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## **EMIRATI DIPLOMACY: A NON-WESTERN PERSPECTIVE**

**William Guéraiche\***

### **ABSTRACT**

The study of the foreign policy of Asian and African countries tends to follow the same paradigms as the study of foreign policy for Western countries, despite the fact that some of these states have a specific vision of their relationship with the rest of the world. The United Arab Emirates is a good case-study for examining how a Gulf monarchy's external actions are a combination of traditional Arab principles and innovations in public diplomacy. Deconstructing the Emirati mindset enables a better understanding of the rationale behind traditional Arab diplomacy. The UAE's inclusion in the networks of globalization and the emergence of a new model of development epitomized by Dubai, have impacted its relations with the rest of the world. Hence, the UAE's foreign policy and diplomacy is no carbon copy of that of Western nations, but a flexible pattern that changes according to the circumstances.

**Key words:** UAE Foreign Policy, UAE Diplomacy, Non-traditional Diplomacy, Nation branding

### **Introduction**

On its website, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ministry of Foreign Affairs presents its areas of responsibility (Cooperation 2019). The cohesion between the 16 items listed is unclear. 'Foreign direct investments', and 'Economic prosperity' are placed alongside 'The right of safe living' and 'Tolerance and co-existence'. To a Western observer, the confusion might stem from the combination of dissimilar elements, in this case moral principles with tools of international public accounting. That said, Emirati diplomacy encompasses the range of issues relating to public diplomacy. The federation maintains bilateral and multilateral links with all the major states and international organizations. No state or non-state actor can claim that the UAE has not strengthened its position in the Middle East – or indeed in the world – over the last decade.

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Puzzlement comes at the unclear rationale behind the external actions of this small state. How can an outsider understand the UAE's role in the world when at first glance the different sectors of intervention are not perfectly articulated? Unlike developing countries that may not have the resources to define a clear road map for their politicians and diplomats, the UAE is a wealthy country that can afford to design a framework for action. But what if, for the Emirati decision-makers the foreign policy makes perfect sense? It would imply that the decisions and actions taken lie within non-Western, non-traditional logic that operates in the realm of public diplomacy.

If academic research acknowledges the evolution of themes related to '*plural diplomacy*', the regional idiosyncrasies, notably in the Gulf region, have not yet been taken into consideration. As **Arlene Tickner** and **David Blaney** rightly underlined, knowledge has been produced by and for the West (Tickner et Blaney, 2012), epitomising the lack of interest in the Middle Eastern logics (Bilgrin 2012) and misinterpretation of foreign policy. Since WWII, the breakdown in area studies, in reality in the relations between emerging regions (former territories under British control) and the two superpowers, led to the conviction that all such regions must in the trajectory of decolonisation undergo a similar evolution and were subject to a similar pattern of analysis. In International Relations, each region has been analysed through Western concepts, first and foremost through the prism of states. A dash of Orientalism highlighted the Middle Eastern states, stamped by 'authoritarian rule'. Until recently, very few researchers in the field acknowledged that decisions of the rulers in the Arab world and in the Gulf for instance may have incorporated a non-Western logic, not entrenched in nation-states or the worldview of an international community.

## **1 The traditional pillars of the Emirati Foreign Policy**

When the Trucial States became independent on December 2, 1971, the United Arab Emirates were only a small state but also a small power (Beyer 2012, 4). Although the circumstances of self-determination in the shadow of receding Victorian colonialism compelled the federation to be careful in dealing with the international community, it developed a diplomacy on its own based on the Emirati perception of the world.

## 1.1 A small state caught between regional tensions

The main guidelines of Emirati diplomacy were developed after independence in 1971 and have braved the main evolutions of the region through the Arab Spring and its consequences. When the British left the Gulf region, the future of the federation looked grim (W. Guéraiche, *Décolonisation des Emirats. Regards britanniques sur les luttes d'influence et les enjeux de pouvoir (1967-1971)* 2014). Iran invaded three islands (Abu Musa and the two Tunb) on November 29, a week before independence (Mattair 2005). In addition, Saudi Arabia coveted what it asserts as an extension of its natural domain, including the rich oil resources of the emirate of Abu Dhabi (Mazrouei 2016). With no army, no efficient administration, the first president, **Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan**, was compelled to be pragmatic. The UAE would entertain, as much as possible, good relations with the other states.

As a quiet rule, peaceful negotiations have trumped direct confrontation. Even during the tense periods with Iran in the wake of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, military action was not an option. Moreover, economic and diplomatic sanctions were considered regionally counterproductive and ideologically antithetical to the complex regional ties. Until he died in November 2004, **Sheikh Zayed** reinforced the identity of the UAE as a pacific state. In March 2003, for instance, he suggested a peace conference between Arab states to avoid the war in Iraq. In addition to mitigation, communication and consolidation as tenets of foreign policy, the federal constitution gives each emirate a certain autonomous room for manoeuvre in its relations with neighbouring states, providing the federation with diplomatic flexibility. An emirate like Dubai could afford, for instance, to have a different stance than Abu Dhabi on Iran.

This particular relationship between an emirate and one of its main trading partners has allowed the federation to have different channels of communications with their Persian neighbour (W. Guéraiche 2016).

## 1.2 The UAE, the Centre of the World

One of the main differences between the ideological paradigms that have governed the Western world and the UAE (this is statement is also valid for the other GCC states) is their perception of their place in the world and their perception of the other. **Abdul-Monem al-Mashat** conceptualised a well-received theory of concentric circles around the federation (Al-Mashat 2008). Since its creation in 1971, the country seems to have bestowed diplomatic

preferences on countries based on their proximity, geographically and culturally, to an ideological core. The seven emirates are the centre around which all states gravitate. The Gulf neighbours, part of the same 'Arab nation' make up the first circle around the federation. The remaining Arab States, a visual and contextual corollary, comprise the second circle and the Muslim ones, in the same vein, make up the third circle. Beyond these three primary circles, the other states of the world indistinctively form the fourth circle. This pattern, however, deserves refining because fault lines exist in the different emirates as well as in the different circles: for instance, Dubai (or Ras Al Khaimah) does not share with Abu Dhabi its perception of Iran as stated before; an Arab state such as Morocco does not have the same credit as Jordan; while dominant powers like the US, some European states or China may enjoy more privileges compared with Brazil or the Philippines. This representation of the world has shaped foreign policy, although economics and security have inevitably guided relations with neighbours as well as the great economic and military powers of the world. Solid on its Arab-Muslim strongholds, Emirati diplomacy has adjusted to many challenges until recently.

Therefore, the Emirati decision makers have preferences, visible in diplomacy, however, on the whole, they make decisions with an eye on the concentric circles of affinity. Such consequences of conceptual territoriality have surprisingly never been taken into consideration in the field of international relations in the Middle East.

## **2 Nation Branding, the Emirati Smart Power?**

Self-perception is an equally dictating factor in UAE foreign policy. Emiratis see themselves as heirs of a long tradition, proud to defend their legacy against the overwhelming changes of globalisation. Ironically, the 'outsiders' perceive the federation as the spearhead of modernity in the Arab world. The genesis of this latter representation dates back to the emergence of Dubai as an economic hub in the Middle East. Abu Dhabi, other monarchies like Qatar, and more recently Saudi Arabia have followed in the footsteps of the merchant city. Even if the initial intention of the branding aimed at attracting investors and tourists, regional diplomacy incorporated the benefits as well as the methodology. Interestingly, the Emirati diplomacy is today a blend of traditional values or practices and state-of-the-art commercial strategies primarily used in Dubai.

Branding, a marketing term, has been recently co-opted in the discourse of

politics and international relations. Indeed, communication teams have associated nation with the concept in order to coin '*nation branding*'. **Simon Anholt**, strategist and policy adviser, has advocated nation and place branding: cities, provinces, or countries can be promoted like any brand with a promotional campaign aimed at spreading a desired image abroad (Anholt 2007). If the initial objective in Dubai was to attract foreign direct investments and tourists, nation branding has become more comprehensive. It has invaded the field of public communication and public diplomacy.

## **2.1 How Branding Dubai Impacted Emirati Diplomacy**

Dubai is one of the best case-studies to analyse how the branding of a local entity, namely an emirate, changed the image of a place, beyond its economic objectives. The branding of Dubai, even if the term did not exist at that time, started in the 1980s. Oil was running out in the emirates. **Sheikh Rashid Al Maktoum**, ruler of Dubai, decided to reorient the merchant city's activities. A deep-water port, Jebel Ali, was created and soon became the first port hub in the Middle East. After the Iran-Iraq War in 1986, Dubai envisioned a comprehensive policy to attract international investors. The main hurdle to this vision was the external perception that the Middle East was not a safe and secure haven for business or leisure. As branding gradually erased this apprehension, the emirate began developing heavy domestic infrastructures and offering them for free to investors. In addition, the creation of free zones and the no-tax policy made the city hugely attractive to the target audience. Last but not least, the government of Dubai sought and secured an exclusive niche in tourism, high-end tourists who spend time and money in the shopping malls.

The emirates mobilized all its resources to gain spontaneous awareness in the world. An agency of the government of Dubai defined the objectives. The Dubai Commerce and Tourism Board from 1989 to 1997 and afterwards the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing since 1997 have coordinated the promotion of the emirate. Over time, the presence of Dubai representatives increased in the international fairs. Road shows exhibited the assets of the city and finally permanent bureaus opened in the major global cities. Emirates, the airline company, fully participated in the branding. Interestingly, Emirates Airline itself was a brand. The initial idea was to associate Dubai with the name of Emirates. By doing so, the promotion of one benefited the other, developing mutual promotion.

In terms of nation branding, strictly speaking, any strategy combines key factors such as the selection of the themes, icons and leaders. In the image of Dubai, tradition merges with modernity. Proud of their Arab-Islamic past, the Emiratis have incorporated their cultural history in tourism packages, for instance, the desert safaris. Meanwhile, the whole city showcases the prowess of modernity pushing the limits of what is possible: the desert both turns green and insulates a ski slope. Sports was conceived as a vector to enhance awareness of the city and emphasis was placed on football with the sponsorship of English Premier League teams. In the meantime, Dubai forged its reputation as a sports city with world-class events<sup>1</sup>. In nation branding, icons are constructions, places or symbols that are immediately identifiable. The Burj Al Arab, the '7-Star' hotel built in the sea, the Palm Island, the biggest made-man island ever constructed, and the Burj Khalifa, the tallest tower in the world, have epitomized world-wide the audacity of the city-state. Some other symbols such as the A 380 have been used in the promotional campaigns. Regionally, the branding strategy also promoted the leader, **Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum**, or '*Sheikh Mo*', praised for his sense of anticipation and established as the flagship of Dubai.

## 2.2 Branding entangles domestic and transnational issues

The branding of Dubai not only gave the emirate economic clout but also changed its status abroad and at home. Because of the federal structure of the UAE, each emirate is granted a certain autonomy with regard to international relations, as long as local foreign policy is in line with federal foreign policy. Its highly visible capacity, however, as a hub for international partnerships, has challenged the domestic balance of power. Because of its success story, the emirate became the Emirati economic centre of gravity so much so that there was a prevalent perception at the beginning of the millennium that Dubai was the capital of the UAE. *Stricto sensu*, Dubai had no foreign policy of its own but because the emirate was engaged in economic partnership, it needed economic 'diplomatic' support that the emirate provided. On the other hand, the federation largely benefited from international media coverage. Its standing increased along with the branding of Dubai, blurring the stereotype that the Arab world is backward. The influence of Dubai on diplomacy has been therefore twofold: the city became a role-model for other emirates as well as states and Emirati

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<sup>1</sup> Dubai World Cup, ATP tournament, Dubai Desert Classic, Rugby 7, etc.

diplomacy used the positive image of the city for the interests of the federation as a whole.

Nation branding spread in the Gulf states and first and foremost in Abu Dhabi. Until the death of Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan, president of the UAE and ruler of the emirate of Abu Dhabi, in 2004, the capital had remained a sleeping beauty managing its oil resources far from the hustle and bustle of its neighbour. Zayed's successor, **Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan**, wanted to recapture the symbolic powers of Dubai and implemented a similar strategy as Dubai. The Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority established the Office of the Brand Abu Dhabi (OBAD). In November 2007, both authorities unveiled the new branding of the capital. The slogan '*Travelers welcomed*' aimed at attracting high-end tourists, especially culturally minded ones. The construction of a maritime and a national museum began alongside the two cultural highlights of the emirate, the Louvre and the Guggenheim branches. The philosophy of the branding relied therefore on the balance between world names and local initiatives. In the field of education, the Sorbonne and New York University opened branches on Saadiyat Island amid the other local higher education institutions. Abu Dhabi did not only catch up with Dubai but often better performed, for instance, in the organisation of sporting events. The mid-November formula 1 Grand Prix of Abu Dhabi, established in 2007, has become a success story, consistently drawing wide international media coverage and eclipsing initial investment.

Before the drop in oil prices, the emirate could afford to organise spectacular events such as the big Bedouin tent in Times Square, a promotion event in 2012 for the new bureau of Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority. Like Dubai, the branding adopted icons like the Emirates palace and the airline company, Etihad. The discreet personality of Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan did not fit the conception of a leader in nation branding. But his brother, **Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan**, crown prince of Abu Dhabi, has embraced this position since the Arab Spring in 2011.

Nation branding, regardless of the entity in the UAE, has not been confined to the economic development of the emirates. The federation's aspiration for a role as a key player in the international community has been a serious incentive. As a result, the capital has taken on environmental issues and cultural tolerance to weave marketing and diplomacy. Against all odds, in 2008, the emirate of Abu Dhabi, enjoying almost 90 billion of proven barrels in its sub-soil, inaugurated the construction of Masdar City, a carbon dioxide-free city. In June 2009, **Sheikh Abdallah bin Zayed Al Nahyan**, minister of foreign affairs, announced



that the UAE would bid for hosting the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). Six years later, in June 2015, the headquarter opened in Masdar City. In this case, the promotion of Abu Dhabi as a modern emirate and the diplomatic interests of the UAE overlap. More recently, in the face of radical Islam the UAE works to represent an age of maturity in political communication extolling tolerance as a cardinal value of the federation since independence. After the reshuffle of the new cabinet in February 2016, **Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi** was appointed Minister of State for Tolerance whose mission is to promote tolerance in the UAE and worldwide. In December 2018, the UAE government announced that 2019 would be officially proclaimed the year of tolerance to encourage stability in the region. From 2014 onwards, the ministry of the foreign affairs and international cooperation has used the position to explain why the Emirates have been at the forefront of the fight against Daesh: 'By spreading a culture of moderation and tolerance, the U.A.E. has strived to become an oasis of peaceful coexistence in the region.' The federation firmly condemned the violence that 'undermine regional and international stability and threaten universal humanitarian values, cultural heritage, and norms of tolerance, multiculturalism, and religious diversity' (Affairs 2004 September 3). Such well-prepared communication strategies underline the effort to create an international image of positive values parallel to the business model of globalisation.

### **2.3 International Aid, a New Form of Branding?**

To clarify how his 'good country index' works, **Simon Anholt** explains that in order for a state's reputation to rank well in the international community, it must do 'good' (Good Country Index 2018). In other words, the positive perception of a country depends on objective factors such as International Peace and Security or contribution to the World Order. International aid is a subset of the last category. With this in mind, the UAE is one of the top donors in the world, and has incorporated humanitarianism into its foreign policy as well as in promotional strategies.

The UAE, a top donor of international aid in the world, has since its independence contributed to numerous projects, mainly in the Arab World (Almezaini 2012) (Hellyer 1997). According to the Emirati authorities, the value of development assistance, humanitarian and 'charitable aid' has amounted to almost \$50 billion. 178 countries have benefited of the official and non-official

aid. The Development Aid Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development estimated that foreign aid per capita placed the UAE in the top 10 world donors. For 2015 alone, the ministry of foreign affairs asserted that the total value of aid reached \$8 billion, given to 155 countries (Council 2016). To parallel the work on the ground, the newly created Ministry for International Cooperation in February 2016, headed by **Reem Al Hashemi**, employs the facts in the promotion of the federation. In 2017, the ministry defined the guidelines of the federal foreign assistance. Solidly anchored on the first UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), the eradication of poverty, the UAE wants to promote peace and prosperity in the region. In parallel to the development agenda, the federation highlights its humanitarian assistance (Cooperation, Summary of the UAE Policy for Foreign Assistance (2017 – 2021). 2017).

While there are 'young' states who have successfully publicised their meteoric rise on the international stage, such as Singapore (although the Singaporean foreign policy is limited to its security in South-East Asia (Ganesan 2005)) and, of course, Israel, the benchmark in the art of nation branding (Guéraiche, *Information Warfare in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, the Invisible Battalion?* 2016), the UAE has integrated the language of nation branding with its liberal perception of diplomacy. Nevertheless, with the emergence of Dubai as a globalised city, international media has paid more attention to the UAE. The report of Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch 2006) pointed international public opinion to the condition of the construction workers in Dubai. **Dr. Anwar Gargash**, minister of state for foreign affairs, was quick to acknowledge that the city 'had an issue' and asserting its willingness to tackle it. (Guéraiche, *The UAE. Geopolitics, Modernity and Tradition* 2017, 96). The federation addressed criticism with the help of years of public relations in the form of branding.

### **3 The Advent of Emirati Neo-Realism?**

The Arab Spring and its consequences deeply impacted Emirati foreign policy (Sherwood 2017) (Young 2017) (W. Guéraiche, *The UAE and the Arab Spring: Rethinking Foreign Policy*, 2018). Against the new backdrop, the federation saw an immediate threat to its existence. It modified the objectives of its foreign policy and became more involved in the regional conflicts. In the realm of International Relations, the Emirates made a noticeable entry with the

intervention in Libya and Yemen. Six years later, the Qatari crisis revealed in June 2017 the new realist approach of the federation's foreign policy.

### **3.1 The turn of the Arab Spring**

The intervention in Bahrain marked a shift in the reaction to the security threats in the region. After the 'day of rage' in Egypt, on February 14, 2011, Bahrainis celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Action Charter that intended to orient the regime towards a constitutional monarchy. Against the backdrop of regional revolutions, the Khalifa ruling family worried about the possible consequences of mass gathering in Manama. At night, police forces dispersed the demonstrators occupying the Pearl Roundabout, leaving four dead and hundreds of wounded. To support the regime as well as to prevent the unrest from spreading in the neighbouring states, the GCC, namely Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE joined forces under the umbrella of the Peninsula Shield Force. The Emirati authorities underlined that Bahrain called for help; out of solidarity, the UAE supported the regime that denounced a plot secretly masterminded by the Iranians with the help of the Shia population. Behind the rationale of the intervention, it remains that for the first time the UAE participated in a military coalition.

At the same time, the UAE also contributed to the deposition of the Qaddafi's regime. After the Security Council of the United Nations passed Resolution 1970 on February 26, 2011, and Resolution 1973 on March 17, 2011, the Emirates joined the Coalition of the Willing. The invitation to the NATO Operation United Protector, alongside Qatar and fifteen other nations, underlined the new military and diplomatic status of the Emirates. When the civil war broke out, the UAE backed the National Forces Alliances and took side with Zintan armed groups while Qatar helped the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group in Misrata. These two opposing factions struggled to control the remains of the Libyan states.

Finally, in 2014, the UAE became directly involved in the Levant. The federation did not change its policy regarding Syria when the civil war broke out in 2011. In line with the traditional tenets of their foreign policy, the Emiratis were one of the main cash donors to the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan near the Syrian border. But the creation of the organisation Islamic State (Daesh) forced the Emirates to change its stance on the conflict. The UAE joined the international coalition alongside 50 states. On a symbolic level, on September

23, 2014, an Emirati squadron was the first to strike the Daesh facilities. Since then fighting Islamism has justified the military interventions abroad such as the war in Yemen. The changes in foreign policy inevitably reflected in diplomacy. The Qatari crisis reveals the new challenges of Emirati diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **3.2 The Qatar Crisis**

On June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen, of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as well as Egypt, the Maldives and the government of eastern Libya decided to sever their relations with Qatar. This ostensible ostracism of a 'brother' state in the GCC triggered the first main crisis in the Peninsula since the Bahraini uprising in 2011.

The dispute with Qatar, over its autonomous sense of foreign policy and its influence on leading international media, has placed the United Arab Emirates in new waters. For at least four decades, the Emirati decision-makers have had a clear idea of their place in the international arena and strength of their ties with other states. The issues underlying the dispute with Qatar stem from the Arab Spring whose consequences revealed how the two emerging powers in the GCC have had opposite conceptions of their roles in the Arab World in general, and in the Gulf region in particular. The culmination of the differences between these economic powerhouses, in June 2017, unsettles the conciliatory policy of the federation.

The UAE and Qatar were commercial and political partners, unified to counterbalance the power of Saudi Arabia in the 1990s-2000s (Guéraiche, *The UAE. Geopolitics, Modernity and Tradition* 2017, 125-129). However, the rift of June 5, 2017, had been in the making for some time and the Arab Spring revealed the underlying tensions between the two partners. When the principle of challenging a ruling family was at stake, Qatar did not join the Peninsula Shield intervention in Manama on March 15, 2011, a move now being scrutinized as a form of support for the Bahraini demonstrators. What is more, during the election of Morsi in Egypt, Qatar supported the Muslim Brotherhood (Roberts 2014) whose ideology was perceived by the monarchies of the Peninsula as a threat to their security and stability (Partrick 2016). Indeed, on March 5, 2014, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE withdrew their ambassadors from Doha. Observers suggested that the quarrel was not deep when Saleh bin Mohammed Al Amiri, the Emirati ambassador returned to Doha in September

2014. Moreover, the emergency in the Levant and especially in Yemen hastened a reconciliation process. Qatar joined the coalition Hope Restoration Operation led by the Saudis in April 2015. Also, the joint committees with Qatar held in May 2016 could have been interpreted as a new start in the diplomatic relations. For the UAE, the 'new' joint committee was likely to be the main tool of regional cooperation (WAM 2016). Nevertheless, the partners did not hide their differences or disputes. Sheikh Abdallah Al Nahyan, the foreign affairs minister, however, warned that the regional tensions 'can't be isolated from the overall challenges we are currently facing' (WAM, At the end of joint committee meeting, UAE and Qatar affirm commitment to continuing mutual consultation and coordination towards bilateral issues, regional and global challenges 2016).

The Gulf leaders made it clear that Qatar, despite the different warnings, has crossed a red line. Territorial, maritime and air traffic immediately stopped. A few days later, the UAE ambassador to the United States made the recriminations behind the decision clearer: Qatar has supported radical groups and ideologies (ideologies promoted by the Muslim Brotherhood), meddled in the internal affairs of its neighbours and, finally, supported media (Al Jazeera not to be officially mentioned) which attacks Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Kahn 2017). To end the crisis, the coalition released their thirteen demands. The conditions for reversing the embargo are substantial, one of which is the termination of the internationally regraded and high-profile media source, Al Jazeera.

The Qatari crisis questions the roots of Arab diplomacy in the Gulf region. The communication strategy of UAE diplomacy as well as that of its partners has shifted. Traditionally, the rulers of the region solve their internal problems behind closed doors. The GCC had been able to manage its internal affairs discreetly since its founding through annual gatherings of the rulers, meetings of the ministers of foreign affairs and private visits between high officials. The uninhibited denunciation of the Qatari state was therefore completely new. The ostracism of the Al Thani family, and by extension, its position in a highly globalised region, replaced the need for an ultimatum in the attempt to make no other option than retraction and compliance possible. Accepting the demands to end the crisis could be a formula for starting negotiations in the West but in the Arab world, it is akin to humiliation. On the other hand, considering the historical role of Islamic, Arab and Gulf identity, the UAE and its GCC partners have to find consensus in the Islamic tradition. Using the metaphor of family, Dr. Anwar Gargash, the UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, repeated amidst the crisis that Qatar remains a brother

state and cannot be treated like an outside partner. Therefore, in this framework, all parties have a moral obligation to find a compromise, otherwise, a foundational pillar of Emirati foreign policy will be undermined. Enforcing isolation while negotiating a compromise is the most likely scenario.

That said, Emirati diplomacy was already at a crossroads. The Qatari crisis can serve to increase the leverage needed to define new rules of engagement. Family relations, namely the monarchical ones, may have to be sacrificed at the altar of security, ironically the compass of the federation since the 1970s. Migrations, development, manpower and global influences on internal security have demanded inevitable diplomatic consequences, such as the growing relations with Asian states, suppliers of manpower and new targets of commerce. In addition – and this evolution was visible before June 5, 2017 – the UAE is ready for a ‘*post-globalisation*’ foreign policy. The international order under the leadership of the US has crumbled, especially after the election of Donald Trump. It might pave the way for a new regional re-organisation, different from the regional integration designed on the pattern of the European Union or even the GCC. Instead of finding its place in the globalised network, the UAE might participate in a new geopolitical block around the Indian Ocean and beyond, in Asia. The *Look East Policy* is likely to gain momentum. It remains to be seen how the UAE is going to negotiate its world-view of the *ummah* with its inclination towards Asia.

If the UAE cannot rely on major diplomatic networks such as the major powers in the world, a new framework of diplomacy may bring its status to the forefront again. It will have to address the main challenges in the region and those in the international community. The UAE has integrated its resources of nation branding in its strategies for international recognition on the political as well as economic stage. This smart power, a blend of soft and hard powers changing according to the situation (Nye 2009), may be its ticket to a new political presence.

## Conclusion

Emirati decision makers have integrated different constituents into UAE foreign policy. They assume their Arab ‘heritage’, showing a preference for policies consistent with the conception of the circles around the ‘Great Arab Nation’. They have shown an ability to adjust actions to circumstances, as Islamic justice does. At the same time, they may also incorporate the latest thinking – for instance on nation branding – to their actions when needed. This

is probably why the blend of tradition and modernity puzzles conventional actors in diplomacy.

Before the General Debate of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, 29 September 2018, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan gave a good illustration of the original model and how the federation justifies its actions with its international partners (Cooperation. 2018). The UAE called for a comprehensive approach to address the threats facing the Middle East. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation identified four key issues. First, he criticized foreign intervention in the region. It could have been an implicit criticism of Western powers but in the present case, he named Iran through the dialectic of Arab friends and Persian enemies. Second, Sheikh Abdullah pointed at radical Islam. If the fall of the organization Islamic State was in audience's head, it was very clear that the ministry also thought of the Muslim Brotherhood. In both cases, tradition justified the UAE's modus operandi. The first refers to the dynamic of the different circles around the UAE, namely Iran vs. Arab States (actually Gulf States) and perhaps the fourth circle (major Western powers) vs. Arab states; the second alludes to the role of religion within society. Since Hassan al-Banna in the 1920's, there is a line of thinking within radical Islam that justifies the elimination of 'bad rulers', which as a principle is on a collision course with the untouchability of the ruling families in Gulf monarchies. The third and fourth threats are more conventional, and more discussed, in the field of international affairs. Third, prolonged crises sustain instability. Fourth, the deterioration of social and economic conditions created unendurable humanitarian situations. These two challenges are common issues, their origins and solutions perfectly identified in international relations today. That said, it is also worth noting that the UAE is among the biggest per capita donors of humanitarian aid in the world. The federation also knows how to use international aid to increase its soft power.

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