenges. As well, the writing style is very dry and wooden. Her bias is symbolized by one of the maps showing the UAE as

extending westward all the way to Dawhat as Salwa, at the southwest base of Qatar. This reflects absurdly ambitious territorial claims of the UAE at a time when the Saudis have claimed the coast in the vicinity of Khawr Duwayhin, southeast of Qatar. This map is emblematic of the book's flaws. A much better book despite its age (1980) is 'Arabia, the Gulf, & the West' by J.B. Kelly.

This is the best introduction available on the Gulf states, examining such critical themes as the British imperial legacy and the relationship between state, economy, and social classes. It certainly offers a non-Orientalist treatment and avoids the condescending and often bigoted discourse adopted by such colonial-minded writers as J.B. Kelly. The late Said-Zahlan had a full mastery of the British archives and extensive knowledge of the region. This is reflected in this valuable and concise introductory work.

I purchased this book for a graduate course on the Arab gulf states. It was used as an introductory book to read. I enjoyed it because it was an easy read. However I was a little bit frustrated because I felt the author was trying too hard to remain objective on certain subjects like colonialism and rentierism, etc. This seemed to cause the author to gloss over certain subjects. Where rather than being objective she could have provided a bit more detail from one angle to help understand the region.

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