

# You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet

by [Nikos Akritas](#) (April 2024)



Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, Abu Dhabi

**Contrary to popular opinion, Dubai** is not the richest emirate of the United Arab Emirates. That stroke of luck goes to Abu Dhabi. The rulers of Dubai, recognizing its oil wealth would not last forever, decided much earlier than their plutonic neighbours to use their abundance in this natural resource to invest heavily in infrastructure, banks and foreign companies.

Abu Dhabi, capital of the UAE but much sleepier than its more well-known fellow emirate, owns 74% of the country's known oil reserves and has, until recently, taken comfort in this fact to leave things as they are. This is no longer the case and within a decade or so looks set to overtake its more popular

neighbour as a nexus for business, travel and leisure.

From the lure of artificial islands with golden beaches to the opening of reputable scholarly institutions [\[1\]](#) and cultural establishments, [\[2\]](#) Abu Dhabi is gradually buying its way into Western culture as well as business. The next step, taking its cue from Dubai (whose buying into *The Times* tainted that paper with the rife antisemitism that is the norm in Muslim countries), was to buy into Western media outlets. Hence, its failed bid for *The Telegraph*. Arab ownership of well-known Western newspapers will only exacerbate anti-liberal, anti-Semitic news-reporting through such brands, giving the content an air of legitimacy.

Anti-liberal regimes, like those of the Gulf states, which understand the West's weaknesses are using these to gain a questionable influence in Western countries—through capitalism and liberalism. The former via trade and capital flows, allowing illiberal regimes to gain influence over Western economies and politics, and the latter by claiming the right to maintain and promote intolerance, in the guise of tolerance.

Questions raised around, and ultimately stopping, the sale of *The Telegraph* to the rulers of Abu Dhabi also raise questions about the UAE's political reach. David Cameron saw no reason to oppose such a sale but his involvement in Project Falcon, along with Tony Blair, [\[3\]](#) assisting the sheikhs to buy into UK infrastructure, surely had nothing to do with that. Is it wise to allow regimes so antithetical to Western values to buy influence into a wide array of high profile organisations?

In a city of skyscrapers, international banks, reputable places of learning and cultural gems one finds businesses coming to a standstill for prayer time (although this is decreasing in spread and frequency); single storey mosques amongst thickets of towering glass and steel; and sand pits waiting to be developed. Where those dressed in professional

attire, driving the latest civilian tanks, pass by traditionally dressed believers who stop anywhere in the street to spread out their prayer mats and prostrate themselves. Where those from the backwaters of the poorest countries, where women do not take their place amongst men in society, have to feign disinterest in the figure hugging, flesh revealing, hair flowing fashions on display by women from more liberalised societies. Their salaciousness cannot be openly expressed for fear of falling foul of the authorities, which, although officially frowning on such 'fashions,' turn a blind eye to states of near undress. This lasciviousness is most blatant on public beaches where groups of very excitable young, and sometimes older, men find themselves sharing nature with members of the opposite sex in bikinis and thongs, and getting wet to boot. Female visitors learn the hard way, it is better to worship the sun at private beaches.

Sometimes, catching a taxi in the morning, one hears Muslim prayers emanating from the car radio, giving a sense your custom has somehow impinged on the driver's privacy.

It is taken for granted that everyone out here is anti-Zionist, if not anti-Semitic, and so views are shared quite freely by some regarding their abhorrence of Israel (merely for existing) and the final existential victory of Islam (the 1400 year old Muslim version of Armageddon is the annihilation of Jews). Many express outrage at developments in Gaza but prior to Israel's invasion there was not a word of condemnation for the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks. Total compliance with expunging the word *Israel* from any literature is ensured by government inspectors.

For all its wealth, Abu Dhabi is home to expats from poorer Muslim countries, who come hoping to send money back to their families. Some live in subhuman conditions—worker camps have come under some criticism but not too much, as with anything which might paint the emirate in a bad light. These, largely

poorly educated, workers find themselves in the middle of what might seem another planet—with buildings that seem to touch the sky, luxury vehicles and half naked women around them.

When their world, inside this world, is one of near-poverty (which it nearly always is back home) and they cannot join in the seeming Sodom and Gomorrah around them, their only solace is the mosque and the sureties of Islam. And so, oddly, their abusive employment situation in a Muslim country causes them to turn to a form of solace which associates all the sinful ideas around them with the West. Regardless of the fact it is other, extremely wealthy, Muslims abusing them, they are convinced their poverty is a direct result of Western imperialism.

Abuse masked by words of economic opportunity results in a situation where the abuser convinces the abused a third party is solely to blame, and so tens, if not hundreds, of thousands each year have a view of the world constructed for them based on pure fantasy. These workers send money home and support a rising middle class back in their own country; a segment of the population who are viewed as having 'made it' or seen as having an increasingly bright future by their less privileged neighbours. Exported with this wealth are anti-Western and anti-Semitic ideas; political and racist views which must be right if the people expressing them are models of success. Abuser and abused become united against a common enemy, conspicuous by its absence.

If one thinks the narratives of the culture wars back home are undermining Western societies, you are only seeing the tip of the iceberg...

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[\[1\]](#) The Sorbonne and New York University already have branches here, and a glut of international schools affiliated to reputable private schools in the UK have opened over the last decade. This is to say nothing of the UAE's financial ties in

the UK with Imperial College, Cambridge University and Gordonstoun.

[\[2\]](#) The Louvre, Abu Dhabi opened in 2017 and the Guggenheim is currently being built. The UAE octopus also has its tentacles in The British Museum, The Royal Philharmonic Concert and London Symphony Orchestras, and Manchester City Football Club.

[\[3\]](#) Blair also advised the Kazakh government on how to deal with Western media in the wake of the Zhanaozen massacres, following demonstrations over poor working conditions.

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