



“The evolution of Emirati foreign policy (1971-2020): The unexpected rise of a small state with boundless ambitions”

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The evolution of Emirati foreign policy (1971-2020): the unexpected rise of a small state with boundless ambitions

Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is today one of the most prominent states in the Middle East. It is one of the world's main commercial and financial hubs thanks to Dubai's world-class infrastructure and business-friendly environment.¹ It projects an appealing image of modernity on the international stage with its glittery skyscrapers, its cosmopolitanism, and the prominent world events it hosts – ranging from sports tournaments to cultural events such as the Dubai Universal Exposition 2020. In other words, the country appears as an oasis of wealth, opportunity and well-being in a region seemingly stricken with conflicts, conservatism and/or poverty. On top of its prestige, the UAE has also asserted itself as one of the major players of the Middle Eastern geopolitical game in the past decade.² The federation has methodically projected its power throughout the region since the outbreak of the Arab Spring, to the point of extending its influence to the North and Horn of Africa and earning the eloquent nickname of “the Middle East's Little Sparta”³. Yet, this prominent multisectoral rise was still inconceivable only two decades ago. Indeed, as a state whose territory is 18 to 25 times smaller than that of its Iranian and Saudi neighbours, and with a national population 30 to 80 times smaller too, the UAE was at best expected to secure its existence by preserving some kind of limited autonomy. This was further believed given the location of the country, whose neighbours vie and compete for regional hegemony. As such, how did the Emirati foreign policy evolve over time, and to what extent has it indeed succeeded in overcoming its small state status?

Our main argument will be that the UAE's foreign policy has essentially shifted from mildness, Arabness and bandwagoning to assertiveness and increasing self-reliance after the passing away of Sheikh Zayed in 2004. This shift happened under the influence of a set of five key factors – among which the concentration of power by Abu Dhabi, the rise of Mohammed bin Zayed in Emirati politics, and the regional upheaval caused by the Arab Spring. However, we will call into question the medium to long-term sustainability of this new Emirati foreign policy, both by analyzing the several setbacks it has experienced up to now, and by highlighting the constraints that smallness still exerts on Emirati power.

Theoretical framework

Before undertaking our study, we would like to briefly clarify the theoretical underpinnings of our analysis. Foreign Policy Analysis, an established sub-field of International Relations, seeks to explain how states engage with their external environment and to analyze the reasons driving their specific behaviour. Several schools of thought exist to account for states' foreign policies. On one end of the spectrum are the schools of thought that insist on the key role of structures. The neorealists, who consider that foreign policies are the result of the international system's forces and structure, typically adhere to this view. So does the Marxist perspective, which focuses on political economy and sees in the uneven distribution of resources between the center and the periphery of the international system the driver of foreign policies. As for the other end of the spectrum, it gathers the schools of thought that understand foreign policy as being the product of the state's internal dynamics and of decision-makers' personalities. Graham T. Allison's book *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (1972) is the most famous study in this respect.

In the case of the United Arab Emirates, and more generally in the case of the small Gulf Cooperation Council states, the above theoretical frameworks have been proved to be by themselves doubly insufficient to account for foreign policy choices.⁴ Given this inadequacy, Wright suggests that

¹ Ardemagni, Eleonora, “Gulf Powers: Maritime Rivalry in the Western Indian Ocean”, Italian Institute for International Political Studies, Analysis No. 321, 13th April 2018, p. 4.

² Soubrier, Emma, “Les Émirats Arabes Unis à la conquête du monde ? », *Politique Étrangère*, 2020/1 Printemps, p. 57.

³ Phrase allegedly coined by former U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis (2017-2019).

⁴ Indeed, it was proved to be insufficient by: (i) Wright, Steven, “Foreign Policy in the GCC States”, in Mehran Kamrava (ed), *International Politics of the Persian Gulf*. Syracuse University Press, 2011, pp. 72-76 – the study insists on the inadequacy of these theoretical frameworks for the foreign policy of GCC states; and, by Galal, Abdelraouf Mostafa, “External behaviour of small states in light of theories of international relations”, *Review of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 5 No. 1, 2020, pp. 38-56 – the study details the shortcomings of these theoretical frameworks for the study of small states' foreign policies.

the most appropriate form of analysis to examine the foreign policies of GCC states is the so-called “multi-level and multi-contextual” approach that was developed by Nonneman, Hinnebusch and Ehteshami.⁵ In this theoretical framework, analysis occurs on three levels: the domestic, which includes history, elite-level alliances, the decision-making process and the sociopolitical context; the regional, which notably analyzes political, security and economic dynamics between countries of the same region; and finally the international level, which focuses on the influence of the international system’s structure, with a special attention given to international powers.

Given the demonstrated suitability of Wright’s suggested approach to Gulf politics, we explicitly ground our analysis in his theoretical framework, which we deem to be the most comprehensive one. As such, our study integrates the ever-changing domestic, regional and international dynamics in the account of the UAE’s behaviour towards the external world. Moreover, given the highly personalized character of rule – especially starting from the 2010s –, a special focus is also given to rulers’ personalities and worldviews.

Emirati foreign policy under Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (1970-2004): mildness, Arabness and bandwagoning, notably as the result of the small status burden

The United Arab Emirates, a small and fragile federation in a hostile and volatile environment

The United Arab Emirates lays in the Arab-Persian Gulf, a region of strategic importance for international powers for centuries⁶, and which is today “one of the most heavily armed, securitized, and highly volatile regions of the world”⁷. The location of the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Quwain in this region has historically exposed them to all sorts of security threats, especially considering that they are sandwiched in-between several powers vying for regional hegemony, in particular Iran and Saudi Arabia. As a result, the United Arab Emirates’ own inception was to a large extent driven by these threats. Indeed, before coming together in the UAE in December 1971, these emirates were shielded from these security threats thanks to their control by the United Kingdom. They were semi-autonomous states (“the Trucial states”), freely ruling their internal affairs while transferring their military defense and foreign policy to the United Kingdom. However, the British policy of withdrawal from all positions “East to Suez”, announced by Prime Minister Harold Wilson on 16th January 1968 to the House of Commons, suddenly exhibited each sheikhdom’s deep insecurity – to the extent that some rulers, including the Emir of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, suggested to the British authorities to financially contribute to maintain their military presence.⁸ As a result of these security threats and of British insistence on leaving, these seven emirates resorted to their second best option to ensure their survival, which was to unite into a federation.^{9,10}

Uniting quickly proved to be insufficient to guarantee the newly founded country’s territorial integrity. Indeed, the British withdrawal created a significant power vacuum that regional powers quickly sought to fill. A day before their withdrawal, on November 30, 1971, the UAE was put to the test with Iran’s military takeover of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb, three islands belonging to the emirate of Sharjah.^{11,12} Furthermore, Saudi Arabia also laid claim on parts of the Emirati territory,

⁵ Wright, Steven, “Foreign Policy in the GCC States”, in Mehran Kamrava (ed), *International Politics of the Persian Gulf*. Syracuse University Press, 2011, pp. 76-83; Nonneman, Gerd, “Analyzing the Foreign Policies of the Middle East and North Africa: A Conceptual Framework”, in Gerd Nonneman (ed.), *Analyzing Middle East Foreign Policies and the Relationship with Europe*. Hampshire: Routledge, 2005, pp. 6-18; Hinnebusch, Raymond and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014.

⁶ Whereas the control of trade between India and Europe was the main cause for the Gulf’s importance starting from the beginning of the XVIth century, its relevance to geopolitics became tied to the exploitation of hydrocarbons starting from the beginning of the XXth century. The Gulf is home to more than half of the world’s oil reserves. As such, it became, and still is to a large extent today, one of the most strategic areas in the world, in which world powers have vested interests. At the same time, the Persian Gulf is also home to several powers who, like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, seek regional hegemony. These two fundamental elements, coupled with a few other factors, have periodically fueled regional instability.

⁷ Kamrava, Mehran, *Troubled Waters: Insecurity in the Persian Gulf*. Cornell University Press, 2018, p. 10.

⁸ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 50-53.

⁹ Although deep-seated feelings of insecurity were an essential driver to the UAE’s inception, the role of agency should not be underestimated in this construction. Indeed, the creation of the federation was also to a large extent the result of the personal and charismatic authority wielded by both Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

¹⁰ Ulrichsen, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*, pp. 51-54.

¹¹ These three islands historically belonged to the Persian Empire from 1622 to 1921, when they were occupied by the British Empire and integrated to Sharjah’s territory.

¹² Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 138.

which it gained under the Jeddah Treaty in 1974, after three years of Saudi refusal to recognize the newly independent UAE.^{13,14} And, in the later decades, the UAE had to constantly contend with regional turmoil. The Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988 and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and its subsequent liberation in 1990-1991 all put a lot of stress on the newly-founded country.

Despite these threats, most emirates refused to relinquish their autonomy to build a federal state sufficiently centralized to cope with the security challenges they individually faced. Paradoxically, the Constitution, which would be amended every five years until its definite approval in 1996, enshrined the build-up of a strong federal state.¹⁵ However, despite this initial centralizing tendency which was specifically pushed for by Abu Dhabi, other emirates led by Dubai sought to protect their autonomy. Two bones of contention in the federation's first decades illustrate this tension.¹⁶ The first one concerned the redistribution of oil revenues. As soon as 1976, Abu Dhabi wanted that all oil revenues, which it held for the most part, be donated to the federal state, but Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah voiced their staunch opposition to this project. These divisions pitched the UAE into a three-year constitutional gridlock, which was finally resolved in 1980 when Dubai accepted to donate approximately 50% of its oil revenues to the central government – a decision that was followed by Ras al-Khaimah a few years later. The second main bone of contention was the unification of the armed forces. This reform was strongly advocated for by Sheikh Zayed, the Emirati President and leader of Abu Dhabi, who officially enacted it by decree on May 6, 1976. However, the strong opposition of Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah hobbled his plans. In the end, a compromise was found by establishing a system of regional command, but it still divided the armed forces into three distinct organizations (West, Center, North).

Apart from the *de facto* opposition of some emirates to centralization, the federation's very own decision-making process also compounded the efficiency of the UAE's political model in the first decades. The Federal Supreme Council, which is the *de jure* highest authority of the country, is a collegial body in which sit the seven emirs of the federation. Decisions are made by majority vote, but "substantive matters" (which are not defined) require a two-thirds majority that includes both Abu Dhabi and Dubai's votes. This set-up renders the Council inoperative on issues of intense division, including foreign policy orientations. Moreover, the emirs of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, who are strongly opposed on the issue of centralization (among other things), respectively hold the federation's Presidency and Premiership (/Vice-Presidency), which has caused frequent constitutional crises in times of tensions between the different emirates.¹⁷

Foreign Policy under Sheikh Zayed: mildness, a commitment to Arabness & bandwagoning

Foreign policy under Sheikh Zayed attests to the structuring role of the external environment on the foreign policy of small states. Indeed, in the first decades of the federation's existence, the United Arab Emirates almost exclusively resorted to a bandwagoning strategy to ensure its security – as shown below and expected by realist small state theory. Yet, smallness did not predicate all the country's foreign policy choices. Fledgling state institutions, identity and also agency played an important role in steering Emirati foreign policy in a specific course. As a result of their influence, Emirati foreign policy was thus also mild and committed to Arabness.

The mild feature of Emirati foreign policy has meant three distinct elements. It has first meant that Emirati foreign policy was neutral and balanced on some regional affairs.¹⁸ The Emirati stance towards the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), which highly divided the country, shows it well. Indeed, during this war, the federal state had no choice but to not take sides, because: on the one hand, the emirates of Dubai, Sharjah and Umm al-Quwain, who were keen on preserving close relationships with Iran, refused to adopt any stance that could hurt these relationships; on the other hand, the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Fujairah and Ras al-Khaimah supported Iraq to varying degrees – with the emir of Ras al-Khaimah going so far as to unilaterally suggest to Saddam Hussein to establish military airbases on his

¹³ Interestingly, UAE territory from 1971 to 1974 bordered Qatar, but the Jeddah Treaty has granted the territory that connected the two countries to Saudi Arabia.

¹⁴ For an in-depth analysis of the border dispute, see: Al Mazrouei, Noura Saber, UAE-Saudi Arabia Border Dispute: The Case of the 1974 Treaty of Jeddah. University of Exeter, 2013, available from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/19743733.pdf> (last accessed on 28th April 2020)

¹⁵ For instance, Article 120 stipulated that 19 domains, including foreign affairs, defense and security, belong to the exclusive competence of the federal state, and article 122 provided that the emirates have all the residual powers not explicitly given to the federal state.

¹⁶ Gervais, Victor, « La transformation des dynamiques internes aux Emirats arabes unis », in C. Freer et al., Les Émirats arabes unis, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, mai 2017, pp. 14-17.

¹⁷ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 59-63.

¹⁸ Gervais, Victor, « La transformation des dynamiques internes aux Emirats arabes unis », in C. Freer et al., Les Émirats arabes unis, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, mai 2017, pp. 22-23.

territory and to embark on an official trip to Iraq, where he was received with the full-fledged honours reserved to heads of states.¹⁹ As a result of smallness, fledgeling state institutions and Sheikh Zayed's personality, who was "always geared toward peaceful settlement of disputes and open dialogue"²⁰, the Emirati federal state has also led a consistent action of diplomatic mediation in the Middle East under Sheikh Zayed.²¹ In fact, the Emirati president personally led these efforts during the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf crisis caused by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, in a territorial dispute between Qatar and Bahrain in the 1990s, and toward the end of his life in the run-up to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Finally, Emirati mildness has also been the result of the UAE preference for the use of soft power over hard power on the regional scene. Foreign aid, extracted from the country's oil revenues, was the main tool of foreign policy during Sheikh Zayed's rule.²² He used to that end the Abu Dhabi Fund for Arab Economic Development²³ which was created as soon as July 1971.

Under Sheikh Zayed's rule, Emirati foreign policy was also motivated to a large extent by identity factors. The sense of belonging to a common Arab nation pushed Emirati leaders to pursue a foreign policy of support for the Arab world.²⁴ In fact, the fact that this identity was shared by all Emirati rulers made it a rare consensual policy that the federal state could easily adopt. Although it served a key interest, which was to gradually obtain and cement international recognition, this policy was also to a large extent the expression of an altruistic desire to show solidarity with fellow Arabs.²⁵ A key episode of this commitment to Arabness, and more specifically to the Palestinian cause, was the UAE's participation in the oil embargo of 1973 and its support for the "front-line states" (Egypt, Syria and Jordan). Apart from this singular event, the UAE also pursued a pro-Arab foreign policy in the long term. Indeed, its foreign aid policy, which amounted up to 10% of its GDP in its first decades of existence, was mostly directed to the Arab world in the 1970s and 1980s.^{26,27}

Finally, given the UAE's smallness, geographic location and weak federation, the last pillar of its foreign policy was, and still is today, reliance on external guarantees to ensure its security. This bandwagoning strategy went through two key periods. The first one materialized with the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, when the UAE accessed to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as soon as it was created in May 1981. By joining the GCC, which was to act as the main bulwark against external threats, the UAE and all the other small and newly independent Gulf states tacitly accepted Saudi hegemony over the Arabian peninsula in exchange for security guarantees. The second key period began with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which suddenly brought to an end small Gulf states' bandwagoning with Saudi Arabia by shedding light on its blatant inability to protect Kuwait on its own.²⁸ Consequently, in the aftermath of the Gulf war, small Gulf states turned to the West, and especially the United States, to ensure their security. The UAE formally established security ties with the United States on 25th July 1994 by signing the bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement, which provided for the stationing of US troops at the Al-Dhafra base in Abu Dhabi and allowed the United States to "preposition equipment at Emirati bases and utilize Jebel Ali for naval visits by American warships patrolling Gulf waters"²⁹.

In exchange for these security guarantees, the UAE actively participated to almost all of the U.S. war efforts since the Gulf War, for the major exception of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 which Sheikh Zayed staunchly opposed. The UAE thus became "the only Arab nation to participate with the U.S. in six coalition actions over the last 20 years: Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, the 1990 Gulf War and the fight against ISIS"³⁰. These efforts should however not be seen as the expression of an Emirati assertiveness. Rather, they should be understood as the product of the Emirati alliance with the United States, which induced the UAE to support its benefactor, and as the result of Sheikh Zayed's own far-sighted policy of increasingly building up his state's armed forces. Moreover, it should be noted that the UAE's bandwagoning with the United States has not led it to forego its Arabist foreign policy

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁰ Almezzaini, Khalid, *The UAE and Foreign Policy. Foreign Aid, Identities and Interests*. London, Routledge, 2012, p. 35.

²¹ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 140-141.

²² Almezzaini, Khalid, *The UAE and Foreign Policy. Foreign Aid, Identities and Interests*, p. 49.

²³ Illustrating the UAE's departure from its strong emphasis on its belonging to the Arab identity, the fund was renamed the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development in 1993.

²⁴ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 138-140.

²⁵ Almezzaini, Khalid, *The UAE and Foreign Policy. Foreign Aid, Identities and Interests*, p. 115.

²⁶ This commitment to Arabness is also illustrated by leaders' personal contribution to the Palestinian cause. For instance, Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed al Maktoum, the emir of Dubai, donated 5,4 million dollars in October 1979 for Palestinians in South Lebanon and 2,7 million dollars in May 1980 for the families of Palestinian martyrs.

²⁷ Almezzaini, Khalid, *The UAE and Foreign Policy. Foreign Aid, Identities and Interests*, p. 106.

²⁸ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 141.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

³⁰ "UAE-US Security Relationship", available online at http://www.uae-embassy.org/uae-us-relations/security_2012

under Sheikh Zayed. Indeed, the UAE tried to reconcile these two orientations, as shown by the Emirati criticism of U.S. sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s, by Sheikh Zayed's personal support of private Emirati initiatives to alleviate the sufferings of the Iraqi population during this period, and by Sheikh Zayed's staunch opposition to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Overcoming smallness after 2004: assertiveness, militarism and increasing self-reliance in the service of security and a global vision to become a nexus state connecting East and West

The foreign policy conducted under Sheikh Zayed did not outlast his passing on November 2nd, 2004. Indeed, Emirati foreign policy began to experience mild changes from the beginning of the XXIst century, and fundamental ones in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. In this new era, the UAE became a regional player that seemingly succeeds in punching above its geopolitical weight. It assertively and martially acts on the international scene to promote its own interest and to reshape the regional order.

The internal, regional and global dynamics enabling and triggering the fundamental shift in Emirati foreign policy

The fundamental shifts experienced by Emirati foreign policy were enabled by five distinct dynamics, which have slowly, yet radically, changed the Emirati decision-making process and the regional and international environment of the country.

Abu Dhabi's concentration of power and assumption of strong leadership within the UAE is one of these factors.³¹ This dynamic was initially launched by the assumption of power of a new generation of leaders in Dubai in the aftermath of Sheikh Maktoum's passing on October 7, 1990. By ambitioning to transform their emirate into a global city and by focusing on economic prowess rather than political dominance, Dubai's new rulers saw fit to let Abu Dhabi expand and consolidate the federal government, as long as they were not hindered from pursuing their own economic agenda.³² Several milestones were thus quickly achieved: the armed forces were unified in 1996 with the merger of the Dubai Defense Force and the Ras al-Khaimah National Guard into the Union Defense Force³³; customs checkpoints between emirates were abolished; interior security forces gradually came under the control of the federal state; and, intelligence services would also come under the control of the Supreme Council for National Security (SCNS).³⁴ Furthermore, on top of this state-building process *per se*, Abu Dhabi also succeeded in establishing its full dominance over Dubai in 2009. The financial crisis, which pushed the emirate to near bankruptcy³⁵, was the turning point in their relationship. It gave oil-rich Abu Dhabi the opportunity to come to Dubai's financial rescue and to extract political concessions from it.³⁶ As a result, the crisis firmly cemented Abu Dhabi's leadership.^{37,38}

The generational shift in Emirati leadership, both at the apex of the federal state and in other layers of the state machinery also enabled the radical shift in Emirati foreign policy. Indeed, "[w]hereas the older, first generation of Emirati leaders had a more measured and deliberate, consultative method

³¹ Gervais, Victor, « La transformation des dynamiques internes aux Emirats arabes unis », in C. Freer et al., *Les Émirats arabes unis*, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, mai 2017, pp. 23-26.

³² This state-building dynamic was to a certain extent self-feeding. Concomitant with the expansion of the federal state, the Al Nahyan family expanded its patronage networks to all the Emirati population, especially those of the North, by offering them advantageous public jobs in the federal state machinery. Abu Dhabi thus further undermined each emirate's local structures of power, all the while increasing the number of people adhering to the project of a strong federation.

³³ *De jure* unification nonetheless took time to translate into an effective unification. As Christopher Davidson points out in *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*: "given that Dubai had been procuring equipment independently of Abu Dhabi for over twenty-five years, this meant that the newly reinforced and genuinely federal UAE Armed Forces was made up of largely incompatible hardware and munitions... Even more incongruous was the equipment used by the various other emirate-level defense forces which had followed Dubai's lead and had also agreed to integrate".

³⁴ This council, which is controlled by the Al Nahyan family, leads all internal and external intelligence operations, on top of supervising the counter-terrorism and crisis management activities of the National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority, and the cyber-defense activities of the National Electronic Security Authority.

³⁵ Dubai's owned debt reached an all-high US\$120 billion, which represented approximately 150% of its GDP.

³⁶ In February 2009, the Abu Dhabi-based UAE Central Bank purchased US\$10 billion of bonds from the government of Dubai. Abu Dhabi also offered it a further a US\$10 billion loan in November 2009 through two emirate-owned banks (the National Bank of Abu Dhabi and Al Hilal Bank).

³⁷ A political crisis occurring in 2003 had already illustrated the extent of Abu Dhabi's newfound power with regards to the Northern emirates. In the context of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Abu Dhabi had obtained from Ras al-Khaimah's emir to replace Sheikh Khalid with Sheikh Saoud as Crown Prince. Sheikh Khalid's vocal support for Saddam Hussein had particularly irritated Abu Dhabi, hence its request. Subsequently, Abu Dhabi's power was further manifested when the federal state militarily intervened in Ras al-Khaimah to oust Sheikh Khalid and his supporters, who refused his eviction and denounced Abu Dhabi's meddling in the emirate's internal affairs by springing up.

³⁸ The new internal distribution of power was quickly reflected by Dubai's agreement to implement the United Nations Security Council resolution 1929 to impose further economic and financial sections on Iran, despite its strong economic relationship with it.

of decision making, the current, younger generation of leaders is more restless and is less reticent to pursue policies that are more aggressive.”³⁹ The rise of Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, Abu Dhabi’s Crown Prince, to the top of the Emirati state both epitomizes this change and exacerbated it. As the third son of Sheikh Zayed, he did not become the ruler of Abu Dhabi after his father’s death. This function was rather assigned to Sheikh Khalifa, Zayed’s eldest son. However, the latter’s erased personality and Mohammed bin Zayed’s own political acumen quickly allowed him to exert considerable influence over the Emirati decision-making process, to the extent of having become the *de facto* ruler of Abu Dhabi and the UAE since Sheikh Khalifa suffered from a stroke in January 2014. From this position, he has further consolidated his power by enforcing an ultra-authoritarian political system at the top of which he sits.⁴⁰

Given the centrality of Mohammed bin Zayed in today’s decision-making process, Emirati foreign policy is to a large extent the direct product of his personality and worldview.⁴¹ As an ex-military man who prominently served as the Chief of Staff of the Emirati Armed Forces from 1993 to 2004, Mohammed bin Zayed holds a Hobbesian view of international relations and is a keen believer in the efficiency of the military tool to solve political differences. He largely conducted the consolidation of the Emirati armed forces, which are today globally touted for their efficiency and professionalism.⁴² It is also under his leadership that the UAE introduced a compulsory military service in June 2014 and implemented a policy to foster a high-quality indigenous defense industry.⁴³ Furthermore, Mohammed bin Zayed is a highly ambitious ruler, who yearns to make his country a “regional power with an international reach”⁴⁴. He upholds a global vision for his country, eloquently dubbed the “Dubai Port World Vision” by Rory Miller and Harry Verhoeven⁴⁵, which is to transform the UAE as a whole into the dominant commercial and financial hub connecting East and West in the Western Indian Ocean world. Within this global framework, Mohammed bin Zayed also works to reshape the Middle East’s own political order. The one he ambitions to build rests on the two pillars: the (economic) liberalism embodied by Dubai, and the (secular) ultra-authoritarianism enforced by Abu Dhabi.⁴⁶

Emirati foreign policy was also enabled to shift as a result of the upward trend in international oil prices that occurred in the beginning of the XXIst century. The increase of the oil barrel’s price from US\$20 in 2002 to more than US\$140 in 2008, and its stabilization at around US\$100 until 2014 represented a considerable windfall for the UAE, who is an important player of the oil market. The country’s financial resources skyrocketed as a result of this trend. The evolution of the assets managed by the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA)⁴⁷ clearly reflects this trend. These assets are estimated to have grown from around US\$100-200 billion by the end of the XXth century to \$627 billion in 2013⁴⁸, and they peak today at US\$875 billion, thereby making ADIA the second to third largest SWF in the world.

Furthermore, the regional and international environment of the United Arab Emirates has been transformed by the shift of the global economy’s center of gravity to the East.⁴⁹ Indeed, this shift has

³⁹ Kamrava, Mehran, *Troubled Waters: Insecurity in the Persian Gulf*. Cornell University Press, 2018, p. 102.

⁴⁰ Fathi, Ahmed, « Portraits of Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) - Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and Chairman of the Executive Council of Abu Dhabi », Institut Moutaigne, 13th November 2018, available from <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/portraits-mohammed-bin-salman-mbs-and-mohammed-bin-zayed-mbz-crown-prince-saudi-arabia-and-chairman> (last accessed on 28th April 2020).

⁴¹ Worth, Robert F., « Mohammed bin Zayed’s Dark Vision of the Middle East’s Future », *The New York Times*, 22nd January 2020, available from <https://nyti.ms/37NmBqJ> (last accessed on 7th April 2020)

⁴² Roberts, David B., “The Gulf Monarchies’ Armed Forces at the Crossroads”, Institut Français des Relations Internationales, May 2018, available from <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/etudes-de-lifri/focus-strategique/gulf-monarchies-armed-forces-crossroads> (last accessed on 28th April 2020).

⁴³ Samaan, Jean-Loup, “The Rise of the Emirati Defense Industry”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 14th May 2019, available from <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/79121> (last accessed on 7th April 2020); and, Ardemagni, Eleonora, “Building New Gulf States Through Conscription”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 25th April 2018, available from <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/76178> (last accessed on 28th April 2020).

⁴⁴ Sherwood, Leah, “Risk Diversification and UAE Foreign Policy”, in Khaled Almezaini and Jean-Marc Rickli (eds), *The Small Gulf States. Foreign and Security Policies before and after the Arab Spring*. London, Routledge, 2017, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Miller, Rory and Harry Verhoeven, “Overcoming Smallness: Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and strategic realignment in the Gulf”, *International Politics*, Vol. 57, 2020, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁶ Gunet, Philippe Henri et Stéphane Lacroix (interview), « Les Émirats arabes unis, un acteur méconnu », *Orient XXI*, 12th February 2018, available from <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/les-emirats-arabes-unis-un-acteur-meconnu.2271>

⁴⁷ ADIA is only one of the several sovereign wealth funds of the United Arab Emirates, among which are the Investment Corporation of Dubai and the Mubadala Investment Company.

⁴⁸ Numbers pulled from the following articles: Jeffrey, Erica, « Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA): Special focus », *Euromoney*, 6th September 2013, available from <https://www.euromoney.com/article/b12kxjbgts07j/abu-dhabi-investment-authority-adia-special-focus> (last accessed on 7th April 2020) ; and, Arnold, Wayne, « Wealth Funds Draw Profit and Attention », *The National*, 13th July 2008, available from <https://www.thenational.ae/business/wealth-funds-draw-profits-and-attention-1.228600> (last accessed on 7th April 2020)

⁴⁹ On this structural dynamic, see: Quah, Danny, “The Global Economy’s Shifting Centre of Gravity”, *Global Policy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 3-9.

first pushed the UAE to internationalize its foreign policy and to strengthen its ties with Asian powers, as outlined in Mohammed bin Zayed's global vision for the UAE.⁵⁰ Furthermore, this rise has also had a profound impact on Middle Eastern geopolitics by inducing a slow, yet structural, U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East.⁵¹ This shift was initiated under the Obama administration by the "pivot to Asia" policy, which concretely meant that the United States would depart from its unconditional support for Middle Eastern regimes.⁵² As a result, and especially in the context of the Arab Spring and in the light of the UAE's almost exclusive reliance on U.S. security guarantees to ensure its survival, the UAE was further pushed to adopt an increasingly self-reliant foreign policy and to autonomously defend its interests.⁵³

Finally, the last factor, which singularly induced a change in Emirati foreign policy was the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011. By threatening regimes as resilient as the Tunisian, Egyptian, Syrian and Bahraini ones, the Arab Spring upended the UAE's direct regional environment and essentially put the Arab world at the crossroads. In simplistic terms, two paths were to be followed. Either a new political order, partly resting on democratic principles, would replace the old one which mostly rested on Western-friendly authoritarian regimes. In this case, the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran would reap a lot of benefits: the first one because of its generally strong entrenchment in Arab societies which would allow it to rise in a democratic setting; the second one because of the fall of Western-friendly states which opposed it. Or, "against all odds", the old political order would be upheld and even be strengthened by integrating other authoritarian countries in the Western orbit, such as Libya and Syria.⁵⁴ In this broad configuration, the UAE firmly stood – and still stands – in the second side, for three main reasons. First, as said before, the country's own political model firmly rests on ultra-authoritarianism. As such, demands for public representation are (obviously) rejected at home but also in the Arab world, in which any democratic success can have a ripple effect throughout the region. Second, Emirati leaders' outright opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood consolidates their rejection of the changes brought about by the Arab Spring.⁵⁵ Finally, the third reason for the UAE's defense and promotion of the old regional order is Abu Dhabi's hostility towards Iran, who also stood to gain from the regional upheaval, especially in Bahrain and Yemen. In fact, in the context of Mohammed bin Salman's rise in Saudi Arabia and considering his proximity with Mohammed bin Zayed, Abu Dhabi has even had further incentives to oppose Iran since 2015: in exchange for its support to Saudi Arabia's containment campaign against Iran, Abu Dhabi hopes to secure Saudi Arabia's cooperation on other key issues, such as the suppression of political Islam and Wahhabism.

The turn to an assertive, martial and increasingly self-reliant foreign policy to ensure the security of the country and position it as a nexus between East and West

As a consequence of all the above mentioned factors, and in reaction to the heightened sense of threat and urgency created by the Arab Spring, the United Arab Emirates began implementing an assertive, martial and increasingly self-reliant foreign policy, which it put in the service of the UAE's security and survival, and of the realization of the so-called "DP World vision". In turn, these two objectives translated into the five following key policies, which have at times overlapped, and less frequently been in dissonance: (i) suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood and any other Islamist groups, including al-Qaeda and the Islamic State; (ii) containing the Iranian influence as much as possible, with a priority

⁵⁰ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 151-156.

⁵¹ This trend has also been induced by the shale revolution, which has turned the United States into a net exporter of oil and has put an end to its reliance on Middle Eastern oil to ensure its energy security.

⁵² In the context of the Arab Spring, the United States effectively pursued a policy of non-intervention in Middle Eastern affairs: it did not stop the President Egyptian Mubarak from falling and approved of the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power in Egypt; it urged Bahrain's leaders not to quell the 2011 uprising and never condoned the repression that ensued; it did not militarily intervene in Syria, even against Obama's own policy of "red line" to the use of chemical weapons; and, most impressively, it engaged a dialogue with Iran and sought to integrate it back to the international community. For a detailed presentation of the "Obama Doctrine", see: Goldberg, Jeffrey, "The Obama Doctrine", *The Atlantic*, April 2016 issue, available from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>

⁵³ Sherwood, Leah, "Risk Diversification and UAE Foreign Policy", in Khaled Almezaini and Jean-Marc Rickli (eds), *The Small Gulf States. Foreign and Security Policies before and after the Arab Spring*. London, Routledge, 2017, p. 17.

⁵⁴ For a study of the Middle East's regional order, see: Kamrava, Mehran, "Hierarchy and Instability in the Middle East Regional Order", *International Studies Journal*, Spring 2018, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp.1-35.

⁵⁵ The UAE's strong opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood is both ideological and political. Ideologically, Abu Dhabi and Dubai firmly reject political Islam because of its rejection of so-called "Western values". The UAE's elite adheres to these values almost fully (with the exception of the political model), and even put them at the basis of their political and economic visions for the UAE and the Middle East.⁵⁵ Furthermore, politically, Abu Dhabi sees in the Muslim Brotherhood a fundamental threat to its own domestic stability and to the implementation of the regional order it vies for.⁵⁵ This is especially true in the post-9/11 world, in which anything remotely related to political Islam might link the UAE to terrorist networks.

given to the Arabian peninsula; (iii) achieving influence in the world economy by positioning itself as a “nexus state”; (iv) achieving prestige on the world stage; (v) and, last but not least, diversifying security and defense agreements and cooperation.

The suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood and any other Islamist groups in the Middle East was the United Arab Emirates’ foremost objective in the Arab Spring era.⁵⁶ In Emirati leaders’ worldview, these groups, and especially the Muslim Brotherhood, were the biggest security threat to their country. They have thus led a wide-ranging and multi-faceted campaign against these groups in virtually all countries of the Middle East and North Africa.⁵⁷ Its most important efforts were in Egypt and Libya. In the Egyptian case, the UAE swiftly backed – despite U.S. opposition – the 2013 coup d’Etat conducted by General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, which put an end to the Egyptian democratic experience and to Muslim Brotherhood rule.⁵⁸ This backing translated into a massive financial support of the Egyptian regime: by late October 2013, the UAE had already offered the Egyptian government US\$4.9 billion of aid⁵⁹, and by the beginning of 2015, its amount of aid reached more than US\$14 billion – the amount of which constituted by far the largest share of the more than US\$20 billion in financial support from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.⁶⁰ Additionally, the UAE mobilized its state-owned enterprises and private sector to massively invest in Egypt. One of the most ambitious projects announced was the housing project worth up to US\$40 billion agreed between Dubai-based construction company Arabtec and the Egyptian army in March 2014. The UAE has also played a major role in the fight against the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. Alongside and in the aftermath of the NATO-led operation to oust Muammar Ghaddafi, in which the UAE participated with twelve fighter jets, Emiratis methodically supported anti-Islamist militias on the ground to gradually build the secular and authoritarian order they vie for.⁶¹ The self-proclaimed Libyan National Army led by General Khalifa Haftar is the coalition that has received the UAE’s biggest support in this respect. It is today one of the two dominant coalitions of the Libyan civil war, the other one being the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord. Militarily, the UAE has conducted a vast amount of precision airstrikes by drones and fighter bombers on Haftar’s behalf and transferred it massive quantities of military gear.⁶² Just in January 2020, the UAE has allegedly sent to Haftar’s coalition 3,000 tons of military equipment.⁶³ The UAE has also offered a full diplomatic support to Haftar’s coalition.⁶⁴ It has given him the political capital he lacked by leveraging its alliances with Western capitals, and especially France, and by encouraging them to support Haftar. Finally, Emirati efforts to suppress the Muslim Brotherhood reached their apex in June 2017, when the UAE led with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Bahrain an unprecedented embargo against Qatar, the Muslim Brotherhood’s regional champion, in an attempt to turn it into a “vassal state”⁶⁵. By organizing such an embargo, the UAE and Saudi Arabia explicitly aimed, *inter alia*, to curb Qatar’s regional support for the Muslim Brotherhood.

Containing Iranian influence has also been a priority of Emirati foreign policy in the Arab Spring era. The UAE has resorted to an important amount of hard power to that end, and more generally to a highly hostile diplomacy towards the country. Relationships between the two countries reached a nadir as soon as 2011, when senior Emirati officials (somewhat falsely) accused Iran of causing the uprising in Bahrain and in meddling in the country’s internal affairs. In reaction to this uprising, which Iran objectively stood the most to gain from, the GCC dispatched its military arm, the Peninsula Shield Force, to quell the protests – here also, despite U.S. opposition to such an intervention.⁶⁶ The UAE contributed 500 police officers to this force, which made it the second contributor after Saudi Arabia who sent 1,000

⁵⁶ Soubrier, Emma, “Les Émirats Arabes Unis à la conquête du monde ? », *Politique Étrangère*, 2020/1 Printemps, pp. 62-63.

⁵⁷ Gunet, Jean-Philippe, “Les Émirats et l’islam politique ou le syndrome des montagnes russes”, in C. Freer et al., *Les Émirats arabes unis*, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, mai 2017, p. 28.

⁵⁸ In fact, Emirati authorities seem to have played a role in Mohammed Morsi’s ousting even before al-Sisi’s coup d’Etat, as shown by : Kirkpatrick, David B., “Recordings Suggest Emirates and Egyptian Military Pushed Ousting of Morsi”, *The New York Times*, 1st March 2015.

⁵⁹ This aid included US\$1 billion of direct grants, US\$1 billion in petroleum products to help Egypt meet its fuel and hydrocarbon needs, and US\$2.9 billion in aid for development and infrastructure projects.

⁶⁰ See Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 201-202; and, Matthiesen, Toby, “Renting the Casbah: Gulf States’ Foreign Policy Towards North Africa Since the Arab Uprisings”, in Kristian Coates Ulrichsen (ed), *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁶¹ See Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 197-198;

⁶² Badi, Emadeddin, “Russia Isn’t The Only One Getting Its Hands Dirty in Libya”, *Foreign Policy*, 21st April 2020, available from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/21/libyan-civil-war-france-uae-khalifa-haftar/> (last accessed on 28th April 2020)

⁶³ Al-Harathy, Safaa, “French sources: UAE sent 3,000 tons of military support to Haftar”, *The Libya Observer*, 1st February 2020, available from <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/french-sources-uae-sent-3000-tons-military-support-haftar> (last accessed on 28th April 2020)

⁶⁴ Badi, Emadeddin, “Russia Isn’t The Only One Getting Its Hands Dirty in Libya”, *Foreign Policy*,

⁶⁵ For a detailed study of the Gulf crisis, see: Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis*. C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2019 ; and, Miller, Rory (ed.), *The Gulf Crisis: The View From Qatar*. Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press, 2018.

⁶⁶ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 196.

soldiers from the Saudi Arabian National Guard. The UAE has also been the second most important contributor to the Saudi Arabian-led intervention in Yemen launched in March 2015, whose official goal was to restore the authority of the Yemeni government by rolling back the Houthi militias who are close to Iran.⁶⁷ From the beginning of their intervention, the UAE assumed a leading role in the ground war. It was the linchpin of *Operation Golden* designed to retake Aden and southern Yemen – whose amphibious assault spearheaded by the UAE to conquer back Aden stunned international observers.⁶⁸ In a word, this all exhibited how radically Emirati foreign policy had changed. It went from being a passive “security consumer” to a proactive “security producer” – although one could argue Saudi Arabia and the UAE’s military intervention has to some extent also fueled instability. At the same time, this resort to hard power has not meant the foregoing of the UAE’s traditional soft power policy. Indeed, the country has continued to conduct humanitarian operations, including in its own theatres of operation. For instance, in South Yemen, the UAE spent a significant amount of aid within months of its military deployment for dozens of rebuilding projects, including the restoration of Aden’s power grid and the reconstruction of 154 schools.⁶⁹ This combination of hard and soft power has thus enabled the UAE to wield “smart power” in some locations.

As stressed earlier, positioning the UAE as a “nexus state”⁷⁰ commercially and financially connecting East and West has also been a top priority of the Emirati leaders. In fact, this has underpinned much of the country’s foreign policy on both the regional and international scene since the 2000s. Internationally, the UAE has sought to strengthen its financial and economic ties with Europe, East Africa and Asia to assert its dominance as the major commercial and financial hub of the Western Indian Ocean – especially in the light of the rising competition resulting from its neighbours’ similar ambitions.⁷¹ This has become apparent during the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, when Abu Dhabi (and other Gulf countries’) sovereign wealth funds served as “lifeline”⁷² to Western financial markets. On the international scene, the UAE has also strengthened its ties with East African states, which astonishingly represented 84% of the Emirati foreign aid budget in 2013.⁷³ Furthermore, the UAE has also significantly worked to bolster its relationships with Asian powers⁷⁴, and especially China given its economic weight and the Belt and Road project announced by Xi Jinping in September 2013, which precisely seeks to consolidate the connectivity between Asia, Europe and Africa.⁷⁵ For now, UAE positioning is effectively the strongest in the Western Indian Ocean.⁷⁶ However, the UAE also faces two key challenges to its dominant position as a prominent hub of international trade: the insecurity of the Red Sea trade route, and the rising competition mentioned above.

UAE efforts to address these challenges compose its regional foreign policy to position itself as a nexus state. This policy consists of two pillars which are synergistically articulated. This first one is to act as the Red Sea’s dominant power and security guarantor. In this respect, the UAE has expanded its military presence and influence across this region, and especially around the Bab al-Mandeb strait, a chokepoint through which passes around 9% of total seaborne-traded petroleum.⁷⁷ Through its involvement in the war in Yemen, it has stabilized and secured the Yemeni coastline through local proxies and has installed military bases on the Socotra and Perim Islands.⁷⁸ Moreover, it has installed other military bases on the African shore of the Red Sea: it runs a military base in Asab (Eritrea) since September 2015, which has been a key platform for its military efforts in the War in Yemen, and one in

⁶⁷ With time, the United Arab Emirates shifted from their objective of rolling back the Houthi militias, and prioritized the objectives of suppressing the local Muslim Brotherhood and of securing southern Yemen’s coastline. For more information on these changing war objectives, see:

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁶⁹ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 208.

⁷⁰ Henderson, Christian, “The UAE as a nexus state”, *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 2017, Vol. 7, No.1, pp 83–93.

⁷¹ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 151-157.

⁷² Sherwood, Leah, “Risk Diversification and UAE Foreign Policy”, in Khaled Almezaini and Jean-Marc Rickli (eds), *The Small Gulf States. Foreign and Security Policies before and after the Arab Spring*. London, Routledge, 2017, p. 11.

⁷³ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 151.

⁷⁴ The UAE’s award to South Korea of a US\$40 billion contract to build four nuclear power reactors in Abu Dhabi is significant in this respect.

⁷⁵ For more information on the Belt and Road initiative, see: Bhattacharya, Amar et al., “China’s Belt and Road Initiative: The New Geopolitics of global infrastructure development”, *Brookings Institute*, April 2019, available from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/chinas-belt-and-road-the-new-geopolitics-of-global-infrastructure-development/> (last accessed on 28th April 2020)

⁷⁶ Estimates in 2014 showed that roughly 70% of all manufactured goods that left China by sea arrived initially in Dubai, where they were either unloaded for regional markets in the UAE and the Middle East, or shipped onward to markets in Europe and Africa. For more information, see: Armijo, Jacqueline, “DragonMart, the Mega-Souk of Today’s Silk Road”, *Middle East Report*, No. 270, Spring 2014, available from <https://merip.org/2014/05/dragonmart-the-mega-souk-of-todays-silk-road/> (last accessed on 28th April 2020)

⁷⁷ Calabrese, John “The Bab el Mandeb Strait: Regional and great power rivalries on the shores of the Red Sea”, Middle East Institute, 29th January 2020.

⁷⁸ Ardemagni, Eleonora, “The UAE’s Security-Economic Nexus in Yemen”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19th July 2018, available from <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/76876> (last accessed on 7th April 2020).

Berbera (Somaliland) since February 2017.⁷⁹ To ensure maritime security, the UAE has also been providing security assistance and training to local security forces in Somaliland and Puntland, including in anti-piracy operations. Synergistically with this military strategy, the UAE has also sought to acquire the management of important port facilities on the Red Sea shores and in the Gulf of Aden. Dubai Port World, “the [Emirati] state-owned maritime logistics juggernaut”⁸⁰ is a prime instrument in the framework of this policy.⁸¹ In recent years, it won concessions for the management of port facilities in Berbera (Somaliland), Bosasso (Puntland), Kismayo (Jubaland), Barawe (South Western State-Somalia) and also reportedly in Eritrea, which adds to the more than 70 terminals that the company runs on all six continents. This expansion of DP World allows the UAE to maintain its dominant position as a nexus state in the Western Indian Ocean.⁸²

Fourth, UAE foreign policy has considerably worked to gain prestige on the world stage through the projection of soft power. The federal state displayed an interest in such a policy by the end of the 2000s as a result of the bad press it was having in the West in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.⁸³ Emirati leaders have invested heavily to internationally brand their country and win the “hearts and minds” of the world in many domains: tourism, in which Dubai had already highly invested from the beginning of the 1990s by building state-of-the-art infrastructure and entertainment facilities; lobbying and public relations activities, mostly in the United States⁸⁴; education, the prime achievement being the creation of NYU Abu Dhabi; mass culture, as shown by Dubai and Abu Dhabi prominently figuring in blockbuster movies such as *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol* and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*; sports, as illustrated by the Dubai Tennis Championships annually held in February and the 2008 takeover of Manchester City; world-class global brands, among which figure Emirates and Etihad Airlines; and high culture, with Dubai’s hosting of the 2020 World Expo. Finally, the UAE has also wielded a high amount of soft power in the past few years by framing itself as a champion of tolerance.⁸⁵ This policy reached its climax with Pope Francis’s historical trip to the UAE in February 2019, during which he signed, together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the document on “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together”.

Finally, the last tenant of Emirati foreign policy has been its strong diversification of its defense and security agreements, which in turn boosts its self-reliance.⁸⁶ These efforts, which are meant to put an end to its exclusive reliance on the United States, began as soon as 2004, when it joined NATO’s “Istanbul Cooperation Initiative”.⁸⁷ In 2008, the UAE signed an agreement with France allowing it a military presence in the UAE. Under this agreement, 400 French military personnel of the naval, land and air forces are stationed at the so-called *Camp de la Paix* (“Peace Camp”).⁸⁸ The UAE has also sought to bolster its security cooperation within the GCC framework since the start of the Arab Spring.⁸⁹ Although the Council is at a standstill since the 2017 Gulf crisis, its official establishment in 2013 of a unified military command structure intended to control 100,000 combat troops is not insignificant.⁹⁰ Besides, the UAE has already begun compensating for the GCC’s malfunctioning as soon as December

⁷⁹ In turn, this entrenchment has incentivized the UAE to act as a regional power broker in the Horn of Africa. It has enhanced its military and economic ties with this region’s countries, and has also engaged in conflict mediation, as illustrated by its role in the Ethiopian-Eritrean rapprochement. For more information, see: “The United Arab Emirates in the Horn of Africa”, International Crisis Group, Crisis Group Middle East Briefing No. 65, 6th November 2018.

⁸⁰ Miller, Rory and Harry Verhoeven, “Overcoming Smallness: Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and strategic realignment in the Gulf”, *International Politics*, Vol. 57, 2020, p. 15.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁸² This policy is accompanied by domestic investments to expand the UAE’s own port facilities. From 2015 to 2018, Dubai considerably expanded Jebel Ali, the regional hub, whose capacity grew from 15.60 million TEUs to 21 million TEUs.

⁸³ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 161-168.

⁸⁴ For instance, in 2014, the “UAE spent a record sum of US\$12.7 million in US lobbying, primarily in defense of its Open Skies Agreement against US airlines critical or Emirates and Etihad as well as of the UAE’s assertive domestic and regional campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood.”

⁸⁵ Cafiero, Giorgio and Kritsian Alexander, “The notion of tolerance in Emirati foreign policy”, Gulf State Analytics, 29th January 2019, available from <https://gulfstateanalytics.com/the-notion-of-tolerance-in-emirati-foreign-policy/> (last accessed on 28th April 2020)

⁸⁶ El-Dessouki, Ayman and Ola Rafik Mansour, « Small states and strategic hedging : the United Arab Emirates’ policy towards Iran”, *Review of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print, available from <https://doi.org/10.1108/REPS-09-2019-0124>, pp. 6-7.

⁸⁷ The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative is an elevation of the Alliance’s Mediterranean Dialogue that seeks to establish a security cooperation between NATO and seven Mediterranean countries.

⁸⁸ Katzman, Kenneth, “The United Arab Emirates (UAE): Issues for U.S. Policy”, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 3rd March 2020, p. 21.

⁸⁹ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 202.

⁹⁰ For a detailed study of the GCC’s unified military command, and especially of its potential and limits, see: Saidy, Brahim, “The Gulf Cooperation Council’s Unified Military Command”, Foreign Policy Research Institute, The Philadelphia Papers, No. 6, October 2014, available from https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/184748/saidy_web.pdf (last accessed on 28th April 2020)

2017 by sealing with Saudi Arabia a political and military alliance⁹¹, which has a strong and long-term potential given Mohammed bin Salman and Mohammed bin Zayed's personally close links.⁹² On top of this strengthening of ties with its neighbours, the UAE has in the past few years begun to engage with non-Western powers in security and defense issues. For instance, the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement" it signed with India in January 2017 includes a security and defense cooperation agreement.⁹³ The UAE has also continued to be a major arms importer from Russia (it was Russia's biggest defense client in 2019), and it has also reportedly begun buying weapons from China – and most famously the Wing Loong II armed drone⁹⁴, which it has heavily used in its military involvements in Yemen and in Libya.⁹⁵ Finally, and interestingly, the UAE has also engaged in a mild yet unprecedented security cooperation with Israel, in the framework of its larger strategy of engaging with this country in the light of their shared hostility towards the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran.⁹⁶ Indeed, the UAE has allegedly purchased Israeli air defense systems for the Libyan front, and has engaged in talks with the Mossad, the Israeli external intelligence agency, to provide Khalifa Haftar's militias with military aid.⁹⁷

The new Emirati foreign policy is strong, but vulnerable on the long-term as highlighted by its setbacks and the challenges it still faces

As shown, Emirati foreign policy has been hyper-activist since the outbreak of the Arab Spring, both to secure vital interests and non-vital interests, such as positioning the UAE as a nexus state. Without doubt, this foreign policy has had major achievements, not least being the country's prestige on the world stage. Yet, the sometimes limited results of the UAE's external behaviour and, on a more fundamental level, the smallness of the country both beg the question of the sustainability of the new Emirati foreign policy.

Several setbacks pushing the UAE to reconsider its foreign policy

For the moment, the United Arab Emirates has experienced two major setbacks that question the durability of its new foreign policy. First, its campaign against Qatar initiated in June 2017 has not had the expected outcomes. By enforcing an embargo against it, the UAE was aiming to curb Qatar's influence in the region and to bring its foreign policy back in line with the GCC's support for the Middle East's Western-friendly, secular and authoritarian political order. However, not only did this policy not curb Qatar's policy (in fact, Qatar had already scaled it down since the assumption of power of Sheikh Tamim, who initially focused more on domestic issues than on foreign affairs), but it even proved to be counterproductive. Indeed, because of the embargo, Qatar was pushed to bolster its relationships with regional powers considered as rivals of the UAE, such as Turkey. Qatar's imports from Turkey rose from less than US\$600 million in 2016 to more than US\$1.2 billion in 2018, and bilateral security ties were strengthened with the decision to increase Turkey's military presence from 300 soldiers to 3,000 soldiers-5,000 in Qatar, where it already has a military base since 2015.⁹⁸ Additionally, the embargo has eroded the geo-commercial dominance of Jebel Ali, which is the linchpin of the UAE's strategy to position itself as a nexus state. Indeed, as a result of the embargo, Qatar has re-routed its supply lines

⁹¹ Wintour, Patrick, "UAE announces new Saudi alliance that could reshape Gulf relations" *The Guardian*, 5th December 2017, available from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/05/uaesaudi-arabia-alliance-gulf-relations-gcc> (last accessed on 29th April 2020).

⁹² Fathi, Ahmed, « Portraits of Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) - Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and Chairman of the Executive Council of Abu Dhabi », Institut Montaigne, 13th November 2018, available from <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/portraits-mohammed-bin-salman-mbs-and-mohammed-bin-zayed-mbz-crown-prince-saudi-arabia-and-chairman> (last accessed on 28th April 2020)

⁹³ Chaudhury, Dipanjan Roy, "India, UAE ink 14 pacts in key areas like defense and security", *Economic Times*, 13th July 2018, available from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-uae-ink-14-pacts-in-key-areas-like-defence-security/articleshow/56780124.cms?from=mdr> (last accessed on 28th April 2019)

⁹⁴ The United States refuses to sell to the UAE its own and original version of the Wing Loong II, the MQ-9 Reaper, because of its adherence to the Missile Technology Control Regime, which is an informal political understanding between countries who collectively agree to limit the exports of some kinds of weapons.

⁹⁵ <https://www.flightglobal.com/military-uavs/china-finds-its-uav-export-sweet-spot/132557.article>

⁹⁶ Martheu, Elisabeth, « Les pays du Golfe et Israël : une convergence d'intérêts ? », *Politique Étrangère*, 2020/1 Printemps, pp. 67-77.

⁹⁷ "Al-Imārāt talja' li-'isrâ'il li-taqwiyat difâ'at Haftar al-ğawiyya", *Al-'Araby al-Jadid*, 10th April 2020, available from <https://urlz.fr/cw28> (last accessed on 28th April 2020), and "Libya's Haftar 'provided with Israeli military aid following UAE-mediated meetings with Mossad agents'", *The New Arab*, 24th July 2017, available from <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/7/24/libyas-haftar-provided-with-israeli-weaponry-following-uae-mediated-meetings> (last accessed on 28th April 2020)

⁹⁸ "Qatar, Turkey to scale up cooperation to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" – Qatar Foreign Ministry", *Reuters*, 5th November 2019 <https://www.reuters.com/article/gulf-qatar-turkey/qatar-turkey-to-scale-up-cooperation-to-a-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-qatar-foreign-ministry-idUSB2N27D01P> (last accessed on 28th April 2020).

through Oman, which has also seized the opportunity to further position itself as an alternative commercial hub to Dubai.⁹⁹

Furthermore, the UAE's own security has been compromised by its involvement in the Yemen war and its hawkish stance against Iran, which consisted in opposing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and adhering to the U.S. campaign of so-called "maximum pressure". First, by gradually succeeding in acquiring and manipulating technologies such as ballistic missiles and drones, the Houthis have become a direct threat to the Emirati territory despite their distance. The group's capacity to conduct a vast array of attacks in Saudi Arabian depth shows it, and the group has seemingly already conducted three attacks against high-profile Emirati targets: the UAE's Barakah nuclear plant that was then under construction on December 3rd, 2017, Abu Dhabi's international airport on July 27th, 2018, and Dubai's international airport on September 30th, 2018.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the Houthis have also explicitly threatened the UAE at several times to launch missiles against them.¹⁰¹ On top of these threats, the UAE was also caught in the crossfire between the United States and Iran in the context of the rising tensions between them in 2018-2020. On May 12th, 2019, four oil tankers belonging to the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Norway were attacked in Emirati territorial waters. Although Iran has not claimed the attacks, the United States explicitly blamed the country for these attacks, and the United Arab Emirates stopped short of putting the blame on it by solely saying the attack was likely carried out by "state actor". As a result of these rising tensions, the UAE has already begun to scale down its hostility against Iran, and even to engage with the country. Indeed, only a couple of weeks after the tanker incident, the UAE sent a delegation to Teheran to discuss maritime security for the first time in six years.¹⁰² Plus, the UAE has also sent medical aid to help Iran amidst the coronavirus crisis.¹⁰³

The fragility of some pillars of Emirati foreign policy: when smallness hits back

On top of the above shortcomings, the sustainability of Emirati foreign policy is also called into question by the robustness of its own pillars. Three remarks need to be made in this respect. First, as we have seen, the Emirati new foreign policy is the product of a highly centralized and personalized decision-making process. However, in the long-run, effective diplomacy requires in-depth knowledge of other states and actors in general. Consequently, we believe Kamrava's remark on Qatar's mediation efforts also applies to the UAE's general efforts in times of peace and war: "given the lack of depth of [the UAE's] diplomatic bureaucracy – a structural condition arising from its demographic limitations – and the resulting dearth of skills and knowhow, as well as resources necessary for sustained, on-the-ground presence, it is far from clear how sustainable and lasting [the UAE's hyper-active foreign policy is] in the long run"¹⁰⁴.

Furthermore, the UAE's policy of supporting authoritarian and often economically unsustainable Arab regimes, such as that of al-Sisi's in Egypt, also calls into question the sustainability of the UAE's external behaviour. Indeed, such a policy, which has been elevated to one of the cornerstones of Emirati regional foreign policy, rests on the hypothesis that these regimes are firmly entrenched and that they are here to stay. Although this might be the case of most Gulf regimes, other Arab regimes' generally blatant inability to satisfy the most basic demands of their population, such as providing job opportunities for the youth or decent public services¹⁰⁵, seriously brings into question their durability. Considering the worsening socio-economic situation since the beginning of the Arab Spring, and the declining financial support they receive from the Gulf during periods of low oil prices, these

⁹⁹ Miller, Rory and Harry Verhoeven, "Overcoming Smallness: Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and strategic realignment in the Gulf", *International Politics*, Vol. 57, 2020, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁰ Barnet, James, Hennessey Herrera and Holly Hunter, "Al Houthi Attacks on Saudi Arabia and the UAE: 2016-2019", *Critical Threats*, 12th December 2019, available from <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/al-houthi-attacks-on-saudi-arabia-and-the-uae-2016-2019> (last accessed on 28th April 2020); Binnie, Jeremy, "Video confirms Yemeni attack on Abu Dhabi's airport in 2018", *Jane's*, 24th May 2019, available from <https://www.janes.com/article/88759/video-confirms-yemeni-attack-on-abu-dhabi-s-airport-in-2018> (last accessed on 28th April 2020).

¹⁰¹ Shaker, Naseh, "Will Houthis follow up on their threats to hit UAE targets?", *Al-Monitor*, 29th September 2019, available from <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/09/yemen-houthis-threaten-uae-saudi-arabia-attacks.html> (last accessed on 28th April 2020).

¹⁰² Vahdat, Amir and Aya Batrawy, "UAE and Iran hold rare talks in Tehran on maritime security", *AP News*, 31st July 2019, <https://apnews.com/49c6da1c33fd45bbaf1b14836ee5e2ec> (last accessed on 28th April 2020).

¹⁰³ "UAE sends medical aid to Iran as coronavirus outbreak intensifies", *Al-Monitor*, 17th March 2020, available from <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/03/uae-iran-medical-aid-coronavirus-outbreak.html> (last accessed on 28th April 2020).

¹⁰⁴ Kamrava, Mehran, *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2013, pp. 95-96.

¹⁰⁵ For a detailed account of the political economy of Arab states, see: Diwan, Ishac, Melani Cammett, Alan Richards, and John Waterbury. *A political economy of the Middle East*. Fourth Edition. Westview Press, 2015.

regimes are highly exposed to the risk of the outbreak of new waves of protests – as shown by the Algerian and Sudanese cases. As such, the UAE constantly faces the risk of losing its political gains.

Finally, the increasingly self-reliant feature of Emirati foreign policy is highly contingent on Emirati economic and military power. However, the two suffer from weaknesses that hamper the UAE from exerting sustained influence on the regional scene and from becoming fully self-reliant. Indeed, the UAE's economic power is still to a large extent contingent on Abu Dhabi's exploitation and export of hydrocarbons. Yet, although prices are expected to remain relatively high in the long term¹⁰⁶, the amount of financial resources extracted from such activities is not guaranteed in the short to medium-term given their volatility. This volatility is even nowadays further compounded by the increase in the number of oil producers, which renders cooperation to keep prices high harder than before – as illustrated by the last price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia that has led, in conjunction with the economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, to a historic drop in oil prices since March 2020. Consequently, the UAE permanently runs the risk of intermittently experiencing a decline of its economic power, which might in turn impact its regional influence.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, and more fundamentally, the UAE's military power is also constrained by three structural factors. As said from the beginning, the most fundamental constraining factor is the country's own smallness and geographic location. By being a small country sandwiched in-between two very large and equally ambitious states, the UAE lacks the strategic depth needed to become a classical regional power. The UAE's own small population, which is around 1 million, is another constraining factor, since it renders the country highly sensitive to the death of its soldiers.¹⁰⁸ The nation-wide tragedy provoked by the death of 45 soldiers during the Yemen War clearly reflects this weakness, despite the leaders' efforts to seize this moment for nation-building purposes and the unwavering strong domestic support for this war.¹⁰⁹ Finally, the infancy of the UAE's indigenous defense industry impedes it from securing the strategic autonomy required by regional powers. Although it is one of the most advanced ones in the Arab world, it still lags far behind the Israeli, Turkish and Iranian defense industries which are able to produce geopolitically game-changing weapons.¹¹⁰ Its small native population, which compels it to rely on foreign engineers, is also an important obstacle to achieve a mature defense industry.¹¹¹ As such, its armed forces are still far from being fully autonomous, and their efficiency is, over the long run, still highly contingent on its support by foreign countries, especially the United States and France.¹¹² Yet, despite considerable efforts in lobbying, the support of foreign countries for Emirati military interventions is far from being permanently secured, as the mounting criticism by U.S. policymakers of its intervention with Saudi Arabia in Yemen has shown. In other words, Emirati foreign policy is and will still be for the foreseeable future limited by the (real) red lines set by its foreign partners, and especially by the United States.¹¹³

Conclusion

¹⁰⁶ Kaufmann, Robert, Pavlos Karadeloglou and Filippo di Mauro, "Will oil prices decline over the long run?", European Central Bank – Eurosystem, Occasional Paper Series, No. 98, October 2008.

¹⁰⁷ For an analysis of the risks concomitant with a regional order resting on constant Gulf financing, see: Soliman, Mohammad, "COVID-19, the oil price war, and the remaking of the Middle East", Middle East Institute, 8th April 2020, available from https://www.mei.edu/publications/COVID-19-oil-price-war-and-remaking-middle-east?fbclid=IwARlebHe8NjyGxUzAsVGZWP4jqseXjk6rVn-N5zL1_0BxNSsu5uWZVOZrgPw (last accessed on 28th April 2020).

¹⁰⁸ That said, the UAE has to a certain extent overcome this structural constraint by resorting to foreigners and mercenaries. In 2010, the UAE has reportedly spent US\$529 million to establish an 800 battalion of foreign troops, mostly of Colombian and South-African backgrounds. The battalion was used for various security missions, including suppressing possible uprisings in the UAE. According to Mehran Kamrava, "there was even a possibility that the battalion of foreign troops might be used to take over the disputed islands in the Persian Gulf [Abu Mussa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb]" (*Troubled Waters*, pp. 101-102). However, doubts remain concerning the ability of the UAE to project power in the long run abroad by relying on mercenaries, especially in lengthy war efforts.

¹⁰⁹ Ardemagni, Eleonora, " 'Martyrs' for a Centralized UAE", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 13th June 2019, available from <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/79313> (last accessed on 7th April 2020).

¹¹⁰ For more information on the Emirati defense industry and the challenges it faces, see: Gaub, Florence and Zoe Stanley-Lockman, « Defense industries in Arab states: players and strategies », European Union – Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper no. 141, March 2017, pp. 47-62; and Samaan, Jean-Loup, "The Rise of the Emirati Defense Industry", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 14th May 2019, available from <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/79121> (last accessed on 7th April 2020).

¹¹¹ Gaub, Florence and Zoe Stanley-Lockman, « Defense industries in Arab states: players and strategies », European Union – Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper no. 141, March 2017, p. 62.

¹¹² Roberts, David B., "The Gulf Monarchies' Armed Forces at the Crossroads", Institut Français des Relations Internationales, May 2018, available from <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/etudes-de-lifri/focus-strategique/gulf-monarchies-armed-forces-crossroads> (last accessed on 28th April 2020), pp. 29-30.

¹¹³ The United Arab Emirates has openly acted against U.S. will over the course of the past decade, be it in its intervention in Bahrain to quell the 2011 uprising or in its support for the 2013 coup d'Etat in Egypt. However, when fundamental U.S. interests are at stake, it is still bounded to act according to them, as shown by the U.S. prevention of an alleged Saudi-Emirati plan to invade Qatar in the summer 2017. For more information, see: Emmons, Alex, "Saudi Arabia planned to invade Qatar last summer. Rex Tillerson's efforts to stop it may have cost him his job.", *The Intercept*, 1st August 2018, available from <https://theintercept.com/2018/08/01/rex-tillerson-qatar-saudi-uae/> (last accessed on 29th April 2020).

To conclude, Emirati foreign policy has truly transformed since the UAE's independence in 1971. Under Sheikh Zayed's leadership (1971-2004), the foreign policy was aimed to ensure the survival and security of the newly independent country and to support its fellow Arab and Islamic countries, be it in the developmental domain or in the Arab-Israeli conflict. During this period, Emirati foreign policy was mild due to the UAE's smallness, its internal constraints and Sheikh Zayed's own personality, and it heavily relied on bandwagoning to achieve security. Then, starting from the 1990s, fundamental domestic and global shifts occurred, among which Abu Dhabi's success in centralizing power and the rise to power of Mohammed bin Zayed. As a consequence, the UAE adopted an increasingly assertive, martial and self-reliant foreign policy, which was in particular triggered by the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Indeed, since then, the UAE has actively sought to act as a regional power by systematically engaging throughout the Middle East and North Africa to eradicate Islamist presence and contain Iranian influence. Furthermore, it has actively worked to polish its image on the world stage, to position itself as a nexus state connecting East and West.

Emirati foreign policy has undoubtedly achieved major successes. Since 2004, the UAE has succeeded in imposing itself as a world trademark, and it has expanded its influence across much of the Middle East and parts of Africa. As such, it has to a large extent overcome the constraints posed to its smallness by: building professional and efficient armed forces, using its massive economic power for geopolitical purposes, and by diversifying its defense and security agreements, including through the sealing of a close strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia. Yet, at the same time, the UAE has also faced several setbacks, not least being the epic fail of its high-profile campaign against Qatar, and it still faces structural constraints that impede it from sustaining its current foreign policy on the medium to long term.

Under such circumstances, one is driven to wonder if the United Arab Emirates will scale down its foreign policy to readjust to its capabilities and limitations, or if it will nonetheless maintain its current pace, and hence run the risk of overstretching. For now, all we can say for sure is that the decision firmly rests with Mohammed bin Zayed, who seems to be slowly beginning to strike a balance between these two orientations. Indeed, in the UAE's direct environment, Mohammed bin Zayed seems to have scaled down the assertiveness of his foreign policy, as illustrated by the Emirati military withdrawal from Yemen and his country's latest attempts to engage with Iran – which somewhat significantly departs from past Emirati policy. At the same time, in remote environments, which are not and cannot constitute any physical threat to the UAE's security, Mohammed bin Zayed does not seem keen on rolling back his ambitions for regional dominance just yet – as illustrated by his recent decision to significantly prop up his military support for Haftar in Libya. As a consequence, what we might be witnessing just now is the beginning of a slow process of refinement of the Emirati foreign policy, the result of which might be a tempered external behaviour in the country's direct regional environment, and an assertive one in remote locations to establish dominance – but this is only a guess, and only time will tell if and to what extent it holds true.

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