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The UAE and the Challenge of Political Legitimacy Post-Arab Spring 2011-19

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The UAE and the Challenge of Political Legitimacy Post-Arab Spring 2011-19

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Abstract

This thesis studies the impact which the Arab protests, widely referred to as the Arab uprisings and the Arab Spring, have had on constructs of regime legitimacy in a modernising monarchy: the UAE. The waves of often violent unrest across so much of the Middle East and North Africa, which saw the overthrow of a series of republican regimes, was widely seen as a challenge to the dynastic regimes of the Arab Gulf, not least with the revival of political Islamist movements whose worldview was often the antithesis of tribally-based patrimonial rule. To date, however, the Gulf monarchies – with the brief exception of Bahrain – have escaped the upheavals that marked the violent transition of autocratic regimes elsewhere in the Middle East.

Two dominant paradigms have been used to explain why the Gulf monarchies and the UAE, in particular, have managed to weather the challenge of the Arab uprisings. First, the UAE, similar to many of its Khaleeji neighbours, is built upon resilient tribal, clan and family allegiances, the bedrock of patrimonialism, which have helped it avoid an otherwise certain crisis of legitimacy. Secondly, the ruling bargain, based on the predominance of rentier state theory (RST) in explaining monarchical legitimacy in the Gulf, fulfils the socioeconomic needs of the population in terms of employment in the state sector but who otherwise have limited political participation or involvement in the wider direction of the country.

These approaches are, however, limited in terms of their explanatory power. While RST clearly has purchase in explaining regime stability amid the pressures of nation building and the external challenges faced, such theories assume an almost static sense of identity and contract between the rulers and the ruled. In particular, the way national identity has emerged and evolved in the UAE amid the pressures of modernity in the era of social media and where young Emiratis have access to information beyond government control suggests acceptance of the ruling order is more than just being about satiating political demands with material goods or the ready acceptance of the patrimonial order.

By developing an alternative theoretical framework that draws upon constructs of legitimacy and role theory, this thesis offers a more nuanced approach to understanding the pillars of regime legitimacy and survival upon which the UAE now rests, the context in which they have developed and how they have come to define the political trajectory of post-Arab uprisings UAE.

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ADIA	Abu Dhabi Investment Authority
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
CPC	Crown Prince Court
EIA	Energy Information Agency
ENEC	Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation
EU	European Union
EXPO	Exposition Universelle
FNC	Federal National Council
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
FSC	Federal Supreme Council
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
IS	Islamic State
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MBR	Mohammed bin Rashed
MBRSC	Mohammed bin Rashed Space Centre
MBZ	Mohammed bin Zayed
MOFAIC	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NRC	National Role Conceptions
PLFOAG	People Liberation Front of Arab Gulf
RST	Rentier State Theory
SCAF	Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
SWF	Sovereign Wealth Fund
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAESA	United Arab Emirates' Space Agency
UK	United Kingdom

UN	United Nations
US	United States
WAM	Wekalat Anba'a al-Emarat

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I am grateful to everyone who agreed to be interviewed as part of this study. You have helped me to develop my research in a manner that would have been impossible without your contributions. I am indebted to my supervisors, Professor Clive Jones and Dr. May Darwich, for showing great patience and support, especially when this thesis was in its infancy.

Dedication

To my beautiful family. To those who stood by me in my darkest hour. You were by my side

at a time when the seemingly insurmountable struggle to stay positive was taking its dreadful

toll on me. I would not have made it this far without you.
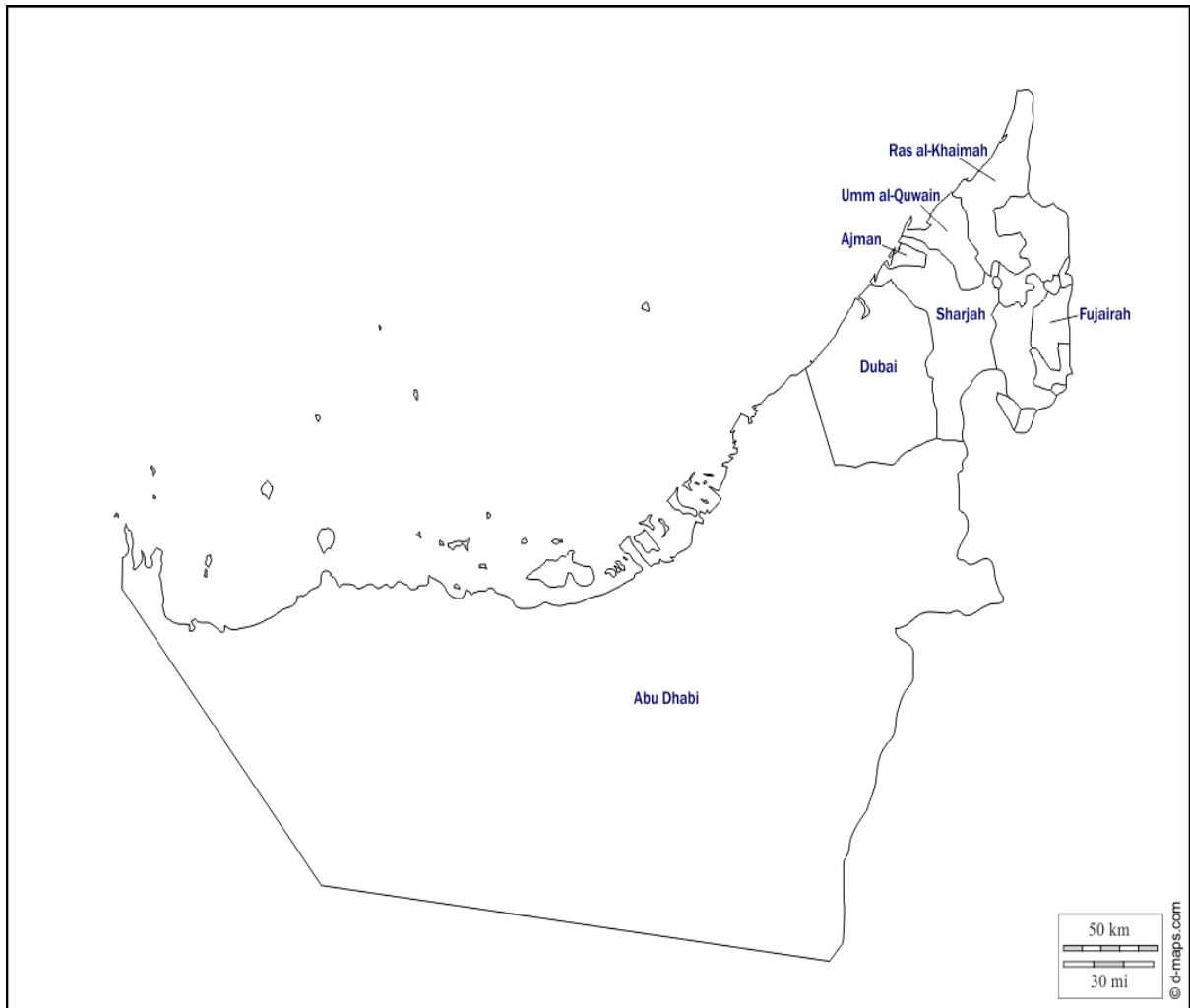
Figure 1: Map of the United Arab Emirates (Source: d-maps.com)

Chapter One: Why the UAE?

In 1971, the United Arab Emirates was established as a sovereign federation of seven Emirates, comprising the capital Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras Al Khaima, Umm al Qaiwain and Fujairah. Since its establishment, the UAE has had to confront a host of domestic and regional challenges as well as an internal struggle for power between the federal and emirate levels (Heard-Bey, 2005: p.360).

The Federal structure of the UAE, while largely influenced by similar structures in the Western hemisphere, is the epitome of a tribal integration that has flourished in a unique socio-political context.[1] The country had long been viewed as a neutral state which favoured peace and stability over confrontation. As such, the now 48-year-old UAE has managed to survive a multitude of regional crises and threats to its stability. The consensus-based leadership style promoted by its late founder, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, and the country's loose yet strong federation have proven resilient enough to cope with these challenges.

Two dominant paradigms have been used to explain why the Gulf monarchies, and the UAE in particular, have managed to weather varying internal and external security challenges over the last half a century, culminating in the challenge of the Arab uprisings. First, the UAE, similar to many of its Khaleeji neighbours, is built upon resilient tribal, clan and family allegiances, the bedrock of patrimonialism, which have helped it avoid an otherwise certain crisis of legitimacy. Secondly, the ruling bargain, based on the predominance of the rentier state theories (RST) for explaining monarchical legitimacy in the Gulf, fulfils the economic and social needs of the population through the state sector but who otherwise have limited

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[1] Author's interview with a leading local commentator. Dubai, 10 Feb 2018

political participation or involvement in the wider direction of the country. In that sense, the theory of rentierism, of which the UAE is often seen as its most developed manifestation, has proven malleable enough to accommodate a set of quick-fix packages and reforms that have largely satiated public demands for wider political change.

Overall, rentierism and patrimonialism are no longer sufficient by themselves to explain the changing nature of regime legitimacy in the UAE and its resilience. There are other emerging facets of regime legitimacy, both domestic and regional, which the rulers have begun to invoke quite extensively. For example, the UAE rulers are beginning to use its evolving foreign and security policies as legitimising agents. Indeed, a sizeable number of the Emirati participants who took part in this study seemed convinced that the UAE represented a force for good at the regional and international levels.

This is all underpinned by the rise of a newfound notion of Emirati identity, channelled from the top down. These two examples indicate that regime legitimacy can evolve rapidly in an autocratic setting and that it is not static. Overall, the thesis attempts to offer a more nuanced approach to understanding these emerging pillars of regime legitimacy and survival, the context in which they have emerged and how they have come to define the political trajectory of the UAE after the Arab uprisings.

Justifying the UAE as a case study

A wide literature examines monarchical survival in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and beyond, including Jordan and Morocco. However, there is a dearth of literature on the impact of the Arab uprisings on monarchical legitimacy in the UAE, suggesting that the topic has not received much attention in scholarly circles; while the 'post-Arab Spring' literature emphasises

the resilience of monarchies as a regime type vis-à-vis their republican counterparts, there has been no thorough examination to date of the impact of the Arab revolts on political stability and legitimacy in the UAE. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is twofold: firstly, to assess the impact of the Arab protests on regime legitimacy in a modernising monarchical state; and, secondly, to address the knowledge gaps caused by the paucity of research on monarchical survival in the UAE after the uprisings.

Following the death of its founder, the UAE embarked on a new era, defined by a paradigmatic shift in its behaviour on the international scene. The thesis sheds light on the transformation of the UAE from a quietist state, which relied almost entirely upon an overseas security guarantor, to an assertive regional power. In doing so, the aim is to showcase the impact of this transformation on regime legitimacy within the UAE.

The country's recent unilateral action in Libya, in addition to its ongoing military campaign in Yemen, suggest that the UAE is now prepared to act unilaterally to protect its regional interests (Gause, 2015; Kamrava, 2015; Ulrichsen, 2014; Young, 2015). As far as this thesis is concerned, a key issue to consider is the context in which this paradigmatic shift in state behaviour took place. Despite Arab Gulf monarchies having managed to remain intact during the Arab uprisings, the prospect of a protest spill-over caused much concern in the GCC. As such, the impact of the Arab protests on regime stability and legitimacy in the UAE merits close examination. To be more specific, by shedding light on the new pillars of legitimacy whilst being mindful of the context in which they emerged, this thesis opens up new avenues for future research on the topic of political legitimacy in the post-Arab uprisings GCC.

This thesis also seeks to provide a context for the UAE's ideational and ideological interventions in the post-Arab uprisings era. The chapter on state-led reform is used for that

purpose. As the UAE happens to be a small state, one question that is explored is whether the UAE can safeguard its territorial integrity and exert influence internationally. There are severe limitations for a country that is geographically and demographically small.

What is worth exploring in the case of the UAE is the cultural iconography of registering the brand of the country as a progressive element in the region and how this is being used for regime legitimacy. The UAE has shown its willingness to embrace progressive ideals to reinforce its regional prestige and, more importantly, to embed its interests with that of its Western allies. Concurrently, the thesis will set out to test the hypothesis of whether the UAE is moving away from rentierism as the key pillar of regime stability. Rentier state theory postulates that the Gulf states rely on their abundant financial resources to shore up their legitimacy and deal with their domestic and regional challenges.

The purpose of this section is to provide a thematic review of the literature on legitimacy in non-democratic states in general and the Arab Gulf states specifically. In doing so, the author aims to shed light on the topics explored over the next few chapters, which form the main pillars of the conceptual framework outlined at the end of this chapter.

Weber's Concept of Legitimacy

The term legitimacy has been used in two different, albeit related, ways. The first refers to a set of political norms and values which work together to maintain a political system (Razi, 1990). These norms form an integral part of what Dekmejian (1985) describes as 'the moral basis of authority'. This political culture and legitimacy style are acquired mainly through the mechanisms of socialisation (Wildavsky, 1987; Binder, 1962). The study of legitimacy covers areas such as the purposes of the government, the rights and obligations of the ruler and the ruled and the methods of selection, change and accountability of the ruling class (Razi, 1990).

The second meaning of the term, 'refers to the extent to which the relevant portion of the population perceives that the regime is behaving' in conformity with or against societal norms'. (Razi, 1987, pp. 461-62). In the case of charismatic legitimacy, 'a leader's charisma is in the minds of the followers' (Rustow, 1970, p. 16). In order to gauge a regime's legitimacy, Eckstein and Gurr argue that it is imperative to study the people's 'positive or negative judgment of what is perceived' about the behaviour of the regime (1993, p. 197). Thus, Razi (1990) states that when a population is by and large content with the government's decisions in the areas of identity, political participation, distribution of wealth, equality and sovereignty, according to the societal norms, there is no crisis of legitimacy.

Since the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, conceptions of 'authority' and 'political legitimacy'

in the Arab world have been revisited and re-articulated. In the case of the UAE and the other Gulf monarchies, the ultimate question revolves around the new form, veracity and sustainability of these changing constructs of legitimacy.

Weber states that the achieving of legitimacy requires considerable effort on behalf of governments:

> But according to the kind of legitimacy which is claimed, the type of obedience, the kind of administrative staff developed to guarantee it, and the mode of exercising authority, will all differ fundamentally. Equally fundamental is the variation in effect (Weber, 1947, p. 325).

For the purpose of situating the study of legitimacy in a broader context, Weber classifies the types of authority according to the kind of claim to legitimacy typically made by each ruler. For him, the validity of a ruler's claim to legitimacy rests on the following pillars (p. 328): 1. Rational/legal authority: rational (or legal) authority can be interpreted as the legality of patterns of normative rules and the right of rulers who abide by said rules to exercise their authority; 2. Traditional authority: rooted in the belief in the importance of traditions. In many polities, rulers who defy long-standing traditions risk losing their legitimacy, 3. Charismatic authority: charismatic authority is understood as the sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of the ruler, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him.

Rational/legal legitimacy is the modern Western form of authority, in which citizens obey the legally established system, instead of just exhibiting devotion to a ruler. Authority in such a system is bureaucratic in nature. The uniqueness of this system is underscored by the separation of private status from public status. Thus, the ruler is an official who has an obligation to abide by the law. Beyond his delineated sphere of authority, he is treated like any other citizen, with no more authority than those over whom he rules (Spencer, 1970). Similarly, his personal property is separate from that of the office; indeed, the position or office is regarded as a

combination of rights and duties which exist apart from the individual exercising them (Smith, 1970). For a person to become part of the bureaucracy, he or she needs to be qualified and experienced. But, in principle, any qualified citizen can be accepted into the bureaucracy. Weber (1947) argues that the bureaucracy is more rational than any other type of organisation: it requires precision, stability, discipline and reliability. Some of the consequences of rational-legal authority are a tendency towards equal opportunity, increased impersonalism and a promotion of education. Bureaucratic administrations also tend, in Weber's view, to promote large-scale industry, transportation, mass communication and a money economy.

Traditional authority stipulates that subjects obey the chief or patriarchal leader who happens to be the traditionally sanctioned ruler of their territory. The traditional polity is different to the legal/rational system, where order is impersonal. In the traditional system, subjects display personal loyalty within the range of traditions. In terms of policy, the decisions of the traditional ruler are deemed legitimate in accordance with tradition or the ruler's free will (Weber, 1947). This latter notion of traditional legitimacy rests upon personal loyalty possessing an unspecified character (Smith, 1970).

The administrative staff in such a system are the antithesis of the bureaucratic workforce. There are not many officials/ They are in most cases members of the ruling group or tribe or members of loyal tribes. There is no pre-defined separation between the public and private capacity of the person in power as there are no delineated powers. The staff do not undergo any technical training as education is not a prerequisite to becoming a part of the ruler's administration. Remuneration is not in monetary form, as is the case in a bureaucracy, but by the distribution of wealth and benefits amongst the high echelons of the ruler's staff. Often the costs of administration are met by means which are not distinguishable from personal property (Spencer, 1970; Weber, 1947). But, overall, traditional authority discourages education and

training. Various aspects of traditional authority, though, combine to slow down development: the arbitrary nature of the leader, over-regulation of economic activity and modes of financing administration (Smith, 1970).

Lastly, charismatic authority exists when a ruler's claim to have superhuman powers is acknowledged by society as a valid basis for their participation in a programme of action which seeks to guarantee ' the success of extraordinary ventures' (Gerth and Mills, 1970, p. 251). As such, the leader's charismatic authority exists outside the realm of everyday life for it stands in stark contrast both to rational/legal and traditional authority: 'both are forms of everyday routine control . . . while charismatic authority repudiates the past, and is ... a specifically revolutionary force'. Accordingly, 'every [charismatic] leader . . . preaches, creates, or demands new obligations' while at the same time repudiating 'any sort of [systematic] involvement in the everyday routine world' (Weber, 1947, pp. 361-362). Charismatic authority assumes a highly unstructured form since it resides not with society but with the ruler. The ruler stands out from ordinary people due to him possessing exceptional, if not supernatural, qualities. A ruler's charisma is dependent on its recognition by the people; meanwhile, those who deny the ruler's gifts are treated as delinquent in moral duty (Dow, 1969). The charismatic ruler is a revolutionary, setting his own legitimacy against institutionalised legitimacy. He uses carefully structured rhetoric to demand the people put their faith in him and his message (Weber, 1947). The administrative staff in such a system is chosen based on their charismatic qualities; they are not officials, but mere disciples of the charismatic leader: 'There is no such thing as "appointment" or "dismissal" in such a system, no career and no promotion, either. There is only a call at the whim of the ruler on the basis of the charismatic qualities of those he summons.' There is no hierarchy to be respected – the leader may arbitrarily intervene at any moment. Rulers are not formal, but rather there is the pattern of 'It is written, but I say unto

you' (Smith, 1970: p.19).

There is no delineated sphere of authority, no salary or benefits. The disciples tend to live in a communistic relationship with their leader. They ignore the economic order, living from gifts or booty (Dow, 1969). (Why a paragraph of just three lines?) Is this a quote?

Charismatic authority remains high unstable; it exists only as a founding, revolutionary project. It is typical of religious movements or of political movements in their early periods. As soon as the ruler gains control over the masses, charisma begins to surrender to the forces of everyday routine, such as the legal/rational and traditional rule (Dow, 1969). For Weber, charismatic authority is bound to become institutionalised because it will no longer be able to cope with the problem of succession and the demands of the administrative workforce for a more regular mode of payment and rights (Smith, 1970; Weber, 1947). Depending on how these two challenges are addressed, charismatic authority can be transformed into traditional or rational authority, or a combination of both. In other words, if the new leader is selected because he might possess supernatural qualities, his legitimacy depends on the method of selection, which incorporates an aspect of legalisation. If the leader is selected on the basis that he or she represents a continuation of tradition, then there is a bias in favour of traditional authority. Similar examples apply to the administrative workforce. But for the most part, a combination of the two types of authority is likely to supersede charismatic authority (Smith, 1970).

Political legitimacy in non-democratic states

Schlumberger (2010) argues that legitimacy is difficult to define and operationalise; it is a complex concept that includes many elements and that even Weber himself could not develop a way to measure its indicators and their interactions. Schlumberger suggests four core

dimensions to studying legitimacy in non-democratic states. These four dimensions can be utilised as tools for the purpose of guiding academic research on legitimacy and legitimation: (1) The 'Who' or Addressees of Legitimacy Claims ; (2) The Success or: Measurement of Legitimacy; (3) The 'What', or: Sources of Legitimacy; and (4) The 'How': or Modes of Legitimation.

While the contents of legitimacy claims have featured prominently in studies on the topic, another relevant issue that needs to be tackled concerns the modes of legitimisation: how do regimes go about conveying the contents of their legitimacy in their strategies of legitimation? This question is different from asking what contents are being conveyed (Schlumberger, 2010). Possible answers to this question include the use of political mobilisation in order to achieve visible demonstrations of popular support. Political mobilisation can also create diffuse support via the creation of new or the revival of old commonalties of a nation. As such, an analytical distinction should be drawn between the type of legitimacy (the content of legitimation strategies) and the mode through which it is conveyed by the rulers (Pruzan-Jørgensen, 2010).

Possible answers to the question above include political mobilisation to achieve consent, symbolic politics and identity politics (Schlumberger, 2010; Wedeen, 2008). While this thesis focuses to a degree on the legitimacy contents that are being conveyed by the UAE rulers in their legitimation strategies, it prioritises looking at the modes used to convey the content of their legitimacy in the post-Arab uprisings context.

Studies on legitimacy focus on national rulers and their legitimacy vis-à-vis their population. Yet, legitimacy strategies can also target different social groups, actors or segments of society. Furthermore, it is worth noting that legitimacy has gained an international dimension in recent times. Schlumberger argues that governments need to take this into account or else they may face the risk of losing their grip on power as it is dangerous to neglect this dimension in today's

internationalised world (2010, p. 240).

Holbig (2011) argues that Western legitimacy theories have centred on the nation-state and the domestic aspect of political legitimacy. However, in a globalised world, a new dimension of political legitimacy has emerged, that is, the international dimension. This emerging dimension of legitimacy allows states to leverage their global standing to garner domestic and international legitimacy. Indeed, Hoffman (2011, p. 3) points out that autocracies and democracies seek international legitimacy. However, he states that international legitimacy predates globalisation as it is a classic facet of regime legitimacy that has its roots in anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic struggles.

Apart from the national and the international spheres, there is the arena of regional politics. When studying the Middle East, this is particularly evident: various non-state or quasi-state actors came into being recently and continue to enjoy popular support and legitimacy, which, in turn, has had a profoundly negative impact on the legitimacy of incumbent governments (Schlumberger, 2010). An example of this is the role played by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a provider of social welfare at a time when the Egyptian state was unable to do so (Milton-Edwards, 2015).

Different sources of legitimacy have been employed by governments and used to varying degrees. First, religion has been utilised to underpin regimes, given its ability to cultivate popular belief in the piety of the incumbent ruler. Throughout history, examples of rulers abound who have sought to convince their subjects that they are ruling on behalf of God as descendants of saints or prophets, or at least as protectors of a religious-political system (Razi, 1990).

Second, ideology has proved an effective tool of legitimacy. In this sense, religion and ideology share several features that combine to cultivate popular support for the legitimacy of a political

order. Both share strong chiliastic characteristics regarding the afterlife and the idea of a perfect society, which can serve to legitimise an ideology and act as a tool to suppress or even pre-empt dissatisfaction with one's situation. This inherently acquiescing element of religions was criticised by Karl Marx as the 'opium of the people' (Schlumberger, 2010).

Nationalism has been an effective tool in garnering legitimacy as well(Schlumberger, 2010). Indeed, it has a strong primordial appeal to a given country's population as long as it is lays out who belongs to the community and who does not (Connor, 1991). Nationalism can be quite aggressive in terms of its rhetoric when nations are striving to be recognised on a global level.

Third, Gilley has identified 'welfare gains' as a means of legitimising a political order. However, welfare is not a legitimising force on its own, as welfare does not guarantee long-term legitimacy. Rather, it is the ability of the ruler to create at least perceived positive changes in welfare which may bolster their legitimacy. But overall, welfare gains or development do not capture the entire dimension of legitimacy with regard to material well-being (Schlumberger, 2010).

In a post-Arab uprisings context, monarchical stability is best explained not by singling out monarchy as the ideal regime type but rather by examining the resources available to monarchs to legitimise their rule (Gause, 2013; Lucas, 2014; Barari, 2015). Authors often argue that monarchs enjoy a unique set of cultural and institutional tools which help ascertain their right to rule (Levins, 2013; Davidson, 2012; Lynch, 2012; Foley, 2010). An example of this is found in the UAE; where leaders such as Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed (MBR) play an influential role culturally and institutionally. Since becoming prime minister and ruler of Dubai in 2006, MBR oversaw a long series of reforms both at the federal and the emirate level.

Monarchical regimes versus republican regimes

The Arab revolts saw the ousting of autocrats in states with republican leanings, while dynastic regimes (the GCC members, Jordan and Morocco) suffered little in comparison (Owen, 2012). Snyder (2015) contends that the survival of monarchs in this context is quite paradoxical because, historically speaking, monarchical systems have tended to be vulnerable to political upheavals. For Huntington (1969), however, monarchs who choose to modernise rapidly are hastening their demise. Huntington discussed a key problem monarchs face: how to liberalise without losing their rule. For him, the monarch could either 'attempt to reduce or end the role of the monarchical authority' and move towards a constitutional monarchy, or the monarchy could endure as the 'the principal source of authority in the political system and efforts made to minimise the disruptive effects upon it of the broadening of political consciousness (Huntington, 1969, p. 177). In a similar vein, Davidson uses Huntington's king's dilemma concept to look at modernisation efforts in the UAE, which will lead to what he calls the 'Sheikh's dilemma'. Similarly to Huntington, he states that this scenario cannot be mitigated as society continues to develop (Davidson, 2005, p. 74).

With the exception of Bahrain, the Gulf monarchies proved largely immune to the Arab uprising because they had long placed themselves at odds with their republican counterparts. They were also able to rely on their vast financial wealth to further bolster their welfare states. From an ideological standpoint, Snyder (2015) argues that it was the republican states' embrace of revolutionary ideals that made them quite vulnerable to the Arab uprisings. These states established exclusive polities that became brittle and unable to reform. Owen (2012) identifies five weaknesses and contradictions of republican regimes that contributed to their abrupt demise. Chief among these was their failure to provide jobs and goods and services for their growing populations amid their descent into crony capitalism.

Owen (2012) further states that the Arab republics failed to incorporate the vast majority of

their youth into their systems of ideology and politics, especially with the governments of these states being estranged from the needs of their young citizens. But most important of all was that the ruling class in countries such as Egypt, Libya and Syria intended to maintain this state of affairs indefinitely. This failure by some Arab republics has to do with their deterioration into dynastic regimes that favours the interest of the ruling elite and their close allies that of the wider population. This has contributed to the growth of poverty in these countries, which was one of the primary causes of the Arab uprisings protests. If the UAE is taken as an example, one can see that the Al-Nahyan dynasty has been enjoying popular support and legitimacy since the 18th century (Maitra and Al-Hajji, 2001).In the context of monarchical regimes, Gause (2013) draws an important distinction between what he calls individual monarchies and dynastic monarchies. While he classifies the kings of Jordan and Morocco as individual monarchs, he describes the Gulf monarchies as dynastic. In individual monarchical systems, a king can initiate top-down democratic concessions to control the pressure emanating from civil society groups and the wider population. However, that is not the case in dynastic monarchies. It is argued that in such systems, any democratic concessions made to the opposition or to the citizens would undermine the influence of the monarch's extended ruling family, which could create schisms within the ruling family itself. For example, in Bahrain, it would be difficult for the King to dismiss the Prime Minister, because he happens to be the King's uncle (Barari, 2015). In the case of the GCC states, civil society continues to be underdeveloped and beholden to the state, which hinders the possibility of bottom-up reform.

Having defined themselves in ideological opposition to pan-Arabism, Middle Eastern monarchies are always fearful of transnational revolutionary networks according to Synder (2015). Efforts to curb the spread of revolutionary movements formed an integral part of what was known as the 'Arab Cold War' during the 1950s and 1960s (Brownlee et al., 2015; Kerr,

1971). Whether it was pan-Arabism or political Islam, monarchs feared transnational movements that challenged the very essence of their rule.

Governments in Arab republics claimed to preserve 'popular sovereignty' and the interests of the nation, but this happened at the cost of development. Although pan-Arabism suffered a major blow after the Arab defeat by Israel in 1967, Arab republics refused to open up politically and become more inclusive. As a result, state socialism evolved into cronyism and corruption (Barari, 2015).

Authoritarian politics are shaped by two factors, a conflict between the ruler and the ruled (control) and a conflict between the ruler and those with whom the ruler shares political power (Svolik, 2012). Rulers in Arab republics have sought to solve the first issue by relying on the autocratic rule of their hegemonic parties to sustain the status quo. Whether it is by relying on a single-party system, as was the case in Saddam's Iraq, or a multi-state system, as was the case in pre-Arab uprisings Egypt and Algeria, the goal has been to sustain the status quo (Sassoon, 2016).

In Arab republics, the mass-mobilising parties emerged from the impact that imperial powers had had on the traditional elites' sociopolitical standing (Angrist, 2006). The patron-client relationship that developed between the ruler and the ruled in the post-colonial period empowered the state to control the educational, legal and religious spheres of society.

However, for Owen (2008, p. 27), these measures proved insufficient as far as the elites' desire for control was concerned. Society could not be transformed by bureaucratic means so people had to be mobilised in order to defeat the opposition before it could create a legitimacy crisis for those in power. Ruling parties thus singlehandedly controlled the political process in that they provided a political platform for mediating elite disputes and preventing the rulers' inner circles from defecting to the opposition (Brownlee, 2007).

Rulers in Arab republics have long relied on their cults of personality to garner legitimacy among their populations. The cult of personality in republican regimes was omnipresent, especially in the case of Saddam's Iraq, where enormous statues of the leader were erected to exalt his self-proclaimed hero status (Wedeen, 2008). The main purpose of the cult was to create an emotional, historical, religious and cultural bond between the ruler and the ruled. Religion was used extensively to further cement the bond and to create a commitment based on fear (Sassoon, 2016). Another purpose of the cult was to convince the population to support the leader's policies. Thus, these cults offer 'validations, legitimations, and authoritative precedents for beliefs, attitudes and practises' (Flood, 2002, pp. 121-137).

Monarchies

The Arab uprisings witnessed the deterioration of the social contract between the ruler and the ruled in many Arab countries and the subsequent downfall of governments (Kamrava, 2015). The ruling contract between the UAE rulers and the ruled remained intact and was further strengthened by a series of reforms that aimed to redefine the domestic legitimacy formula and what it means to be an Emirati citizen.[2]

Davidson (2012) identifies a number of existential challenges facing the governments in the Gulf, including that of the UAE. Davidson makes the transition from explaining regime survival strategies to predicting the demise of the Gulf monarchies (p. 191). In his analysis of the UAE, Davidson sheds light on problems such as the lack of freedom of expression, corruption, the lack of accountability, human rights abuses, and the unequal distribution of wealth, all of which, he contends, might bring about the end of the Emirati monarchy in its

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[2] Author's interview with a senior Emirati expert. Abu Dhabi, 28 Feb. 2018.

current form.

Predictions of regime downfall in the Gulf are not new. Since the mid-twentieth century, many have argued that the era of absolute monarchies was over (Hudson, 1977). What is interesting, though, is that such arguments are usually made after a regional upheaval (Gause, 2011). For Gause (2013), the scholarly reluctance to admit that these monarchies enjoy unique resources – be they religious or material – is due to many scholars tending to view the situation through a particular ideological lens.

Halliday's work, *Arabia Without Sultans,* falls into this trap despite its best efforts to relate global and regional themes of the 1970s to an analysis of the Arab Gulf states and Iran. Halliday sought to demystify the exotic image Western audiences had of sheikhs, deserts and holy places, claiming that this had long beset analyses on regional society and politics.

While this claim seems plausible at first glance, Halliday's assertion that the societies of the Gulf were ruled not by Sheikhs but by 'the thief of oil rents,' leaves many questions unanswered regarding the role of the state and ruler legitimacy. Crucially, his application of a class-based analysis in a region where class consciousness is absent downplays the importance of the primordial loyalties that supported the regimes of the Gulf.

This thesis does not make any predictions of monarchical demise. Rather, it seeks to make an original contribution to the existing body of knowledge by studying the impact of the Arab protests on the behaviour of the state and its rulers. The analysis draws the reader's attention to the emergence of new forms of legitimacy and the role they play in the survival of the UAE in a post-Arab uprisings context. The thesis sheds light on the four key areas of political stability and legitimacy in the UAE.

As stated previously, states need to maintain their legitimacy in order to survive (Weber, 1947;

Murphy, 1998). In the context of non-democratic states, repression, institutional co-optation and strategies of legitimation play an important role in ensuring regime survival, especially at the height of a regional upheaval (Gray, 2011). Strategies of legitimation are commonly known in the literature as 'survival strategies', a term first coined by Brumberg (1995). Survival strategies often consist of carefully thought out economic and political strategies that are designed to keep the ruling class firmly in place. While adopting these strategies, leaders in non-democratic states aim to strike a balance between dealing with crises of legitimacy and protecting their positions (Haimerl, 2013).

In the Middle East, the legitimacy of most polities rests on four key pillars: traditional, material, ideological and religious (Schlumberger, 2010). But it is clear that in examining regime legitimacy in the Arab Gulf states, an emphasis has been clearly placed on the material aspect of legitimacy (Mahdavy, 1970; Beblawi, 1987). In particular, much of the literature focuses on the utility of rentier state theory in explaining the stability and legitimacy of the Gulf monarchies.

The argument of rentier state theory is that since the state receives external rent in the form of oil revenue and distributes it to the population in the form of job opportunities and welfare benefits, it need not extract income from its citizens through taxation. This also relieves the government of having to make democratic concessions to its population (Beblawi, 1987). There is ample literature that attributes monarchical survival to the economic advantage of commanding vast oil reserves. Indeed, many authors are in agreement with regard to the monarch's ability to 'buy off' their citizens in return for political acquiescence (Davidson, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2012; Freer, 2015; Jones, 2015; Jones, 2017a; Jones, 2017b). Beblawi (1987) contends that in reversing the call for 'no taxation without representation', Gulf monarchs have relied upon their vast oil wealth to provide their citizens with generous handouts

to keep them content and apathetic when it comes to politics.

Rentier state theory seeks to explain state-society relations by shedding light on the political economy of oil-rich states to explain the lack of democratic representation, the development challenges faced by these states, and the nature of the ruling elite and their interactions with society (Gray, 2011, p. 1). Classic rentier state theory was first used to make sense of politics in Shah's Iran and Iraq between the 1960s and the 1980s (Mahdavy, 1970). Classic rentierism posits the idea that the state is autonomous from society in that it can act freely without any consequences. The classic rentier state is characterised by corruption and wastefulness, which usually goes unpunished due to its ability to buy off its citizens. The second phase of rentier theory was more nuanced than its predecessor and resulted in two strands of the theory, specialised rentierism and conditional rentierism. Specialised rentierism makes the same assumptions regarding the state's allocative nature but rejects the idea of complete state autonomy, arguing that the state is only partially autonomous. The state applies some form of taxation and is not as wasteful with its wealth as proponents of classic rentierism argue (Crystal, 1990; Chaudhry, 1997; Davidson, 2008, 2009). Conditional rentierism combines classic rentierism with other political economy theories, international relations theories and history (Herb, 1999 in Gray, 2011).

Finally, late rentierism in the Arab Gulf states sought to build on classic rentierism by drawing attention to the development of these states. Late rentierism developed as a result of state maturity, experience with the 'oil curse' and globalisation (Gray, 2011). Gray identifies and explains the seven characteristics of the late rentier states, which are: responsive but undemocratic; embraces globalisation but with some protectionism; has an active economic and development policy; is energy-driven as opposed to energy-centric; has an entrepreneurial state capitalist structure; displays long-term thinking; and has an active and innovative foreign

policy.

He concludes that there is plenty to discuss in relation to the GCC states beyond oil and rentierism. Social change and reform, technology, globalisation and a host of other factors are impacting these states in a multitude of ways. Gray further states that rentier state theory can provide an understanding of the political realities of GCC monarchies, their durability, their behaviour and the nature of their relationship with society.

While late rentier theory contributes much in terms of critiquing and building on classic rentier theory, it still overstates the role of rent as a be-all-and-end-all method of understanding state-society relations in the Gulf. It also bizarrely downplays non-rentier aspects of regime legitimacy, which in the case of the UAE are rooted in its history and culture (Gray, 2011). Also, while his characteristics of the late rentier state apply to the UAE, Gray misses the opportunity to explore those characteristics at length. His argument that rentierism remains the most credible theory for explaining the political dynamics of the GCC and that of the UAE falls short of capturing other non-rent aspects of legitimacy, which the GCC monarchies have long sought to cultivate. This thesis seeks to fill this gap by providing a fresh take on the emerging legitimacy formula in a modernising monarchy following a watershed event. As the thesis hypothesises, the state is attempting to do away with the rentier formula by encouraging its citizens to be more entrepreneurial and less reliant on state largesse. In the case of the UAE, this culture is being instilled through the national service, youth forums and other state-sponsored campaigns.

As a sense of national consciousness is being developed in a top-down manner as a result of the UAE's involvement in the war in Yemen, it has been argued that young Emiratis are

becoming increasingly cognisant that they are indebted to the country and its leaders.[3] Indeed, the official rhetoric has shifted more towards a confrontational tone given the situation in the region and the perceived threats of the Muslim Brotherhood, terrorism and the Houthis, whom the UAE are fighting in Yemen. Diwan (2016) situates the UAE's nationalism in the context of a 'new nationalism' in Gulf Arab countries, which seeks in part to galvanise young Emiratis to do more for the state.

Following the 'Arab Spring' protests, it has been argued that governments in the GCC promised increased pay-outs for their citizens in an effort to prevent a protest spillover effect (Snyder, 2015). Proponents of the concept of the 'national contract' (Kamrava: 2012; Kamrava, 2014) have made this point. How far this social contract meets popular consent is difficult to gauge, which explains why this approach has been criticised (Gray, 2011). Haimerl (2013) argues that the economic health of the state is a central pillar of regime legitimacy as it forms the basis for the functioning of the ruling bargain and defines state-society relations. She then contends that if the economic part of the ruling bargain is compromised, the state will begin to lose its legitimacy. But, as mentioned previously, there are several issues that arise from overstating the importance of oil rents in the context of political legitimacy in the UAE.

One of the main goals of this thesis is to complement existing constructs of political legitimacy that go beyond the rentier state argument. This is not to say that a government's ability to redistribute wealth to its citizens is not an integral part of the legitimacy formula. The aim of this thesis is to critically examine the belief that a state's legitimacy hinges entirely upon its ability to 'buy off' citizens. The tendency to treat citizens as voiceless, passive subjects whose consent can simply be bought off does not bode well for any type of research on the UAE and

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[3] Author's interview with a leading Emirati commentator. Dubai, 10 Feb. 2018.

the Gulf as a whole. If anything, this practice exposes the deep roots of orientalism as it promotes racial stereotypes which deny a voice to alternative perspectives (Said, 1978). The remainder of this literature review focuses on reviewing the literature on the new pillars of political legitimacy in a post-Arab uprising UAE. As mentioned, the desire to redefine what it means to be an Emirati underpins the state's attempt to move away from traditional sources of legitimacy (rentierism, tribalism and Islam).

Overall, several Western scholars contend that the UAE will have to accept and accommodate dissenting voices in a post-Arab uprisings context. Dissent is likely to manifest itself as a direct response to the systemic policy changes that the Emirati government has elected to implement in the aftermath of the 'Arab Spring' (Davidson, 2015). A few scholars contend that the government faces new threats to its legitimacy as it moves towards implementing better financial accountability and wealth preservation strategies for future generations, and kickstarting economic activity in the less affluent five emirates (Forstenlechner, Rutledge and Alnuaimi, 2012; Davidson, 2012; Davidson, 2015; Ulrichsen, 2016b).

But if rentierism has been part of the ruling bargain, this tells us little about how external relations have come to inform our understanding of regime legitimacy in the UAE. This is important as Emirati foreign policy has increasingly come to represent a new image of the UAE, onto which allegiance to and the legitimacy of the state are now projected.

UAE foreign policy

In his overview of the UAE's foreign policy, Hellyer (2001) identifies continuity as one of its key features. He argues that, since its inception, the country has devoted much effort towards playing an active role in resolving conflicts whilst taking a firm stance against impulsive behaviour. Hellyer highlights the influential role Sheikh Zayed played in the formation of the

country's foreign policy and how it has gone about its business in an unstable region. Consistency has been the theme of the UAE's foreign policy until the passing of Sheikh Zayed in November 2004. Throughout Zayed's reign, the small and vulnerable country demonstrated an ability to survive in an inhospitable international and regional environment in the Middle East (Al-Mashat, 2008).

This was a difficult feat considering the scale and seriousness of the conflicts that took place in the region. The Cold War, the Iranian revolution and the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, the two Gulf wars, 9/11 and the ongoing regional instability caused by the Syrian civil war and the rise of the so-called Islamic State. Overall, the UAE's emergence as an influential regional player is due to two main factors; (1) Sheikh Zayed's style of leadership favoured the peaceful settlement of disputes and open dialogue; (2) the federal structure of the UAE, which resulted in a carefully crafted and constructive foreign policy. What is unique about the UAE in general is that its federal structure created an environment where each individual emirate was allowed to pursue its own foreign policy on some issues and limited the creation of a substantive foreign policy. In other words, the UAE is a state with not only one but multiple foreign policies, due to the different foreign policies of the individual emirates. This had been the case before the country was founded in 1971, but nowadays there is a hierarchy of power, with Abu Dhabi and Dubai at its apex. The foreign policy of the UAE reflects its domestic, regional and international realities. In the early years following the UAE's establishment, its behaviour towards other states was consistent with the characteristics of small states, as discussed by scholars of international relations (Al-Mezaini, 2012).

Meanwhile, Rugh (1997) argues that the foreign policy of the UAE shares many similarities with geographically small states in that it has one fundamental goal, which is to improve diplomatic relations with foreign governments, individuals and organisations to safeguard the

prosperity, stability, power and independence of the federation and its citizens. Following Britain's departure from the region in 1971, Washington's influence began to grow and it is no surprise that the United States has assumed an influential role in the UAE's recent political and foreign policy decisions. Al Mezaini (2012) argues that recent political reforms have been pushed by external powers, rather than by the UAE's own people.

Overall, the UAE was traditionally restrained by its small and limited military capabilities. As such, it lacks the capacity bigger states enjoy when it comes to defining and charting its own foreign policy. In the new millennium, however, the UAE changed its foreign policy orientations. One of the key ways the UAE has developed its foreign policy is through using its wealth to invest globally, especially after the 2008 financial crisis.

Al-Alkim (1989) believes that the UAE's foreign policy contains a paradox, given its federal nature and the discrepancy that exists between what it claims to stand for and its actual foreign policy dealings and alliances. Due to the federal nature of the country, it is difficult to conceptualise its foreign policy behaviour. Baabood (2005) explains that the GCC's multidimensional nature created six sets of national interests that sometimes converge but, more than often, diverge. As such, having a confederation of seven emirates in the UAE creates a new host of conceptual issues, which make studying and explaining the foreign policy behaviour of the UAE challenging. Despite these conceptual hurdles, one can infer that the UAE has evolved quite rapidly over the past five decades, which is reflected in its relations with its allies and other states.

From its establishment in 1971 until 2004, the UAE was ruled by Sheikh Zayed and foreign policy decisions were under his control. In an absolute monarchy, the leader's personality is important to understanding the country's behaviour. Still, Sheikh Zayed's behaviour, similar to that of his regional counterparts, was shaped by certain cultural factors, namely Islam and

pan-Arabism (Nonneman 2005).

The influence of Islam and pan-Arabism in the formulation of foreign policy has varied at different periods owing to changing regional and international dynamics. The UAE was established while the sentiments of Arabism were still strong at the regional level, which is why there was a clear need to emphasise the Arab-ness of this newly formed country. However, following the demise of pan-Arabism in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war – which also left a vacuum that was filled by Islamists eventually – the foreign policy of many Arab nations underwent significant change (Korany, 2008; Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 2002; Al-Alkim, 2012). The country's founder, Sheikh Zayed, demonstrated an awareness of the importance of Arabism and Islamism to his country's regional prestige and legitimacy and, as such, structured the UAE's foreign policy to champion those causes. In a speech given on the first anniversary of the union in 1972, Zayed stated that the UAE was aspiring to build good relations and cooperation with its neighbours, was resolved to settling any disputes that might surface in the future using cordial, peaceful means; was abiding by the Emirates' commitment to the Arab people; was showing solidarity with the Muslim Ummah through cooperation with Muslim states in all aspects; and was maintaining good ties with all nations in all fields to ensure the establishment of security, peace and progress in the world (Abed and Hellyer, 2001). However, Sheikh Zayed came to discover that pursuing an idealist foreign policy would not suffice on its own.

According to Gause (1999), Zayed's vision of foreign policy rested upon three basic premises: maintaining a healthy balance of power in the Gulf so that no one state can dominate the region; showing a willingness for conciliation with neighbours for the purpose of maintaining regional stability; and having a desire to increase cooperation with oil-producing nations, be it regionally or internationally. Hence, despite the volatile nature of both the region and the Gulf,

the UAE's foreign policy charted a very constructive path, which led to the country cementing its place as an important regional and strategic hub in spite of its size and limited military capabilities. The utilisation of two significant tools, which has maintained the status quo, alliance building and foreign aid, facilitated the achievement of this goal (Al Mezaini, 2012).

Here, the thesis draws upon role theory to help critique the development of Emirati foreign policy as a key pillar in post-Arab uprisings regime legitimacy. As an analytical tool, role theory provides scholars with a wide array of typologies that can be used to categorise and make sense of different foreign policy behaviours (Krotz, 2002). Holsti (1970) introduced these typologies, which consist of 17 major national roles that have been adopted by scholars such as Walker (1979) and Chafetz et al. (1996). Other scholars such as Adigbuo (2007), Jönsson (1984), Harnisch and Maull (2001) and Elgström and Smith (2006) built on Holsti's seminal work by introducing typologies of role sets for superpowers, civilian powers and the European Union. Holsti was the first scholar to challenge the prevailing view within IR circles that states are unable to play more than one role in the international system.

Role theory was first used in sociology and psychology to understand the behaviour of individuals (Biddle and Thomas, 1966; Le Prestre, 1997; Grossman, 2005). In particular, role theory highlights the importance of national role conceptions (NRCs) and how such conceptions are realised among foreign policy elites. The literature on role theory begs the following question: Can elite role conceptions be used to account for changes in a state's foreign policy? Role theorists, in general, tend to attach considerable importance to the elites' role in foreign policymaking, based on two explanations (Cantir and Karboo, 2012; Korany, 2005).

Firstly, national role conceptions are claimed to have their roots in society and can, as a result, be shared by most citizens in a state (Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot, 1996). This argument

rests on roles, among other things, being part of a state's history, culture and social characteristics (Aggestam, 2006). In addition, role theorists justify their use of elite NRCs by asserting that roles are 'intersubjective' and are, therefore, embedded in the minds of citizens. (Cantir and Karboo, 2012). This assertion challenges the idea of the rational actor model in foreign policy decision-making and sails close to a constructivist critique of foreign policymaking that emphasises particular settings as determining the actions of the elites.

The application of role theory to analyse the foreign policy of a liberal democracy is far less straightforward than applying it to study the foreign policy of an autocratic state, where power resides in the hands of a few decision-makers. In autocracies, contesting a state's foreign policy in an overt manner may carry a severe legal risk for the individual or the group concerned. As such, citizens in autocratic states may outwardly support a state's foreign policy, but the reality might be entirely different. The UAE, being an autocratic state, has sought to fill this gap by fostering and cultivating a strong sense of national consciousness. As will be explored, this process has informed a state-led effort to redefine what it means to be an Emirati citizen.

A second explanation as to why elite NRCs can serve as an indicator of a country's actual NRCs is that even if those conceptions are not shared among the population, foreign policy elites are the ones who make decisions about a country's foreign policy. Role theorists argue that these elites cannot overlook what would be acceptable to their people. One indication of what 'acceptable' means is obtained by examining public opinion polls (Chafetz et al., 1996; Adigbuo, 2007). This argument suggests that public opinion can act as a constraint on NRCs and raises the question of what happens when public opinion does not support the role conceptions held by the elite. This is an apparent gap in role theory literature, which this thesis seeks to fill by drawing attention to the UAE's efforts to redefine national identity.

The literature on foreign policy analysis suggests that disagreement between elites and citizens

may arise when it comes to defining the country's role in the international system. Indeed, there is often a lack of consensus between leaders and the public on a number of specific issues, as well as more general foreign policy orientations and national role conceptions: 'the most conspicuous gap between citizens and leaders [in the United States] is a familiar and long-standing one: more leaders than citizens tend to be "internationalists" at least in the simple sense that they say they favor the United States taking an "active" part in world affairs' (Page and Barabas, 2000, p. 344).

If disagreements between elites and the public exist over foreign policy roles, the relationship between the public's views and elite choices is not as straightforward as it would seem. The view that foreign policy decision-makers are unconstrained by an apathetic, uninformed population with unstable views has been challenged by a number of studies, particularly after the Vietnam War (Holsti, 2002). Shifts in public opinion may not necessarily be an indicator of political instability, but can be 'rational' in the sense that they are responsive to external factors (Page and Shapiro, 1992). This is the case with autocratic regimes, namely in the Arab world, whose populations still oppose the normalisation of relations with Israel. Indeed, Arab leaders who open up to Israel might face a domestic and regional legitimacy deficit, although this might change in the near future.

The UAE is in the process of cultivating a sense of national consciousness through state-led reform. As it continues to do so, it uses its foreign policy to assert the national role conceptions that are held by its leaders to garner further legitimacy from the population. An example of this is the visa exemptions awarded to UAE citizens by 172 countries (al-Bayan, 2019). The achievement was celebrated by Emiratis across multiple social media platforms and hashtags were made to thank the foreign affairs minister, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who happens to be a member of the royal family. The UAE's ministry for Foreign Affairs and

International Cooperation launched the initiative 'UAE Passport Force' to place the Emirati passport on the list of the five most powerful passports in the world by 2021 to extend the country's long tradition of 'positive diplomacy', in the words of its minister for foreign affairs and international cooperation (Arabian Business, 2018). As such, understanding role theory and NRCs is crucial for examining how foreign policy is being used to achieve political legitimacy at a time when the UAE has begun to punch above its weight on the world stage.

The link between the UAE's NRCs and legitimacy lies in the manner such conceptions are used by the state leaders. As will be explored, such NRCs also inform the UAE's foreign aid programme. Leaders of the country often emphasise the country's goodwill and generosity when discussing such aid. Showing generosity is a desired trait in the Arab world and displays of generosity are used in this case to garner domestic, regional and international legitimacy and influence. The UAE leaders have a new vision for the Middle East region (al Otaiba, 2016) – a future-oriented model that advocates tolerance, the empowerment of women, diversity, innovation and global engagement. The state's official discourse makes the claim that these values have been ingrained in the leaders' minds since the country's founding in 1971. In a post-Arab uprisings context, this new vision is being used by leaders such as Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed to promote the UAE's progressive vision vis-à-vis religious extremism and intolerance. It is thus important for shedding light on how the country's perceived role is being used to cultivate domestic and international legitimacy.

In the words of Ehteshami, 'To understand the GCC states' foreign policy conduct, we need to understand not only the nature of decision-making in these states but also the conditions under which decisions are being crafted' (2015, p. 15). For a fuller understanding of the foreign policy of the GCC states, he advocates dividing the analysis of the GCC monarchies into two distinct but related realms, first, the drivers of foreign policy and, secondly, the context for foreign

policy, the arena in which foreign policy is crafted.

To this end, the UAE has made use of two main tools in its foreign policy. First is its diplomacy: small states tend to rely very heavily upon diplomacy as a foundation in their foreign policy towards their neighbours and other states (Al-Suwaidi, 2011). This is due to small states demonstrating a low level of participation in world affairs, which limits their sphere of influence to their immediate geographic arena. Moreover, due to their limited size and capabilities, small states rely a lot on diplomatic and economic foreign policy instruments as opposed to coercive instruments. They tend to depend on superpowers for protection, partnerships and resources (Hey, 2003). Despite it being a young country, the UAE has demonstrated sufficient diplomatic acumen to cement its place among influential regional states, which can be observed in the role it plays in Arab politics through initiatives and propositions. Indeed, until the Arab uprisings, the UAE adopted a 'quiet diplomacy' (Abdullah in Al-Mezaini, 2012).

The impact of oil on UAE foreign policy

The second tool is economic: the influx of oil wealth has transformed the way the UAE is perceived both regionally and internationally. This gave the UAE the ability to use wealth as a tool in its foreign policy. Hey (2003) states that this behaviour is common among most wealthy small states as most of them lack military power. Foreign aid has been a critical tool in the UAE's foreign policy. According to the foreign ministry's Foreign Aid Report for 2015, the UAE disbursed a total of $8.8 billion in foreign aid to 155 countries. At least 120 of these were eligible to receive Official Development Assistance, with 43 being categorised as 'least developed countries' by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (MOFA, 2015). As an economic tool, foreign aid plays a role in understanding how states behave regionally and internationally. As such, the country developed strong diplomatic relations with many

countries, courtesy of its generous foreign aid programme. The UAE would probably have pursued a completely different foreign policy had it not been a wealthy state. To some extent, both the diplomatic and economic tools in UAE foreign policy give scholars a glimpse into one of its key external survival strategies. Its small size and enormous wealth determine its role in the international system (Al-Mezaini, 2012).

A state's security and defence policies are defined by the environment in which it finds itself. The UAE was forced to adopt a unique security strategy to survive internal and external threats (Ibish, 2017). It has utilised its wealth and soft power gained through foreign aid disbursement to craft its foreign and security policies, promote its interests and improve its regional image (Davidson, 2005; Jones, 2017; Ulrichsen, 2016b; Al Mezaini, 2012; Sherwood, 2016).

Being a small state, the UAE has played a marginal role in the international security order. The literature on small states shows that such actors have long pursued pragmatic and reactive security strategies and that is due to their limited size (Archer, Bailes and Wivel, 2014; Bailes et al., 2014; Griffiths, 2014). Indeed, in the decades after the Second World War, size played a fundamental role in determining whether a territorial unit qualified for statehood, as size has generally been understood to mean capability and influence. Whilst being a large state is correlated with power, being small is seen as a big obstacle to survival (Browning, 2006).

Military power and population size play an equally important role in that as well. There is a consensus among scholars of international relations and security that unless a state has more than ten million citizens, over one per cent of global gross domestic product, a large territory and a strong military force, it is treated as a small state no matter what other attributes it possessed or roles it plays (Miller, 2017). As Thucydides put it, 'the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept' (1972, p. 302).

Geography makes the UAE a small state, but it also makes it influential. The UAE uses its

abundant economic and energy wealth to exert power and employ risk diversification strategies, which may seem incompatible with the current literature regarding small states. Nevertheless, the classic small state strategies of bandwagoning and alliance forming have long been key features of the UAE's approach to foreign and defence affairs (Rickli, 2008; Al-Mezaini, 2012). Little is known about how security strategies which alternate between proactive and defensive security postures are chosen for a small state like the UAE (Soubrier, 2016; Sherwood, 2016). Furthermore, with regard to this thesis, one must be mindful that the UAE's pursuit of those new strategies has occurred against a backdrop of regional instability. It is equally important to understand that the UAE's recent efforts to develop its expand its network of allies and partners both in the region and beyond forms an integral part of the emerging legitimacy formula that this thesis puts forward.

The UAE pursues 'strategies of survival' for small states based on finding a strong security guarantor (particularly the United States) while ensuring to become an influential player at both the regional and the international level (Peterson, 2006). The UAE has utilised a two-pronged 'smart policy' in its relations with Washington (Al Suwaidi, 2011). In the small-state literature, this is considered typical behaviour as small states struggle with the ability to exert influence (Prasad, 2009). At the end of the second Gulf War, the UAE sought security protection from the USA while attempting to build regional partnerships and alliances. Walt (1987) states that this is a common survival strategy used by vulnerable small states. These security strategies can take the form of bilateral and multilateral 'alliances' but they are not mutually exclusive (Bailes et al., 2011).

The UAE's doctrine of containment in its relationship with Iran is a good example of this two-pronged and seemingly contradictory approach to its security and foreign policy (Al Suwaidi, 2011; Soubrier, 2016). The UAE's policy towards Iran shows not only its earlier constructive

engagement policies, but also its newfound ability to adopt defensive and proactive security policies at the same time (Al Mashat, 2010). Some scholars argue that a small state may possess intelligence assets that far exceed its size, and this can be used as a strategic leverage to decrease the gulf between great and small powers (Lemass, 1971). Through the use of economic strategies which tie the economic security of their adversaries to their own survival, small states are able to mitigate threats and contain their adversaries. The UAE policy of containment towards Iran is a clear example of that (Sherwood, 2016; Baldacchino, 2006; Briguglio et al., 2006, p. 20).

State-led social reform

The Emirati government has, in recent years, dedicated considerable resources to maintaining the status quo on a domestic level while ensuring that country continues to modernise. Nowhere is that more apparent than in its efforts to forge a new Emirati identity by means of state-led citizen building. Jones (2015) defines this phenomenon as an effort by rulers to shape the character of the citizens they govern by influencing their societies through education, propaganda and public symbolism. This form of citizen building assumes a pluralistic outlook. In political theory, citizen building emphasises individualism, personal autonomy, critical and reflective thinking, the separation of religion from the state, and tolerance (Macedo, 1990). In the context of non-democratic regimes, contemporary literature treats this phenomenon as a manifestation of 'competitive authoritarianism' (Levitsky and Way, 2010). Levistsky and Way, who base their findings on 35 case studies of authoritarian regimes across four continents, argue that such liberal reforms reflect a rational strategy on behalf of autocratic rulers to maintain the status quo.

In the case of the UAE, these liberal reforms are taking place in the social sphere. The state is not aiming to liberalise the political system. It is actively promoting its interpretation of

religious tolerance, women empowerment and gender equality while attempting to keep a lid on tribalism and religious fundamentalism. The end goal is to build an inclusive state for foreign nationals who live in the country or visit it from time to time. The UAE model stands in stark contrast to extremist ideologies which have spread across the region following the deterioration in the regional security order. By emphasising the inclusiveness of this model, the UAE leaders hope to enhance their country's external image and legitimacy.[4]

The maintenance of autocratic rule depends on the capacity of the incumbent ruler. In his study of authoritarian state building and regime competitiveness in post-communist regimes, Way (2005) defines incumbent capacity along three interrelated dimensions: authoritarian state power, elite organisation and know-how. Authoritarian state power is defined by its dimensions of control, scope and size. Control refers to the ability to control opposition through patronage. Scope refers to leaders' capacity to sustain their rule by expanding the range of issues over which the government has discretionary control. Finally, the size of the state and its economic performance affects the degree of exposure to external pressure for reform and its fiscal health (Way, 2005, p. 235).

However, autocratic survival cannot be achieved without popular consent. Indeed, citizen loyalty is instrumental for political survival in a non-democratic setting as autocrats cannot rule by repression indefinitely. Wintrobe (1998) states that the more a state relies on coercion to sustain the status quo, the more vulnerable it becomes to being toppled by these players. In the event of popular unrest, autocratic rulers who rely on coercion to survive fall victim to power struggles within the security apparatus (Magaloni and Wallace, 2008). As such, protests and acts of citizen frustration can lead to the demise of their rule in a matter of days (Kuran, 1991).

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[4] Author's interview with a DC-based expert on regional affairs, 13th April 2018.

In the case of the UAE in its early days, however, popular consent was achieved through traditional channels such as tribal affiliation, wealth distribution and religion. But this formula is changing as the state looks to move beyond traditional modes of legitimacy. Legitimacy is now being garnered on the basis of regime performance. Consent is now being mediated through state-led reform, which recently allowed young Emiratis the opportunity to have a bigger say in their country's affairs without endangering the political system. The introduction of national service is instructive in this regard. In essence, the political acquiescence of young Emiratis loyalty to the rulers brings about security and stability. Through national service, the elites hope to create citizens who tie their survival to that of the monarchy.[5]

Thus, in introducing top-down social reform, autocrats exhibit a narrowly self-interested behaviour. They carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of introducing liberal change before concluding whether such societal transformation will safeguard the status quo and ensure their survival. Scholars emphasise the rationality of autocrats and their capacity to evolve. The rationalist literature depicts autocrats as being at the head of their societies, courtesy of their ability to exercise innovative forms of social control (Jones, 2015). Meyer et al. (1997) highlight how the need for political legitimacy can explain why countries which share little in common historically or culturally choose to adopt similar policies and build identical institutions. As such, autocratic liberalisation may reflect a desire to conform to global cultural norms, spearheaded by autocrats who believe they can modernise their societies from the top down (Jones, 2015).

A review of the literature on state-led social reform shows a wide variety in the terminology used to account for similar activities. These include 'people-building' (Smith, 2001); the

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[5] Author's interview with a leading local commentator. Dubai, 10th Feb. 2018.

'making of citizens ' (Merriam, 1931); 'nation-building' (Bendix, 1964); 'political socialisation' (Almond and Verba, 1963); 'indoctrination' (Mosse, 1975); 'education for citizenship' and 'civic education' (Heater, 2004); political ' character formation ' (MacMullen 2015); 'social control' (Cohen and Scull, 1983); 'social management' (Garon, 1997); 'mass persuasion' (Cull, Culbert, and Welch, 2003); and finally, 'social engineering' (Jones, 2017b). These terms may differ, but they deal with similar empirical phenomena which revolve around state-led efforts to build citizens, society and culture (Jones, 2017). State-led reform is not a recent phenomenon; it has been used by governments throughout history. For instance, it was something envisaged by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato in the ancient city-state of Sparta (Heater, 2004b). Different empires throughout history have attempted to shape the behaviour of their subjects and ultimately win their hearts and minds (Kennedy, 2007).

The emphasis on reshaping Emirati citizens takes place against the backdrop of Emirati-led efforts to weaken Islamist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, at the domestic and regional level. The UAE certainly views political Islam as an existential threat to its stability. While the term political Islam has various meanings, it is commonly used to describe religious groups or organisations which take part in politics. The term is also used to describe Islamic groups which were originally established to fulfil certain political objectives and groups that exhibited a desire to enter politics at a later stage. The pan-Islamist Muslim Brotherhood is the most prominent of such groups (Leiken and Brooke, 2007).

There is a consensus in the literature that these groups view themselves as national political stakeholders (Al-Saif, 2014). However, Rosler (2005) believes that this narrow definition overlooks state-sponsored religious activist groups which do not see themselves as being independent of the state. In Saudi Arabia, the state-sponsored Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prohibition of Vice is a case in point (Al-Rasheed, 2006). Such groups can also

take the form of purely proselytising or specialised knowledge groups, such as schools that teach the Quran and the Shari'a *(madrasas),* which do not engage in politics or are apolitical by default. Overall, each group is treated as an interest group insofar as it has its say in the affairs of the state (Al-Saif, 2014).

The GCC states have some of the world's toughest laws governing civil society (Ehteshami and Wright, 2007) and, as such, religious-political activists have long been kept under control. In countries like Qatar and the UAE, Muslim Brotherhood affiliates have been rather forcefully relegated to the social sphere (Roberts, 2014; Al-Zo'by and Başkan, 2015). Kuwait, on the other hand, provides the Muslim Brotherhood affiliates with relatively more freedom to operate in the political arena. Similarly to their Egyptian counterparts, Kuwaiti political Islamists have grown accustomed to working within a restrictive system (Hamid, 2014). Freer (2015a) argues that their ideology cannot be 'bought off' simply by the government's wealth. Diamond (2011) further states that these groups have successfully created ideological links at the grassroots, which are crucial for securing long-term popular support.

Authors who have addressed the topic of Islamist movements in several Gulf states are in accord regarding these movements' potential to affect the political scene (Al-Rasheed, 2006; Roberts, 2014; Al-Zo'by and Başkan, 2015). One of the main reasons for that is that Islamists view monarchical systems as an anathema to Islamic tradition, which prohibits the centralisation of power in the hands of a ruling family or clan. Saudi Arabia, led by the Al-Saud dynasty, has faced opposition from two Islamist groups in the 20th century, Juhayman Al-Utaibi's JSM (Al-Jama'a Al-Salafiya Al-Mohtasibah) and the more recent MB-inspired Awakening (Sahwa) of the 1990s (Hegghammer and Lacroix, 2007; Al-Rasheed, 2006; Dekmejian, 1994). Al-Rasheed (2006) contends that the Sahwa movement can be regarded as a product of alien religious interpretations and Islamist political movements, mainly the

Egyptian and Syrian branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, Qutbist and Jihadi ideologies. Scholars contend that Saudi liberals and the official religious establishment are acutely aware of the threatening potential of Sahwa activists who call not only for the Islamisation of Saudi society, but for the toppling of the state-sponsored Ulema and its replacement with a narrative based on contestation. Sahwis do not subscribe to a single political ideology. Indeed, there are Sahwi groups which identify with the Muslim Brotherhood in its two variants: followers of Hasan al-Banna (founder of the MB) and those of Sayyid Qutb (Dekmejian, 1994).

Milton-Edwards (2015) situates the debate within a broad historical context. She notes that during the Arab Cold War era (1958-1970), inter-Arab politics centred upon the regional battle for supremacy between the pan-Arabist republicans, spearheaded by Egypt's leader Abdel Nasser, and the Western-backed monarchies led by states such as Saudi Arabia (Kerr, 1971). Pan-Arabism posed a challenge to the regional order in terms of its revolutionary aspirations and unification efforts, which were evident in the formation of the United Arab Republic in 1958 between Egypt and Syria. Pan-Arabism also encouraged these states to interfere in the internal affairs of their regional neighbours, which placed them at odds with pro-Western conservative states such as Jordan and Yemen (Milton-Edwards, 2015).

These power struggles and proxy wars depended on having the support of a number of actors, including the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), regionally as well as internationally. The Arab Cold War reflected the wider conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. In countries like Jordan and those of the GCC, exiled members of the MB played an important role in the nascent educational and professional structures of their host states. (Milton-Edwards, 2015, pp. 166-167). In the context of Saudi Arabia, the influx of the exiled brothers prompted an alliance between them and the Saudi state to address the growing threat of pan-Arabism. The Brotherhood integrated rather seamlessly into the Kingdom's social and political sphere, and

it played a central role in the politicisation of Saudi Islam, and the emergence of the Sahwa movement later on (Lacroix, 2014).

After the Arab uprisings, a resurgent Muslim Brotherhood (MB) emerged as a key player in the region, advancing a new bottom-up approach to power based on an Islamist ideology. The meteoric rise of the MB was watched with growing concern by some Gulf states, which feared the challenge of the MB monopolising the Islamic discourse in their countries (Dacerma, 2013). Following the 2011 uprisings, the GCC monarchies adopted several approaches to deal with this emerging threat. Some key events occurred in 2012 which highlighted the difference between the increasingly hostile stance towards the MB demonstrated by the UAE and Saudi governments and the more embracive Qatari stance (Roberts, 2014; Dacerma, 2013) The Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE share the goal of Islamising society in an age of rampant Westernisation. However, Freer (2015) notes that since their establishment, these groups have had to change their priorities to varying degrees. The Kuwaiti Brotherhood achieved more political gains in comparison to its Qatari and Emirati counterparts. Indeed, it has enjoyed electoral success and political influence courtesy of its holistic approach to the reformation of society, which was introduced in the 1980s (Diwan, 2015).

The Qatari MB branch has favoured the ideological and social elements of its platform over the institutional aspect. Before it was officially disbanded, the UAE MB branch operated under a somewhat amorphous character (Roberts, 2014). While it called for social reform, Emirati MB activists began criticising the state of 'political freedoms' more broadly, thereby provoking a heavy-handed crackdown from the government. The government intervened before the Emirati MB could match the political influence of its Kuwaiti counterpart by attracting political support across the country. Overall, and in spite of the different trajectories that these movements followed, each of the GCC MB movements began with a clear message: to counter

the spread of Western influence in their societies (Al-Noqaidan, 2012).

Moreover, Freer (2015) argues that the GCC rulers' ability to redistribute wealth does not mitigate Islamist complaints, nor does it render their message irrelevant. The UAE government is aware of the political capital held by the local MB movements and, as previously stated, considers them an existential threat to the country's stability. Kuwait and Qatar, on the other hand, have allowed Islamists more freedom to operate, which shows that the Al-Sabah and the Al-Thani families believe that co-optation and containment serve their interests better than heavy repression.

Although, historically speaking, the MB across the Middle East has existed as a social movement, its ability to provide a modicum of societal security in places where the state was unable to do so has enabled it to become extremely influential and popular. Also, the appeal inherent within *'al dawa'* is what concerns a number of states across the region given its transnational appeal. These two factors have paved the way for Islamists to achieve significant political gains in the post-Arab uprisings period.

The legitimising values in Arab monarchies are rooted in the politics of kinship, religion and custom. But they are no longer wholly traditional; they do not conform precisely to the classical notions of Middle Eastern patriarchy. One can see clear elements of modernity in the legitimacy formulas of even the most traditional monarchies in the Arab world; the persistent strands of traditional identifications in those systems have crossed the revolutionary divide in the region. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there exist significant differences between them. Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf monarchies are patriarchal in a distinctly familial way; others such as Morocco and Jordan are more bureaucratically developed and share similar characteristics with constitutional monarchies. The sudden influx of oil wealth has transformed several of these monarchies into developed welfare states, yet they remain governed by

medieval structures and values. Monarchy is an anachronism in the modern world of nations, but surviving Arab monarchies have proved more resilient and adaptable than thinkers such as Huntington would argue. Every Arab monarchy has invested considerable wealth and effort in order to develop its society and to push back the tide of pan-Arab revolutionary movements that it dreads. Consequently, monarchical regimes have become more adept in their struggle to survive and garner legitimacy than observers have predicted (Snyder, 2015).

The ideal Arab monarchy, existing in congruence with the values of the traditional political culture, can take the form of an Islamic theocracy governed by the leader of a tribe who claims descent from the Prophet Mohammed. The ruler upholds the values of Islam and adheres to the patriarchal-consultative procedures of tribal decision making. Authority in such systems rests not only on the ruler's ability to exert power but also on the respect of his people for a guided leader who observes customary procedures of decision making. Hudson (1977) states that by behaving in an exemplary manner, the ruler earns the public's trust and thus acquires authority. Al-Rasheed (2006) makes a similar argument, stating that the ruler's personal adherence to Islamic behaviour and kinship loyalties is the principal criterion of his legitimate authority, not the office or institution of kingship itself. The monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula are not far removed from this, with Saudi Arabia offering the best example. The oil-rich monarchy remains a theocratic dynastic state, in which kinship ties and religion play a fundamental role (Levins, 2013).

In contrast, the Gulf sheikhdoms of Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman are structurally similar. Religion plays a lesser role as a political ideology and the political process is more open to external influences. For instance, Kuwait, although still very much an absolute monarchy, has an elected parliament and its press enjoys more freedom than any other media in the Gulf. Of the seven sheikhdoms that federated with some difficulty into

the United Arab Emirates, the five smallest remain conservative to a degree while the two core states, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, have adopted liberal policies in commerce and tourism. This thesis hypothesises that this has prompted a shift in the UAE from relying solely upon religion and traditional modes of familial authority for its legitimacy (Heard-Bey, 2005).

Moreover, the federal structure of the country has resulted in a broader definition of identity and more complex perspectives on obligation and participation. In tiny cosmopolitan Bahrain, the ruling al-Khalifa family has been facing considerable pressure from labour and progressive political groups to put an end to its monopoly over power and grant more rights to the disenfranchised Shia majority (Hudson, 1997). The public's discontent with al-Khalifa, which has been festering for decades, has formed the precursor to the wave of protests that swept the country during the events of the Arab uprisings. Oman has been the most isolated of the Gulf monarchies, but even under the leadership of Sultan Saeed ibn Taymur (1932-1970), a violent challenge to the monarchy gained strength, in the form of an armed Marxist-inspired rebellion in Dhofar. Sultan Qabus, who became the country's leader after overthrowing his father in 1970, managed to transform, albeit at a slow pace, traditional allegiances which gravitated from the politics of kinship into a more sustainable nation-state model through the use of 'symbol politics.' Qabus wanted to promote nationalism through state symbols, such as the flag and the monarchy, to bring together the different and overlapping identities – the ethnic, religious and historical identities of his subjects – as part of his nation-building and legitimising strategies (Valeri, 2007).

In the other Arab monarchies of Jordan and Morocco, society is more complex and the political rhetoric is more nuanced. Unlike the GCC monarchs, the monarchs of Jordan and Morocco are not portrayed as the fathers of the nation but rather as strong leaders (Schlumberger, 2010). Governmental structures and capabilities are highly developed. Political parties and opposition

movements enjoy a comparatively higher level of freedom in these monarchies, despite they being under constant surveillance and intimidation by the government (Joffe, 1988). If the oil-rich monarchies are trying to circumvent the king's dilemma, the monarchs of countries such as Jordan and Morocco are trying to meet the challenge head-on. It is worth noting that the legitimacy question varies considerably from place to place, as do regime strategies of legitimacy (Rugh, 2016).

Throughout history, the successful development of Arab states hinged upon the rulers' ability to mobilise the military, gain political support from tribes and use Islam to unite various tribes under a single banner (Hudson, 1977). Thus, the concepts of tribalism and Islam have reigned supreme in the histories of many Gulf monarchies, particularly in light of the ruling elites' reliance on religious and tribal legitimacy. Since the discovery of oil, however, the relationship between tribes, Islam and the monarchs has undergone a profound change. Today, monarchs operate in a political landscape where their legitimacy and that of state institutions is sporadic (Levins, 2013). Arab monarchies have successfully created a potent mix of Islam and tribalism, based largely upon their own interpretations, as they continue to seek legitimacy, both domestically and internationally. Overall, the Gulf monarchies have based their legitimacy on being affiliated with or sympathetic to a particular Islamic grouping or cause. In most cases, these aforementioned groupings consist of a loose alliance between the political and religious elite (Gause, 1994). Over time, governments in the Gulf have managed to contain Islamic mosques, schools, courts, scholarly organisations and religious trusts, co-opting them into the state in order to control them. One of the outcomes of the subordination of religion, nevertheless, is to pave the way for the opposition to unite along tribal and religious lines. Because monarchies still cannot control the political interpretations of Islam and tribal values, opponents usually critique them for failing to adhere to those values (Levins, 2013; Davidson,

2012).

While all GCC monarchies use religion to legitimise their rule, only Saudi Arabia claims an explicitly religious justification. The Wahhabi interpretation of Islam still holds sway among millions of Muslims in the present, the Saudi monarchy having faced countless opposition movements over the centuries. Saudi Arabia continues to use Islamic texts and scriptures as the state's constitution and reaffirms that their system is the most Islamic of all ruling systems across the Muslim world (Al-Rasheed, 2007). However, the Saudi government is still in control of the religious establishment in the country, despite the clerics' strong influence in Saudi society. In all GCC monarchies, religious courts com under the control of ministries of justice, with state-appointed judges. Secular civil courts have been established, most notably to deal with business and economic matters, thus reducing the authority of the religious courts.

In Jordan and Morocco, by contrast, the kings claim direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad, which grants them some semblance of religious authority and puts them above criticism. When the late King Hussein of Jordan opted for more political liberalisation, the 'National Charter' of 1991 was framed as a key democratic breakthrough. The charter was hailed as an inclusive document that gave all relevant social forces a voice and, in some ways, represented an institutionalised social contract (Schlumberger, 2010). Article (1) of the charter describes Jordan as a Hashemite kingdom, thereby reinforcing the status of the Hashemite monarchs as direct descendants of the prophet and his tribe of Bani Hashim. This, in turn, has created an institutionalised, potent blend of state and religion that cannot be easily challenged by the public. The Moroccan monarchs share with their Jordanian counterparts the claim to direct descent from the Prophet Mohammed. Scholars have thus assumed that being able to claim descent from the Prophet provides a much more stable foundation for religious legitimacy, as is the case in Saudi Arabia (Pruzan-Jørgensen, 2010).

However, Islam is not routinely used by these two monarchies as a legitimising tool in daily politics. Islam in Jordan and Morocco is also not a factor that can be used by the monarchs for the purpose of mobilising larger parts of society. On the contrary, both rulers face growing opposition from Islamist political parties which claim to uphold religious norms and values and have a huge base of supporters in society (Wegner, 2007). Moreover, the Islamist opposition groups in these countries have established links to similar organisations and parties across the region, creating a resilient transnational Islamist network with high levels of coordination and influence. Outside the GCC states, therefore, the growing influence of Islamist movements has lessened the regimes' prospects for undisputed religious legitimation (Schlumberger and Bank, 2001).

Despite this, Islam still retains its central position in the legitimation strategies of several Arab governments. Governments also bear the financial and administrative responsibilities for religious schools and training institutions. For instance, in many Arab states, high-ranking Sunni religious officials are appointed by the state, while the leadership of Shia minorities is more independent. As a result, most of the religious establishment, which consists of judges, teachers, scholars and preachers, is employed by the state (Gause, 1994).

The pattern that evolved during much of the last century between the state and religion can be seen in the manner in which states have sought to deal with the tribes. Historically, ruling monarchs have monopolised power in the Gulf's traditional polities, 'a position buttressed by the availability of effective and loyal armed forces and internal security apparatus to quash any domestic challenge' (Ehteshami and Wright, 2007, p.914). However, it does not reflect that ruling elites in the GCC have long relied on tribal values and their ability to command loyal tribes to obtain power and assert their status as rulers. Unlike religion, tribalism lacks a unifying characteristic which opposition movements can utilise as a platform of dissent (Gause, 1994).

Also, tribalism is seen as a source of disunity in GCC opposition movements because it lacks the unifying message Islam carries. In Saudi Arabia and Oman, for instance, some tribes have attempted to oppose the state. Rulers have been forced to seek local allies and international support to curb those threats (Levins, 2013).

As mentioned previously, the ageing Sultan Qabus of Oman and the late Sheikh Zayed, who ruled Abu Dhabi from 1966 to 2004, are good examples of traditional legitimacy. Qabus has managed to alter the traditional nature of the Omani political landscape, which revolved around old notions of tribal politics, focusing instead on carving out a larger nation-state through the adoption of symbolic politics. Thus, Oman's political landscape has transformed following this 'incorporation of tradition into the state.' (Valeri, 2007, p. 147). Valeri also argues that 'tradition is merely reinvented and was never practiced before Qabus, therefore bearing witness less to the past than to the regime's pervasive personalization.' (2007, p. 149) Zayed, on the other hand, had been brought up in the harsh desert climate of the Al-Ain oasis in the Empty Quarter (Al-Rub'i Al-Khali) of the Arabian Peninsula – a fact that is often brought up to refer to his tough personality and style of leadership (Heard-Bey, 2005). When the small Gulf country began to export oil, the sudden influx of wealth paved the way for rapid modernisation and development. Even now, the transformation of the UAE continues to be attributed to Zayed's wise leadership and wisdom rather than to the influx of wealth, as Al-Hosani (2012) argues.

However, tradition is not only a source of legitimacy for the seemingly traditional monarchies of the Gulf. The dynastic style of succession has not only been witnessed in the GCC states, but also in the more developed monarchies of Morocco and Jordan. However, successful transfers of power among ruling family members not only occurred in monarchies such as Morocco, Jordan, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and, more recently, Saudi Arabia, but

also in the Arab Republic of Syria following the death of its former leader, Hafez Al-Assad. What is striking about Syria is that it still claims to be a socialist state which adheres to a constitution that draws much inspiration from the former East Germany. While there exists some literature on the question of succession in the region, its relevance for questions of legitimacy requires further analysis. Thus, the phenomenon that since the 1960s has been referred to as the presidential monarchy persisted for decades until the Arab uprisings (Brownlee, 2007; Brooke, 2013; Owen, 2012).

To set the stage for the remainder of the thesis, the final section here reviews the literature on the UAE's pre-Arab uprisings legitimacy formula as a preface to the section on the conceptual framework, which sheds light on the post-Arab uprisings legitimacy formula.

The pre-Arab Uprisings Regime Legitimacy Formula in the UAE

A broad review of the literature on pre-Arab uprisings regime legitimacy in the UAE reveals that, aside from rentierism, the UAE's regime legitimacy formula rests on the following pillars: 1) Patrimonial Legitimacy, which was the state of affairs in the pre-oil era; 2) Ruler's charisma; 3) Neo-patrimonial legitimacy; 4) The regime's promotion of a traditional notion of Emirati identity at a time when Emirati nationals are considered a minority in their own country.

Patrimonial legitimacy

The UAE's management of tribal politics has always stood in stark contrast to the prevalent norms in other Gulf states. Indeed, the rise of Al-Bu Falah, the tribe to which Al-Nahyan belongs, to Bani Yas leadership occurred as a result of popular acceptance and acknowledgement of Al-Bu Falah's competence and legitimacy. In order to make sense of this, it is imperative to provide the historical background of the most influential coalition of tribes in the UAE, the Bani Yas clan. The Bani Yas clan consists of 15 different tribes, including the

ruling tribe of Al-Bu Falah. These tribes have played a major role in transforming Abu Dhabi from an obscure sea village to a commercial coastline capital (Kelly, 1963). Understanding the historical role and evolution of the Bani Yas clan is key to understanding political legitimacy in contemporary UAE, especially given that the clan's history is seldom spoken of in the English-speaking literature on the UAE (Maitra and Al-Haji, 2001).

The role of Bani Yas tribes as a major constituent of the ruling tribe has remained consistent throughout the centuries, well before the discovery of oil. Although these tribes are not directly related, their union was based on fraternity and solidarity, which was reinforced by their common history and struggle against their adversaries, namely the Wahhabis. Kelly (1963) describes them as being fully integrated and united. Regional historians, such as the Omani historian, Al-Sayabi, has noted that they are one of the most established and well-known tribes in the Arabian Peninsula. The members of Bani Yas were skilled warriors, camel herders and fishermen, and they were able to establish a strong foothold in the region located between modern-day Doha and Al Buraimi (Lorimer, 1932).

The tribe's headquarters was moved to modern-day Abu Dhabi following the discovery of freshwater wells in 1763, during the reign of Theyab bin Eisa, the great grandfather of the current ruler. This discovery led to the creation of an Al-Bu Falah settlement in the area. The strategic location of the island was the main reason it was chosen as the new headquarters for the clan. That it is flanked by two water creeks has made it a difficult area to invade (Tuson, 1990). Also, the spread of coral reefs along the northern coastline of the Emirate makes it difficult for ships to navigate its waters.

Rivalry between the Hinawis, led by Bani Yas, and the Ghafiris, led by Al-Qawasim, which began in the 18th century and involves all the tribes in the Trucial Coast area, was based along these lines. The Hinawis were understood to be Qahtani, while the Ghafiris claimed to be the

descendants of Adnan. However, such tribal relations were neither stable nor straightforward; not all of the tribes in the Hinawi alliance were Qahtani and not all the Bani Ghafir were Adnani (Motohiro, 2011). It is important to note that some tribes chose to ally themselves with historical rivals at a given time. Nevertheless, these tribal alliances have not been maintained to a high degree in modern-day society. It is not uncommon to see a Hinawi tribe building a strong relationship with a Ghafiri tribe through marriage and business cooperation, and vice versa. The tribal concepts of Qahtan or Adnan, Ghafili and Hinawi do not have much significance in modern society, but they still offer a basis for understanding the history of the UAE.

It is important to note that the Hinawi-Ghafiri divide extends to the field of religious practise: Hinawis follow the Maliki sect while the Ghafiris have long adhered to the Hanbali school of thought. Hinawis have stood against the overtly sectarian Wahhabi expansionism, while the Ghafiris, especially in the northern emirates, seem to have embraced Wahhabism. Evidence of this can be seen today: Hinawi-controlled regions such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai are liberal and globalised compared to the conservative northern Emirates. This also explains the Hinawis' longstanding ambivalence towards religious fundamentalism and transnational religious movements. It is no surprise that these movements found a safe haven in the historically conservative northern Emirates, where they were not only given the freedom to carry out their activities but were also sponsored by the highest authorities in those Emirates.

Tribal organisation and relationships among tribes have varied throughout history, owing to the everchanging domestic situation. This has been demonstrated in the disputed Buraimi Oasis area. The oasis, which sits on the border between Abu Dhabi and Oman, has come under strong political influence from Oman. The tribes which lived in that area, including Na'im, Al Bu Shamis and Bani Ka'ab, were part of the Ghafiri alliance. What made things difficult for the

Hinawis, namely Al-Bu Falah, was that those tribes had pledged allegiance to the Sultan of Oman and were members of the rival alliance. Although the existence of the tribal alliances of the Ghafiri and Hinawi was significant, they still maintained some degree of autonomy when it came to deciding on matters of interest to their respective tribes. For example, when the Sultan of Oman signed a deal with the Iraq Oil Company to explore the Buraimi Oasis area for oil resources against the will of the tribes which were inhabiting the region, those tribes decided it would be in their best interests to build a relationship with the Hinawis through then ruler's representative in the Eastern Region, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan (Wilkinson, 1991). Bani Yas maintained a strong relationship with the Dhawahir tribe, a Hinawi tribe which resided in Buraimi and was traditionally an enemy of Na'im and Bani Ka'ab, to keep the Ghafiri tribes in check. But the overall changes in the political and economic reality paved the way for regroupings among tribes, which challenged long-standing tribal conventions (Mohotiro, 2011).

This formed the precursor to the union of the Emirates. Aside from shared security concerns, blood relations and common destiny, Sheikh Zayed was motivated by recent improvements in Hinawi-Ghafiri relations to fulfil his vision of a united country. One of the biggest obstacles aside from historical rivalries and territorial disputes was to convince the leading tribe in the Ghafiri alliance, the mighty Qawasim, to be part of what would become the UAE. Given its religious orientation and history, the north was leaning more towards the Wahhabist model of governance, as opposed to the Maliki model, to which Bani Yas adheres. For instance, the Emirate of Ras Al-Khaima joined the federation in 1972 as it was still under the patronage of Saudi Arabia. Indeed, the UAE's historically uneasy relationship with the Saudis came under further strain when old territorial disputes resurfaced after oil companies entered the Arabian Peninsula in the 1930s. The Buraimi Oasis dispute, which Saudi was also part of, lasted for

nearly 26 years until it was resolved in 1976 when Saudi Arabia was given a 'window' on the Gulf at Ras Al-Khaima in exchange for renouncing its claim to the Buraimi Oasis (Rizvi, 1993).

Meanwhile, Britain tried to manipulate the domestic scene through a process of a 'divide and rule'. . Indeed, the British acknowledged the Al-Nahyan section of the Al Bu Falah in Abu Dhabi, the Al-Maktoum section of Al Bu Falasa tribe of Bani Yas in Dubai, and the Qawasim tribe in Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah as rulers of those respective emirates. Out of all the emirates, Abu Dhabi stands out as the one which maintains strong tribal characteristics despite having a developed economy and society that has witnessed a large influx of foreigners. As a result, tribal influence has become limited (Zahlan, 1978; Motohiro, 1995). Evidence of this can be seen in modern-day Dubai, where members of Bani Yas tribes refer to themselves using the names of their sub-families as opposed to referring to themselves using the tribe's name.[6]

The ruler's charismatic legitimacy

The clearest embodiment of charismatic authority in the UAE's case was its late founder, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan. He was widely revered by his people for his work in maintaining the federal structure of the country. Al-Hosani (2012, p. 69) states: 'Without question one of the most important factors in sustaining the UAE for more than three decades and endowing it with its present strength and stability was Sheikh Zayed's leadership, notable for both its long duration and effectiveness. Sheikh Zayed was a practical visionary with a humanistic approach to statesmanship.'

From the outset, Zayed's approach to authority remained rooted in his belief that that one

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[6] Many Dubai-based families which are descended from influential Bani Yas tribes such as Al Marrar and Bu Mhair avoid using their tribes' names in official communications and use their Qawm's name instead. Al Tayer of Al Marrar is a good example of this.

should 'never put oneself in the position of leader unless one feels that one is able and unless God has given one the gift to carry out the mission' (Morris, 1974, p. 63). Sheikh Zayed projected personal authority and charisma in the face of challenges to his country's stability. His sharing of Abu Dhabi's oil wealth with the less affluent Emirati sheikhdoms reflected both the instincts of Bedouin generosity and the capacity to understand the development needs of a young federation project (Peck, 1986). He sought to fulfil his promise that the wealth of the nation should be used to the benefit of its entire people (Al-Hosani, 2012).

In more recent times, Gulf rulers have managed to attain celebrity status, albeit at great expense. This is particularly evident in states where political mobilisation is limited. Young sheiks in the UAE and Qatar have successfully managed to promote themselves as great horse riders and falconers to their populations. The focus of these campaigns is to highlight the young sheiks' command of sports and activities considered to be linked to the tribal heritage of their countries (Davidson, 2012). This celebrity status grew exponentially with the advent of social media websites. Indeed, sheiks are relying less upon traditional modes of communication (i.e., state-sponsored media) to cultivate their charisma and personal legitimacy. Sheiks now have their own personal websites and verified Twitter and Instagram feeds. One of the best examples in the UAE's case is the ruler of Dubai, Sheik Mohammed bin Rashed Al-Maktoum. Sheik Mohammed was one of the first UAE rulers to launch his own website, which was dedicated to showcasing that he was not only an active monarch but also an eloquent poet and writer and an accomplished horse rider. His son and crown prince of Dubai, Hamdan bin Mohammed, is following in the footsteps of his father. Fazza,[7] as he is known in the realm of poetry, describes

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[7] In the Emirati dialect, the word *fazza* (فزاع) is used to describe the person who hurries to assist others, especially in their hour of need.

himself as having learned effective leadership through excelling at sports such as sky-diving and horse riding. He claims that such hobbies equip him with the skills needed to propel Dubai forward in its quest for prosperity and development (Business Insider, 2011).

It is worth noting that the manner in which charismatic authority is projected has developed with the advent of new communication technologies. Sheikhs no longer have to show they are capable of commanding armies or resolving tribal feuds. The UAE, nevertheless, remains a traditional society despite undergoing rapid urbanisation and development over the last five decades. Therefore, the rulers need to demonstrate they are still wedded to the country's long-standing traditions whilst using new communication technologies as a new tool in their effective personal image-building formula.

Another example of charismatic leadership and authority was the popular ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al-Maktoum, often called the 'Father of Dubai'. Sheikh Rashid successfully presided over an era of vast development in the emirate of Dubai until his death in 1990. Rashid was, in his own way, as charismatic a ruler as Zayed. His role in promoting Dubai's fortunes helped his emirate gain parity within the union with the wealthy and powerful emirate of Abu Dhabi at the time of independence from British rule (Peck, 1986). However, Rashid's approach to governance is quite different to Zayed's; scholars often describe him as a merchant prince. Rashid used to treat his government as a large holding company, with him at the helm. He was described as being quite disdainful of bureaucracy and had thus sought to keep the administration of the city's affairs under his control. Rashid's ruling style was praised by Hudson (1977) in his study on monarchies in the Arab world.

In Sharjah and the rest of the northern emirates, the ruling families are considered popular and continue to command support from their subjects. Indeed, the rulers' charismatic rule and personal legitimacy play an important role in their legitimacy formula (Davidson, 2005).

Spontaneous rallies and public displays of allegiance to the royal families continue to be a regular theme in Emirati politics. Sharjah's people take pride in their emirate being the intellectual and cultural hub of the country, which is in part the product of the emirate's early experience of a modern school system. Sharjah's current ruler, Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, was the first in the UAE to hold a university degree (Peck, 1986). Sharjah also happens to be the most recent emirate to experience a violent struggle over its leadership. In 1972, the former ruler of the emirate, Khalid bin Muhammad, was assassinated in a coup attempt launched by loyalists of Sheikh Saqr bin Sultan Al Qasimi, who had been previously removed by the British (Sheikh Sultan official website). The new federal Emirati government subsequently intervened, through the Supreme Federal Council, and successfully secured a smooth transition of power after a turbulent period. Sheikh Sultan is the 18th Ruler of Sharjah in a long line of Al Qasimi sheikhs whose rule dates back to the 17th century. He is widely known for his role in transforming the Emirate's cultural, economic and social scenes and is seen as having played a crucial role in promoting cultural interaction and dialogue among nations at the local, regional and international levels.

The rulers of Ras al-Khaima, who are from a different branch of the Qawasim tribe, have long been resentful of the reversal of established power politics in the area and the emirate's continued marginalised status in the seven-emirate federation. The Emirate was ruled for more than sixty years by Sheikh Saqr bin Mohammed Al-Qasimi until his death in 2010. Following the death of the popular Sheikh Saqr, his eldest son and heir, Sheikh Khalid bin Saqr al-Qasimi, returned to the emirates following his exile and proceeded to the presidential palace of the Emirate in a bid to install himself as the ruler of Ras al-Khaima. Accompanied by over a hundred men, Khalid had hoped to reassert his position as the rightful heir to his late father, with his younger half-brother, Sheikh Saud, retaining his position as Crown Prince. However,

much to the dismay of Khalid and his supporters, the UAE's federal government issued a statement of condolence through its official news agency WAM, which stated that Sheikh Saud had succeeded his father as ruler of the northern Emirate. Sheikh Khalid did not accept the official statement and issued a video message in which he asserted his claim to the throne, labelling the decision to appoint his younger brother as ruler 'unacceptable' (*The Guardian*, 2010; WAM, 2010).

The Emirates of Um al-Qaiwain and Ajman experienced a number of power transitions in recent times following the passing of three ruling sheikhs, but those were peaceful and swift in nature. Because these Emirates are ruled in the same style as the rest of the Emirates, the rulers continue to enjoy support from their populations. Portraits of the ruling sheikhs continue to adorn the streets and landmarks and the population seems quite content with the status quo. The same applies to the Emirate of Fujairah, where Sheikh Hamad bin Mohammed Al Sharqi and his son and Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Hamad Al Sharqi, continue to command considerable legitimacy among their population (Rugh, 2007).

Neo-patrimonial networks

A key pillar of stability in the UAE's earlier legitimacy formula is the unwritten ruling bargain between the ruler and the ruled. Together with a strong neo-patriarchal system, the ruling bargain continues to fulfil the needs of the population and guarantee a degree of acquiescence and gratitude from the population (Davidson, 2012; Huntington, 1968). It is worth noting that the ruling bargain had been established before the formation of the country as the nature of the political structure was beginning to shift away from reliance on personal authority following the population boom, rapid urbanisation and the growing administrative pressure being placed on the state (Davidson, 2005). After the formation of the UAE, the rapid population growth and the establishment of new governmental entities created a distance between the ruling

sheikhs and their populations. Although personal authority still forms an integral part of the legitimacy formula, it has been superseded by the rise of extensive neo-patrimonial networks in recent times as governments invested considerable time and wealth in the establishment of a new pattern of authority based on informal relations, kinship and long-standing tribal loyalties. A good example of this was Sheikh Zayed's appointment of three influential Bani-Yas figures to run the country's finances, foreign affairs and oil sector. Those three were Mohammed bin Habrush Al-Suwaidi, Ahmed bin Khalifa Al-Suwaidi and Mani bin Saeed Al-Otaiba (Van der Meulen, 1997).

As the population continues to grow, the country's leaders will continue to have enough candidates to occupy key posts in both the local and federal governments. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed and his crown prince and half-brother, Mohammed bin Zayed, continue to rely on Bani Yas tribesmen and other loyal tribes to fill key governmental posts. Although the neo-patrimonial network is a modern construct, it still reaffirms the historical and cultural realities of the country. Indeed, the UAE rulers continue to command considerable legitimacy from their role as tribal leaders, which explains why key governmental positions are occupied by members of the Bani Yas coalition. Davidson (2009) states that the advent of a multi-sector economy and the establishment of new governmental entities presents the ruling elite with the opportunity to incorporate more Emiratis into the decision-making establishment. As such, old tribal alliances are evolving and are beginning to form the backbone of tribal capitalism by providing the ruling elite with the educated technocrats they need to occupy key posts at both the local and federal levels.

The neo-patrimonial network of Dubai is not as pronounced as the one found in Abu Dhabi.[8]

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[8] In Abu Dhabi, entire tribes or tribal coalitions occupy high-ranking official posts and ministries.

However, there are channels of vertical communication that take the form of a pyramid, connecting the ruler and his associates down through intermediaries before reaching members of society. This pyramid can also act as a system of checks and balances when high-ranking officials abuse their powers or stray off the path laid out by the ruler: in addition to being relieved of their duties, their extended family's name is tarnished, which ultimately hinders the economic prospects of all other members of that family (Davidson, 2008).

The Al-Maktum rulers of Dubai descend from the Al-Bu Falasah[9] tribe of the Bani Yas clan and have always favoured members of their tribe to occupy key positions in the government. Chief among those are the Bin Sulayems, the Bel Houls, the Bin Delmouch and the Bin Huraiz sub-families. In addition to that, the prominent Al-Tayir family, which is a branch Al-Marrar, continues to play an important role both at the local and federal levels (Van der Meulen, 1997).

Dubai's rulers have also been keen to include non-Bani Yas tribes in the emirate's patrimonial network. The non-Bani Yas population of the emirate consists mostly of members of Dubai's Ajami merchant families and naturalised immigrant Arabs who moved to the emirate in the early twentieth century. An example of the latter is a breakaway branch of the Sharjah-native Al-Shamsi, who left Sharjah for Dubai and became prominent members of the emirate's chamber of commerce and police force (Van der Meulen, 1997).

Preserving Emirati identity in a fast-changing world

In the UAE, a debate emerged after the government published the population census in 2005, which revealed a significant population imbalance. The debate raised 'serious issues regarding

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[9] Al-Bu Falasah is the plural form of Al-Falasi, the second most influential tribe in the Bani Yas coalition.

national identity, citizenship, residency, multiculturalism, sustainability and, ultimately, the question as to who [would] be in the driving seat of this rapidly globalising society?' (Martin, 2014: p.93).

Similarly, a local commentator noted in an online article: 'the number of naturalised people, who have been granted citizenship, should not exceed the number of native citizens, because this, if it happens, will pose a strategic threat to the nation's identity and homogeneity' (al-Sha'ali, 2012).

In the same year, two Emirati women launched a social media campaign under the hashtag #UAEDressCode to call for a dress code in public places. The sight of tourists and residents wearing scant clothing in public places is regarded by many Emiratis to be an infringement of local values and tradition. The campaign did not aim to change the law; its main goal was to stop the erosion of local culture and values. The campaign's co-founder, Al-Rayyes, stated in a newspaper interview that she was not asking foreigners to wear long and loose clothing but to 'cover up parts of the body that are sensitive to our culture' (Ollson, 2012).

However, others were less critical of the situation. In a newspaper column, social media personality and commentator Sultan Al-Qassemi argued that immigrants who had resided in the UAE since the 19th and 20th centuries had 'assimilated and enriched UAE society having become citizens of the newly created state,' and that 'mixed marriages and a more globalised migration ensued, further diversifying the population' (Al-Qassemi, 2013). Similarly, the director of the government-funded Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Scientific Research, Jamal Sanad Al-Suwaidi stated: 'the demographic fight is 'lost' and that 'coexistence' is needed', while Mishaal Al-Gergawi called for 'offering a special permanent residency status to those long-term residents sharing the cultural values and (official) language of the country' (Partrick, 2009, p. 30). It is worth noting that the ethnic backgrounds and the

degree of tribal affiliation influence public views regarding such issues, as is the case with the Emiratis quoted above. Sultan Al-Qassemi is a member of the ruling family of Sharjah, Jamal Al-Suwaidi's family forms part of the Bani-Yas clan and Al-Gergawi is a member of a merchant family of Persian descent (Martin, 2014). Their opinions, therefore, provide a valuable insight into the diverse nature of Emirati society, which goes beyond the oft-used generic terms and constructs present in a sizeable number of publications on the region and its people. It also shows the 'fluidity of identity was probably always present' and that 'understanding that this is the nature of the ordinary people who live in the region helps explain why the battle to control and shape their identities can be so fierce' (Beeman, 2009, pp. 156-157).

Accordingly, Davis and Gavrielides discuss 'the relationship among state formation, historical memory, and popular culture' (1991, p. xiv) and explain how, in the Gulf, as in other countries, governments have invested heavily in establishing a new historical narrative in a manner which reaffirms the undisputed legitimacy of the rulers and deter any potential threat to their rule. Similarly, the authors make a distinction between the notions of 'state formation' and 'statecraft', which they respectively define as 'the process or mechanisms whereby a state enhances its power and authority' and 'the skills whereby political elites or ruling classes promote state formation' in order to 'generalize their interests to the populace at large' (Davis and Gavrielides, 1991, p. 12).

This is normally achieved through a combination of formal and informal means to emphasise that the rulers and the population share a common destiny. Davis and Gavrielides argue that the UAE government has 'actively promoted the notion of Gulf folklore as a basis for forging a more explicit political consciousness centred around a Gulf Arab identity' as well as a distinct Arab tribal identity (1991, p. 19). The question of identity has been a mainstay in Emirati

politics in recent years. The year 2008, declared the year for National Identity and the Federal Demographic Council, was established to propose policies to address the current demographic imbalance in the country (Martin, 2014). The government has constructed an elaborate construct of Emirati identity typified by 'images of camels, horses, forts, coffee pots, dhows, and falcons...' in traditional and emerging forms of media (al-Dhaheri, 2009, p. 276).

These symbols often serve to reinvigorate tribal histories and preserve the national identity through strengthening the state's historical narrative (Davidson, 2009). However, this narrative ignores many aspects of this society that remain important when it comes to understanding the current social realities of the country. What is worth noting about the official narrative is that it is not only aimed at Emiratis but also at expatriate residents and is used 'as a visual reminder of their status as guests of the UAE' (Szuchman, 2012, p. 37).

Indeed, efforts have been made to remove any existing cultural idiosyncrasies to protect national identity, but this has created somewhat of a divide between social groups and the subsequent dismissal of cultural elements which were deemed 'less Arab' and the 'less tribal' (Vora, 2013; Martin, 2014). For Patrick (2009, p. 17) 'a Bedouin-style cultural past even as nationals are overwhelmingly part of settled communities underscores the separate identity and history of the individual emirates, for whom the notion of the wider Emirati nation is a construct with, by definition, a short-lived history'. For instance, many Emirati children are not told that teak wood is imported from India, that Arabic music is heavily influenced by its African counterpart, that the falcons used during the hunting season are actually caught in Pakistan, or the henna used to adorn the hands of women originates from India. All nationals are expected to accept this amalgamated notion of identity in order to become part of the community, regardless of their origins or their cultural and social heritage (Vora, 2013).

As a result, a discourse has emerged of Emiratis being more Emirati than others, thus

strengthening the argument that strict definitions of citizenship give rise to xenophobia (Baharoon, 2012, p. 1; Al-Qassemi, 2010). Indeed, the Dubai-based research centre, B'huth, warned that pushing the narrative of the UAE's culture being threatened by other cultures would eventually backfire due to its divisive nature (Baharoon, 2012). In order to dismantle xenophobic sentiments, the government launched a social development programme called *'Watani'* (my nation), which aims at creating 'a discourse of National Identity that does not collide with multiculturalism in a diverse community' within 'a framework where National Identity can be maintained through inclusion rather than exclusion' (Baharoon, 2012, p. 2).

The focus here was to put an end to the clash of cultures narrative. Little attention was paid to the plural cultures that have historically contributed to the establishment of multiple Emiratis identities. For many scholars, this would have made society more inclusive and contributed to the acceptance of differences as enriching rather than being treated as a threat (Martin, 2014; Vora, 2013) At the other end of the spectrum, Al-Qassemi (2013) argued in one of his newspaper columns that due to having diverse cultural backgrounds, Emiratis have adopted an inclusive Emirati identity over the last four decades and that being Emirati denotes a distinct way of life and a strong sense of shared destiny.

Conceptual framework and assumptions

The goal of this section is to highlight the thesis' contribution to our understanding of political legitimacy in the UAE and how it builds upon the literature. The conceptual framework presents the reimagined regime legitimacy formula in the post-Arab uprisings era.

The earlier regime legitimacy formula in the UAE rested heavily on Weberian notions of charisma and traditional authority; patrimonial loyalties undermined the establishment of a neo-patrimonial order due to the state of pre-oil politics in the Emirates. When the country was

established, the transition from a patrimonial order to a neo-patrimonial one took place. This was marked by the establishment of state institutions, run by members of the ruling families and their historical allies. While this move reflected the ruler's ambition to lay the foundations for legal/rational authority, this process was impeded by the existence of the well-established neo-patrimonial networks.

While it is understandable that scholars would attribute the UAE's stability over the years to its unique socio-political structure and its rulers' ability to redistribute oil wealth to the population, it is important to note that the UAE's legitimacy formula is not static. Indeed, as this thesis explores, the leaders of the country have carved out a new legitimacy formula, which responds to the demands of a changing regional and domestic political landscape in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. This new legitimacy formula draws more on secular notions of identity and citizenry and less on notions of tribal and religious identity.

The purpose of this study is therefore twofold: firstly, to study the impact of the Arab protests on regime legitimacy in a modernising monarchy; secondly, to address the knowledge gaps caused by the paucity of Emirati-led research on post-Arab uprisings UAE. The thesis will focus on the internal and external legitimacy of the state by studying its domestic and regional response to the Arab uprisings. The thesis will therefore focus on the following topics:

- The foundations of domestic legitimacy in the UAE, before and after the Arab uprisings

- The rise and fall of local Islamists in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings

- The evolution of the UAE's national role conceptions evident in its assertive foreign policy

- The UAE's post-Arab uprisings security strategy

- State-led citizen-building efforts as a new mechanism to redefine the domestic legitimacy formula

The rationale behind the selection of these topics stems from the belief that they encapsulate the best examples of the UAE's management of the post-Arab period both at the regional and the domestic levels. One of the main goals of this thesis is to explore alternative explanations for political legitimacy in the UAE that go beyond notions of rentierism. This is not to say that rentierism is not an integral part of the legitimacy formula. But the thesis aims to dispel a widely-held belief that a state's legitimacy hinges entirely upon its ability to 'buy off' citizens. As the literature review has shown, the tendency to exaggerate the importance of rentierism while treating citizens as passive subjects whose consent can simply be bought limits the scope of our understanding of the evolving internal and the external facets of political legitimacy in the UAE and in other Gulf states.

The evolving nature of legitimacy in the UAE occurred at a time when its authoritarian regime was faced with an external threat that transcends physical borders. One of the important precursors for regime downfall and loss of legitimacy some Arab states was the fragmented nature of a social contract that had long run its course. Many of these states descended into chaos because of growing societal insecurities, which not only included increased pressure for greater political emancipation but also action to ameliorate growing socio-economic distress. While the UAE was comparatively stable, this stability was underscored by a robust social contract that still unites the people and its leadership. Economically, the UAE's welfare state proved sufficient enough to cater to the economic demands of its population. Drawing on an array of conceptual tools to construct its framework of analysis, this thesis rethinks how we can conceive of regime legitimacy in a modernising yet hereditary monarchy after the Arab uprisings.

The need to understand authoritarian legitimacy in the UAE without total reliance on rentier state theory is important. This is the starting point of this research and it is where its conceptual framework plays a key role. The volatility of oil prices, the challenge of Islamists and the lack of a strong national identity necessitated a departure from relying on traditional norms and tools of regime legitimacy. The Arab spring has had a significant impact on constructs of regime legitimacy and this thesis has identified four salient features of post-Arab spring UAE that, collectively, constitute its conceptual framework. The conceptual framework plays an important role in informing and ordering the material used to answer the research question. As such, the individual chapters explore the components of the conceptual framework at length. Although this is not one of the main goals of the thesis, it is important to emphasise the uniqueness of the UAE vis-à-vis its GCC counterparts. This is a much-needed departure from the scholarly tendency to treat GCC states as a monolithic bloc. Indeed, the recent intra-GCC crises have presented the need for a dynamic academic discourse on the GCC, especially with regards to their diverging foreign policies.

The nature of political legitimacy in the UAE is evolving and the need to understand the changing nature of state-society relations is crucial to explaining its post-Arab spring political trajectory. Rentier state theory retains its importance in explaining the economic side of state-society relations but more often than not, it assumes loyalty and political acquiescence can be bought off. By contrast, the conceptual framework developed in this thesis offers an alternative explanation over how Emirati elites have revised the social contract to embed new forms of legitimacy with a clear Emirati national identity. Bringing these different conceptual tools together to form a framework creates a nuanced discourse that seeks to explore how regional political transitions can alter the behaviour of states and how they use change to shore up their legitimacy.

Schlumberger suggests four core dimensions to studying legitimacy in non-democratic states, which can be utilised as tools for the purpose of guiding academic research on legitimacy and legitimation. To recap, these are: (1) The 'Who' or Addressees of Legitimacy Claims; (2) The Success or: Measurement of Legitimacy; (3) The 'What', or: Sources of Legitimacy; and (4) The 'How': or Modes of Legitimation.

As mentioned in the literature review, one of the issues that needs to be addressed concerns the modes of legitimisation. Namely, how regimes go about conveying the contents of their strategies of legitimation to their populations This question is different from asking what contents are being conveyed (Schlumberger, 2010). Possible answers include political mobilisation to achieve consent, symbolic politics and identity politics (Schlumberger, 2010; Wedeen, 2008). While this thesis focuses to a degree on the content of legitimacy being conveyed by the UAE rulers, it prioritises looking at the modes used to convey the content of their legitimacy in the post-Arab uprisings context. This is where it becomes important to examine the role of top-down reform as a mode of conveying the content of the reimagined legitimacy formula.

As the literature review has shown, studies on legitimacy focus on national rulers and their legitimacy vis-à-vis their population. Yet, legitimacy strategies can also target different social groups, actors or segments of society. Furthermore, it is worth noting that legitimacy has gained an international dimension in recent times. Schlumberger, while mindful of this, nonetheless placed the focus of his enquiry on domestic legitimacy (2010, p. 240).

Overall, Western legitimacy theories have centred on the nation-state and the domestic aspect of political legitimacy. However, in a globalised world, the international dimension of legitimacy has come to play an important role in explaining how countries go about achieving their foreign policy goals. This thesis takes that into account when looking at the UAE's foreign policy in the post-Arab uprisings era. As the below diagrams show, the UAE's foreign policy and its top-down reform agenda inform one another as integral components of the reimagined regime legitimacy formula. Hoffman (2011) points out that autocracies and democracies alike seek international legitimacy, stating that the pursuit of international legitimacy in international affairs predates globalisation.

Given that it has been established that Rentierism does not, on its own, explain state-society relations and regime legitimacy in the UAE and the GCC, it is important to provide a more nuanced explanation for regime legitimacy. And this is the goal of this thesis, which it aims to fulfil through putting forth the four frames of analysis of the UAE's reimagined regime legitimacy formula. It is not an overstatement to argue that even in an autocratic political system, legitimacy is not a static concept. Indeed, even autocrats need to find ways to legitimise their rule by obtaining popular consent. The thesis attempts to amplify this point.

When examining the broader literature on legitimacy in the Gulf, two major shortcomings become apparent. Firstly, while many Western scholars understand the region, their scholarly output reflects their own understanding of regime legitimacy and state-society relations, which draws on Western constructs of legitimacy where parliamentary sovereignty and strong civil societies determine its scope. As such, the literature presupposes a bottom-up notion of legitimacy, driven by political emancipation, rather than being channelled from the top down. Indeed, Western scholars view top-down reform in a negative light, mainly because they see

such reform as 'social engineering', in an attempt to impose technical solutions to what are in essence, socio-political problems. (Jones, 2017) It is worth emphasising here, however, that just because the momentum for a reform process is top down, it does not follow that the wider population in autocratic states remains passive. If anything, the regime uses top-down reform to reimagine the legitimacy formula as a way to accommodate the evolving nature of society, demographic shifts, and the way in which new technologies, not least social media platforms, have globalised the flow of and access to information beyond state control.   Still, it hopes to lessen dependence on traditional modes of legitimacy, it does not call for their outright abolition. Rather, it seeks to build upon them in reimagining the future citizen.

Understanding this top down process of political reform in an autocratic state and how, in the process, it has recast our understanding of legitimacy, is the main contribution made by this thesis to the literature. It aims to provide a way to understand how the UAE has weathered the storm of the Arab uprisings. This was not achieved through material means alone. Thus it is important to understand this emerging legitimacy formula. For while it is undoubtedly a top down process, it does not mean it is being imposed on the population in an arbitrary manner. One of the most unique features of top-down reform in the UAE, is that, despite it taking place in a closed political system, the process is being negotiated between the state's institutions and the Emirati population, especially among the youth.

The UAE's emphasis on cultivating a new Emirati identity has taken place against the backdrop of regional change. Even though the triumphs of Islamists across the region proved to be short-lived, the regime in the UAE remains wary of their transnational appeal and their ability to utilise a religious-based discourse to instigate political change. As such the UAE battle against

Islamists informs both its state-led reform efforts internally and its foreign and security policies externally.

These areas have come to characterise the response of the UAE post-Arab spring, which is why they form an integral part of the framework. Chapter Two and Chapter Three, which cover the UAE's response to Islamists and its state-led social reforms respectively, act as important precursors to the discussion that takes place in the chapters that shed light on the country's foreign and security policies. The fight against Islamists and social reform have come to inform and shape the UAE's self-perception regarding its role in the region. This is where the use of role theory becomes vital because it examines closely how states conceive of their foreign policy roles by also incorporating domestic determinants. These can range from the mindset of its leadership to the eddies of internal politics.

It is essential to note that the conceptual framework is designed to helps us to rethink the ideas surrounding legitimacy in the UAE. This is where its different components and conceptual tools come together. By tackling each individual component of the framework, the thesis addresses the central research question by exploring how these components have impacted the UAE's post-Arab spring policies both internally and externally.
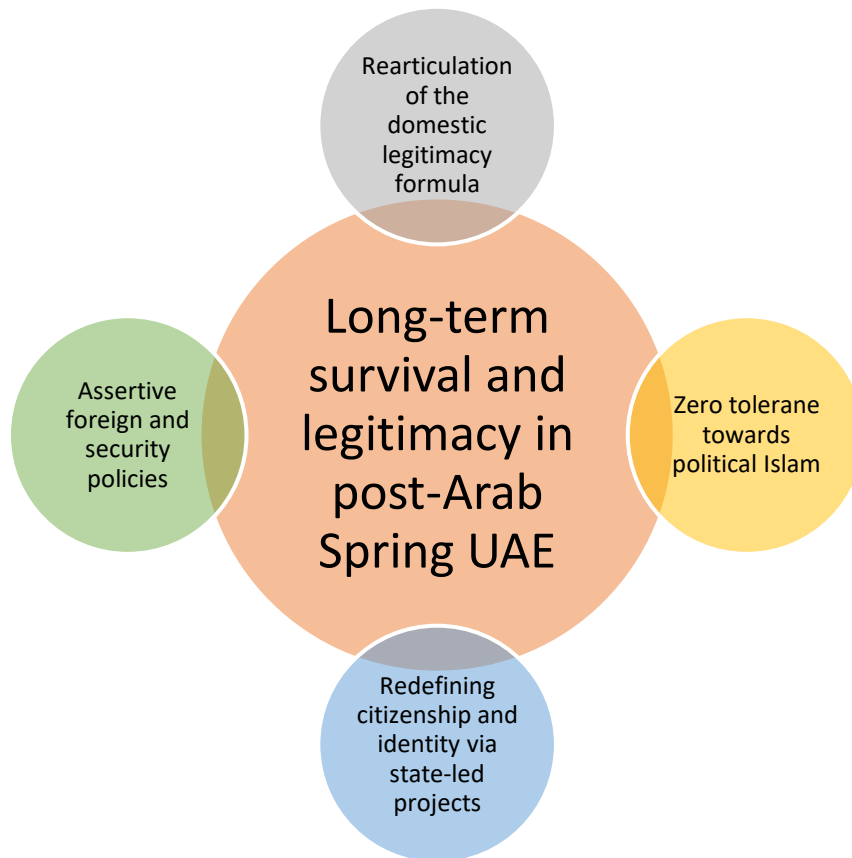
Figure 2: Political legitimacy and survival in the post-Arab uprisings UAE: a conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework shown above consists of four elements, which are critical to legitimacy.

1. Re-articulation of the domestic legitimacy formula: the need to revisit the social contract forms an important part of the regime's long-term plan to stay in power. The role of rentierism as the focal point of state-society relations will be diminished. Also traditional modes of legitimacy, such as religion and tribalism, are diminishing in importance. This is significant as far this study is concerned because those who seek to contest the regime legitimacy will find it difficult to invoke religion or tribal allegiances to challenge the new construct of regime legitimacy.

2. Zero tolerance of political Islam: The internal and external threat of political Islam was met with a heavy handed response from the regime. Islamists capitalised on the

revolutionary sentiment of the uprisings to pressure Arab regimes to reform. The UAE, who came to view the uprisings as a threat to its legitimacy, decided to adopt a zero tolerance approach to dealing with perceived threats to its legitimacy. This has had a significant influence on the regime's internal and external policies. Internally, it gave the regime's top-down reform a renewed focus. Externally, it influenced much of the country's foreign and security policies. The challenge posed by the Islamists has had important implications for the regime's legitimacy in the post-Arab uprisings era.

3. Promotion of new identity through state-led reform: The promotion of a progressive identity fulfils the goals set out by the regime, which is to re-articulate the regime legitimacy formula. To avoid being beholden to primordial modes of legitimacy such as religion and the tribe, the new identity emphasises loyalty to the state by promoting a national identity that is politically conservative, socially liberal and economically neoliberal. Legitimacy is thus garnered on the basis of performance as opposed to being garnered by invoking religion and tribal allegiances. To reengineer the rentier mentality, the state introduced the national service. The national service teaches individuals not to expect anything from the state but to instead be willing to make sacrifices. To reengineer the rentier mentality, the state hopes to alter the existing social contract. The goal here is for the Emirati citizen is to be an embodiment of the regime's vision for the UAE, internally and externally. This is tied in to the regime's own National Role Conceptions which inform its foreign policy.

4. Assertive foreign and security policies: The UAE's assertive foreign and security policies are designed to eliminate perceived threats to the state's survival and legitimacy. Although the focus here is on confronting external threats, the UAE's

foreign policies are rooted in the regime's National Role Conceptions, conceived internally. When examining the UAE's foreign policy in the post-Arab uprisings era, it becomes apparent that it was influenced by the rise of Islamists. The threat posed by Islamists on the regime's internal and external legitimacy in a changing region had kickstarted a new era in the UAE's foreign policy. Here we notice two features of the country's foreign policy that relate to its efforts to safeguard its legitimacy. Firstly, the need to eliminate threats, and secondly, the need to diversify its current network of allies. Through the use of role theory, we look at the domestic determinants of foreign policy making and how it reflects its intended role, as per the regime's vision. However, the new foreign policy is also a reflection of the new Emirati identity, which is shaped by the top-down emphasis on exporting Emirati values. This pattern can be seen when looking at how the regime uses its foreign-aid programme as a legitimising agent. It can also be seen how the national service acts as a legitimising agent for the regime's foreign and security policies. By cultivating the notion of sacrifice, the regime focuses on the internal and the external facets of sacrifice. The internal facet of sacrifice, explained above, creates citizens that are less reliant on state largesse. The external facet focuses on preparing young Emiratis to sacrifice their lives for the country. Although, there is a lack of evidence surrounding the participation of conscripts in overseas military operations, it is important to note that this is not the focus of this thesis. Indeed, as far as this thesis is concerned, the external facet of sacrifice reinforces the regime's legitimacy by teaching young Emiratis to be prepared to give their lives for the country. This is an important method of teaching Emiratis that loyalty for the regime transcends their own individual needs and desires, at a time when the regime is attempting to rewrite the social contract.

Overall, the construct of legitimacy in the UAE encompasses a two-stage process. The first stage is the pre-Arab uprisings legitimacy process explained in the previous section. These earlier modes of legitimacy included tribal and clan allegiances, alongside rentierism. While authors like Gray (2011) have attempted to broaden the scope of Rentierism in the previous decade, he still regards it as the main pillar of regime legitimacy.

Rentierism, while integral to understanding regime legitimacy, no longer explains fully the basis on which that self-same legitimacy rests. Thus, the conceptual framework represents the second stage of understanding legitimacy in post-Arab uprisings UAE. It draws attention to the emerging sources of political legitimacy in the UAE at a time when the state is beginning to move beyond reliance on traditional sources of regime legitimacy, notably Rentierism, tribalism and Islam. While these new facets of legitimacy might seem unrelated at first glance, it is important to be aware of the context and the environment in which they have emerged in the aftermath of a watershed event that swept the whole region.

Thus, by developing the conceptual framework shown above, this thesis sets out to analyse how the construct of legitimacy in the UAE has undergone profound change since the Arab uprisings. The main hypothesis to be tested is that the UAE has set the foundations for long-term regime survival, both internally and externally. This has been made possible by the proactive approach it has adopted regarding the issues outlined above. These areas were chosen as areas of enquiry because they reflect the most salient features of post-Arab uprisings UAE.

The conceptual framework explains the progression of legitimacy in the UAE. It seeks to explore the UAE's response to the Arab uprising, which was perceived to be a threat to its legitimacy. It identifies four interrelated features of post-Arab uprisings UAE, which form its

conceptual framework. The framework serves as a map that guides the researcher towards fulfilling the objectives of the study, which is to study the impact of the uprisings on regime legitimacy in the UAE. The role of the chapters is to shed light on the areas which the UAE had emphasised to shore up its internal and external regime legitimacy. It also seeks to reimagine the prevailing understanding of state-society relations through arguing that there is more to those relations than Rentierism has to offer.

It is necessary to be mindful of the changing domestic environment when exploring the UAE's quest for external legitimacy. This is where role theory is capable of providing an insight into the conception of a state's foreign policy and its role in safeguarding external legitimacy.

The extensive use of role theory in the analysis of foreign policy has long generated ambiguity among scholars as to what exactly a role is, how NRCs are formed and understood, and who the main carriers of these NRCs are. It is, therefore, imperative to provide a brief background of role theory before attempting to use it to analyse the foreign policy of the UAE in Chapter Four (Ifantis, Triantaphyllou and Kotelis, 2015). Krotz (2002, p. 6) defines NRCs as follows: 'NRCs are domestically shared views and understanding regarding the proper role and purpose of one's own state as a social collectivity in the international arena. They are products of history, memory and socialization. They may be contested, but often endure.'

A different approach is taken by Hymans (2006), who defines NRCs as follows: 'An individual's understanding of the state's identity – his or her sense of what the nation naturally stands for and how high it naturally stands in comparison to other in the international arena' (Hymans 2006, p. 18).

It is important to note that despite the key role domestic factors (capabilities and identities) play in shaping national role conceptions, there is a strong consensus among role theory

scholars that national role conceptions are also shaped in response to the expectations of other parties (mostly states) on the international scene (Thies, 2010).

It has to be noted, however that the application of role theory to analyse the foreign policy of a liberal democracy is usually more complex than applying it to study the foreign policy of autocratic states, where power resides in the hands of a few decision-makers. In autocracies, contesting a state's foreign policy in an overt manner carries severe risks, legal or otherwise, for the individuals or the groups concerned. As such, citizens in autocratic states may outwardly support a state's foreign policy, but the reality might be entirely different. The UAE, being an autocratic state, has sought to mitigate this tension by cultivating a strong sense of national consciousness. As will be explored in the thesis, this process has informed a state-led effort to redefine what it means to be an Emirati citizen.

Using role theory to study foreign policy in autocratic states requires access to information on the internal dynamics of foreign policy decision-making, including the thought processes and psychological attributes of decision-makers. This is the most significant contribution of role theory, especially when used in conjunction with face-to-face interviews with decision-makers. However, gaining access to such primary material related to NRCs by dealing with decision-makers is a difficult task given the political climate that does not generally accommodate this type of research (Sekhri, 2009).

Role theory may be useful to understand how the elite conceive of the state's role, but it remains limited to some extent. Firstly, roles do not determine behaviour. Indeed, while role theory can give us an insight into NRCs, how this actually effects their behaviour remains unclear. Wendt's (1999) assumption that roles are predefined via symbolic interactionism has been criticised by McCourt (2012) who draws on the original text of G.H. Mead (1934). From Mead's perspective, roles are sets of appropriate behaviours, not fixed duties; they emerge

through interaction and give the actor a sense of its structure and the scope of possible action. Roles are thus the necessary social vehicle for action in its meaning-creating, identity-affirming sense.

Critics of role theory such as Nabers (2011, p. 80-81) and Zehfuss (2002) state that role theory neglects the role of language as an important part of social interaction. This further undermines its position as a tool of foreign policy analysis (in Baert, Langenhove and James, 2019).

Role theory has been criticised for restricting the complex field of foreign policy analysis to "roles" (role perceptions and role performances). Overall, placing great emphasis on the concept of "role" when analysing foreign policy might limit the contributions made by role theory to no more than a descriptive account (Sekhri, 2009).

However, despite those shortcomings, researchers can still use role theory to understand how a state rationalises its foreign policy. Indeed, the systematic use of role theory facilitates the division of foreign policy analysis into six broad categories: (i) the exploration of the various determinants and factors that shape foreign policy, (ii) the study of the impact of these factors on foreign policy making, (iii) the study of the nature and characteristics of foreign policy orientation (role perceptions), (iv) the study of the nature and characteristics of foreign policy conduct (role performances), (v) the study of decision-making process and finally (vi) the examination of the interplay between role perceptions and role performances (Sekhri, 2009).

Role theory is a flexible theoretical instrument as it allows its users to combine procedures and principles drawn from different paradigms and approaches within the same framework. For example, when exploring the sources of foreign policy, users of role theory may draw on the Realist paradigm, which draws attention to the role of state capabilities and state resources as the key determinants of foreign policy. Also, analysing foreign policy orientation could involve the use of discourse analysis or it could also involve looking at it through the lens of

bureaucratic politics (Sekhri, 2009).

However, while there may be a discrepancy between role perceptions and actual role performances in authoritarian regimes, this does not the undermine the strength of role theory. Indeed one way to overcome this gap is to use role theory in conjunction with interviews to obtain primary data regarding a state's foreign policy. It is possible that, within certain bounds, access to key decision-makers is possible but that the interview material needs to placed and affirmed within a wider conceptual literature.

Holsti's work on role theory was criticised on analytical grounds. On the one hand, there was a focus on Holsti's categorisation of state roles and its limitations. Scholars like Shih (1998) argued that Holsti's typology fails to describe the richness of human cultures, and its greatest flaw is that it does not employ deductive categorisation of roles. Moreover, Holsti's typology was also criticised for being outdated due to the fact that it was conceived during the Cold War era. Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot (1996) introduced new national role conceptions such as 'global system collaborator' and 'global leader' which were not previously included in Holsti's work. The purpose of this was to categorise state roles in the post-Cold War international system. But obverall, as Ifantis, Triantaphyllou and Kotelis (2015, p.3) noted; Holsti's typology did include similar roles such as "subsystem collaborator" and "subsystem leader."

There are also concerns regarding the analytical power of role theory, especially as far as its application to foreign policy analysis is concerned. Given the fact that the theory was imported from a different discipline, the most obvious concern is whether it can be applied to the study of foreign policy analysis. This issue of an interdisciplinary fit becomes even more apparent when the theory in question is used to study phenomena on a different level of analysis (Ifantis, Triantaphyllou and Kotelis, 2015). Still, Backman (1970) was optimistic that role theory (as

psychologists and social psychologists use it) can also be used to gain insight into foreign policy decision-making.

Cantir and Kaarbo (2012) identified that the main response to the different level of analysis problem, which was mentioned above, was for scholars to study the NRCs of the decision-making elites. The goal here is to allow role theory to fulfil its original purpose, which is to understand the behaviour of individuals. As elites can be studied individually, role theory might be more relevant to them than it would to a different level of analysis, such as the state (Ifantis, Triantaphyllou and Kotelis, 2015).

Nevertheless, in an authoritarian context, the distinction between those individuals and the state is far less pronounced than it is elsewhere. Thus, an examination of the shift in the behaviour of an authoritarian state following a change in leadership is possible through the use of role theory. This is what the thesis aims to achieve by using role theory to understand the UAE's evolving foreign policy.

Through the use of role theory, we look at the domestic determinants of foreign policy making and how it reflects its intended role, as per the regime's vision. However, the new foreign policy is also a reflection of the new Emirati identity, which is shaped by the top-down emphasis on exporting Emirati values. This pattern can be seen when looking at how the regime uses its foreign-aid programme as a legitimising agent. As established earlier on in thesis, this is an important method of teaching Emiratis that loyalty for the regime transcends their own individual needs and desires, at a time when the regime is attempting to rewrite the social contract.

According to Pinto (2014), there are two important caveats in the study of the emergence of the UAE as a regional role model. While it is worth noting that the UAE's self-image has undergone profound changes according to its official rhetoric, our knowledge regarding the public's perception of the UAE's evolving self-image remains limited due to the lack of research on hetero-images. The analysis of hetero-images focuses on selected audiences receiving the country's discourse. The study of self-image and hetero-images forms an important element of the study of national role conceptions and an empirical differentiation between the two can explain how a country makes sense of its foreign policy within the international community (Elgstrom and Smith, 2006). A second caveat is connected to the disparity often observed between a government's rhetoric and its actions. As Mayers (2008) stated in the context of the studies of the EU as an ethical power, comparing the government's rhetoric to its actions inevitably reveals contradictions.

Usually, researchers have sought to justify the use of role theory by investigating the NRCs of foreign policy elites. This, in their view, provides an insight into the domestic determinants of foreign policymaking (Korany, 2005). NRCs are argued to have their roots in society and can, as a result, be shared by most citizens in a state (Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot, 1996). This argument rests on roles, among other things, being part of a state's history, culture, and social characteristics (Aggestam, 2006). In addition, role theorists justify their use of elite NRCs by asserting that roles are 'intersubjective' and are, therefore, embedded in the minds of citizens. (Cantir and Karboo, 2012, pp. 7-8).

While the ruling elite may believe that a state should play a certain role internationally and they may believe the public supports their foreign policy decisions, this may not always be true. Indeed, the elite's assertion of a national role is not a reflection of a domestic consensus, especially when examining the foreign policy of federation such as the UAE.

The views held by the public are rooted in the core values or orientations of their societies (Cantir and Karboo, 2012). These orientations, such as internationalism or pacifism, certainly relate to and shape public notions of national roles. So when the elite act in a way that clashes with those perceived roles, they begin to be scrutinised and questioned by the public. As the ruling elite feel that this could lead to their legitimacy being threatened, and to prevent the UAE's foreign and security policies from being scrutinised by the population, the government has spearheaded a series of top-down social reforms which aim to redefine what it means to be an Emirati citizen. State-led reform has gained a new impetus following pressure from Islamist-led opposition, whose adherents became more vocal in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. Role theory will be utilised to showcase that top-down reform has utility beyond internal politics. It is worth emphasising that will be the first time the UAE's foreign policy is examined from this perspective.

What makes the UAE a suitable case study for role theory is the significant shift that occurred in its foreign policy in the years leading up to and after the Arab uprisings. Its assertive foreign policy is unlike anything the country has produced since it was founded nearly fifty years ago. While it may seem plausible to attribute this change to the mindset of the current generation of rulers, it would make more sense to explain this identity-based evolution through the lens of role theory.

The use of role theory as a tool of foreign policy analysis (FPA) has broadened the scope of research for IR scholars. While FPA introduced actor-based approaches by examining the state from within, its tendency to overstate the importance of the cognitive dimension of foreign policymaking leaves a few questions unanswered in terms of the lack of an operational and descriptive framework (Ovali, 2013).If national identity is assumed to be a determinant of foreign policy, as this thesis argues, there is a strong case to be made for favouring role theory

here. Role theory takes into account the unique characteristics of each society and the role of the ruling elite when it comes to the conception of the self, self-related roles and the performances of these roles (Aggestam, 2006). This is key because it reveals the connection between national identity, the one the UAE is attempting to construct, and its newfound foreign policy behaviour. In this respect, the questions of who we are and how we are perceived by others brought identity to the forefront of FPA literature even before social constructivist theories made their debut in the field (Ovali, 2013).

Overall, the conceptual framework presents the author's understanding of how its layers of analysis interconnect and inform one another amid the thesis' focus on the impact of the uprisings on internal and external regime legitimacy. This is its most significant contribution to the literature.

The thesis puts forth a legitimacy formula that is unique to the UAE. This conception of this formula occurred at a time when the state was faced with internal and external challenges to its legitimacy. Mindful of the volatility of oil prices, the UAE has made economic diversification a long-term goal. This is by no means a new phenomenon and it has been widely discussed in the literature on the UAE and the GCC. The resource-based economies of the Gulf have indeed been attempting to diversify for decades, to avoid being reliant on oil alone. Nonetheless, the current emphasis on diversification encompasses a sociopolitical character. When looked at in the context of the changes taking place in post-Arab spring UAE, this represents an attempt on behalf of the regime to promote a construct of legitimacy that draws less on Rentierism than at any point in the country's history.

How the components of the conceptual framework interrelate is an important question as it sets the stage for answering the main research question. The diagrams below show the linkages between the components of the conceptual framework and legitimacy.
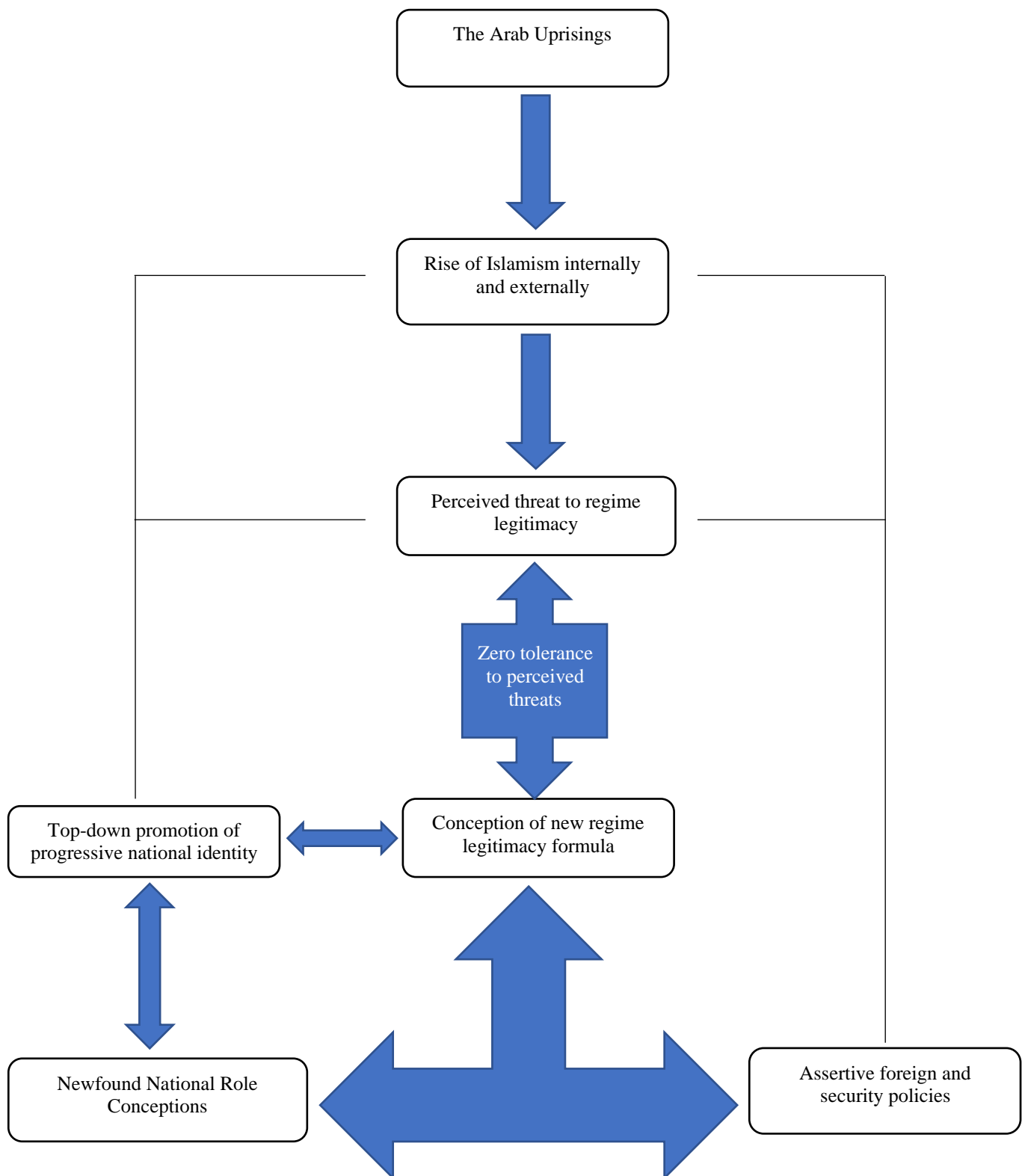
Figure 3: How the different components of the conceptual framework interrelate.

To understand the impact the 'Arab Spring' has had on the UAE's stability, we have to examine the UAE's reaction to it. The UAE's reaction was driven by the need to maintain the domestic and regional status quo. The response need not be seen as anti-revolutionary in its totality; the Arab uprisings have forced the country to adopt a more proactive approach to security, one that for example has placed it at odds with Qatar's. Recent changes in the UAE's survival strategy can be traced back to external and internal developments. Internally, a key source of legitimacy has been the civil model and soft power image the UAE has crafted in recent years.

It is important to state that this new legitimacy formula is neither perfect nor set in stone. It is a context-specific model that is exclusive to the UAE, which means that it may not fit other Gulf states. It is also still crystallising; its success or lack thereof will depend on the UAE's ability to continue its efforts to diversify its economy, project power and utilise its foreign-aid and investment budgets in the correct manner.[10] The UAE's long-term regional stability will depend on the quality of its allies and the future of its partnerships.[11] The UAE's allies and partnerships will continue to change as the state's strategy evolves and changes, which might lead to a reorientation of its foreign and regional policies.

The new Emirati identity that is being constructed –.or rather sculpted from the past – is very much conscious of the present. It is politically conservative, socially progressive and neo-liberal economically. Politically, it favours order over change even if it is potentially positive because change is seen as disruptive. For Emiratis, loyalty is not entirely based on the welfare state. In fact, leadership and legitimacy are garnered on the basis of overall performance rather than being dependent on the rentier state. It used to be the case that political apathy guaranteed

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[10] Author's interview with a leading local commentator. Dubai, 10th of February 2018.

[11] Author's interview with a thinktank director. Abu Dhabi, 5th March 2018.

access to the welfare state but that is no longer the case as the formula has changed; political acquiescence guarantees access to security, especially after the Arab uprisings.[12]

The state has introduced social reforms to cultivate its legal/rational legitimacy. This new outlook aims to rely less on traditional modes of conveying legitimacy. However, state-led reform in the UAE, while being socially liberal, contains a paradox; while it seeks to promote a liberal social order that complements the new Emirati identity described above, it still emphasises and promotes loyalty to a hereditary monarchy as the chapter on state-led reform shall explore further.

Following the discussion on its conceptual framework, the thesis sets out to answer the following research questions.

Main Research Question

How have the Arab uprisings impacted upon constructs of regime legitimacy and survival in the UAE?

Sub Questions:

1. How did the pan-Islamist Islah movement attempt to contest the legitimacy of the state?
2. What is the driving force behind recent citizen-building initiatives in the UAE?
3. How effective is the UAE's post-Arab uprisings foreign and security policies in terms of ensuring the country's survival in a turbulent region?

To answer these questions, this thesis is structured as follows. Chapter One provides a historical background of political legitimacy in the UAE, thereby setting the stage for the remaining

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[12] Author's interview with a leading local commentator in Dubai, 10th of February 2018.

chapters.

Chapter Two sheds light on the history of the pan-Islamist Islah movement in the Emirates, whose adherents were on the receiving end of a sweeping government crackdown. The purpose of this chapter is to showcase the manner in which Islah attempted to contest the legitimacy of the state following the Arab uprisings and the impact this had had on the state's domestic and regional survival. Chapter Three critically discusses the topic of state-led citizen in non-democratic states. In doing so, the thesis pays close attention to the liberal social reform initiatives of the UAE, which aim to carve out a new meaning of citizenry that adheres to liberal notions and values. In addition to that, this chapter aims to explain the driving force behind such initiatives in the UAE and how they fit into the context of political legitimacy and survival in the post-Arab uprisings era.

Finally, Chapters Four and Five analyse the UAE's post-Arab uprisings foreign and security policies respectively. Chapter Four studies the emergence of the UAE as a key regional player in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. By using role theory, this chapter examines the recent change in the UAE's approach towards regional issues and argues that it reflects a change in the way the UAE's rulers view their own country. Chapter Five examines the UAE's evolving security and defence strategy in a post-Arab uprisings context. The goal here is to build on the previous chapter. Both the UAE's foreign and security policies are inextricably linked. Given that the UAE is geographically small, the chapter explores the UAE's position in a changing regional landscape while demonstrating an awareness of the literature on small state security.

Methodology

Academic research rests on philosophical assumptions regarding what qualifies as 'valid' research. It is the researcher's responsibility to choose the research method that best suits their

research to pave the way for the development of knowledge during the inquiry process (Thomas, 2010).

The thesis follows a qualitative approach in order to explore the research themes outlined above. It draws on primary material, including government data, official statistics and nine in-depth interviews with policy practitioners and scholars who specialise in GCC affairs. It is worth noting that despite conducting a limited number of interviews, I was able to obtain an elite-level perspective on the topic of regime legitimacy in post-Arab uprisings UAE. This was made possible through interviewing high-ranking Emirati officials and scholars whose access to power and understanding of Emirati decision-making was unparalleled in an otherwise closed political system.

The thesis also makes use of secondary sources. In order to situate the topic of regime legitimacy and survival in an academic context, the thesis builds on the existing body of literature when it comes to the concept of survival in authoritarian states (Brumberg, 1995; Schlumberger, 2010).

Research interviews capture the views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of individuals on specific matters. In the context of this thesis, the interviews served to inform the existing debate on the research topic while illuminating new avenues of enquiry. Interviews are quite useful in terms of getting detailed insight into the subject matter. They are also particularly useful for exploring sensitive topics, where participants may not be willing to address such issues in a public setting (Gill et al., 2008). This was taken into consideration when the interview questions were drafted.

As human interaction and negotiation are seen as the basis for the understanding of social life in the interpretivist tradition, it is the interaction between the researcher and the researched, which takes place in an interview situation, which creates knowledge (Edwards et al. 2013).

The data generated through the interviews is regarded as a co-construction. Kvale (1996) calls this a 'literal interview'. Semi-structured interviews were used as a method of data generation due to the explorative nature of the thesis. The interviewees were chosen based on their expertise and background knowledge of the chosen area of study (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005).

Through the use of the interpretivist approach, the thesis seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon by learning its function and how individuals understand it in particular contexts. As such, the purpose was to shed light on context-specific meanings, rather than seeking generalised meanings abstracted from particular contexts, which, given the nature of the research, was an ideal methodological route to follow (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012).

The interpretivist paradigm places a great deal of emphasis on human interest. Myers (2008, p. 38) states: 'interpretive researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments'. Reeves and Hedberg (2003) point out that the interpretivist approach stresses the importance of placing analysis in context to facilitate the understanding of phenomena through the experiences of individuals. It is worth noting that interpretivism is not a single paradigm; it is, in fact, a collection of diverse paradigms (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

The interpretivist paradigm is found in and is used across different disciplines. Examples of this include phenomenology, the Chicago School of Sociology, and Boas and Malinowski's methods of inquiry used in anthropological studies. The interpretivist paradigm developed as a critique of positivism in the social sciences. In general, interpretivist research promotes a relativist ontology, which assumes the world is constructed inter-subjectively while researchers explore socially constructed meanings and values (Robert Wood Joseph Foundation, 2008).

Its subjectivist epistemology posits that researchers cannot separate themselves from their research. The researcher and his or her research are linked in that their identities and

worldviews form a central part of how they perceive themselves, others and the world.

By positing a reality in which the subject and the object are inseparable, the interpretivist paradigm posits that researchers' values are inherent in all stages of the research process. Indeed, findings or knowledge claims are created and negotiated over the duration of the inquiry process. Findings emerge through dialogue in which different interpretations of the same phenomenon are debated between researchers and scholars of a certain discipline.

This is why interviews are commonly used as a means of establishing dialogue among members of a community chosen by the researcher. Their role in creating a dialogue between researchers and the research participants is critical. It is through this dialectical process that a more informed and nuanced understanding of the subject matter emerges. Thus, the interpretivist paradigm states that all interpretations are located in a particular context or situation and time. They are open to being revisited, reinterpreted and negotiated through dialogue (Qualres.org, 2008)

However, as much as interviews are a valued primary source, they can lead to confirmation bias. This issue was encountered during the interviewing process, especially where participants demonstrated favouritism towards the UAE. As such, in line with good research practises, the author sought to negate confirmation bias by comparing information gathered from interviews to the wider body of literature on the UAE. According to Angen's (2000) criteria for good interpretivist research, the findings of the research must be located in the discourse of the research community for them to be considered valid.

Observation and interpretation are a key part of interpretivist research; while observing, the researcher collects information about a phenomenon (Aikenhead, 1997). The goal is to understand a phenomenon by exploring the subjective meanings that participants have chosen to apply (Deetz, 1996; Thomas, 2010). As such, this research does not predefine dependent and

independent variables, but focuses on how human beings construct meaning and make sense of a phenomenon as the inquiry process takes place (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994).

Research methods and ethical boundaries

Most of the interviews were conducted in person. I was able to reach my Emirati participants through an extensive network developed over many years. Bearing in mind the sensitivity of my topic, it was important to phrase the interview questions in a manner that would not elicit a negative response from the participants. Some of the interviews were conducted in Arabic as some of the participants found it easier to express themselves in their mother tongue. The openness of semi-structured interviews was fully exploited to change the order of the questions and their wording depending on the context of the interview.

The goal was to allow research participants to express their views in their own terms. Semi-structured interviews combine the rigidity of structured interviews with the openness of their unstructured counterparts, which, in turn, enabled me to develop a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter. As this study was conducted by an Emirati researcher, there was a high level of understanding when it came to the idioms and colloquial references of Emirati Arabic. This has given the research a high degree of cultural sensitivity and nuance that may be denied to research conducted by non-Emiratis or non-Arabic speakers. This allowed most of the interviews conducted to flow smoothly, with the Emirati participants showing a great deal of eagerness and motivation to get involved in the research.

Given that this thesis deals with a phenomenon that took place in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, it is of the utmost importance to note that the term 'Arab Spring' carries a set of negative connotations in the UAE as a whole. This is evident in the manner in which the state responded to its perceived threat at both the regional and the domestic levels. The researcher

thus used broader descriptions of the phenomenon instead (e.g. Arab uprising) to ensure that the interviews flowed smoothly and that the participants (especially Emiratis) felt comfortable throughout the interviewing process.

Information about the interviews was made anonymous and kept separate from any other material, such as transcripts and recordings. I made it clear to my participants that every piece of information obtained from them would be destroyed upon completion of the doctorate programme. Where appropriate, methods for preserving the privacy of my participants were used. These include the removal of identifiers, the use of pseudonyms, replacement terms, vaguer descriptors as well as other technical means for breaking the link between the data obtained and the research participants. No data were published or released in any shape or form that could have led to the actual or potential identification of the research participants. The objective was to achieve a high level of anonymisation whilst maintaining maximum content. To avoid distorting the data and making it unusable, I created an anonymisation log (see example below) of all replacements, aggregations or removals made. This log was stored on an encrypted server and could only be accessed by the researcher.

Interview and page number	Original	Changed to
Interview 1		
P2	Sultan (real name)	Khaled Mohammed (pseudonym)
P5	Fujairah	Northern Emirate

P7	2nd of December	December
P1	50-year-old government official	Veteran policymaker
P9	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	A government entity
P4	Minister of State	A high-ranking official

(Source for log: UK Data Archive)

Any information obtained from my participants was made anonymous to avoid putting the researcher and the participants at risk. As mentioned above, I took full advantage of the liberal nature of semi-structured interviews to rephrase any questions when necessary. Having such a mitigation measure in place avoided putting my participants in an uncomfortable position by forcing them to discuss topics they deemed to be sensitive. Fortunately, I did not encounter this as my interview questions and overall research were not critical of the state leaders or the federation and its entities, either explicitly or implicitly. Any discussion that centred on critiquing any of the above would have put me and my participants at risk. This is where a host of ethical issues may arise. To avert those risks, I came up with the mitigation plan outlined below.

Mitigation plan

Prior to the interviews, I made it clear to the participants that their information would be anonymised automatically. I also made this clear in the consent form given to my participants.

I took advantage of the openness of the semi-structured interviewing style to rephrase some of the questions if needed. My participants were made to feel empowered and comfortable prior

to commencing the interviews. For example, they were granted freedom to choose the venue of the interview. Meanwhile, I made sure to observe local customs and traditions when addressing them. Scholars have touched on various aspects of respondent empowerment. Shuy (2002) states that respondent empowerment is key in face-to-face interviews. Demonstrating care and empathy prior to and during the interviewing process was my priority as it is essential for eliciting information from interviewees. This is particularly important when researching sensitive topics (Kavanaugh et al., 2006). Finally, research participants were given the freedom to stop the interview and withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason.

Chapter Two: The Islah Movement

The role of Muslim Brotherhood affiliated movements in the GCC states as important domestic actors is often overlooked by scholars who study these states, due in part to the lack of access to means of institutionalised political participation (except in Kuwait). Despite these constraints, these movements have been quite influential in Gulf societies courtesy of their grassroots socioeconomic programmes, which have helped Brotherhood members to spread their ideology and accumulate a considerable amount of political capital. However, these programmes were not an absolute necessity in the UAE given its high living standards. Indeed, the role of the Emirati branch of the MB, known as Islah, was to provide ideological guidance and social activities in a society where Emiratis have long feared for their Islamic and national values (Freer, 2015b). Thus, Islah became an influential player in the political scene 'by engaging in hands-on activist work in popular neighbourhoods, they [Islamists] have learned the informal language of politics spoken by the people' (Ismail, 2006, p. 176)

The strong ideological message of Islah and similar movements in the GCC enabled them to garner popular support and legitimacy. For instance, the Kuwaiti Brotherhood branch remains an influential actor in electoral politics due to its grassroots outreach, targeting the youth and education sectors, which, in turn, helps to secure young voters. In Qatar, the Brotherhood maintains a strong social influence through the *majlis*, in line with the official stance that backs the movement. The Emirati Brotherhood operated in the social sphere prior to the crackdown following the uprisings, where it also attempted to influence the political scene under the banner of expanding participatory politics (Forstenlechner, Rutledge and Alnuaimi, 2012).

The sheer scale of socioeconomic development that took place in the Emirates in the early years of the federation did not occur within a political vacuum. Arab nationalism had been

growing in Dubai prior to 1971, while the rise of an educated urban class of citizens in Sharjah and other emirates exposed them to a wide array of political issues and ideologies.[13] As in other Gulf States, the education sector proved to be a source of conflict between Islamists and ruling families. This was due in part to the influx of teachers and other professionals from states such as Egypt, Palestine and Jordan, who settled in the Gulf and exercised a formative role in their newly established educational and legal institutions. Most of these individuals had been exiled from their home countries as part of state-led crackdowns. It is also important to note that the introduction of the first modern schools in the 1950s and 1960s and the return of the first batch of students who had studied abroad provided a boost to local and nationalist presses and the first cultural clubs that were set up in the years leading up to the establishment of the federation. As Abdullah (1978) notes in his study on the history of the UAE, education instigated a wave of cultural and political change. The flow of monetary aid from neighbouring Gulf countries made it possible for Emirati students to study abroad. This resulted in them developing a strong grasp of the contemporary nationalist movements that were popular in the region at the time. The flow of grants also strengthened the ties between the Trucial Emirates and other states in the region (Abdullah, 1978).

As mentioned, many of the Arab professionals who came to settle in the Arab Gulf region either were members of the Muslim Brotherhood escaping the crackdown on the organisation during the Nasserite era or had some affinity with the broader Islamist cause. Whilst studying abroad, Emirati students and activists became inspired by those ideals and formed the Association for Reform and Guidance (known as Islah henceforth) in 1974 with Dubai as its headquarters. Despite being having the same ideological stance to Muslim Brotherhood

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[13] Author's interview with an expert on regional political Islam. Dubai, 8th March 2018.

movements in the region, Islah members have long claimed to be operationally and ideologically autonomous from them.

The Dubai branch of the Islah society was one of the very first civil society groups to receive government approval. Perhaps unaware of the political motives of the group, Dubai's late ruler, Sheikh Rashid al-Maktoum, funded the establishment of the group's headquarters in Dubai, which was, at the time, construed as a sign of the government's willingness to use an Islamist group to keep the spread of Arab nationalism under control. According to Mansour Al-Nuqaidan (2012), following the establishment of the Dubai branch, similar branches were set up in the northern emirates of Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah, with the funding from Sheikh Rashid.

The UAE's president and Abu Dhabi ruler at the time, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, also allocated a plot of land to help Islah open its branch in Abu Dhabi in the late 1970s. It is worth noting that a branch was never established in the conservative Emirate of Sharjah, the cause of which was attributed to the popularity of Arab nationalism in that Emirate or its Wahhabist leanings as a result of its historical ties to Saudi Arabia. In the Emirate of Ajman, Emirati Islamists accepted being part of a wider reformist group known as the Association of Guidance and Social Counselling (Irshad) instead of having their own branch (Al-Nuqaidan, 2012).

Similar to MB-affiliated group elsewhere in the region, Islah operated in the social and cultural realms, where it organised numerous sporting and charity events. According to the UAE-based political analyst, Abdulkhaleq Abdullah, 'The Muslim Brotherhood had a good understanding with government and good backing from business. Arab nationalists hadn't had the same support because they were seen as Western' (Freer, 2015b). Islah's influence was growing steadily in the early years of the federation, especially when the founding members of Islah

Sheikh Saʿid ʿAbdullah Salman and Muhammad ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Bakr were named Minister of Housing and Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs and Endowment respectively (Al-Nuqaidan, 2012). In 1979, Salman became Minister of Education and Chancellor of UAEU, while a member of the ruling family of Ras al-Khaima, Sultan bin Kayed al-Qasimi, directed the national curriculum division. Thus, Islah influence grew exponentially in the UAE; the group consisted of individuals who were well educated, professional and ambitious. By granting them important positions in the public sector, the UAE gave members of the educated elite of Islah the opportunity to introduce policies that would remain in place for decades – especially in the education sector (Freer, 2015b). However, Islah ran afoul of the UAE government as soon as it drifted away from its social and cultural focus and began venturing into the political realm (Al-Qassemi, 2012).

This chapter starts by providing an insight into the history of the Islah movement in the Emirates, whose adherents were on the receiving end of a sweeping government crackdown following the Arab uprisings. Secondly, it analyses the influential role once played by Islah in Emirati society and how this very role became a significant tension point between the movement and the Emirati government years before the Arab uprisings broke out. The aim here is to show that Islah has long been viewed by the government as having the potential to threaten the UAE's political stability. The short-lived gains of Islamists after the Arab uprising empowered the Islah movement and encouraged its members to contest the state. The chapter discusses the political implications of Islah's attempt to contest the state's legitimacy and how that completely altered the UAE's view of Islamist movements, which led to them being deemed a threat to the state's political stability and legitimacy. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks.

Islah's ideological inspirations

Islah was a movement that operated in the social and cultural realms and sought to reform society by curbing the spread of Westernisation within it. Movements seeking to reform Islam have been a part of the Islamic tradition for centuries. It is important to note that they have risen in response to different challenges across the diverse Muslim world. That said, they are quite similar in terms of their focus on wholesale reformation. While some movements are conservative, others are moderate, while still others are militant-nationalist. The Wahabi movement of the 18th century was one such movement. The puritan movement in Arabia was led by Mohammed bin Abd al Wahab, who rejected the prevalent religious practises at the time and called on Arabs to return to true Islam. The pan-Islamist movement of famous Muslim scholar Jamal ad-din al-Afghani was both a religious and a political movement, playing a major role in transforming Islamic thought in the 19th century. Afghani believed in the glory and unity of Islam, travelling far to promote his ideology, which appealed to many people (Keddie, 1973). The establishment of Ikhwan al Muslimin, the Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt in the 1920s, can be understood both in terms of the prevailing nationalist sentiment of the interwar period and the Wahhabi and Pan-Islamic movements. Their motto showcases the group's objectives and aspirations: 'Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. The Qur'an is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope' (Vidino, 2005). Intellectually, they were inspired by Wahhabism and Afghani, and Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida's teachings and philosophies. Abduh was a disciple of Afghani; he embraced science and advocated new methods of education. Rida was one of his followers. While the Arab world had been colonised by European powers after the breakup of the Ottoman empire, the occupation of Egypt was viewed as an attempt on behalf of Christians to dominate the Muslim world. These sentiments gave birth to strong religious nationalism, which fuelled the

1919 anti-British uprising (Wickham, 2013). British colonial rule spread Westernisation and secularisation among educated Egyptians. This was viewed as a symptom of weakening Islamic laws and institutions, on the one hand, and religious traditions and values, on the other. For instance, the constitution of 1932 was viewed as being a British-inspired constitution (Sattar, 1995). Events in Turkey had had a clear impact on Egypt as well. The abolition of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal was seen as a de-Islamisation of a Muslim nation that for centuries had been the centre of Islamic authority in the Muslim world. The movement can also be viewed as a reaction to the corruption of the Egyptian monarchy. The British-backed King Fuad was intent on keeping nationalist and religious groups under control. Hasan al-Banna, a young schoolteacher, capitalised on the prevailing sentiments at the time, and established the Society of Muslim Brothers in 1928 (Sattar, 1995). In the early years, keen for political legitimacy, the society had a religious and reformist orientation (Wickham, 2013). But in the late 1930s, the leaders of the MB society decided to get involved in politics. A new political weekly, *Al Nadhir* ('The Warner') was issued, which explained the group's political agenda and its aim to spread its ideology in Egypt and beyond. After World War II, the MB became active in Egyptian politics. Having amassed about half a million followers, with about 2000 branches, a network of socio-religious activities all over Egypt and a following in other Arab countries, the group's leaders thought it was prepared to change the Egyptian political landscape (Sattar, 1995; Gomaa, 1983).

One way to look at the Brotherhood's ideology is to look at its leaders, namely al-Banna and Qutb, and how they viewed religion and society. Al-Banna viewed the growth and expansion of the movement in two stages. The first stage was peaceful propagation *(da'awa)*, aimed at gaining support among members of society. The second stage related to the mobilisation of select units, which represented the paramilitary group. The third phase was militant, an

'unrelentless struggle amounting to a holy war (jihad), and persistent efforts to achieve the goal, notwithstanding all hardship and suffering' (Sattar, 1995: p.12). The aim was to establish a state in which Islam dominates society in all aspects. The Muslim Brotherhood views Islam as a belief *(aqeeda),* and worship *(ibada),* a homeland *(watan),* a nation *(ummah)*, a religion *(din)*, a state *(dawla)*, a holy book *(mushaf)*, and a sword (Sattar, 1995). On the use of violence, Banna added that resorting to violence is 'not proper yet in terms of timing. One must choose the appropriate conditions or calculate fully before resorting to it' (Gomaa, 1983). Meanwhile, Qutb's (1964) ideas and militant approach are explained in his book, *Ma alim fil Tariq*, which is more of a political than a religious work (Sattar, 1995). Qutb developed two main themes, first, the idea that Western civilisation was on the brink of collapse due to a lack of system of values and spiritual orientation. Islam was their only hope of achieving this courtesy of its God prescribed system of morality. He also developed the concept of *jahiliya*, a term used to describe the state of affairs in pre-Islamic Arabia before the message of Prophet Mohammed. He argued that contemporary society lived under a new form of *jahiliya,* which swept what he calls the 'so called Muslim countries'. Qutb believed that a true Islamic society was that which applied Islam as *aqeeda, ibada, sharia, nizam* (system), *khuluq* (morals) and *suluk* (conduct) (Sattar, 1995). He further stated that Muslims were not really different from infidels *(kuffar)* if they lived in a state of *jahiliya* (Qutb,1964). He warned that transforming society in the manner he prescribed would result in great hardships, suffering and persecution at the hand of the incumbents. One finds many strains and influences in the thoughts of Qutb. The idea of contesting political authority through violence can be traced to 14th century theologian, Taqi ud din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya, who gave a call for jihad against rulers who did not follow Sharia law (Gomaa, 1983: p.152).

Islah and Emirati society

As mentioned above, Islah was at some point tolerated, albeit cautiously, by several of the rulers in the UAE, as Al-Nuqaidan (2012) noted in his study on Islah. The founding members of the Dubai branch approached then ruler of Dubai for permission to acknowledge Islah as a legitimate civil society organisation. Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Maktoum was the first chairman of the board of directors of the Dubai branch. On an organisational and operational level, Islah received significant support from the Kuwaiti branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Kuwaiti Brotherhood helped both administratively by organising a series of exchanges, meetings and summer camps in Kuwait (Ulrichsen, 2016b). Within the UAE, the organisation's most important patron was the late ruler of Ras al-Khaimah, Saqr bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, and his close relative, Sultan bin Kayed Al Qasimi, who served as the organisation's chairman before his arrest in 2012 (Al-Qassemi, 2012).

A member of Islah noted that there were no clashes between the group and the Emirati government, which, to some extent, approved of their activities in the first few years following the Islah's establishment. As mentioned previously, by gaining important positions in the government, the Islah movement was presented with the chance to enact policies that would remain in place for decades, especially in the education sector (Freer, 2015b). As such, Islah was able to exert influence in Emirati society by establishing a firm foothold in the religious and educational governmental entities.[14] As a result of Islah's growing influence within the education sector, relations between the UAE government and the organisation became visibly tense in the 1990s as its members started to operate in a manner which was construed by the government as an attempt to contest the state's legitimacy through ushering in political

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[14] Author's interview with an expert on regional political Islam. Dubai, 8th March 2018.

activism (Al-Qassemi, 2012).

An integral part of Islah's social outreach was its magazine, *Al-Islah*, which was launched in 1978. The publication spearheaded a wave of attacks on so-called leftist and nationalist opponents, with writers claiming that the state's institutions had been infiltrated by un-Islamic communists (Freer, 2015b: Al-Nuqaidan, 2012). As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the front cover of Islah's magazine always bore strong, confrontational messages, with a local, regional and international focus on Muslim affairs. Internally, Islah came to view itself as the sole defender of the country's decaying social and religious values. An examination of *Al-Islah* issues published between the 1970s and 1980s reveals that the most commonly discussed topics revolved around Islamic education, boycotting the West, banning alcohol, government corruption and the influence of Western culture on Emirati society (Freer, 2015a).
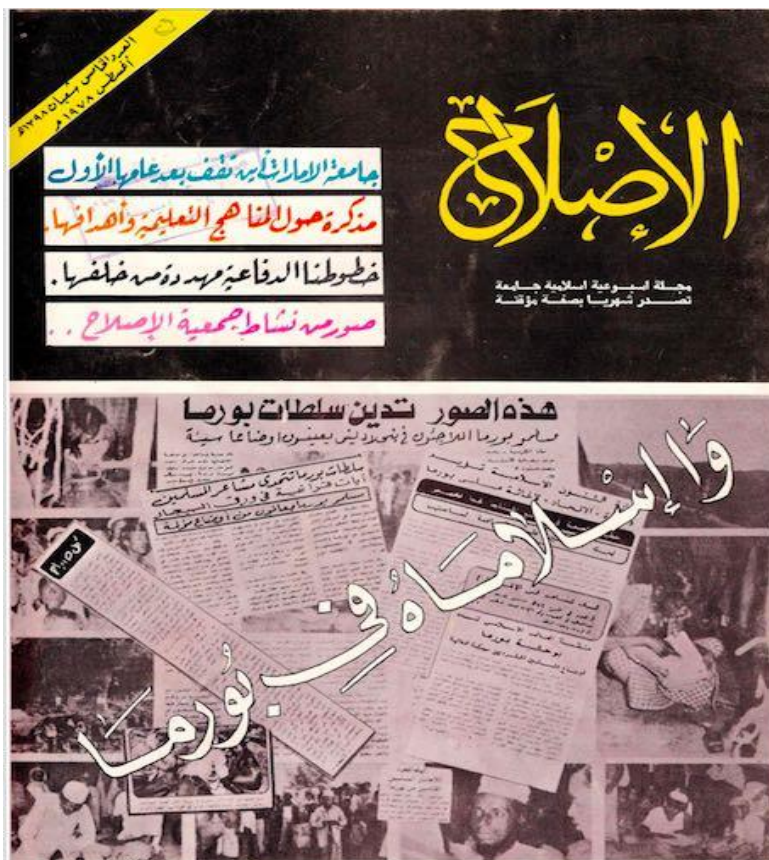

Figure 4: Front cover of the fifth issue of Al-Islah magazine in 1978 (alislaah.org)

Islah was able to influence society in a less institutionalised manner through student activities such as summer camps and scout groups. In 1982, the then president of the UAE University and Islah member, Sheikh Salman, launched the Union of Emirati Students, with Islah dominating student union elections until 1992. At that time, the Emirati government made a significant effort to depoliticise campuses, replacing the union in 2012 with partially-elected student council polls contested by individuals rather than political blocs (The National, 2012). Similarly, the UAE government sought to remove politics from Friday prayer sermons towards the end of the 1980s to stop the spread of Islah's ideas. According to Fyfe (1989), Dubai's Awqaf Authority pressured mosque imams to avoid discussing topics that would stir up religious hatred and political sensitivities. This move was followed by a demand to submit written, advance copies of sermons to the ministry and to steer clear of stirring controversy and sectarian sensitivity through limiting the focus of those sermons to guidance on Islamic principles and rituals.

However, this did little to curb the spread of Islah's influence in Emirati society. By the 1990s, Islah had grown to become the most influential non-state, political actor in the UAE, due in part to its members' influence in the education and judicial sectors. As such, Islah members began pressing for political reforms despite the UAE's clear stance on political organisations and political activism.[15] As Islah's popularity grew, it became more vocal in pressing for what it deemed to be political reforms. This is what caused the government to treat it as a danger to national stability, as the next section of the chapter explains (Boghart, 2013; Al-Nuqaidan, 2012). At the crux of why there was a post-Arab uprisings crackdown on Islah members is the question, why does the UAE consider Islah to be a political threat?

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[15] Author's interview with an expert on regional political Islam. Dubai, 8th March 2018.

As noted above, the concern of the UAE government regarding Islah's growing influence in Emirati society was well merited as members of the group had, by the start of the 1980s, occupied key positions in the educational sector in the country. Islah activists waged a strong attack against Abdullah Omran Taryam during his six-year tenure as minister of education as Islah sought to thwart attempts to teach the English language in primary schools. Islah also sought to convince decision-makers in the education sector to ban music classes and urged female students not to attend music and dancing classes. To counteract what they viewed as being an affront to national and Islamic values, Islah launched a series of lectures and seminars dealing with the danger of Westernisation and intellectual invasion (Ulrichsen, 2016b).

Sultan bin Kayed Al Qasimi, a member of the royal family of Ras al-Khaimah, sought to curb the spread of Westernisation when he served as director of the Curriculum Division within the Ministry of Education between 1977 and 1983. Concurrently, Islah-affiliated cabinet members Sheikh Salman and Al-Bakr were relieved of their duties (Freer, 2015b). The loss of two ministerial posts in 1983 did little to curb Islah's influence. The group continued to play a central role in Emirati society for another decade until it found itself on the receiving end of a government-led crackdown in 1994. Islah has long been reliant on its control of student unions and the organisation of summer camps and other recreational activities, such as scout groups, to influence young Emiratis. This was seen as a threat for the UAE authorities, as was the influence of Islah preachers and their deeply politicised Friday sermons (Freer, 2015b). *Al-Islah*, which was campaigning vociferously against the Westernisation of Emirati society, was also viewed as a major threat to the government's legitimacy and stability. One example of this occurred when the magazine published its famous telegram to the general manager of Dubai TV asking whether it was his goal to spread 'vice and corruption among the youth of this Muslim nation' and whether there was someone pushing him to commit such a terrible deed.

The telegram called on the boss of the TV station to step down if he could not 'stop this overwhelming flood of corruption' as this would be more 'honourable' (Al-Nuqaidan, 2012).

By the late 1980s, a number of articles that had appeared in *Al-Islah* marked a departure from social criticism to outright opposition of the national education policy. In 1987, Islah guided a strong campaign against the acting Minister of Education, Ahmed Humaid al-Tayer, while a year later the magazine criticised the Basic Education Project, a pre-university course in Arabic, English and Mathematics for new students at UAE University (Ulrichsen, 2016b). The first real clash between Islah and the UAE government happened in 1988 after the organisation's magazine was suspended for six months due to its overt criticism of government policy. This subsequently led to it adopting a subdued tone of rhetoric. Hence over the next five years, the magazine toned down its political rhetoric and turned its attention instead to less sensitive aspects of everyday life, such as the threats posed by foreigners to Emirati culture and identity.[16] Despite this, Islah's influence within the education sector remained very strong through the early 1990s, albeit with an additional amount of government concern being shown over Islah's blatant politicisation of student scholarships, which were granted by and large to its sympathisers and members (Ulrichsen, 2016b; Al Qassemi, 2012).

Islah had successfully carved out a political agenda alongside its social programme, pressing for more political representation and a fair distribution of the country's wealth. In March 1979, Islah leadership penned a letter to the UAE's Supreme Council of Rulers supporting the UAE's attempts to eradicate corruption while urging the state to spend oil money in a pious manner. This tone of rhetoric was construed by the government as being threatening and

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[16] Author's interview with an expert on regional political Islam. Dubai, 8th March 2018.

confrontational.

Just as Islah expected to accumulate more political capital, the Emirati government also anticipated it adopting an increasingly political stance. The Emirati government feared that Islah's newfound political focus would gain a large following as a political bloc. As such, the government moved to curb the spread of this ideology lest Islah gain political sway to influence Emirati politics at an institutionalised level. Islah's alleged disregard for the law legitimised the authorities' decision to crack down on the organisation (Al-Nuqaidan, 2012).

In the early 1990s, Islah came under severe pressure from the UAE government when investigations by Egyptian security services revealed that terrorist militants of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad had been recipients of financial aid from Islah's Committee for Relief and Outside Activities. Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood came to be known as an outside group, that used outside groups to further its agenda, which is to establish an Islamic Caliphate. The Emirati government considered the MB's oath of allegiance (bayʿa) to the Brotherhood's General Guide (Murshid) to be a direct political threat and demanded that Islah members pledge loyalty to the UAE alone. In an attempt to assert its authority, the Emirati government moved swiftly and decisively to dissolve and suspend the external activities of Islah's boards of directors in 1994 (Freer, 2015b).

Furthermore, the government banned Islah and its Islah members from gaining access to public sector jobs (Al-Rashid, 2013). Notably, the Ras al-Khaima branch of Islah was exempted from the government's crackdown but it still had to suspend its external activities. Until the most recent crackdown, which took place after the Arab uprisings, Islah remained independent under the patronage of Ras al-Khaima's late ruler, Sheikh Saqr al-Qasimi, who flatly rejected the dissolution of the group because he strongly believed it played an integral part in guiding and

preserving the youth of the country.[17] Ultimately, though, the government's policy towards Islah prevailed, with Sultan bin Kayed al-Qasimi, the ruler's cousin and leader of Islah in the emirate, being arrested in the post-Arab uprisings government crackdown on the Islamist organisation (Freer, 2015b).

9/11: The Second Brotherhood Crackdown

The relationship between the UAE government and Islah grew tenser in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The news regarding the involvement of two Emirati individuals in the attacks put a considerable amount of pressure on the government to prove to the international community that it was willing to curb the spread of religious extremism. As part of this effort, UAE authorities tightened security measures and introduced a new system to monitor financial transfers. In 2002, the UAE's State Security Directorate *(Jihaz Amn al-Dawla)* arrested over 250 suspects accused of terrorism and of harbouring Islamist sympathies. However, most of the suspects were released a few years later.[18] In 2003, the UAE government began hosting talks between Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan and prominent Islah members to persuade them to put an end to their organisational activity inside the country and to sever their relations with regional and international Muslim Brotherhood organisations. In return for those concessions, the UAE government would support Islah as it continued to spread Islamic *da'wa*. In the view of the country's leadership, if Islah were not an organisation with a political agenda, it would not require its organisational autonomy. After a long series of meetings, Islah rejected the government's demand to abandon its political agenda and organisational activities in favour of engaging in *da'wa* (Al-Nuqaidan,

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[17] Author's interview with a former diplomat. Ras Al-Khaima, 1st March 2018.

[18] Author's interview with an expert on regional political Islam. Dubai, 8th March 2018.

2012; Al-Rashid, 2013). As a result, the government came to realise that it could not put an end to Islah's activities and turned instead to mitigating its political and institutional influence. It began transferring around 170 Brotherhood members, including 83 officers from the education sector, to other government departments.

Despite this setback, the remaining three branches of Islah in the Emirates of Dubai, Fujairah, and Ras al-Khaimah, and the Guidance Society in Ajman, resumed their activities, which included hosting religious seminars, lectures, and Quranic competitions, as well as the publication of the movement's monthly magazine (Freer, 2015b; al-Noaimi, 2012). According to Herb (2010), it was starting to become increasingly clear that the UAE's leadership no longer tolerated political Islam after the arrest of prominent Islamists and their subsequent ban from occupying jobs in the education sector. In such an environment, it became increasingly difficult for the group to operate autonomously, which drove many of its members to join the UAE's broader movement for political reform. Hence, overall, one can argue that the 1994 and post-9/11 crackdowns against the Islah organisation were a precursor to the post-Arab uprisings crackdown on the organisation.

How popular is the Islah movement?

Before discussing the political implications of Islah's attempt to contest the state's legitimacy in the post-Arab uprisings period, it is important to understand the extent of popular support for the group. As mentioned previously, Islah was an important player in Emirati society because of its social and religious-based activities. These activities formed an integral part of the social fabric in the Emirates, where Islah's presence was pronounced. For this reason, the majority of its members and sympathisers reside in the northern, historically conservative emirates. Among the 94 Islamists convicted in the clandestine organisation trial, only a few came from the more liberal emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai (al-Ittihad, 2013).

The Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed, is convinced that Islah poses a major threat to the country's stability and legitimacy. Indeed, in a U.S. Department of State diplomatic cable, Mohammed claimed that the UAE had nearly 700 Muslim Brotherhood members on its soil. He then claimed that the State's Security Directorate had identified 50 to 60 Emirati Brotherhood members in the country's army. He also expressed a concern that the country's army would heed the call of religious leaders rather than respond to the call of their country's leadership (Freer, 2015b). As a result of Sheikh Mohammed's deep-seated conviction that the Brotherhood posed a big threat to Al-Nahyan's legitimacy, the UAE government moved to ramp up security throughout the country. Islah was officially dissolved and designated a terrorist group, which, in turn, neutralised the group to a point of no return. Islah responded to allegations of terrorism by saying they were false, insisting that it is 'an independent, patriotic group that has received no funds from abroad ... [and] is loyal to the Emirati government' (al-islah.org, 2014).

According to a Dubai-based journalist, those inside the UAE who remain sympathetic to Islah and its activists 'are very careful and keep it quiet', and there is little evidence of their influence on government policy compared to the past. Still, the UAE government remains vigilant after witnessing the extent to which Islah's ideology has spread in Emirati society in the past, especially when its members took advantage of their public sector jobs to achieve political ends. Despite being disbanded, Islah still holds ideological sway over segments of the UAE population in the conservative emirates, yet the extent of it remains unknown. There is an absence of government statistics on the number of Islah sympathisers due to the sensitivity of the topic (Freer, 2015b).

According to Jones (2015), the UAE leaders have implemented a number of policies aimed at promoting secular nationalism above Islamism. A visual representation of this is the restriction

of the length of beards that members of the armed forces can grow lest they be mistaken for Islamists who grow their beards in line with the sunnah of Prophet Mohammed (Freer, 2015b).

Overall, the Emirati government's first two crackdowns against Islah came as a result of the group's growing political and social influence. Influential figures within the UAE's leadership view it as a serious threat to the status quo and no less dangerous than a belligerent foe such as Iran, according to Al-Rashid (2013). Also, the government has felt increasingly threatened by Islah's newfound political focus, fearing that this might have a negative bearing on the leadership's legitimacy among the different populations.[19] Many of those fears were proven right as Islah's political agenda gained a new dimension following the surge in support for political Islam in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. Islah's attempt to contest the state's legitimacy after such a watershed event has had some significant political implications for the UAE's perception of political Islam at both the national and international levels (al-Noaimi, 2012).

The political implications of Islah's attempt to contest the state's legitimacy in the post-Arab uprisings period

The theorising of the nature of political opposition in the Arab Gulf states following the Arab uprising has been heavily focused on the state's willingness and ability to offer economic patronage to 'buy off' opposition. Many scholars have chosen to focus on the resilience of the state, reiterating the often-touted argument of 'Gulf exceptionalism', which rests heavily on the rentier state social contract. Within this limited conceptual framework, the risk of opposition only arises when the state is no longer able to offer generous economic handouts to

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[19] Author's interview with a thinktank director. Abu Dhabi, 5th March 2018.

its citizens (al-Zo'by and Başkan, 2014). Such thinking rules out the chance of opposition occurring for reasons that have little to do with economic demands and tends to simplify our understanding of the internal and external dynamics of regime legitimacy and survival in the case of the UAE and the Gulf as a whole. Moreover, applying the haphazard one-size-fits-all arguments of 'Gulf exceptionalism' to six different Gulf states does little to develop a nuanced understanding of the different manifestations of dissent which the GCC states have faced historically.

The deterioration of relations between the UAE and the Brotherhood is instructive not just as an event that occurred against a backdrop of shifting political dynamics in the region and the emergence of new alliances and opponents along ideological lines in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, but more broadly as an important question regarding state-Islam relations in the Gulf region at large. More specifically, it demonstrates the extent to which a religious-based oppositional discourse can threaten the legitimacy of a state. To observers, Islah's oppositional discourse is defined by a commitment to morality, civic rights, and social justice, and that is courtesy of the Muslim Brotherhood's global outreach (al-Zo'by and Başkan, 2014). However, as one respondent noted, many observers do not speak Arabic and have had no exposure to the Muslim Brotherhood's hostile Arabic language rhetoric, which stands in stark contrast to its English language rhetoric.[20]

 To these observers, the UAE's wealth, which enables it to bestow economic benefits upon its citizens, was sufficient to curb the rise of any potential opposition emanating from the sweeping mood of the Arab uprisings. While the management of social power and political demands forms an integral part of state-society relations in some GCC countries within the

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[20] Author's interview with a leading local commentator. Dubai, 10th February 2018.

rentier state paradigm, it would be a mistake to surmise that state-society relations rest entirely on this single paradigm (al-Zo'by and Başkan, 2014).

A petition addressed to the UAE's president, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan, and members of Supreme Council of Rulers in March 2011 and endorsed by 133 civil society members, among them prominent members of the Islah organisation, was met with a heavy-handed response from the UAE government. The petition came against the backdrop of the Arab uprising, although the reason for it was the government's decision not to expand the number of eligible voters for the Federal National Council's elections. Notably, four prominent civil society organisations, all of which were known for being sympathetic to the Islamist cause, signed the petition. This set an important precedent in the history of Emirati politics of liberal and Islamist opposition coming together to make political demands (Al-Nuqaidan, 2012).

In April 2011, however, five of the petition's signatories, who later came to be known as the UAE5, were detained by the country's security forces. Aside from being accused of being the primary provocateurs of such motion, they were charged with insulting the President, Vice-President and Crown Prince during a discussion that took place on an internet forum. These five signatories were handed a three-year prison sentence in 2011. Shortly after being sentenced, the five activists were pardoned by Sheikh Khalifa and subsequently released. The detainees included Ahmed Mansour, a local activist and Nasser bin Ghaith, an academic working for the Sorbonne university in Abu Dhabi. Ahmed Mansour was the founder of the www.uaehewar.net website in 2009; his goal was to launch a platform to discuss politics, development and society in the country. He claims he launched the website because, similar to most Emiratis, he cares about the country and wants what is best for it (Gulf Newsletter, 2011). Bin Ghaith, on the other hand, had been very vocal regarding the economic reforms being

promised by Arab rulers at the time, which he viewed as a tool for quieting calls for reform and claimed before his arrest that political reform would come about (Ulrichsen, 2016b). However, despite the initial warning, the UAE5 activists continued their political activism, taking advantage of new forms of communication, such as Twitter, to voice their political views (Freer, 2015b).

Hoping to prevent a spillover effect, the UAE authorities disbanded the boards of the Jurist Association and Teachers' Association in 2011, an organisation with heavy Islamist ties and a chief supporter of the petition. The government made a few political concessions to the populations, which included the expansion of the FNC's pool of voters to 12 percent of Emiratis above the age of 18 for the September 2011 elections. The government also announced a significant public sector pay rise and boosted welfare benefits by 20 percent, as well as allocating more than 12 billion Emirati dirhams to help poorer nationals pay off their bank loans. Furthermore, the UAE government announced a stimulus package worth 10 billion Emirati dirhams to fund infrastructure projects in the less affluent northern Emirates (al-Arabiya, 2011).

Islah maintained its support for the so-called UAE5 and imprisoned Islah members as the government's campaign continued into 2012. As mentioned, the petition has been drafted by liberal and Islamist activists. This posed a new challenge to the government as it found itself dealing with two opposition groups instead of one. The Emirati government accused the Islah organisation of exploiting the international media coverage surrounding the UAE5 for political ends. Indeed, Emirati political scholar al-Ketbi argued that Islah had used 'the umbrella of reform to reach their goals' to establish a strong foothold over the country's institutions (Freer, 2015b).

Although the significance of Sheikh Saqr's loss only became clear in retrospect, that his passing occurred less than three months before the beginning of the Arab uprisings made it less difficult for the UAE's government to disband the organisation. Evidence was beginning to mount during 2010 that Islah was plotting to break out of its long-held base in Ras al-Khaimah and begin working for a national campaign that would tackle social and political issues in the country. In May 2012, a member of the organisation laid out the moralising nature of the group's activities, stating that Islah focuses on charitable and social work that aims to instil a sense of morality in the youth. This is achieved by delivering Islah's way of thinking to society. Further to that, a Public Relations Committee based in Ras al-Khaimah was tasked with creating an action plan for members and Islah sympathisers across the seven emirates to further extend its outreach. At the same time, members of Islah began to voice their calls for reform and campaign for a widening of the FNC electorate. Thus, several members of Islah's PR Committee were signatories of the petition which was submitted to the UAE president (al-Nuqaidan, 2012).

While the first wave of post-Arab uprisings government crackdown was aimed at individuals who started the petition, the second wave targeted Islamist activists affiliated with Islah. Following the victories of Islamists in the region, the UAE felt that Emirati Islamists would seek to capitalise on those gains by pressing for what they saw to be reforms. As explained in the chapter, the government came to view Islah as a chief political threat following the spread of its influence in Emirati society, which stood in stark contrast to the liberal opposition, whose social and cultural activities were not as influential. In April 2012, seven Emirati Islah members, dubbed the UAE7, who signed the petition and whose passports were subsequently revoked, were sentenced to prison after refusing to leave the UAE following the government's

request (Ulrichsen, 2016b).

By the end of 2012, 94 members of the organisation had been arrested, with 69 of them sentenced to between seven and fifteen years in prison during the trial of the clandestine organisation (al-Tandhim a' Serri) that took place on July 2, 2013. The UAE's Attorney General ruled that members of the organisation posed a serious threat to the UAE's national security due to their ties to outside organisations with destabilising agendas, including regional and international Islamist organisations. According to a press release from the Ministry of Justice, Islah was convicted for plotting crimes against national security and for defying the country's leadership and its constitution (WAM, 2013). The government stated that it received those confessions from Islah members when they were detained. According to WAM (2013), members of the organisation admitted that their organisation had an armed wing whose aim was to overthrow the country's leadership to re-establish an Islamic state. Islah released an official communique through its website that categorically denied all charges, reiterating that it was a pacifist, civilian and moderate organisation which had never and would never entertain the use of force for political reasons (al-islah.org, 2017). The UAE94 suspects included men and women from all seven emirates,[21] some of them members of influential tribes, including al-Rumaithi, al-Suwaidi, al-Nuaimi and al-Shamsi, plus a member of the royal family of Ras al-Khaima. Among those arrested was the high profile lawyer, Mohammed al-Roken, who was the co-defence counsel for two of the UAE5 in 2011. When another lawyer declared his willingness to represent al-Roken, he was detained by the UAE authorities in summer 2012 (Ulrichsen, 2016b).

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[21] Twenty-eight members came from Sharjah, twenty-four from Abu Dhabi, fourteen from Ras al-Khaimah, eleven from Dubai, eight from Ajman, five and three from Fujairah and Umm al-Quwain.

In the run-up to the Islah trial in July 2013, Emirati officials portrayed the UAE as being on the frontline of a defensive campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world. The crackdown on Islah and other groups perceived to be linked to the Muslim Brotherhood was spearheaded by the outspoken former chief of the Dubai Police Force, General Dhahi Khalfan. In March 2012, Dhahi claimed that the Brotherhood was planning to overthrow the Gulf governments. Later in the same year, following a series of protests in Kuwait in October, the UAE foreign minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, described the Brotherhood as 'an organisation which encroaches upon the sovereignty and integrity of nations' and urged fellow decision-makers in the Gulf to form a coordinated plan to stop them in their tracks (Black, 2012). In another interview in 2012, Dhahi warned the Muslim Brotherhood that their attempts to threaten the Gulf's security would be met with a swift and forceful response. Dhahi resumed his anti-Brotherhood theme in 2013 when he labelled them 'dictators', whose primary goal was 'to change regimes that have been ruling for a long time, but they also want to rule forever', adding that he had irrefutable evidence that suggested the Brotherhood was conspiring to overthrow the Gulf rulers (Ulrichsen, 2016b). In a similar vein, Anwar Gargash, the UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, has been a vocal critic of Islah's partisanship and politicisation of Islam. A similar sentiment was expressed by Jamal Sanad al-Suwaidi (2015), chairman of the Emirates Centre for Research and Strategic Studies, who discusses political Islam and the threat extremists pose to regional and global security.

An important outcome of the state-led campaign against the Brotherhood is that it has altered the Emirati political landscape and made the government proactive in terms of handling dissent. Further cementing the UAE's stance against Islah and the Muslim Brotherhood, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan approved a new anti-terrorism law in August 2014, allowing for the use of the death penalty and other severe punishments to protect the state against acts of terror. The

legislation came at a time when violent extremist groups were threatening regional security following the establishment of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. In line with the law on combating terrorism, the UAE cabinet endorsed a list of 82 organisations that it considered to be terrorist groups. Apart from militant organisations, the list included groups such as Islah and regional branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, in addition to advocacy groups such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Islamic Association in Britain (Gulf News, 2014).

To an extent, the UAE's leadership feels vindicated by subsequent developments in the region. Media outlets in the country have long referred to the 'Arab Spring' as the Arab autumn, following the triumph of what are viewed as extremist groups. An examination of the media coverage of the Arab uprisings received from the Abu Dhabi-based Arabic newspaper, *Al-Ittihad,* encapsulates the public sentiment felt towards it. The UAE has long distinguished itself in the GCC in particular and in the Arab world more generally by taking an overtly confrontational stance on Islamists, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, even as other Gulf states were beginning to adopt a softer stance on the Muslim Brotherhood, the UAE's policies appeared unchanged, still steadfastly opposed to what it views as a serious existential threat. But, as this chapter explained, this was not always the case. For many years, key leaders in the UAE had no objection to the Brotherhood and allowed it to grow within the country's federal system before a broad crackdown began in the 1990s (Ibish, 2017).

The UAE's categorical rejection of political Islam

Overall, the Emirati perspective on Muslim Brotherhood is best summed up in an address by its Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, at a strategic forum in Abu Dhabi in late 2015. Gargash stated:

> The UAE believes that extremist ideologies and terrorism are two faces of the same coin, which mutually reinforce the other and contribute to

instability. The battle against extremism and terrorism is not just a physical one. It is also, more importantly, an ideological, intellectual, and societal one (WAM, 2015).

Therefore, the UAE rejects groups that espouse extremist ideologies even if they appear to reject violence of all kinds, as most Muslim Brotherhood parties (apart from Hamas) at least claim to. The UAE leadership believes that such groups are no different from violent terrorist organisations. Indeed, it sees the two as symbiotic (Ibish, 2017).

Meanwhile, disagreements within the GCC over the Muslim Brotherhood-led to a major schism between the Gulf partners when the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain severed diplomatic ties with Qatar in March 2014. The three Gulf states blamed Qatar's interference in their internal affairs and its unwavering support for the Brotherhood in the GCC and the broader Middle East region. The diplomatic crisis lasted for eight months until relations were finally restored after Qatar agreed to bring its policies in line with that of the GCC, especially with regard to its approach to regional affairs. The GCC states thought that Qatar would reduce its support for Brotherhood groups, especially in the Gulf region following its pledge of non-interference in the internal affairs of its Gulf neighbours, as per the Riyadh Security Agreement (Gulf News, 2014). The inter-Khaleeji diplomatic dispute of 2014 demonstrated how deep tensions run over the issue of the Muslim Brotherhood as a whole. It also formed a precursor to the most recent Gulf crisis of 2017. Following the normalisation of relations amongst GCC members, Saudi Arabia and Qatar began showing signs of rapprochement on several regional issues, which included adopting more compatible policies towards Islamists. Riyadh has been seeking to broaden the Sunni coalition to weaken its adversary Iran and its Shi'i allies in the region, which is why, unlike the UAE, it stopped perceiving the Brotherhood as a major threat to its domestic and regional survival (Ibish, 2017).

These divergent perspectives on the Brotherhood have led to some differences between Saudi

and Emirati approaches to regional conflicts. For instance, in Yemen, while Saudi Arabia has sought to use the influence of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups and figures in the fight against the Houthi rebels, the UAE refused to follow suit. While the overall goals of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in Yemen and Syria remain almost similar,[22] the divergent policies towards Islamists, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, have led the UAE to pursue a different path and form different allies than Saudi Arabia (Ulrichsen, 2016b). The Syrian conflict is a clear example of how the UAE-Saudi disagreement on the Brotherhood has played out on a regional level. Where Saudi Arabia and Qatar have reportedly provided lethal and nonlethal support for a number of Islamist groups, the UAE has chosen to provide diplomatic and nonlethal support while keeping these groups at arm's length. The UAE's approach stood in contrast to that of the United States under Obama at the time.

As noted, however, the UAE's stance on the Muslim Brotherhood has remained unchanged; the country's leadership still considers it a terrorist organisation. According to Sheikh Abdulla bin Zayed, the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates, along with ISIS and al-Qaeda, are the source of regional instability (Fox News, 2014). The UAE also maintains its strong opposition to both the pro-Iranian policies and the brutal crimes of Bashar al-Assad. This has left the UAE little room for engagement in Syria and limited its options on the battlefield and even in diplomatic negotiations (Ibish, 2017).

This unwavering antipathy towards the Muslim Brotherhood has played a key role in strengthening relations between the UAE and el-Sisi's Egypt, which shares the same antagonistic view of the Muslim Brotherhood. This has led both countries to launch airstrikes against Islamist targets in Libya while backing the Libyan general, Khalifa Hifter. This has had

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[22] These include the reinstatement of the Hadi government in Yemen and working towards regime change in Syria.

negative bearings on their relations with Hamas (the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood), although neither, especially the UAE, has had very good relations with the Palestinian Authority under President Mahmoud Abbas. Abbas and others have for several years believed claims that the UAE is conspiring to depose him in favour of the former Fatah leader in Gaza, Mohammad Dahlan, who currently lives in UAE and has good relations with the UAE government (Ibish, 2017).

Overall, the UAE believes that it represents a forward-looking, modernising and moderate Arab approach, while the Islamists, including the Brotherhood, fight for a backward, exclusively extremist agenda (Gargash, 2014). Others, however, see the UAE's agenda in the region as representing the interests of monarchical regimes as opposed to republicans, which Islamists claim they are, and even as one of the chief perpetrators of the counterrevolution against the Arab uprisings.

The greatest flaw of this once pervasive and still persistent counter-revolution narrative is that it takes the implicit or explicit claims of Islamist groups as given. Following the Arab uprisings, the Muslim Brotherhood has claimed that it legitimately represents Arab revolutions and the Arab popular will in general. The UAE strongly rejects such claims: the government views the Muslim Brotherhood as an opportunist group which, after years of acquiescence to the status quo, has sought to exploit a watershed event to further its own agenda and establish its self-declared caliphate (Ibish, 2017; Gargash, 2014). The UAE also stresses what it sees as the ideological similarities between Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, Khomeini-inspired Shia extremists, Salafist groups and Salafist-jihadi militant groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS (Gargash, 2014). It is worth noting that the UAE does not conflate these groups, but it does, in a sense, see them as different manifestations of virulent and extremist religious thought. It sees them as espousing the same ideals and, hence, opposes them all. Still, the UAE

does not fit Western conceptions of secularism, but it is militantly and ideologically anti-theocratic, especially following the short-lived gains of Islamists in the region. This profound opposition to the politicisation and radicalisation of Islam in all of its varieties is among the most important political implications of the UAE's domestic crackdown on the Brotherhood and remains, to date, an important guiding principle of the UAE's domestic and foreign policies (Ibish, 2017).

Islah is the prime agent for generating and sustaining an expansive opposition discourse on the government's policies, which, according to al-Zo'by and Başkan, (2014), presents a legitimacy crisis for the government. However, the claim that Islah is capable of instigating a severe legitimacy crisis for the government overlooks the broader legitimacy framework, which underpins the survival of the UAE monarchy in its current form. Still, Islah remains a threat due to its religion-based or inspired discourse and that the UAE lacks an institutionalised religious clergy (aside from the Awqaf Authority) to take on a group that draws upon narratives of religious-based opposition. Given that the UAE's legitimacy rests upon the state's ability to safeguard the social fabric and Emirati identity, Islah's activism could potentially threaten the country's stability UAE due to its religion-based nature. However, by examining Islah's tone of rhetoric, as voiced through its official magazine and website, one can develop a sense of the mindset that governs the group's behaviour: Islah and its members operate on the assumption that Emirati society is corrupt and is in need of religious rehabilitation to restore its moral order, a view that does not resonate with the leadership and Emiratis in general. The Arab uprisings further complicated the situation for the government as the Brotherhood in Egypt and its offshoot in Tunisia rose to prominence as powerful political actors. Despite the subsequent defeat of political Islam in the region, the Arab uprisings set an important precedent for religion-based discursive opposition in the UAE, the impact of which could have been less

threatening in a region where no political upheaval was taking place (al-Zo'by and Başkan, 2014).

With most Islah members either detained or forced into exile,[23] the question remains of why the government, particularly in the capital Abu Dhabi, reacted so strongly despite the lack of any mass protests in the UAE. As this chapter explains, Islah's agenda became overtly confrontational and political well before the Arab uprisings as a result of its long history of social and institutional influence. The gains of the Muslim Brotherhood in the transitionary period following the downfall of a number of Arab regimes emboldened local Brotherhood members (Forstenlechner, Rutledge and al Nuaimi, 2012). On top of that, Islah sought to draw upon are narratives of economic distress and disparity in wealth that had proven such an influential tool for mobilising the masses in Egypt and Tunisia among other countries in the Arab world. Islah members such as Mohammed al-Sadiq took to Twitter to criticise the differential in development between the two wealthiest emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, whose GDP accounted for about 90 percent of the GDP of the country, and the five comparatively less affluent northern emirates. Indeed, GDP per capita was estimated to be about $110,000 in Abu Dhabi and $41,670 in Dubai in 2011, which stands in contrast to $22,100 for Sharjah and $21,897 for Ras al-Khaimah. Infrastructure projects also lagged behind in the northern emirates, with a study by the Federal National Council in 2010 finding that 900 buildings and houses lacked access to electricity and running water, and that Sharjah and Fujairah were experiencing constant power blackouts and fuel shortages in the late 2000s. Unemployment figures were perceived to be higher in several of the northern emirates, reaching up to 20.6 percent in Fujairah and 16.2 percent in Ras al-Khaimah (Ulrichsen, 2016b).

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[23] A sizeable number of its exiled members now reside in countries such as Turkey and the UK.

However, these figures remain high due to the local governments' inability to afford to employ nationals and therefore offer little insight into the political situation in these emirates. Also, many citizens who come from these emirates seek employment opportunities in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, where salaries are much higher.

Nevertheless, the Gulf States Newsletter went so far as to label the northern emirates a 'ticking time bomb' in 2011 (Gulf States Newsletter, 2011). Aside from the gap in living standards, Islah has long decried the alleged discrimination against Emiratis from the northern emirates when it comes to federal government jobs or positions in the more prestigious semi-government companies. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether this alleged discrimination truly exists because, as mentioned, a large number of northern Emiratis hold high-paying jobs and positions in the government and semi-government sectors as well as in the country's army.[24] Despite this, members of Islah along with a few scholars insist that the wealth disparity between the less affluent northern emirates and Abu Dhabi and Dubai could escalate grievances, which might quickly gain a political dimension as witnessed elsewhere in the region during the events of the Arab uprisings, particularly should they happen among the more conservative communities of Emiratis in the northern emirates (Ulrichsen, 2016b; Forstenlechner, Rutledge and Alnuaimi, 2012).

Indeed Boghardt (2013), whose writing has addressed the topic of Islah in the UAE and the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gulf in general, has suggested that following the UAE94 trial, UAE decision-makers were concerned about 'Disparities between the northern and southern emirates [which] provide a socio-economical background in which the religious-inspired message of Al-Islah for a more just society resonates as it relates to a sense of injustice felt in the north'.

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[24] Author's interview with a local thinktank director, 5th Mar 2018, Abu Dhabi.

The government crackdown on Al-Islah was part of a broader crackdown on organisations that advocate for political or regime change in the region. This was followed by a government takeover of local civil society groups and the closure of a number of regional branches of international organisations which were based in the UAE. Following the arrest of the 2011 petition organisers, the elected boards of the Jurist Association and the Teachers' Association were replaced by government appointees; both organisations had been signatories to the petition. In a similar vein, the Dubai office of the National Democratic Institute was closed down by the government while the Abu Dhabi branches of the German think-thank Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Gallup polling Centre were also shut. Meanwhile, in December 2012, the authorities in Abu Dhabi asked the RAND Corporation to close its offices there (al-Wasat News, 2012).

In the aftermath of the closures, the Assistant Foreign Minister for Legal Affairs, Abdul Rahim al-Awadhi, stated that some of these foreign institutions had been operating in the country without a license. This prompted the local authorities to order their closures with immediate effect (Ulrichsen, 2016b). However, representatives of these groups rejected the claim that they had been operating without a license; a spokesperson for the Konrad Adenauer Foundation stated: 'We react with utter disbelief to the unexpected and completely sudden developments in Abu Dhabi', while the head of the same organisation, interpreted the closure as 'an alarming signal if nongovernmental organizations and political foundations are not welcome in the Arab world' (Jamjoom, 2012). The wave of closures also affected the Gulf Research Centre, a leading think-tank in the GCC, which had been based in Dubai since 2001 until it was forced to cease its activities in the country following its failure to gain a renewal of its license in 2012. Similarly, the Regional Office of the US State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) was shut down on the request of the UAE government, and many expatriate academics

based at Emirati universities, who have found it increasingly difficult to conduct independent research since 2012, have had to leave the country (Ulrichsen, 2016b).

Overall, the UAE's crackdown on Islah and its regional fight to eradicate Islamists has had important political implications for the country's legitimacy and survival. The rise of what was deemed to be a common enemy caused the majority of Emiratis to rally behind their leadership, especially after Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed gave a memorable interview on Abu Dhabi TV, where he reassured Emiratis that the country remained 'united' despite Islah's threat[25]. The UAE has always feared transnational movements, especially those with religious leanings, as religion is seen as the main pillar of legitimacy in the non-democratic regimes of the Middle East. Thus, as the next chapter explains, state-led social reform serves a multitude of goals as it places a great deal of emphasis on cultivating a secular Emirati identity, one that is beholden to the state and its rulers.

The move to modernity is construed by Islamists as the antithesis to the social order they prefer and strive for. Today, the UAE's policies are subjected to far greater international scrutiny and critique than at any point in its history. No longer can it be described as a small Gulf state that is far removed from international affairs. This has been the case since the outbreak of the Arab uprisings and the UAE's resultant stance towards the Muslim Brotherhood at the local and regional levels. The clash between the UAE and Islah does not portend a Huntington-style clash, nor is it symptomatic of a lack of national identity or a confessional divide. Islam as a faith and a set of values remains different from political Islam, which, although ideologically grounded, remains fundamentally opposed to Western constructs of modernity (Lekhraibani, Rutledge and Forstenlechner, 2015). The UAE views Islamists as threatening not only its

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[25] A video clip of the interview can be accessed via this link: https://youtu.be/HGa91Wvskv0

political order but also its transition towards a knowledge-based economy. The economic reforms that are now underway are meant to overcome the socioeconomic consequences that often affect oil-based economies (Rutledge, 2014). The country's security and stability, both actual and perceived, are vital to diversifying the economy and to attracting non-oil based foreign direct investment (FDI) and human capital, such as highly skilled expatriate labour (Lekhraibani, Rutledge and Forstenlechner, 2015).

In conclusion, the UAE is seeking to become a regional social, economic and cultural powerhouse, having cemented its reputation as a regional leader in logistics and financial services. This is one of the reasons why the country's leadership considers political Islam to be a grave threat to its security and stability. Aside from its ability to influence conservative elements of UAE society, the catalyst of its vehement opposition to political Islam can be traced to the events that took place in Tunisia and Egypt in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. Yet, in both states, the Islamists who sought to fill the political vacuums, which were created after the fall of Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, have since been ousted by popular demand, in Tunisia by way of elections and in Egypt, by military intervention (Lekhraibani, Rutledge and Forstenlechner, 2015). In a poll, almost two-thirds of the Egyptian population supported the ousting of Morsi, with many of them having voted for the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party (YouGov, 2013). The UAE is not concerned that the Muslim Brotherhood is considered a legitimate political actor by a number of commentators in the Middle East.

Some authors, such as al-Zo'by and Başkan (2014), have gone so far as to suggest that the UAE Brotherhood drew on an oppositional discourse that transcended demands for political and economic reform and ventures into a broad de-legitimation discourse that found its expression in notions of social justice, identity rights and civic entitlements. In their view, this

constituted a grave legitimacy crisis for the state, although they provide little evidence in the way of empirical data to support such claims. However, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, the political agenda of political Islamists, along with their message that 'Islam is the solution', still resonates with large numbers of the populace due to its ability to encourage conservative elements of Emirati society to accept that doctrine as the way forward for the region.

Overall, the UAE's quest to defeat political Islam has important political implications for the country's legitimacy and survival. The rise of a common enemy resulted in the majority of Emiratis to rally behind the al-Nahyan government, especially after Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed's message that the UAE remains 'united' despite Islah's threat. As the next chapter explains, one of the by-products of such top-down socio-political reform is the creation of a new notion of Emirati identity by way of liberal state-led social reform.

The UAE's leadership views political Islam, both locally and regionally, as not only a serious threat to its political order but also its ongoing transition towards a knowledge-based economy. The country's security and stability, in actual and perceived terms, are vital to diversifying the economy and to facilitating the flow of FDI and human capital such as highly skilled expatriate labour (Lekhraibani, Rutledge and Forstenlechner, 2015).

Chapter Three: State-led reform in the UAE

When the United Arab Emirates came into being in 1971, the founding sheikhs, led by Sheikh Zayed, had to grapple with a great many challenges in their quest to build the state, only one of which was instilling a sense of belonging and loyalty among the country's citizens. As noted in Chapter One of the thesis, the federation struggled to sustain itself in the early years following its establishment. Indeed, the UAE leaders had little to rely upon at the time aside from traditional modes of politics and a number of hastily established government entities (Davidson, 2005). The collapse of the federation of South Arabia and the rise of a radical Marxist government in Yemen was fresh in the minds of the UAE's leaders.

Tensions between different Emirates and influential tribes[26] along the Trucial Coast continued to brew beneath the surface. In addition, the UAE found itself grappling with a number of existential threats to its security from the onset, with Iran securing its grip on the three islands in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia, the Buraimi oasis area located near the city of Al-Ain. The building of a sense of citizenship in the early days of the UAE was thus fraught with difficulty, especially when the pervasiveness of tribalism, defined by the absence of an indigenous anticolonial movement, is taken into consideration (Taryam, 1987). Still, the government was able to instil a basic sense of identity in the population despite these challenges. That said, the philosophy of the leadership has evolved in recent years and so has its idea of citizenship. Its current citizenship model is far more complex, rationalised and articulated, marking a shift from the earlier basic model to an increasingly active one (Jones, 2017). As I argue in the chapter, this dramatic evolution of the UAE's notion of citizenship took place against a

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[26] Historically, the Bani Ghafir tribal coalition, led by al-Qawasim, dominated the northern region of the Trucial Coast, while the Bani Yas-led Hina'i coalition dominated the south.

backdrop of regional change as the government sought to redefine what it means to be an Emirati citizen by ushering in a wave of liberal social reforms.

The objective of this chapter is to touch upon the topic of top-down citizen building in the UAE after the Arab uprisings. The chapter comprises four main sections. The first section is dedicated to explaining how state-led citizen building works. The second section provides an overview of liberal citizen-building initiatives in a non-democratic setting. The third section argues that the UAE's leadership aims to construct a new concept of Emirati identity in an era of regional turmoil and uncertainty through embarking on a series of hitherto unprecedented reforms in key areas, including institutionalising tolerance, gender equality, formally co-opting youth and introducing compulsory military service for Emirati males aged between 18 and 30. This was done with the aim of constructing a new Emirati notion of citizenship, which serves, in my view, as a means to deter future political crises and to alter the traditional legitimacy formula,[27] which invokes tribal and religious-based notions of regime legitimacy. Indeed, those changes became more pronounced in the post-Arab uprisings period. In order to trace this chapter back to the thesis' main research question, the fourth section explores the impact of these initiatives on regime legitimacy and survival in a post-Arab uprisings context. Finally, the chapter ends with some concluding remarks.

How does state-led citizen building work?

When building an ideal of citizenship, a state must make its case continuously for each new generation and each era (Meriam, 1931, p. 10) The case the state needs to make is subject to

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[27] This state-led reform constitutes what I call the 'reengineering of rentierism,', which signals a move away from traditional modes of material legitimacy in an era when Gulf states aim to cut public spending to reduce their reliance of oil to sustain the citizenship bargain.

its own historical and socio-political realities. Thus, the end goal of state-led citizen building is to convince citizens that the state and its rulers are legitimate enough to rule over them. But beyond that lies the question of the type of citizen states and rulers want to create whilst initiating top-down social reform.

By and large, citizen character-building efforts in the UAE assume a distinct liberal form. In political theory, this form of state-led citizen building emphasises individualism, personal autonomy, critical and reflective thinking, the separation of religion from the state, and tolerance (Macedo, 1990). In the context of non-democratic regimes, contemporary literature treats this phenomenon as a manifestation of 'competitive authoritarianism' (Levitsky and Way, 2010). Levistsky and Way, who base their findings on 35 case studies of authoritarian regimes across four continents, argue that such liberal reforms reflect a rational strategy on behalf of autocrats to maintain the status quo.

However, the question must inevitably be asked: how do governments mould their citizens into their ideal image? This question has informed a substantial body of research across different disciplines. Jones (2017b) argues that there exist a number of important gaps in our knowledge, not only of why and how states shape citizens, but also about the outcomes of such efforts and the reasons for those outcomes. These knowledge gaps become more pronounced when we approach the topic of citizen building in contemporary politics, especially in a region such as the Middle East. For governments worldwide, the challenge of building the ideal body of citizens is a significant one. As Merriam (1931) argues in his seminal work on national character building, governments face the continuous challenge of making their case for each new generation of citizens and for each historical period.

Citizen building forms an important pillar of nation-building which, for Wimmer (2018), works in two ways: the extension of political alliances across a territory (the political integration

aspect) and the emergence of a sense of loyalty to the state (the political identity aspect). The goal is to create citizens who will define national identity in broad terms to include all citizens equally, regardless of their backgrounds. States aim to create loyal and accountable citizens through fostering a sense of ownership of the state and promote the idea of a collective purpose that transcends tribal, religious and sectarian realities (Wimmer, 2018).

The term national character-building usually referred to the effort on behalf of rulers to instil a notion of national identity into a large number of citizens, most of whom had never heard of the term before. This expression was used by the Hashemite prince, Faisal, who became the first King of Iraq after World War I (Batatu, 1978). Between the late 1700s and the late 1800s, rulers on the European continent introduced policies that aimed to influence and homogenise their populations, thus marking the beginning of European-centric nationalism. The practice continued well into the 20th century, when postcolonial rulers followed in the footsteps of their predecessors (Hobsbawm, 1990). At that time, leaders aspired to build citizens in a very basic sense, instilling a basic notion of national identity, recognition of the state as a legitimate authority, and a pledge of loyalty to its rules. It is important to note that earlier efforts to build a citizenship ideal were carried out at a time when interstate conflict was a common occurrence in an international order characterised by anarchy. To ensure the survival of their polities and their nations, rulers aimed to foster a strong sense of loyalty and self-sacrifice among their citizens. It was important to rulers that citizens were ready and willing to participate in wars and sacrifice their lives for their countries. For example, following France's defeat by Prussia in the late nineteenth century, French rulers introduced a number radical public education reforms, whose goal was to build the character of its citizens, aiming to better prepare and motivate them to fight and die for their country. Elementary school curriculums were changed to teach children that it was their duty to defend the homeland, to die for it, to obey its rulers,

and to perform military service (Lindert, 2004). As I argue later in the chapter, the UAE is aiming to instil the same values in its youth today, especially after the introduction of mandatory conscription, which preceded the country's military intervention in Yemen. Overall, the demands of today's world are different to earlier periods. Although leaders still aspire to build citizens who take pride in their national identity and are willing to fight their country's wars, their focus has shifted to other aspects of citizen-building. Indeed, it is no longer the norm for most state leaders to contend with a large body of population that lacks any semblance of patriotism because states exist in a more mature international system, one in which they are taken for granted and identities are considered a given (Jones, 2017b).

Also, the fast-changing nature of the global economy emphasises the importance of innovation and competitiveness. Indeed, in the context of today's world, an oft-used standard for judging the quality of citizens is their market-readiness, characterised by a desire to fight, not on battlefields, but in market economies. Indeed, scholars such as Mearsheimer (2001) treat economic power as a form of latent military power.

State-led citizen building aims to shape citizens in a variety of ways; these include education, media, rituals and spectacles. As noted by a number of scholars, the UAE has focused heavily on rituals and spectacles for the purpose of citizen-building (Khalaf, 2000; Davidson, 2005, 2012: Ulrichsen, 2016b). The government encourages citizens to take part in the country's ritualistic heritage festivals as well as celebrate spectacles such as Burj Khalifa and the Louvre Museum in Abu Dhabi. State-led citizen building, as a concept, carries negative connotations in the literature due to it being synonymous with more extreme and coercive methods than softer approaches to shape hearts and minds, which themselves can restrict the autonomy of the individual. State-sponsored expulsion of minorities, sectarianism, the banning of local languages and the whitewashing of cultural diversity have all been linked to top-down citizen

building and its homogenising character (Mylonas, 2013). Indeed, efforts to shape citizens through education and other means can also be more or less coercive. Because it is a political process, it is uncommon to see it being discussed neutrally.

Jones (2017a & 2017b) adopts Marshall's (1950) framework for studying modern citizenship in her study on social engineering in the UAE. Marshall's initial framework focuses on (1) civil demands, (2) political demands and (3) social and economic demands. However, Jones adjusts the framework to make it more suited for the study of citizen building. First, she incorporates conceptions of citizen responsibilities alongside their rights. Second, she adds a fourth dimension to Marshall's framework, the national dimension. Third, she includes the ruling class perspective to develop a nuanced understanding of top-down reforms (Mann, 1987).

Dimension	examples of empirical referents
National	Attachment to the country, patriotism, pride in the nation.
Civil	Demands for civil rights; civic-mindedness, tolerance, desire to volunteer.
Political	Demands for political participation (e.g., vote)
Economic	Demands for social/economic rights; self-reliance, entrepreneurship, willingness to contribute to the nation's development

Figure 5: A modified version of Marshall's framework (Jones, 2017b)

State-led citizen building in a non-democratic setting: The UAE as a case study

Autocratic rulers who introduce top-down social reform exhibit a narrowly self-interested

behaviour. They carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of introducing liberal change and conclude that such societal transformation will safeguard the status quo and ensure their survival. Scholars emphasise the rationality of autocrats and their capacity to evolve. The rationalist literature depicts autocrats as being ahead of their societies courtesy of their ability to exercise ingenious forms of social control (cited in Jones, 2015). Jones (2015, p. 26) states: 'ideas and norms may shape actors' preferences and conceptions of self-interest, which then direct action in as calculated and instrumental a way as ever.' Meyer et al. (1997) highlight how the need for political legitimacy can explain why countries which share little in common, historically or culturally choose to adopt similar policies and build identical institutions. As such, autocratic liberalisation may reflect a desire to conform to global cultural norms, spearheaded by autocrats who believe they can modernise their societies (cited in Jones, 2015). Several scholars emphasise the role of 'norm entrepreneurs,' who influence autocrats to adopt alternative norms of appropriateness (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998).

In the context of the UAE, the government confronted big obstacles to instilling a sense of national identity in the population during the early years of the federation, one of which was finding a common bond between the *Bedu*, the nomadic Bedouin tribes of the interior concentrated in Abu Dhabi, and the *hadhar,* the settled population that lived along the coast (Ulrichsen, 2016b; Hellyer, 2001; Heard-Bey, 2005). Another was ethnic diversity; coastal cities like Dubai had long been home to Persian and Indian communities, mostly merchants who had intermarried with Arabs (Davidson, 2008). Miriam Cooke (2014) states that the discovery of oil ushered in a new phase in Gulf cosmopolitanism. As oil wealth grew and opportunities boomed, more people came from the Indian Ocean region and beyond to seek economic opportunities in the Gulf (AlShehabi, 2015). Due to UAE society's tribal and conservative nature, the question of lineage and who was genuinely indigenous and thus

deemed worthy of UAE citizenship formed an integral part of the early debate surrounding Emirati identity. So how could rulers, themselves often at odds, instil a national identity and sense of loyalty in such a conservative and ethnically diverse people? Scholars such as Jones (2017b) and Davidson (2005 & 2012) state that this was made possible due to oil wealth. These scholars contend that the ability to distribute oil wealth and provide for citizens in a multitude of new ways enabled the state to garner loyalty and legitimacy from its citizens. Indeed, Beblawi and Luciani (1987) state that rentier states use their oil wealth to buy off their populations and keep their political demands in check.

However, such arguments fall drastically short of capturing the full picture. Although Sheikh Zayed was willing and eager to use the country's oil wealth to develop the UAE and provide material benefits to his citizens, this alone was not enough to foster loyalty among the people. Indeed, Zayed and his fellow rulers had to work hand in hand to erase a long history of tribal conflict that had taken place between different Emirates and tribes. One such obstacle was al-Nahyan's struggle to contain and co-opt the powerful Manasir tribe.[28] A letter from the British Resident, G.N. Jackson (1948), revealed the extent to which the Manasir were a major cause for concern for Abu Dhabi rulers. In addition to that, oil was a source of instability in the 1930s and 1940s; the political implications that the signing of the oil concessions had on intra-emirate border disputes were too significant to be overlooked. Such border disputes escalated into a full-blown conflict between Abu Dhabi and Dubai, which lasted from 1945 until 1948 and claimed hundreds of lives (Heard-Bey, 2005). Thus, it is worth emphasising that early efforts to build a citizenship ideal in the UAE did not materialise, not only because the UAE had vast oil wealth but because its rulers were able to overcome the tribal and border disputes that once

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[28] Plural for al-Mansouri.

dominated the state of the intra-Emirate political landscape. These historical facts remain absent in discussions on political survival in the UAE.

In recent times, however, the focus of state-led citizen-building efforts have shifted to meet the demands of globalisation, which is also an important practical issue in global policy-making circles. Although the UAE is a unique state in its own right, it is also one of the very few countries in the Middle East with the resources, political will and a sufficient level of legitimacy to be able to launch a pro-globalisation series of social and educational reforms. Indeed, in Jordan, the government recently revised grade school textbooks, not only to bolster national unity but also to prepare its citizens to be active players in the global economy. Such revisions included, for example, editing out gender-stereotypical portrayals of women, adding images of Jordanian churches alongside those of mosques, and secularising science textbooks. This was done with the aim of making education correspond to the needs of the labour market. However, such ambitious reforms met with significant resistance from a number of Jordanians, including the burning of the new books in schools (Jones, 2017b). This wave of discontent can be attributed to the strong influence of Islamists on Jordanian society, which was the case in the UAE prior to the crackdown on Islah activists. Some suggest that a lack of 'globalisation-readiness' is linked to dangerous trends in terrorism and political violence (Faour & Muasher, 2011).

In the UAE, the state has put in a serious effort to build a new kind of citizen who is at ease in an increasingly competitive international arena. The UAE leaders want to build globalised citizens. Leaders' motivations, constraints and reasoning are complex, but what can be deduced from such efforts is that the UAE is aware that there is plenty of work that needs to be done for its citizens to be able to compete on a global level. Indeed, they are interested in creating what they regard as a more open society, which corresponds to the demands of a globalised world,

involving certain Western-influenced ideas about how modern and productive citizens ought to behave. Suffice it to say that these ideas often reflect the leaders' own experiences of life in the Western world. The UAE leaders' ultimate goal is to transform their youth into self-reliant, achievement-oriented adults, who will make less economic demands on the rentier state, while showing the desire to be proactive players in their communities and contribute to market-driven economies.[29]

It is worth noting that they also hope to maintain the status quo by preserving citizens' loyalty and political quiescence while boosting patriotic sentiments. This is important since the UAE leadership wants to maintain a healthy level of stability and legitimacy to deter any possibility of future unrest. Overall, the UAE's idea of the 'globalisation-ready' citizen is, therefore, more than a passive citizen who can simply be bought off by the state. Rather, he is a proactive citizen who understands his rights and responsibilities within a non-democratic system. This has culminated in a wave of state-led citizen building initiatives that are at once liberal, neoliberal and authoritarian in nature. These have involved a series of transformative education reforms, an emphasis on symbolism in public discourse, and other tools of citizen character building. One such example of state symbolism is the recent construction of the Pavilion of Honour at Wahat al-Karama (Oasis of Dignity) in Abu Dhabi. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, stated that the memorial was a cultural landmark which reflected the nation's pride in the sacrifices made by its soldiers: 'The heroes who so loyally served their country were an example to be followed, and would inspire future generations of young Emiratis to be devoted and loyal to their homeland.' (The National, 2016). This is unprecedented because, historically, the Gulf states have not been active promoters of

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[29] Author's interview with a leading Gulf expert. 5th April 2018.

nationalism, which sits uneasily with monarchical systems. Instead, GCC states have relied

more on social welfare, presented as the paternalistic provision of the rulers. In Saudi Arabia,

national identity has been shaped by a commitment to the unitarian Wahhabi creed and

adherence to societal norms, enforced by religious officials and the clergy (Diwan, 2015a).

> A staple of the rentier system in the Gulf has traditionally been a government job. Hence, most Emiratis aspire to land high-earning jobs in the public sector. Concurrently, the private sector continues to be dominated by non-Emirati workers. Emiratis make up only about 20,000 of nearly 4 million workers in the private sector, according to Ministry of Labour statistics. Yet, as oil prices continue to fluctuate, public sector employment is no longer a guaranteed right for every Emirati. The country's leadership is now beginning to urge Emiratis to stop thinking about working for the government and to seek self-employment. This is part of the state's effort to reengineer the so-called mentality as the chapter will later show.

The Federal National Council stated that there were 800,000 jobs in the private sector ready to

be occupied by Emiratis, but so far only 20,000 to 30,000 Emiratis are employed in the private

sector (Nachdi, 2017). Although resource wealth provides a temporary cushion, the UAE faces

several of the same structural problems that plague the Middle East in general (Jones, 2017b).

In the Middle East, governments are the largest employers of citizens. Public sectors across the

region are beginning to reach the point of saturation, with unemployment rates soaring among

the youth. With the region's growing refugee crisis, large migrant populations now living

alongside citizens of host nations is also increasingly common, bringing with it related tensions

and the need to maintain security. Thus, although the UAE naturally faces its own set of

challenges and threats, the problems themselves are not unique. But the UAE remains in a

comparatively favourable position to address them (Jones, 2017b).

This emphasis on cultivating loyalty and devotion to the country among young Emiratis is the

reason why the UAE has spent heavily on ambitious cultural and educational projects.

Nowadays, educational curriculums place much emphasis on skills such as creativity, critical

thinking and English fluency, while encouraging students to learn values such as self-reliance, tolerance, civic consciousness, entrepreneurship and a reduced sense of entitlement.

As part of the effort to rethink state-society relations, the UAE's leadership has carved out new citizen-building goals, as illustrated in the figure below. The rulers wish to introduce change in the national, civil and economic dimensions of the state-citizen relationship without making significant political concessions. As such, state-led social reforms aim to increase patriotic sentiments and enhance the feeling of belonging to a nation, thereby transcending tribal and religious-based allegiances. The latter is especially important because the conception of this state-led project occurred at a time when Emirati Islamists had been dealt a major blow after the authorities cracked down on them. Understanding this new identity is a necessary precursor to understanding the newfound assertiveness in the UAE's foreign and security policies, which had come to define the country's political trajectory post-Arab uprisings. One of the key components of state-led reform is to boost civic-mindedness, not in the form of a demand for civil liberties, but rather in terms of tolerance and a desire to take part in the public domain (the civil dimension). Economically, the state aims to reduce reliance on government employment and the economic benefits of the welfare state by encouraging a spirit of entrepreneurialism and risk-taking in business (the economic dimension). Overall, the UAE's leaders, many of whom view themselves as father-like figures to the youth, want to transform their young citizens, whom they consider to be too reliant on their government, into self-reliant adults with a reduced sense of entitlement and a greater willingness to work hard and contribute to the development of the country in a variety of ways (Ulrichsen, 2016b). Thus, this new construct of Emirati citizenship has a different set of rights and responsibilities suited to the globalised age, and constitutes what I call the re-engineering of the rentier mentality.

Citizenship Dimension	Desired State-led Social Reform Outcomes
National	Heightened sense of patriotism, willingness to defend to the nation
Social	Progressive, liberal, less tribal
Political	Conservative. Takes part in managed political openings (e.g., FNC elections)
Economic	Increased self-reliance, entrepreneurship, willingness to contribute to the nation's development. Decreased reliance on state welfare

Figure 6: Modified version of Jones' (2017b) framework for understanding state-led citizen-building in the UAE

Re-engineering rentierism: constructing a new Emirati identity in an uncertain era

The UAE's leadership's goal is to avoid being seen as breaking the economic bargain between themselves and their citizens. However, due to mounting economic pressures, the UAE leadership aspires to make some revisions to this bargain. Gulf leaders have long sought to reduce interest in public sector employment as a result of the volatile nature of the energy markets. Thus, the UAE wants to achieve two goals at once: (1) cutting state expenditure and (2) building the right type of citizen for the post-oil era. The top-down drive to 'reengineer rentierism', both at a public and state level, lies at the heart of this effort, which marks a shift in the manner in which a rentier state like the UAE is perceived.

However, it is worth noting that such economic reforms might not be well received by the public, especially those that include reducing public sector salaries or taking away certain aspects of the welfare state. As such, it is worth noting that the government does not intend to

introduce radical economic reforms outright but is opting for an alternative, more wholesome notion of change. Thus, rather than introduce sudden structural change, the government has focused on modifying the citizens who operate within the rentier structure, attacking the rentier mentality rather than its material underpinnings. As citizen-building efforts are led by the government, the state maintains leverage over society, which reduces the likelihood of a legitimacy crisis. To take Jones'(2017b) argument a step further, I argue that the economic state model of the UAE is experiencing a shift from the allocative model to a more extractive one[30] judging by recent economic and social reforms, some of which were unprecedented. Thus, building the ideal type of citizen for the post-oil era is a priority for the government, which has shown itself willing to take that risk.

To facilitate such a shift, the state is now teaching its citizens to give as opposed to take. Citizens are told not to expect state largesse but instead to be prepared to make sacrifices. This is the primary goal of national service which aims to re-set the rentier mentality through militarising (what do you mean exactly) them. But militarising them does not entail their participation in combat per se. Rather, it fulfils the state's long-term goal of fostering a sense of loyalty that supersedes rentierism.Although this is hardly a new phenomenon, what is worth stating here is that the Arab uprisings gave this process a new stimulus driven by the unique confluence of internal and external threats.

Overall, the state-led focus to reshape identity can be attributed to Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan, who became President following the passing of his father in 2004.He is credited for placing the building of a new citizen at the centre of the government's agenda[31]. In a 2006

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[30] Rentierism as per Beblawi's (1987) definition.

[31] Author interview with a senior Emirati expert, Abu Dhabi, 28th February 2018.

speech, he stated that the country was entering new phase: *marhalat al-tamkeen* (empowerment phase), whereby citizens were required to be more participative and contribute more (Al-ittihad, 2011). Over the last two decades, the government announced a number of landmark strategies aimed at introducing reforms in a number of areas, one of which is UAE Vision 2021. The project aims to build citizens who will be equipped with the right type of skills and mentality to ensure the UAE's economy remains competitive in the post-oil era. The UAE Vision 2021 states that Emiratis should be creative and innovative and able to build a sustainable knowledge economy. The leadership also aims to fulfil the following set of goals listed in Education Vision 2020, which was launched in 1999:

> education for the future and adaptability, education for producing a creative character that is able to make and enrich knowledge, education for citizenship and affiliation despite globalization, education for responsibility and social accountability, education for competition in the world of global economy and free trade (p. 24).

At the individual emirate level, Abu Dhabi introduced a long-term plan to diversify the emirate's economy, which includes a reduced reliance on oil and placing greater focus on knowledge-based industries. The official document of Abu Dhabi Vision 2030 outlines seven main economic priorities, one of which is improving education to create an efficient labour market by developing a competent work force (2008).

Overall, these long-term development strategies aim to create a diverse, knowledge-based economy with Emiratis playing an active role in it. To meet the demands of the globalised world, it is thus important for the notion of Emirati identity to be synonymous with professionalism, loyalty to the state and a willingness to contribute to the country's development. This need to redefine Emirati identity comes at a time where the region had its share of political upheavals, which, to some degree, have changed the way Arabs view state-society relations. To respond to such change, the UAE has had two political openings, in the

form of FNC elections in the post-Arab uprisings period. The Federal National Council is an advisory body, but one that lacks legislative powers. Only prechosen voters can take part in the FNC elections, where they vote for 20 members, while the remaining 20 members of the 40-member council are appointed by the rulers of the seven emirates. Still, even this managed political opening can provide a window into dynamics within Emirati society and how the leadership is seeking to manage relations within it. While the FNC's powers are largely limited, it still plays a major role in national integration and in setting the stage for social and cultural development within the UAE. For instance, the FNC campaigns for greater inclusion of women in public life. Women have the right to vote in FNC elections, as well as take part in the elections (Diwan, 2015a).

The aim of the leadership is to cultivate a national identity that trumps passive citizenship; this is done by urging citizens to take part in such political openings. This form of citizenship focuses primarily on economic, social and cultural aspects, but does not quite prioritise political participation. The evolution of the citizenship construct from a passive model to an active one sets a historical precedent in the UAE. The new ideal combines elements of neoliberal characteristics within a non-democratic setting. It is neoliberal because the government aims to influence the economic and social dimensions of citizenship in a manner, which reflects emerging norms in the global economy and their desire to reengineer rentierism. It is authoritarian because the government wishes to maintain the status quo while experimenting with carefully managed political openings (Diwan, 2015a) Overall, the main goal is to create citizens who are more entrepreneurial, self-reliant and market-oriented. Thus, future Emiratis will be more able and willing to contribute to, rather than receive welfare benefits from, the UAE's development. The result will be the creation of a new elite class of nationals, that is bourgeois in character yet operates safely within an authoritarian system (Davidson, 2012).

The foreign policy chapter provides an insight into the national role conceptions held by the UAE leaders, one of which is the belief that the citizen should act upon this role as a force for the good. Thus, the leadership aims to usher in a knowledge renaissance, which extends well beyond technology and science, encompassing non-political arenas.

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However, this cannot be achieved without rethinking the state-society relations and altering the social contract. This makes state-led reform a political exercise irrespective of whether the state hopes to use it to reform the non-political aspect of Emirati identity. As the role of religion becomes less significant in the public sphere, the state is wary of the transnational appeal of Islamist movements and seeks to promote its construct of active citizenship to deter any religious-based challenges to its legitimacy. At the same time, teaching citizens to rely less on state welfare has an important long-term goal as far as regime legitimacy is concerned, especially when it comes to securing long-term political stability. But that does not mean that the state-led reform will achieve its intended goals without difficulties. The most significant challenge lies in the leadership's ability to rely less on rentierism without creating an environment of popular unrest. As ambitious as those reforms may be, some of them may not be readily accepted, and scholars need to account for that (As do state officials!!) . However, what's unique about the UAE is that its state led reform programme that seeks to reimagine the very construct of Emirati identity is coterminous with its drive to become a regional leader in culture, tolerance, innovation and science. This ambition underpins its foreign and security policies, which will be discussed in the next two chapters.

Institutionalising tolerance

In line with the UAE's goal to promote a cultural renaissance at the local and regional levels, the government has made it a priority to institutionalise tolerance and outlaw all forms of discrimination and hate speech. In February 2016, the Prime Minister of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed, announced the appointment of a State Minister for Tolerance and tasked her with carrying out the goals of the UAE National Tolerance Charter..

The UAE's efforts to spread what it sees as the values of tolerance comes at a time when a number of neighbouring countries are consolidating their efforts to defeat terrorism and stop the spread of extremism. Islamists are blamed for this. Indeed, one of the aims of institutionalising tolerance is to send a strong message to Islamists, whose religious-based discourse has been blamed by the country's leadership for instigating hatred and discrimination towards non-Muslims and non-Sunni Muslims in the post-Arab uprisings period (Black, 2012). It is also meant to act as a political deterrent on the internal level in that it draws mostly on secular notions of tolerance as opposed to religious-based ones. Indeed, the aim of emphasising secular notions is to construct a new legitimacy formula which is seemingly at odds with religious-based notions of legitimacy. Overall, the leadership wants to eliminate all possible avenues of state contestation which Islamists can utilise to undermine regime legitimacy in the UAE.

In a similar vein, the UAE introduced Law No.2 against Discrimination and Hatred. The law prohibits all forms of discrimination on the basis of religion, belief, sect, faith, creed, race, colour or ethnic origin. This covers speech and the written word, books, pamphlets or via online media. The law also includes provisions for punishing anyone who terms individuals heretics or unbelievers (The National, 2015). It is significant that, aside from its promotion of tolerance, this law prohibits discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin and tribal background, which has long been a principal feature of the largely conservative societies of the Gulf countries. I

surmise that the rationale behind this law is to usher in an era of neo-tribalism, a situation whereby the UAE remains governed by a ruling tribe (al-Nahyan of al-Bu Falah) but adopts the characteristics of the modern nation-state. Thus, the reconstruction of the UAE legitimacy formula aims to somewhat diminish the influence of religion and the tribe, guided by the belief that they both have the potential to undermine the state's legitimacy.

That said, it is worth noting that the UAE is an ecosystem of tribal networks and alliances. The ruling families of Abu Dhabi and Dubai come from the Bani Yas tribal coalition. Abu Dhabi used to have control over modern-day Dubai[32] until Al-Bu Falasah, led by Sheikh Maktoum bin Butti Al Falasi and his loyalists, left Abu Dhabi to settle in Dubai. The ruling families of Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah are closely connected as they come from the al-Qassimi tribe. Local commentator Sultan al-Qassemi (2012) has stated that a network of intermarriage

> connects all members of the UAE ruling families without exception … In the continuous absence of credible federal institutions, this inter-marriage network has been overlooked as an element that has no doubt contributed to the survival of the UAE as a federation over the past four decades.

It would be difficult to abolish tribalism altogether due to the role it plays in the survival of the political order. Therefore, the thesis argues that a move towards neo-tribalism will help the ruling families of the country to maintain their tribal alliances while decreasing the influence of the tribe in the public sphere, which is what these recent reforms aim to achieve. Thus, the goal is to build an Emirati citizen who takes pride in a national identity that transcends notions of *qabbaliyah* and tribal affiliation, loyalties that are seen as anathema, indeed antediluvian to this new construct of tolerance and modernity.

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[32] Dubai was governed by Sheikh Haza'a bin Za'al Al Sadouni Al Falahi, who was appointed by Abu Dhabi's ruler, Tahnoun bin Shakbout Al Nahyan, as the ruler's representative in the Dubai region.

Youth management

In February 2016, the Prime Minister of the UAE called on local universities to create a shortlist of three young men and three young women to occupy the post of Minister of State for Youth Affairs. Eventually, 22-year old Shamma Al Mazrui was chosen as the Minister of State for Youth Affairs. Shamma's appointment was part of a ministerial shake-up which included the appointment of eight new ministers, five of whom are women. The government's aim was to inject new blood into the Cabinet. Indeed, the average age of the new ministers in the restructured cabinet is only 38 years, with Al Mazrui being the youngest minister, at 22. The new Youth Minister also heads the Youth Council, which was established to 'represent the youth ideas, aspirations and solutions before the government' (UAE Government Website). The council includes 13 young members of both sexes who serve as government advisors on youth issues. Its role is to develop youth-related strategies which correspond to future trends in the UAE, identify challenges facing youth and ensure the participation of youth in the decision-making process.

The UAE is aware of the change in youth attitudes towards voicing their demands. This change in behaviour became more pronounced in the period leading up to the Arab uprisings and persisted following the demise of Mubarak and Ben Ali. The shift in the political outlook of Arab youth and the redefinition of the 'self and the other' in their relationship with domestic rulers and foreign powers has altered the political landscape. The creation of a youth bulge across the Arab world had a major role to play in that. For instance, Egypt's youth bulge played a major part in Mubarak's downfall. A youth bulge can cause unemployment rates to soar and lead to social unrest (LaGraffe, 2012).

Therefore, the UAE's leadership plan to include its youth in the decision-making process is simply not an effort to co-opt young Emirati men and women, but can also be understood as a

signal that the country is open to listening to the social and economic demands of its youth. In a recent interview, the UAE's Youth Minister stated that governments need to find a way to connect to their youth because neglecting their demands can cause political instability (CNN, 2017). As such, the state wants to build a young generation which is unafraid to express their views, while making sure they fall just short of pressing for drastic political reforms. In my view, the emphasis on the ruler's willingness to listen to the youth is the legitimising agent in these reforms as the country wants to find a way to bridge the age and generational gap between young Emiratis and their current generation rulers. As far as the quest to reengineer the rentier mentality is concerned, 'connecting with the youth' gives the state the political capital and legitimacy it needs to prepare for the post-oil era. For example, the Ministry of Education has discontinued its scholarships programme for humanities and social sciences and restricted it to the following areas (UAE Government Website):

- Innovation and future quests

- Space science

- Medicine and health sciences

- Water sources (desalination)

- Renewable and alternative energy

- Agriculture and food systems

- Transportation and infrastructure

- Oceanography.

Similarly, the Ministry of Presidential Affairs' Scholarship Office provides scholarship opportunities to school graduates that comprise competitive monthly salaries, university tuition and fees, health insurance and other allowances. The state still offers the same kind of largesse it provided in the past, albeit to a different pool of recipients. Indeed, such state-led efforts to

urge youth to pursue the abovementioned degrees is in line with its aim to move away from the unsustainable economic allocative model to a more extractive and competitive one, where education reflects the needs of the labour market. Also, the leadership believes that the rentier mentality hinders development. In its most ambitious form, the government-led citizen building drive aims to convince UAE citizens to behave in a way which goes against what they are used to by redefining their interests and attitudes at a young age. Indeed, they view the young generation as 'uncorrupted' by the pervasive rentier mentality and culture of entitlement and capable of being made into the ideal kind of citizens (Jones, 2017b).

To help cement these ideals further, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan ordered the establishment of the 'Mohammed bin Zayed Majlis for Future Generations' in 2017. The Majlis was borne out of Sheikh Mohammed's desire for today's youth to adopt the future skills and global mindset needed to play an active role in what he terms the '4th industrial revolution' (Mohammed Bin Zayed Majlis for Future Generations). The new era coincides with one of the most transformative and important periods in the UAE's recent history – the arrival of the post-petroleum era. To reflect the UAE's goals and vision, the Majlis is organised around three key pillars:

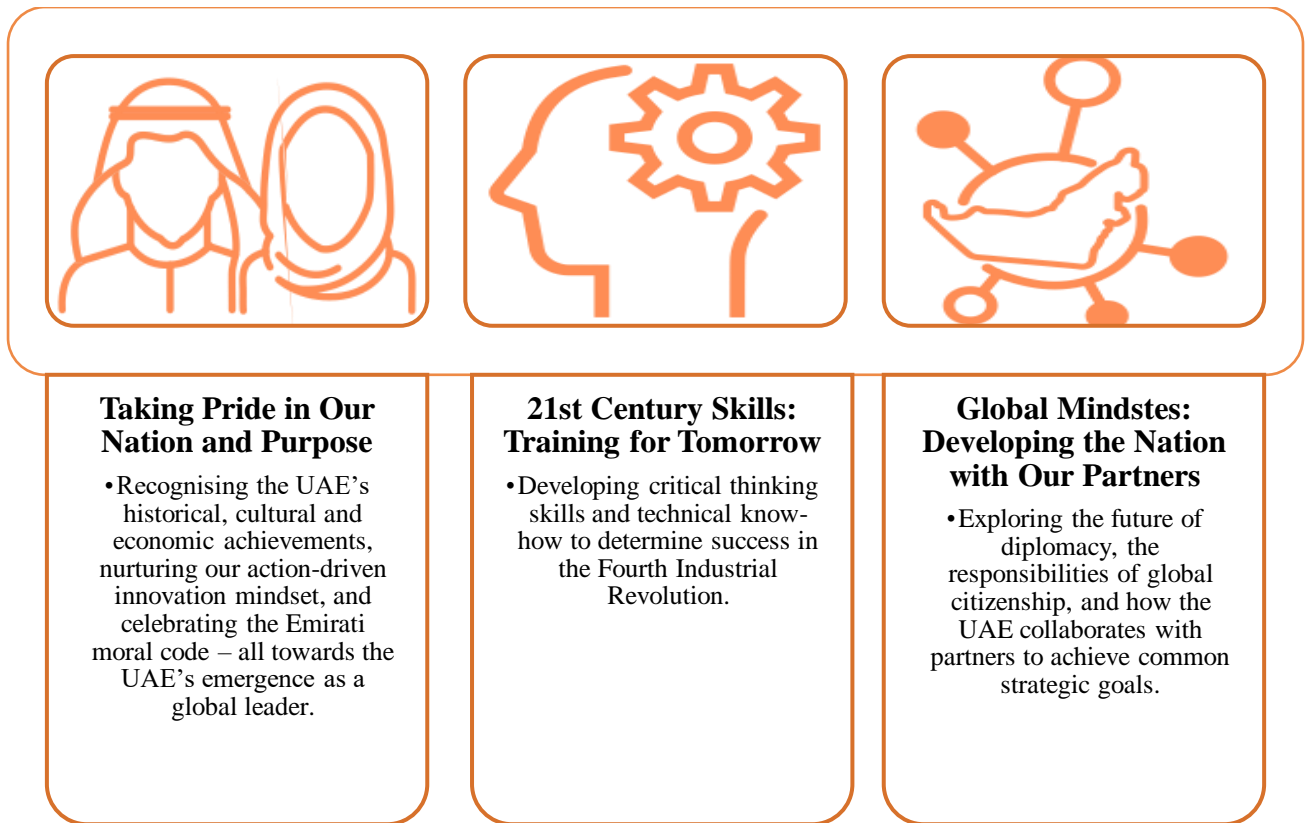| **Taking Pride in Our Nation and Purpose**	**21st Century Skills: Training for Tomorrow**	**Global Mindstes: Developing the Nation with Our Partners**
• Recognising the UAE's historical, cultural and economic achievements, nurturing our action-driven innovation mindset, and celebrating the Emirati moral code – all towards the UAE's emergence as a global leader.	• Developing critical thinking skills and technical know-how to determine success in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.	• Exploring the future of diplomacy, the responsibilities of global citizenship, and how the UAE collaborates with partners to achieve common strategic goals.

Figure 7: The pillars of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed's Majlis for Future Generations.

The Majlis has so far hosted more than 20 high-profile speakers, including UAE ministers, over the course of 30 sessions. The number of attendees in those sessions surpassed 3,000. In a recent session, which hosted the Minister of State for Higher Education and the Minister of Human Resources and Emiratisation, the Majlis focused on the topic of private sector employment. The minister's message was clear: 'our role is to show you the way, and your role is to take the decision to walk the path.' Speaking about Emirati private sector employment, the Human Resources and Emiratisation Minister described the important role of the private sector in the UAE's economy as it currently forms 80 percent of the country's GDP. He also shared a call to action for the attendees: 'We would like you to lead this vital strategic sector that's leading our economy.' The minister then drew the Majlis' attention to the steps

taken by the UAE government to enable Emiratis to embrace the 'identity of the coming phase.' He revealed, in an effort to fulfil the goals of Vision 2021, that the Ministry of Labour has been renamed the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation. The new ministry will undertake new initiatives, including promoting working from home, as well as self-employment opportunities. This once again shows that the government is promoting the culture of entrepreneurship and risk-taking among the youth. It is also urging Emirati students to pursue part-time private sector jobs while studying.

Perhaps what is interesting about this *majlis* is that it connects the youth to the country's most powerful decision-maker, whose goal is to use these platforms to engage with the country's youth whilst providing a degree of non-political participation. This is a visible example of the proactive model of autocratic regime legitimacy that creates a dynamic environment for youth participation within clear boundaries, in which the leader is seen as a dynamic figure, as opposed to an autocrat who's interested in sustaining the status-quo.

National Service

Any discussion on state-led reform in the UAE needs to shed light on the corrective role of The National Service and its implications for state-society relations This is where this chapter aims to build on Jones' (2017) work and at a time when the state is hoping to alter the ruling bargain without losing its legitimacy.

The National Service law, announced in 2014, aims to hone the physical, cognitive and moral aspects of UAE citizenship along these same lines. The law, which introduces mandatory military service in the UAE for the first time, aims to enhance the fatherly bond that unites the UAE's youth and its leadership. It requires all Emirati men aged between eighteen and thirty

to serve in the army for a minimum period of sixteen months[33]. Women are not required to serve but should they decide to, the minimum training period lasts for nine months regardless of qualifications. The training involves an important physical component. The chairman of the National and Reserve Service Authority, Major General Sheikh Ahmad bin Tahnoun Al Nahyan, remarked that the National Service incorporates a 'wide range of significant training courses aimed at helping these young recruits develop their creative skills and capabilities to take part in meaningful and effective community engagements' (Gulf News, 2014). Part of the non-physical training programme requires conscripts to attend lectures which are designed to 'protect them against destructive ideologies', a clear reference to Islamist and jihadist ideologies (al-Bayan Newspaper, 2014). It remains unclear what the UAE policy will be for the reserves. From the outset, it seems that the overriding reason for introducing conscription is the need to dismantle any potential expressions of dissent, which became more common in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. However, it can also be argued that this is part of the UAE's plan to supplement its army following the escalation of its military activity due to its participation in the war in Yemen (Amara, 2017).

Broadly speaking, the National Service aims to fulfil the national goals of the UAE and reaffirm the willingness of the nation through enhancing the bond between the leadership and citizens, investing in human capital, preserving the nation's stability and security and, finally, helping the UAE to succeed in every possible way. To make for a life-lasting experience, the National Service focuses on instilling the set of values outlined below in the conscripts, which it claims is derived from the UAE's traditions. As is the case with other top-down reform initiatives, the

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[33] In July 2018, the General Command of the Armed Forces announced the extension of the National Service term to 16 months. The minimum service term was 9 months.

national service aims to build the character of the nation's youth through teaching them the values of 'good citizenship,' as well as instilling a sense of civic consciousness in them. Policymakers believe this will have a transformative impact on their behaviour towards themselves and their nation. Indeed, one of the core values the national service aims to promote is loyalty, which, according to the official website, focuses on: '…promoting the spirit of loyalty and belonging through deepening the conscript's confidence in the leadership, the government and its entities in a manner that ensures internal security and stability' (The official National Service website).
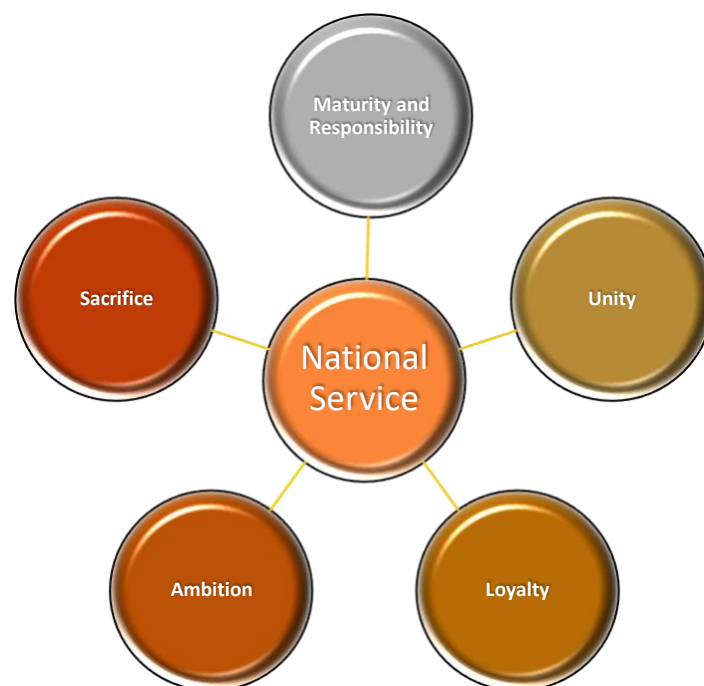

Figure 8: The values of the National Service (Source: The Official National Service Website)

Latterly, some countries are calling for national conscription for the purpose of reaffirming citizen commitment to the nation-state. Such calls stem from a desire for an equitable sharing of sacrifice and the need to enforce social cohesion through increasing patriotic sentiments (Eikenberry, 2013). Adding to the debate is a range of youth issues, stemming from a massive youth bulge in many parts of the Middle East. Such issues include soaring unemployment rates, corruption, socio-economic stagnation and a lack of opportunity and social inclusion. This has reached a critical point, with the ousting of two Arab presidents, the mass movement of people and the rise of dissent and dissatisfaction across the Arab world (Amara, 2017). As such, those calling for conscription believe that it will temper the passions of youth and increase their loyalty to the incumbent political leaders (Borani, 2017). The efforts of militaries to instil civic consciousness among young people is a persistent theme in the experiences of diverse countries (Enloe 1980; Glatthaar 1990; Holm 1992; Segal 1989; Weber 1976). In Bolivia, for instance, a key aspect of basic training is to teach conscripts to think of the army as omnipotent and omniscient. Young conscripts are incorporated into an environment in which every aspect of their lives becomes controlled and regimented, and their ties to society are non-existent or very restricted. To become a man and a soldier, it is essential that they get used to being away from home, and that they move to being under the control of older male figures. The military then subordinates their individuality to the identity of the male group and instils discipline and commitment to military values (Gill, 1997).

Recently, governments in the GCC began to raise awareness of the need for a more robust platform for national which that transcends mere economic and tribal constructs of citizenship. The origins of this transition are complex; yet they appear to have been caused by a shift in economic and political dynamics (Diwan, 2015a). Growing populations and diversifying economies have prompted GCC states to introduce subsidy cuts and encourage private sector

expansion. As such, the decline of public services, coupled with the inability of governments to employ citizens, is undermining the rentier state's ability to garner loyalty. It is also increasing the need for a better-trained and more enterprising citizenry. Thus, in the absence of a strong national identity, Islamist movements provide robust platforms for political participation, belonging and dissent. The UAE's concerns about the transnational appeal of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi populist movements and politicised Shia networks were heightened following the collapse of a few Arab states and mounting challenges from Islamist reformists and jihadists. The need to foster a strong bond between citizens and the rulers has motivated states such as the UAE to use conscription to achieve its goals (Diwan, 2015a). I therefore argue that conscription is a novel form of nation-building in the GCC.

Overall, what I believe to be unique in the case of the UAE is that the government wants to create responsible and ambitious adults from its conscripts, which reflects its goals to promote the spirit of entrepreneurism through teaching its youth self-reliance and responsibility. Indeed, Avrahami and Lerner (2003) argue that some forms of military service foster entrepreneurial attitudes among conscripts, especially the ones which promote self-reliance and risk-taking. Despite the military being often seen as promoting anti-entrepreneurial characteristics, such as conformity and bureaucratic behaviour, it is important to note that the UAE's emphasis on teaching its youth self-reliance is one of the reasons it has introduced conscription. As such, it is worth emphasising that the national service aims not only to discipline the country's youth but also to reengineer the rentier mentality by keeping their level of expectations low when it comes to state largesse. Thus, the national service serves an important function in ensuring regime survival, considering that it teaches young Emiratis that their security hinges upon that of the leadership and the country (The official National Service website).

Although there is an absence of substantive evidence concerning the conscipts' participation

in overseas military operations, this does not mean that National Service is failing to fulfil its purpose. Indeed, what cannot be overlooked is the corrective role it plays in reeingineering the pervasive rentier mentality and facilitating the shift from an allocative economy to a more extractive one, where citizens are expected to be more productive as opposed to being reliant on state largesse. By taking a look at the core values of the National Service above, it is possible to gain a better insight into its long-term goals. Unpacking those values is important to understanding the context in which they were conceived:

1) Maturity and Responsibility: This is a recurring theme in the state-led focus to reshape citizens in the UAE. The leadership, as explained previously, wants to instil a sense of maturity and responsibility in its citizens, who had fallen victim to the rentier mentality. The National Service aims to do this through honing the physical and cognitive abilities of the conscripts.

2) Unity: Creating a national identity that unites Emiratis irrespective of their ethnic, religious and tribal backgrounds is important. Especially amid the disparity in wealth between Abu Dhabi and Dubai on the one hand and the less affluent Emirates on the other. The focus here is to unite those Emiratis behind their leadership and deter any enmities that could be exploited by transnational movements.

3) Loyalty: Through unity the leadership's goal is to create loyal subjects. Loyalty is no longer cultivated along tribal, ethnic or religious lines but rather on the basis of overall government performance. Loyalty to the leadership transcends everything else.

4) Ambition: This ties in to the discussion on promoting entrepreneurship above, which is essential to the leadership's goal to rely less on oil by creating a knowledge-based economy.

5) Sacrifice: One of main goals of the National Service is to instil the idea of sacrifice in

the conscripts.   However, when examining the broader context of state-society relations, the regime's goal is to teach conscripts to set their expectations at a low level when it comes to state largesse by sacrificing their socioeconomic privileges. This is an integral part of the regime's plan to reengineer the rentier mentality.

The impact of state-led citizen building on legitimacy and survival in post-Arab uprisings UAE

The new Emirati identity being constructed is very much conscious of the present. It is politically conservative, socially progressive and neo-liberal economically. Politically, it favours order over change even if it is potentially positive because change is seen as disruptive. Economically, it is one that is overtly neo-liberal; one that believes in free trade, in openness, and in economic growth, with all that it may entail. As a result of the state-led emphasis on reengineering the rentier mentality, many Emiratis have now become critical of the welfare state. There is some openness to smart subsidies on specific things, but the idea of the average Emirati having to work hard is now becoming a value. Culturally, the UAE is more progressive than it used to be at the time of its establishment. Emiratis now draw a very clear line on social issues, which, in a way, has its roots in the current politically conservative mindset; if social change poses a threat to the status quo then it would be challenged, but if it does not, then change is accepted.[34] Fundamentally, the UAE is more similar to Prussia than Sparta. Prussia wanted to usher in an era of cultural enlightenment, which is what the UAE wants to do in the region, according to its leaders (Al-Maktoum 2006). Fredrick the Great is famous for saying, 'give me people', when the Edict of Nantes was revoked and Huguenots were being

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[34] Author's interview with a leading local commentator. Dubai, 10th of February 2018.

slaughtered. In response to that, he issued the Edict of Postdam and hosted the protestants. In the view of a leading Emirati commentator, the UAE does the same in that it is willing to accept people who want to work for the country and contribute towards its development:

> So in that way, we are continuously accepting people from different places that work within the model that we are trying to build, that share the values we share. So that is the identity that's being developed – I think it allows plenty of room for those who work hard but also those who don't.[35]

The priority is to maximise the output of the average Emirati. Thus, the chapter argues that there is a strong commitment to the new notion of citizenship. The rhetoric of *al tarkeeba al sukaniyah*[36] – of Emiratis being a minority – is no longer part of the debate. For there is now a clear recognition that things would be problematic from a socioeconomic standpoint if the population of Emiratis reached five million. Also, people no longer invoke tribal/religious arguments during transitory periods or watershed events.

As mentioned towards the end of Chapter One, loyalty is not entirely based on the welfare state. In fact, leadership and legitimacy are garnered on the basis of overall performance rather than being dependent on the rentier state. It used to be the case that political apathy acquiescence led to access to welfare benefits but that is no longer the case as the formula has changed. Nowadays, political acquiescence guarantees access to security. Overall, the politics of nepotism, by means of tribal and familial affiliations, is less pronounced today, which means there is plenty of room for socioeconomic mobility for most Emiratis. As far as state-led projects go, the state is using its power to push for reform in areas such as female empowerment, which in a way goes against conservative and male-dominated social

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[35] Ibid.

[36] An oft-used term in discussions on demographic imbalance in the UAE.

conventions. Overall, this change assumes a rational and meritocratic character and is part of the state-led enlightenment the government is keen on promoting.

Thus, the UAE rulers want to usher in as the kind of enlightenment and knowledge renaissance that the region needs and one that is necessary for their nation's progress in the post-oil era. They aim to achieve this well before the UAE's oil reserves are depleted. As such, they have introduced ambitious education reforms at all levels and related efforts to create a knowledge-based economy and build the ideal type of citizens to play a leading role in it. Overall, state-led social reform is a political process, and the UAE is no exception. Whereas a social contract based on rentierism has to some degree governed state-society relations in the past, with wealth distribution used as one of several sources of legitimacy, the UAE's leadership is now trying to change the terms of the social contract, as I have explained above. At the same time, they would like to maintain citizens' loyalty to bolster their own legitimacy. Moreover, they would also like to see reduced expectations when it comes to the state's largesse and more self-reliance being shown by Emiratis. The leadership wants to dismantle the rentier mentality and build a new type of citizen with a new identity. Thus, the ruling elite aims to modify the existing economic contract without overtly abolishing it by authoritarian decree. In short, if Emirati citizens choose to become economically independent, then that will offset the need to undertake risky structural reforms to urge citizens to change their mentalities. As such, leaders in the UAE want to show 'disciplinary power' while shaping their citizens (Foucault, 1977). This is less risky than attempting to change citizens through initiating a wave of overtly coercive measures. Generally speaking, the UAE's leaders are reluctant to apply drastic changes in that sense; thus, in the public sector, salaries continue to be high and job security is the norm. It is safe to assume that many Emiratis prefer the status quo. Public-sector employment offers great economic benefits and some citizens consider their right (Davidson, 2012). But, as explained

above, the government wants to modify the rentier mentality to speed up development. In many ways, state-led social reform aims to convince UAE citizens to behave in a way that goes against what they are used to by redefining their interests and attitudes at a young age. Indeed, the leadership has faith in the young generation because they see them as 'uncorrupted' by the pervasive rentier mentality and culture of entitlement and capable of being made into the ideal kind of citizens (Jones, 2017b).
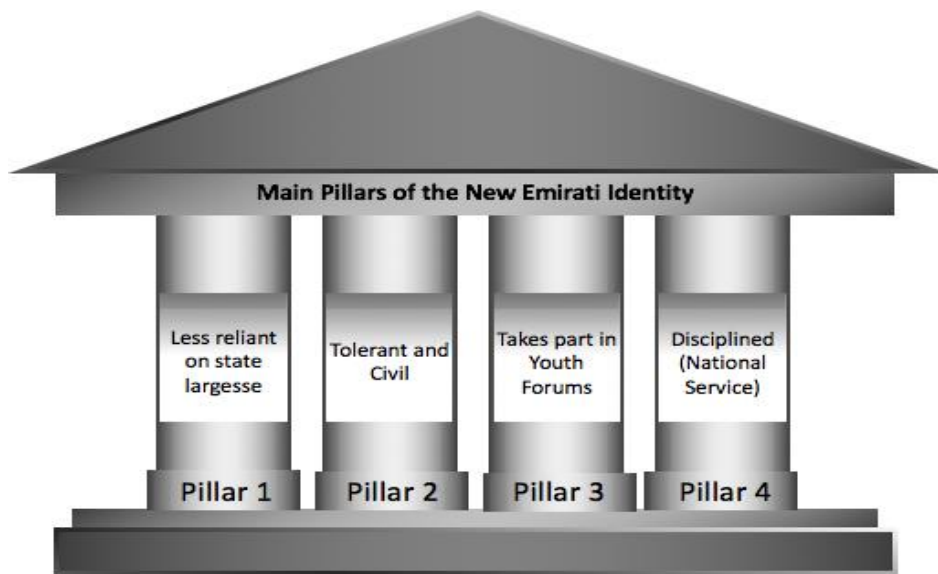
Figure 9: Youth as the focus: Re-engineering rentierism through building a new Emirati identity.

More generally, governments which undertake citizen-building projects expect that liberal, student-centred approaches to education will encourage youth to be more responsible and self-disciplined. According to a senior figure at Abu Dhabi's Education Council, 'Students used to do what the teacher said because the teacher told them what to do. Now, they are being asked to do more – to take responsibility for their own learning' (Jones, 2017b). A mission statement released by the Ministry of Education in 2011 also makes this a priority in the long-term. Top-down social reforms aim to promote a certain form of rationality, in line with Max Weber's

ideals of capitalism, which views the latter as 'a part of the total development of rationalism' (1997, p. 27). Such a rational life includes a natural tendency for goal-setting and goal-achievement, a focused, determined attitude, especially in problem-solving, and an ability to concentrate (1997, p. 18). All of this includes a habit of 'systematic self-examination' (1997, p. 79) supplemented by a regimented lifestyle so as to ensure that one is thinking and behaving rationally towards the achievement of their personal goals. In real terms, this translates to less reliance on the state for jobs and materialistic gain. This is important from the leadership's perspective since overreliance on oil has proven to be economically unsustainable. As the UAE aims to transform the state's model from a largely distributive model to a more extractive one[37] and as the GCC states strive to shore up government income while adjusting to lower oil prices, diversifying government revenues has become a necessity. Indeed, the IMF stated that the Gulf states would have had a combined fiscal deficit exceeding US$270 billion between 2015 and 2019 had they failed to introduce economic reforms (IMF, 2016).
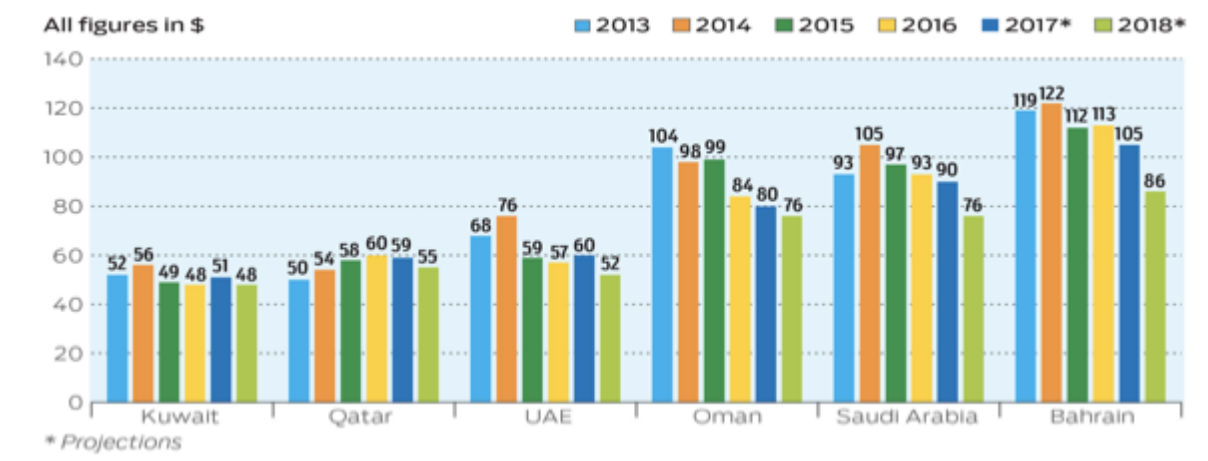

Figure 10: GCC's budget breakeven oil prices (Image source: Gulf News via The Institute of International Finance).

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[37] The UAE has recently lifted subsidies on water, electricity and petrol. It also imposed taxes on tobacco and sugary drinks and VAT on non-essential consumer items.

The leadership realises that some of these reforms may not be well received amongst a sizeable number of Emiratis, especially the country's youth, who have lofty expectations when it comes to state benefits. This is where the National Service comes into play, in my view. Although the country's senior officials claim its main purpose is to strengthen the army, it can be argued that one of its main goals is to reshape the mentalities of the young and urge them to give more to a leadership which cares about its citizens, in the words of the Vice Prime Minister, Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan (al-Bayan Newspaper, 2014). Also, nationalism and patriotism are being given as reasons for young Emiratis to accept the more active roles envisioned for them by the leaders. Although UAE leaders have long sought to cultivate strong nationalistic and patriotic sentiments, building loyalty to the UAE, which transcends both religion and the tribe, has not been the focus of citizen-building efforts until recently (Alsharekh, Springborg and Stewart, 2008).

While embarking on economic reforms, leaders aim to emphasise the hardships of the past to help motivate present-day youth to contribute more. This could explain why Emiratis are often portrayed as Bedouins in some advertisements and visual media as the leadership favours the Bedouin citizen, whom they view as being tougher than the *hadar* (city-dwellers) (Patrick, 2012). The Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi stated in his 43rd National Day speech: 'the new generation should be aware of the suffering of its ancestors. This awareness will provide them with drive, firmness and solidity in order to complete the epic of construction and development initiated by our fathers and ancestors' (Crown Prince Court website, 2014). As such, the National Day celebrations have become noticeably more elaborate, with heightened pageantry and an emphasis on the traditional aspects of Emirati citizenship. Schools, universities, shops and local and federal governmental entities spend weeks in preparation, draping massive UAE

flags over the front of buildings, and adorning roads with nationalist placards with pictures of the president and the country's rulers. Shops across the country sell large photos of the sheikhs for Emiratis to attach to their cars. The leaders' emphasis on building a strong nationalistic sentiment has had a transformative impact on the way Emiratis understand and celebrate the National Day. Indeed, in 2010, Zayed University launched a festival of 'flags, a traditional souk, Arabian tents, food and ornaments and other symbols of the UAE's heritage and folklore', with over 3,000 students and staff attending the event (Sherif, 2010).

Western-style universities and schools continue to grow in number in the GCC, competing with the older state education systems against a backdrop of internationalisation and privatisation of education (Davidson, 2012). Educational partnerships have been announced in the UAE with, among other foreign universities, INSEAD for business education, Munich Technical University, the University of Bonn, and Tufts University. This phenomenon has received plenty of scholarly attention in recent years. Indeed, the establishment of these institutions has been correlated with increased curiosity, questioning and engagement among the youth in non-democratic societies (Tétreault, 2010). Meanwhile, Ghabra and Arnold emphasise their liberalising effect while distinguishing them from their state-owned counterparts which encourage learning through memorisation: 'American-style higher education uses a method and model of learning based on thinking critically and articulating opinions, honing oral and written communication skills, emphasising lifelong learning, and using a variety of tools and resources' (2007, p. 2). Although censorship laws limit the scope of learning in such institutions, they still maintain a strong liberalising effect on society. Rulers in the UAE share a particular enthusiasm for Western-style education. In 1997, Sharjah's ruler established the Emirate's University City with the co-ed American University of Sharjah. In 2003, Dubai announced the creation of the Knowledge Village, an academic free zone in the heart of Dubai

where foreign universities offer a vast array of degree programmes (Davidson, 2012).

Thus, although these initiatives play a role in the UAE's efforts to spur a knowledge renaissance and shape its citizens, the argument that the UAE is trying to simply copy the West overlooks important nuances and complexities.[38] Indeed, the UAE's leadership does not see itself as mindlessly copying other nations:

> by founding world-class, top-ranking universities, Gulf political leaders seek not just to close the 'development gap' in their countries; they explicitly intend to reverse the balance of knowledge between the West and the Middle East. Their aim is to change the Arab academe from a site of knowledge reception to one of knowledge production (Romani, 2009, p. 4).

They intend to do so in a manner that suits their countries' social and political realities. After the Arab uprisings, the UAE emerged as a regional leader in this regard.

With more than 200 nationalities living in the country, The UAE leadership's aim is to showcase the country's hospitable and tolerant society, which stands in stark contrast to the kind of society envisioned by Islamists and Jihadists. This has broader implications for the state's legitimacy at the local and international levels as the UAE strives to become a regional hub for enlightenment and progress. In a recent Arab Youth Survey, in which interviewed 3,500 youths aged 18 to 24 from 16 countries were interviewed, the UAE was chosen as the 'model country' for other countries in the region to emulate. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed, Ruler of Dubai, welcomed the results of the survey: 'The UAE is a country for everyone. The ambitions of young Arabs align with ours, and our dream is for the entire Arab region to prosper.' He added that those surveyed identified the UAE not only as a role model for development, but also as the number one ally to their respective countries (al-Maktoum, 2017).

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[38] Author's interview with a senior expert. Abu Dhabi, 28th February 2018.

A third of respondents said the UAE was safe and secure, a quarter believed it had a growing economy, and a quarter said it has a range of job opportunities.

Although the UAE leadership believes liberalising society and tweaking the social contract will have a positive impact on Emiratis, there is a sizeable group of citizens who view these reforms as a threat to the national identity and way of life. Given the radical nature of some of these reforms, it is surprising that a more nationalist backlash has not arisen. This is arguably due to Emiratis trusting their leadership's vision of development. However, a 2010 speech given by Emirati professor Maryam Lootah at an education conference lamented those policies. The use of English as the language of instruction in public schools, as well as it becoming the dominant language in business, public events, and even the public sector, has attracted criticism from Emiratis. Such a sudden shift is denying Emiratis the right to acquire knowledge in their native tongue, which leads to an erosion of Arab and Emirati identity (Matthew, 2010). Moreover, dedicating large sums of money to financing foreign experts hinders the confidence of Emiratis who aspire to play an active role in these reforms. As such, these critics tend to view state-led citizen building with disdain; they regard it as a mix of Western cultural imperialism and the government's lack of trust in the culture – especially considering that this new idea of development is led by the state (Matthew, 2010). The same anti-imperialist sentiments are common amongst Islamists in the country, who, as seen in Chapter 3, rarely miss the opportunity to criticise what they see as anti-Islamic, imperialistic reforms. A few scholars have already stated that the move to modernity is, in certain respects, incompatible with the social order envisaged by most Islamist groups (Bronson, 2005; Brumberg, 2005; Hammond, 2012; Okruhlik, 2005; Piscatori, Lewis and Kepel, 2002). In no small part, this is because of the sensitivities surrounding globalisation. Not only does a deeper integration expose a culture to ever-changing global ones, it also raises the need for systemic educational and labour-market

reform. These include: (1) a move towards new forms of reasoning (science and technology) at the expense of religious methods of inquiry; (2) pedagogies centred on critical thinking as opposed to memorisation; and (3) a greater use of English as the medium of instruction (Lekhraibani, Rutledge and Forstenlechner, 2015).

In conclusion, the purpose of this chapter was to explore the topic of top-down citizen building in the UAE after the Arab uprisings. The first section explained how state-led citizen building works. The second section delved into the topic of liberal citizen-building initiatives in a non-democratic setting. In the third section, the chapter sheds light on the unprecedented reforms undertaken by the leadership. The aim has been to construct a new concept of Emirati identity at a time of regional instability through introducing reforms in key areas, which include, but are not limited to, institutionalising tolerance, gender equality, formally co-opting youth and introducing compulsory military service for young Emirati men. The new Emirati identity will serve as a means to deter future political crises and to alter the traditional legitimacy formula, which invokes tribal and religious-based notions of regime legitimacy. These reforms form a part of the wider move to reengineer the rentier mentality, which, in and of itself, signals a move away from traditional modes of legitimacy at a time when the UAE needs to cut public spending to reduce its reliance on oil to sustain the citizenship bargain. As those changes have become more pronounced in the post-Arab uprisings period, it is important to approach this fresh topic with the broader research question in mind.

This is where this chapter builds on Jones' work on top-down reform in the UAE, which she calls "liberal social engineering." The most obvious flaw in Jones' work is that she approached the topic with a preconceived normative bias. The dichotomous nature of academic discourse on oil-rich states (especially the Gulf) portrays them as seemingly backward regimes, ruled by reactionary autocrats who wish to modernise their subjects by westernising them. Jones inadvertently echoes the views of many Western scholars who think regime survival can only be understood through rentierism. In Jones' case, this represents a missed opportunity despite her attempt to immerse herself in the culture. This is an example of the limitations of the literature on state-society relations in the GCC. Jones' work demonstrates a high level of understanding of the UAE but it was conceived in a Western setting. Indeed, Western centric attitudes regarding top-down reform presuppose citizen passivity, which in turn influences the academic discourse on the topic. This is why Jones calls the process 'social engineering' as opposed to top-down or state-led reform. The term carries negative connotations to authors like Jones because the process takes place in an authoritarian context, where citizens are not allowed to express their opinions freely. As stated in the beginning of this thesis, state-led reform forms an integral component of the regime's reimagined legitimacy formula. These kinds of reforms are meant to accommodate the evolution of society and this is where this thesis builds on Jones' work; the argument here is that this whole process is not imposed by the regime but rather constantly negotiated and enhanced through the state's institutions. In many ways, the leadership is hoping to reduce the influence of religion and tribalism without rejecting traditional modes of legitimacy but rather seeking to build upon them. It is important to be mindful of the nuances of the debate surrounding state-led reform in the UAE, especially after the Arab uprisings and the challenge of Islamists, and how it ties in to the regime's goal of ensuring long-term survival. This feeds into the UAE's emerging construct of internal and external legitimacy, which in turn informs its domestic and foreign policies.

The next chapter will look at the role of the new Emirati identity in its post-Arab uprisings foreign policy. Through the use of role theory, the next chapter aims to showcase how the new Emirati identity has come to play a central role in the UAE's quest for regional and international legitimacy.

Chapter Four: Foreign policy in an uncertain era

This chapter aims to analyse the UAE's foreign policy and trace it back to the main research question on legitimacy and survival in the post-Arab uprisings era. To achieve this goal, the chapter will provide a chronological framework of the evolution of Emirati foreign policy since its establishment until the period leading up to the 'Arab Spring'. Thus, the main goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the extent to which the UAE's foreign policy has changed in the post-Arab uprisings era, which, as far as the thesis argues, is rooted in the country's desire to ensure survival via achieving internal and external legitimacy.

The chapter also draws upon a hitherto under-utilised theory of foreign policy analysis in the context of Arab and Middle Eastern states, namely role theory. As an analytical tool, role theory provides scholars with a number of significant advantages as far as the study of international politics is concerned. It also offers a number of typologies that can be used in order to group and understand diverse foreign policy behaviours (Krotz, 2002). Through the use of role theory, it will be possible to build on the previous chapter on state-led reform by showcasing the manner in which the new Emirati identity is being channelled through the country's post-Arab uprisings foreign policy.

In the words of Ehteshami (2015, p. 15): 'To understand the GCC states' foreign policy conduct, we need to understand not only the nature of decision-making in these states but also the conditions under which decisions are being crafted.' For a fuller understanding of the

foreign policy of the GCC states, he advocates dividing the FPA in the Gulf into two related categories: first, the drivers of foreign policy and, secondly, the context for foreign policy, the arena in which foreign policy is conceived.

As previously mentioned, there are two important caveats in the study of the emergence of the UAE as a regional role model. While it is worth noting that the UAE's self-image has undergone profound changes according to its official rhetoric, our knowledge regarding the public's perception of the UAE's evolving self-image remains limited due to the lack of research on how the country's discourse is received among selected audiences. The study of a country's self-image and hetero-images form an important element of the study of national role conceptions (Pinto, 2014). An empirical differentiation between the two can explain how a country makes sense of its foreign policy within the international community (Elgstrom and Smith, 2006). A second caveat is connected to the disparity often observed between a government's rhetoric and its actions. As Mayers (2008) stated in the context of the studies of the EU as an ethical power, comparing the government's rhetoric to its actions reveals inevitable contradictions.

Using role theory in foreign policy analysis

Role theory made its debut in foreign policy analysis in the 1970s, when IR scholars were in the midst of observing the regular behavioural patterns of countries within the realms of the bipolar Cold War order. For example, Holsti (1970) divided the countries of the world into three different groups: 'non-aligned,' 'allies' and 'satellites'. Since then a growing number of IR scholars and role theory proponents have argued that social roles exist, such as that of leader, mediator, initiator, as well as counter-roles, such as that of follower and aggressor as the social structure of the international system evolved (Harnisch, Frank and Maull, 2011). Roles are social positions which are governed by ego and alter expectation regarding the purpose of an

actor in a group. These social positions entail the existence of a socially recognised category of actors. The position's function in the group is limited in time and scope and relies upon the structure and purpose of the group. Whereas some roles are constitutive to the group, for example, recognised members of the international community, other roles are dependent on the current function of the state, that is, balancer or initiator (Harnisch, Frank and Maull, 2011).

Holsti (1970) introduced a typology of 17 major national roles which has been adopted by scholars such as Walker (1979) and Chafetz et al. (1996). Other scholars such as Adigbuo (2007), Jönsson (1984), Harnisch and Maull (2001) and Elgström and Smith (2006) have built on Holsti's seminal work by introducing typologies of role sets for superpowers, civilian powers and the European Union respectively. Holsti identified 17 major roles undertaken by states between 1965 and 1967. These comprise bastion of revolution, liberator, regional leader, regional protector, active independent, liberation supporter, antiimperialist agent, defender of the faith, mediator-integrator, regional-subsystem collaborator, developer, bridge, faithful ally, independent, example, internal development, isolate, and protectee. The average number of roles undertaken per state during that period was 4.6, with a range of 0 (Ivory Coast) to 8 (the US).

To understand role theory, one has to understand what exactly a role is, how NRCs are formed and understood, and who the main carriers of these NRCs are. (Ifantis, Triantaphyllou and Kotelis, 2015). As mentioned previously, NRCs are products of history, memory and socialisation. To a certain degree, they reflect an individual's understanding of the state's identity – a sense of what the nation stands for and how it projects that identity at the international level (Hymans 2006, p. 18).

Scholars who study role theory in IR have highlighted two different aspects of NRCs (Adigbuo 2007; Chafez, Abramson and Grillot 1996; Candir and Kaarbo 2012). Firstly, they use a

constructivist approach to argue that identities and NRCs in each state are social constructions and, hence, they reflect social phenomena that can be shared among members of the decision-making community. The interests of the state are defined by how it sees itself in relation to other states; this, in turn, leads to the creation of social identities at both the domestic and systemic levels of analysis (Harnisch, Frank and Maull, 2011):

> Actors normally have multiple social identities that vary in salience…Social identities have both individual and social structural properties, being at once cognitive schemas that enable an actor to determine 'who I am/we are' in a situation and positions in a social role structure of shared understandings and expectations (Wendt, 1994, p. 385).

Secondly, role theorists suggest that even in the absence of national consensus regarding a state's role, it is the elites who make the decisions and, as such, they are obliged to opt for what would be acceptable by the people whom they represent. This explanation is heavily based on Putnam's argument, who suggested that elites play simultaneously a game on two fronts, one internationally with their international counterparts, and one domestically, where they have to rationalise their actions to society, the parliament, their constituencies and the like (Putnam 1988, p. 434).

Role expectations for states and international organisations may vary considerably. On the one hand, they often include ego expectations, which often deal with domestic or individual expectations as to what constitutes the appropriate role for a state. They also include altering expectations, which are implicit and explicit demands by others (counter-roles or complementary roles, and audience cues). On the other hand, role expectations vary in terms of their scope, specificity and obligation. Hence, roles and role sets have the potential to create a conflict within a role itself, which manifests itself as a conflict between ego and alter expectations or as an inter-role conflict.

With regard to the UAE, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan laid the cornerstones of the country's foreign policy, stating:

> The Foreign policy of the UAE aims at advocating for legitimate Arab and Islamic issues and interests and strengthening the friendship and collaboration ties with all other countries, based on the UN convention and the internationally recognized morals and ethics… Our policy is based upon the principles of legitimate rights, justice and peace, and is driven by our faith that peace is an urgent need for the future of mankind.[39]

What can be deduced from this speech is that the UAE's rulers feel accountable to their people and, by extension, the Arab and Muslim world when it comes to their foreign policy. The UAE is a non-democratic state and decision-making, in general, is centred in the hands of members of the ruling families, who, unlike their counterparts in democratic states, do not need to justify their decisions to their societies, parliaments and constituents. Still, this does not imply that the UAE's rulers can pursue any foreign policy they desire. If anything, that the UAE identifies as a Muslim and Arab country creates a great sense of expectation with regard to the roles it should perform regionally and internationally. The UAE has signalled, through both language and action, its position vis-à-vis others and its perceptions of the role expectations of others. These conceptions encompass the social identity of an actor and the actions and perceptions of others. Changes in roles are important determinants for role enactment and identity formation (Harnisch, Frank and Maull, 2011).

In the 1990s, social constructivists and discourse theorists gravitated towards drawing a distinction between role and identity in role theory scholarship by splitting national roles into ego and alter components whilst endogenising them. Drawing heavily on the works of Wendt

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[39]The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation's website at: https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en/The-Ministry.

(1987) and Mead (1934), the model emphasises the ego part of a role as the self-conceptualisation of the social position of an actor vis-à-vis a social group. The ego part is then endogenised in the process of role taking, which refers to the stage where a corporate identity meets the role identity. When roles and their enactment undergo a change, they are treated as having displayed the capacity to learn and to adapt (Harnisch, Frank and Maull, 2011). In the context of foreign policy analysis, role adaptation is used to refer to the changes of a state's strategies and instruments in performing a role. The purpose of that underlying role remains unchanged. Adaptation, on the other hand, is often used as a causal mechanism in rationalistic role approaches, where an actor's role regulates his or her behaviour but is not treated as having a constitutive impact on the actors or the social setting in which they operate.

The endogenisation of corporate identity in the study of role theory is guided by the belief that the selection or appearance of significant others in international relations does not occur randomly.

Significant or generalised others are central concepts in symbolic interactionism because roles cannot be formulated without their existence. The generalised other provides a theoretical starting point only and that is due to it remaining an intangible component. As such, it can only be imagined as an abstract concept for the individual disposition to recognise itself as possessing a distinct identity or as belonging to a social category (Dodds et al. 1997). Mead's conceptualisation of the significant other is predicated upon this as it presumes choice by agency. As Wendt (1999, p.327) states: 'not all others are equally significant, however, so power and dependency relations play an important role in the story'.

Broadly, the process of role learning can be conceptualised in two ways: In rationalism and cognitivism, learning refers to a causal process in which the role beholder alters the structure

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and content of their national role conceptions (NRC) based on new information that is usually attained through experience. In social constructivism, learning is understood as a constitutive process in which a state acquires a new role, and sometimes identity, in a given or evolving social group (Harnisch, 2011). When actors acquire a new role and act according to what they consider to be appropriate behaviour, they recreate the counter-roles around them, rather than adapting to the latter. Also, the process of learning in foreign policy is not confined to socially accepted or prescribed forms of behaviour. It does entail that actors acquire roles that may be considered unacceptable to others or to their society at large. In this sense, the role of a rogue state, aggressor or outsider runs counter to the role of 'insider', 'civilised nations' or 'defenders of democracy' (Harnisch, Frank and Maull, 2011).

Amidst the profuse literature on the Gulf states, few scholars have focused on the GCC's own perception of their strategic environment. Indeed, many scholars analyse the Gulf states' foreign policies through the eyes of Western interests. Seeing as the nature of decision-making on foreign policy issues in the GCC states is personalised, this calls for a focus on the perception of decision-makers in these states (Soubrier, 2016). This is where role theory and the study of NRCs make a real contribution to the understanding of foreign policy-making in the Gulf states.

For instance, other strands of foreign policy analysis such as neoclassical realism focus on structural determinants and domestic variables, while arguing that politics is a perpetual struggle among states to pursue their interests in an anarchic international system. As Rose (1998) argues, the foreign policy of a country is driven first by its relative material power, but intervening unit-level variables such as decision-makers' perceptions and state structure play an important role in the process. For scholars of neoclassical realism, a state's size provides insight into its foreign policy role. State size is readily recognised as a structural variable because it determines a state's ranking in the global hierarchy of great powers, middle powers and small states (Neack, 1995). However, size is a problematic unit of measurement.[40] Indeed, a state that is considered small in a global context may nonetheless be an important regional player. Despite role theorists being aware of the correlation between state size and its role conception, there is a consensus among them that foreign policy role conceptions are not exclusively determined by size. Also, NRCs are not necessarily bound to structural variables. Role theory can demonstrate not only that using structural variables delimits perception and behaviour, but also that agency involves behaviour that can transform existing structures. (Harnisch, Frank and Maull, 2011).

The making of the UAE's foreign policy: Towards an understanding of local dynamics

The UAE is a constitutional federation of seven Emirates: the capital Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras Al Khaima and Fujairah. Following the death of his

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[40] Size is operationalised in a variety of ways (geography, population, economy and military), which do not lead to a straightforward ranking since it is not clear what weight should be attached to these measures.

father, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan was elected as President by the Supreme Federal Council. The Supreme Council, whose membership consists of the rulers of the seven Emirates, meets every five years to reaffirm the position of the incumbent president or elect a new one. The term of office for the country's Vice-President is also five years (UAE constitution, Article 46).

The Federal Supreme Council (FSC)

Although the UAE's constitution states that the Federal Supreme Council is the highest constitutional authority in the government, the president remains the highest authority in the decision-making process. Article 47 of the constitution stipulates that the FSC has the power to ratify international treaties and agreements, as well as delegate to the president and the Cabinet of Ministers the power to issue decrees in its absence. However, such delegation of powers does not include the power to ratify international treaties and agreements, impose or rescind of martial law, declare war, or appoint the president or judges for the Supreme Federal Court (Article 115). As the country's highest authority, the FSC's approval is required for the president to conclude international treaties and agreements (Al-Alkim 1989, p. 98). In addition, the FSC has the right to oppose any treaties concluded between an individual emirate and neighbouring countries, as stated in Article 123 (Al-Mezaini, 2012):

> The Emirates may conclude limited agreements of a purely local administrative nature with neighbouring states provided the Agreements do not contradict federal laws and the interests of the Union, and provided the Supreme council of the Union is the Union, and provided the Supreme council of the Union is notified in advance.

If the council objects to such agreements, then the matter must be postponed until the federal government makes a decision on this objection at the closest opportunity. According to the constitution, foreign policy decisions are made by members of the FSC, although in many

cases, it is not consulted. As such, the UAE's President's influence on the FSC is greater than the constitution states (Al-Mezaini, 2012). Indeed, Article 54 of the UAE constitution states that the President is the chief representative of the UAE before foreign states in all aspects of external relations and has the power to appoint diplomats to serve in other countries and accept the accreditation of diplomatic and consular representatives of foreign countries to the UAE and receive their letters of accreditation. Foreign policy decision-making is usually made within the presidential circle, which includes his chief advisers, the Crown Prince and other influential members of the royal family (Hellyer and Al-Abed, 2001).

The Cabinet of Ministers

The Cabinet of Ministers forms the third pillar in the UAE's executive authority. It is tasked with the execution of all internal and external affairs of the UAE in accordance with the constitution and the federal laws of the country. The Cabinet operates under the supervision of the UAE President and the Federal Supreme Council. The Cabinet consists of the Prime Minister, the two Deputy Prime Ministers, the federal ministers and an active General Secretariat.

With regard to foreign policy and as stated above, the Cabinet's role is to supervise the execution of the UAE's executive authority. Hence, its function is to supervise the enactment of international treaties and agreements signed by the UAE. Additionally, it specialises in policy alternatives and makes policy recommendations that can be analysed by the President or members of the Supreme Council (Al-Alkim 1989, p. 99). The Council is presided over by the prime minister and comprises thirty members in total, of whom seven happen to be

members of the ruling families.[41] Non-ruling family members of the Cabinet are selected from the country's elite class, typically from merchant families or influential tribes. However, in many cases, they can be selected based on their education and professional abilities (Al-Abed and Hellyer, 2001, p. 152). The Cabinet is the main government institution in which the politics of balance and inclusion are played out; this process remains to an extent limited to members of ruling families, members of the elite and a handful of technocrats. Therefore, the Cabinet plays an important, albeit somewhat indirect, role in the foreign policy decision-making process (Al-Mezaini, 2012).

The Federal National Council

Parliaments play a significant role in the formulation of foreign policy. In theory, the Federal National Council (FNC) was established to represent the people, but its influence remains minimal compared to that of the ruling families. The first elections to the FNC were held in 2006, resulting in the election of half of the members by a very small and pre-selected electoral college. Before the 2006 elections, the selection process for the FNC members was left to the rulers of the seven emirates. In the inaugural 2006 elections, the electoral college comprised only 1% of the total Emirati population. However, in the subsequent elections of 2011, the electoral college was expanded significantly, enabling 129,274 citizens to vote.[42] The government's intention to encourage more political participation was outlined by the country's ruler, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed, in a speech he made on the occasion of the UAE's 34th National Day. Hence, the expansion of the electoral college serves to fulfil the President's

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[41] Of the thirty Council members, four of are members of the Al-Nahyan ruling family, outnumbering those representing the Al-Maktoum and Al-Qasimi ruling families.

[42] Roughly 13% of the total Emirati population could vote in the 2011 FNC elections.

vision (Ministry of FNC Affairs, 2015). In terms of composition, the FNC consists of 40 members, of whom half are elected by the population to serve a four-year term while the other half is directly appointed by the Ruler's Court of the UAE's seven emirates (Yaghi and Boateng, 2015).

As regards foreign policy, the FNC's role in it remains limited due to the domination of the rulers over the decision-making process. According to Article 91 of the UAE's constitution, the government has to notify the council about the international treaties and agreements it signs with foreign states and international organisations. These notifications are usually accompanied by an outline of these treaties.

The Foreign Ministry

The role of the Foreign Ministry in the formulation of foreign policy is mainly concentrated in the administrative process. The Foreign Affairs Minister is the representative, but he remains unable to take major foreign policy decisions as this power is exclusive to the president or members of the Federal Supreme Council. Therefore, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his Under-Secretary are restricted to making low-profile decisions with regard to foreign policy. The ministry plays the role of an advisory body and makes policy recommendations with regard to international issues; the minister is considered to be the key adviser to the president on matters related to foreign policy (Al-Mezaini, 2012). The structure of the ministry itself is pyramid-shaped. The Foreign Minister sits atop the pyramid and the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, is positioned immediately below and is considered the second most influential person in the ministry. The second tier comprises the Under-Secretary, who occupies an ambassadorial portfolio (Al-Alkim, 1989). The Under-Secretary is in charge of the political and administrative departments of the ministry as well as its diplomatic missions. Overall, the role of the Foreign Ministry remains limited in many areas, which is why it is

somewhat difficult to understand its actual role. The foreign policy decision-making process makes sense in theory, but remains complicated in reality since it involves the President as the most influential figure, as well as other political institutions. Theoretically, the FSC should have a bigger say in the formulation of foreign policy; but in reality, its role has been rendered ineffective, as has the Foreign Ministry's. This is due to clashes of interests between the two major foreign policy actors in the federation, the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, which has had some effects on the process of foreign policy decision-making in the country (Al-Mezaini, 2012).

Overall, foreign policymaking in the UAE and elsewhere in the Gulf is shaped by a host of domestic factors and external challenges. Al-Alkim (2011) states that desertification, water shortage and food insecurity are playing an important role in the making of foreign policy in the region. As part of their social contract upon which political legitimacy is justified, almost all MENA countries heavily subsidise food prices. The heavy spending on food subsidies is partly due to the bread riots of the late twentieth century and the recent Arab protest movement in 2011 (Babar and Mirgani, 2014). Affordable food is an important part of the ruling bargain in any country and the GCC is no exception. If anything, welfare provision and subsidies assume greater importance in the Gulf due to their role in safeguarding political legitimacy (Woertz, 2014).

A historical analysis of the UAE's foreign policy roles

Over the four decades from the founding of the country until 2004, the UAE's foreign policy went through four distinct yet somewhat linear phases (Al-Mashat, 2008; Al-Mezaini, 2012; Pinto, 2014). Firstly, the period between 1971-1978 marked the consolidation of the federation and its entities, plus the withdrawal of Britain from the UAE and its neighbours in the Gulf. Secondly, the period between 1979-88 was characterised by several watershed events in the

region, including the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the Iraq-Iran war. Thirdly, the period 1989-2000, which witnessed the establishment of a unipolar order in world politics in the aftermath of the Cold War, was characterised by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the change in the status of the UAE constitution from provisional to permanent. Fourthly, between 2001 and 2004, three major events which affected the UAE's foreign policy took place: the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the death of the country's founder in late 2004. As stated previously, Sheikh Zayed played an influential role in the country's foreign policy decision-making until his passing. The changes in the regional and international scenes, then, had a direct impact on decision-making in the UAE's foreign policy formulation.

For the past decade, the UAE has been presenting itself, both domestically and internationally, as a model to be followed by regional countries. The practices that the UAE consider as constituting role model behaviour include, among other things, the manner in which the country upholds culture and religion, the successes of its economic policies, and its self-declared peaceful and civilised stances towards regional and international politics. As stated by the state's official news agency, hard work has earned high status for the country (WAM, 2011). This overall official evaluation is complemented by the leadership's image of the UAE as being 'among the most advanced nations in the world' (UAE Vision 2021 Charter). The laudatory self-assessments provide a key insight into how the country's self-image has evolved, especially if one is to compare them with the ways the UAE saw itself during the first phase of its existence. Indeed, the UAE's humble self-image in the first years of its existence is laid out in the preamble of the Emirati Constitution (Pinto, 2014):

> ... it is our desire and the desire of the people of our Emirates to establish a Union ... to promote a better life, more enduring stability and a higher international status for the Emirates and their people; And whereas the realisation of the foregoing was our dearest desire, towards which we have bent our strongest resolution, being desirous of advancing our country and

> our people to the status of qualifying them to take their appropriate place among civilised states and nations.

The preamble of the UAE's constitution shows that the leadership held very modest views not only regarding the UAE's NRCs but also the level of social and economic development then existing in the country. The stark contrast between the UAE's self-image, defined as the image that one forms of themselves when we view themselves through the eyes of others, displayed in the first decade of its existence and the one displayed today, as well as the reasons that led to this transformation, are yet to be explored at depth in the literature. Pinto (2014) states that the UAE's willingness to become an assertive force, as captured by the notion of 'role model', has been a key element in its self-image transformation (Harnisch, Frank and Maull, 2011).

The UAE's self-assertiveness can be observed in the manner in which the UAE utilities language as a medium to construct its individual disposition 'I' (Harnisch, Frank and Maull, 2011). The government adopted a proactive approach towards policymaking, both domestically and regionally, which was aimed at acquiring a prestigious status for the UAE in the international domain. By advocating a positive interpretation of these policies and engagements,[43] the government's aim was to build an assertive and progressive national narrative which would further enhance the UAE's image worldwide (Al-Alkim, 1989; Al-Mashat, 2008; Al-Mezaini, 2012; Pinto, 2014). In this sense, it can be surmised that internal development and foreign policy go hand in hand: the improvement of the material conditions of Emirati citizens was one of the most important ways to foster political legitimacy, and a proactive foreign policy helped to ensure its survival and articulate its identity vis-à-vis its neighbours. As a result of this dual approach, the nation's views about Emirati identity

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[43] For example, the UAE government emphasises foreign aid as an example of UAE citizens' generosity (Al-Mezaini, 2012).

and what the country stands for, encapsulated in the country's NRCs , were thus projected to the international arena. If the predominant status in the early years was that of a follower state which still had much to learn from its neighbours, progressively, this self-image evolved into the that of a role model state which, in turn, became a strategy to ensure domestic survival and legitimacy, a concern which remains at the heart of the UAE's foreign and domestic policies (Pinto, 2014).

Phase one: Setting an example (1971-1978)

The UAE was put on test from the first day of its formation. These two events shook a federation still in its infancy (Al-Mezaini, 2012). Indeed, this new threat presented a security and political concern for the UAE on top of the most pressing issue of all, which was to consolidate the union and set up government institutions. Although the news was regarded as a loss on the Arab street, it still had some somewhat positive repercussions at the domestic level; the presence of a belligerent neighbour in the form of Iran prompted the UAE rulers to work on strengthening and safeguarding their union. Thus, scholars consider this to be one of the major turning points that has contributed to the survival of the federation. Indeed, the improvement of inter-emirate relations and federal institutions during this phase was driven by these mounting security concerns (Al-Mezaini, 2012; Al-Nahyan, 2013; Hellyer, 2001; Heard-Bey, 2005). At a wider regional level, the 1973 war was the first war the UAE had to react to. Its strong relations with Arab countries had forced the UAE to take a bold stance on the conflict (Al-Abed and Hellyer, 2001, p. 170).

In 1973, the UAE declared an embargo on oil exports to the United States in a bid to support fellow Arab states during the Arab-Israeli war. The UAE had been providing approximately 20% of the US' fuel requirements at the time. It used its vast oil reserves as a diplomatic tool in its foreign policy in the first year of its existence. The state's regional prestige and legitimacy

had had a great role to play in the UAE's decision to impose the embargo. By applying Holsti's typology of state roles, it can be surmised that the UAE's decision reflected its NRCs and role expectations at the time. However, despite having a strong pro-Arab policy, the UAE was in favour of the presence of a security guarantor in the US, especially after the British withdrawal (Al-Abed et al., 1996, p.51).

Overall, the UAE's foreign policy during the first period of its existence has been characterised by, first, unconditional support to the Arab cause. Arabism and Islam were among the major drivers of the country's foreign policy. The UAE sought to play the role of the 'defender of the faith' (Holsti, 1970). Furthermore, the UAE offered generous monetary aid to several Arab countries. Secondly, despite the early blow the country was dealt following the Iranian occupation of its islands, the UAE's leaders favoured constructive engagement and chose not to take any confrontational stance against Iran. In this instance, the UAE wanted to set an example in terms of dealing with such matters. Finally, Emirati leaders began using foreign aid as a significant foreign policy tool (Al-Alkim, 1989).

Phase two: mediator-integrator and protectee (1979-1988)

During this period, the Gulf states and the wider region experienced a number of major political and security dilemmas. The overthrow of the Shah and the triumph of the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979, the first Gulf War in 1980, and the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council which included six countries (the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain). These new regional dynamics have had an influential role to play in determining the behaviour of these states at both a regional and international level and had a big impact on the UAE's domestic and foreign policies (Al-Mezaini, 2012): 'the departure of the Shah from Iran and the success of the Islamic revolution did not, however, end Iranian influence in the UAE' (Al Alkim 1989, p. 61). The need for better relations with Iran has been largely driven by

Dubai, which had strong economic relations with Iran. However, the UAE leaders had to strike a balance here; they had to make sure their trade with their Iran did not severely impact their stance on the Iranian occupation of their islands (Al-Nahyan, 2013).

Al-Alkim (1989, p. 161) argues that 'the outbreak of Iran-Iraq war in September 1980 imposed a heavy burden on the UAE, especially since the issue of the islands was at the centre of the conflict'. Faced with the looming threat of being caught between two warring states, the UAE played the role of a mediator-integrator state (Holsti, 1970). The Gulf states have been, simultaneously, front row observers and mediators of the Iran-Iraq conflict. As such, the GCC was established to ensure the collective survival of the Gulf states. After the war had shown no signs of abating, the US feared that the hostilities might spill over to the oil-producing Gulf states. As such, the US decided to intervene by playing the role of a security guarantor for its oil-producing allies in order to protect its interests (Rubin, 1989). The US President, Jimmy Carter, made it clear that any assault on American interests 'will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.'[44]. The UAE's stance on the conflict remained unchanged, despite Dubai's growing relations with Iran. Its foreign policy during this period was characterised by two main features; first, the UAE's peaceful behaviour towards the issue of the islands, and second its neutral position on regional issues at that time, especially the Iraq-Iran War (Al-Mezaini, 2012).

The UAE constitution was designed in a way that allows each individual Emirate to pursue a foreign policy of its own so long as it does not clash with the federation's foreign policy.

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[44] Jimmy Carter: 'The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress. ,' January 23, 1980. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33079.

Despite the UAE's success in avoiding conflicts, its foreign policy was unclear. This was due in part to the country's federal institutions lacking clear cut roles in the formulation of foreign policy; the political structure of the UAE, being a federation, rendered it very difficult for the country to adopt a more independent and vivid foreign policy (Hellyer, 2001; Rugh, 1997; Al-Mezaini, 2012).

Phase three: The beginning of the transformation into a regional leader (1990-1999)

The UAE, and by extension the GCC, faced a period of turmoil and uncertainty in the 1990s. Saddam Hussein's decision to invade his Kuwaiti neighbours in 1990 spread fear across the Gulf and was considered a big turning point in the history of the region as a whole. The escalation of American involvement in the Gulf was marked by a number of GCC states signing defence agreements with the US. The war has deeply divided the region and prompted a significant change in inter-Arab relations. Indeed, the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Second Gulf War led to a shift in the balance of power in the Middle East and internationally; the escalation of American involvement in the affairs of the region has served to weaken regional hegemons, such as Iraq and Iran. As such, the US became the Gulf's sole security guarantor in the aftermath of the Second Gulf War (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 1997).

The UAE provided financial aid to the sanction-stricken Iraqi population during this period, despite the feeling of hostility and tension between Iraq and the GCC states. The UAE remained committed to its leader's desire to provide as much help to the Iraqi people as possible (Al-Hosani, 2012: Obaid, 2004). As the regional order was being redefined, the UAE saw fit to sign a security agreement with the US in 1996. However, this did not signal a permanent change in the UAE's foreign policy towards its regional and Arab neighbours, but had, in fact, given the UAE confidence in taking a firm, supportive stance on the plight of Iraqi people by

increasing the flow of humanitarian aid to Iraq. However, the UAE's foreign aid to Iraq was limited; yet it set a good example for other donor states to follow. The UAE's foreign policy has noticeably changed relative to earlier periods, particularly in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The escalation of American involvement provided the UAE with a new security guarantor, which, in turn, marked an important turning point in the country's history and resulted in greater security for it after years of turmoil and uncertainty (Al-Mezaini, 2012).

Overall, the UAE's foreign policy was defined by two main features during this period: it remained committed to championing the Arab cause by increasing its financial aid to Arab nations and its federal foreign policy overshadowed that of the individual emirates, especially after Ras Al-Khaimah declared its support for the Iraqi people (Hellyer, 2001).

Phase four: A regional leader (2000-2004)

The beginning of the 21st century has drastically changed the face of regional and international politics. Three main events occurred during this period which led to significant changes in the UAE's foreign policy: the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and, last but not least, the death of the country's founder Sheikh Zayed in late 2004. The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, had an immense impact on the UAE and most of the Arab countries. Given that Islam is the dominant religion in the region, the attacks changed the way the world viewed the region, its people and the religion of Islam (Al-Mezaini, 2012; Al Sayegh, 2004). Despite that the majority of those involved in this attack being from the Arabian Peninsula, none of the Gulf states participated in the planning phase of the attacks. Instead, they were on the receiving end of its aftermath: a sizeable number of Western analysts blamed Islam, the Gulf states' authoritarianism and their decrepit educational systems for feeding the anger that has allegedly created a generation which feels extreme hatred of the West. As such, Washington sought to rally the West behind its cause as it objected to

political and religious interpretations in the Gulf, which, in turn, led the world to focus its attention on the Gulf states' internal politics. The US thought the GCC could benefit from democratic reform, improved educational systems and extensive social reforms. The Gulf states found themselves in a difficult position of being pressured by the US to make democratic concessions to their populations, change their domestic policies, improve their human rights records and crackdown on any suspected terrorist activities. However, the US was unaware of the nature of Gulf societies, where change is driven by complex internal dynamics, and where tradition and politics of kinship play an important role (Hawthorne, 2003).

The US persisted in its position and insisted that democracy was the best way to put an end to religious extremism. In response to the US's demands, the UAE introduced gradual reforms to its political and educational systems. Internally, the country took a significant step towards political reform by holding its first ever parliamentary elections in late 2006,[45] with one of the four seats in Abu Dhabi going to a woman (FNC website, 2006). Externally, the post-9/11 period has changed the UAE's foreign policy towards the West, causing it to adopt a more pro-Western pattern. This has led to noticeable improvements in its relations with the West, which culminated in the signing of several defence agreements. Suffice it to say, that the US administration's plan to promote democratisation in the UAE and the GCC was a cause for concern for its leaders, as they feared it would destabilise their polities. As such, the UAE's leaders saw fit not to replace their Arab and Islamic ideologies with liberal ideologies, particularly in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq and Bush's failure to promote democracy in the region (Al Sayegh, 2004). Sheikh Zayed stood firmly against the invasion

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[45] Half of the Federal National Council, which has forty members, was elected. Only 6,689 of approximately 300,000 Emirati citizens over the age of 18 were allowed to vote, 1,163 of them women; the voters were selected by the rulers of the seven emirates.

and made repeated demands for Saddam Hussein to step down to avert the risk of war (Al-Hosani, 2012).

During this period, the UAE's foreign aid surpassed the UN's target of 0.7 percent of its GDP. Courtesy of its role in the war on terror, the UAE was beginning to be treated as a moderate Arab state by the West (Al-Mezaini, 2012). The period following 9/11 had a great impact on the UAE's foreign policy as the world's attention turned to the Gulf states; the war on terror and the rise of Al-Qaeda has caused the UAE leadership to reorient the country's foreign policy (Al Sayegh, 2004).

The UAE's newfound NRCs in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings

As stated, the genesis of the assertive approach to regional security did not start with the 'Arab Spring' but rather grew out of developments during the 2000s, which witnessed a significant shift in the UAE's self-image and national role conceptions. Among these were the meteoric rise of Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan as Abu Dhabi's crown prince and Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed Al Maktoum as the ruler of Dubai, as well as the changes in global politics that opened up new avenues for small states to demonstrate different forms of power and influence which transcended their limited size and obvious lack of hard power. The shift in the regional balance of power following the events of the Arab uprisings spurred the small and wealthy GCC states, such as the UAE and Qatar, to adopt increasingly confrontational and proactive foreign policies, which allowed them to emerge as key players in the regional security order (Kamrava, 2013; Pinto, 2014; Ulrichsen, 2015; Ulrichsen, 2016a).

The UAE has noticeably altered its internal political and security policies in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. Much of that change was geared towards dealing with and deterring the threat of local Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated activists and dissenters. The implementation of

a strict internal security approach has served to keep levels of popular dissent comparatively low.[46] Here we can see a correlation between changes in the state's internal policies and its hawkish approach to regional affairs that can be observed in its attitude towards the ongoing political transitions in a number of Arab states. The shift from follower status to that of a regional leader occurred in conjunction with a radical change in the UAE's national role conceptions. Indeed, as this section demonstrates, the UAE's foreign policy has become increasingly ambitious and proactive in comparison to its foreign policy under Sheikh Zayed.

In early February 2014, Dr. Gargash, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, gave a lecture on the UAE's foreign policy in the post-Arab uprisings era as part of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed's Majlis series.[47] Gargash emphasised the internationalisation of the country's foreign relation, evident in the successful EXPO 2020 and IRENA hosting bids, and explained the drive behind the UAE's assertive foreign policy. He also stated that the UAE's key decision-makers operate on the premise that regional issues should be dealt with within a regional framework due to the rapidly changing status quo in the region, apparent in the political instability and the spread of terrorism since the events of the 'Arab Spring' took place in 2011, which has led to increased volatility in an already volatile political and security landscape (Crown Prince Court website, 2014). Gargash also reiterated the UAE's unconditional support for the Egyptian government and President Abdul-Fatah al-Sisi, which stems from the leadership's commitment to the Egyptian people: 'No doubt, the UAE's support for Egypt's

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[46] In comparison to other Arab countries, where opposition to the incumbents was far more widespread and vocal.

[47] Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed's Majlis (court) hosts a lecture series that featured a wide number of high-profile speakers, including Dr Tony Yam, current president of Singapore, Tony Blair, the UK's former prime minister, Professor Muhammad Yunus, founder of Grameen Bank and Nobel Peace Prize winner, as well as the well-known American entrepreneur, Bill Gates.

stability and will of its people is yet another example of the advanced and brave stances of the UAE foreign policy. The solid stance with the people of Egypt, their determination and future will be assessed by history as a critical moment for the UAE boldness and courage in determining the course and option in favour of Egypt and its people.' He remarked that the Arab World was still in the midst of a political transition and that the UAE would work with the new governments that emerged in the post-Arab uprisings era to establish and safeguard the institutions of the modern state.

Gargash's lecture highlighted the regional battle for supremacy that was unfolding between the UAE and Qatar as both countries competed for influence and supported very different and rival groups during the post-Arab uprisings political reshuffle. This was evident in Libya, where both the UAE and Qatar played a major role in the NATO-led military intervention that led to the end of Colonel Gaddafi's reign in August 2011. In Egypt, however, the post-Mubarak political reshuffle presented a real test for the UAE leadership in the form of a Qatari-sponsored Muslim Brotherhood government being elected to preside over Egypt. However, Mohammed Morsi's reign did not last for long due to mounting popular discontent, which culminated in him being ousted by a military coup led by the current incumbent al-Sisi in summer 2013. Following the fall of Morsi's government and the subsequent defeat of the Brotherhood in Egypt, the UAE took advantage of the situation and pledged to offer al-Sisi financial support that far exceeded Qatar's support of Morsi. The role played by the UAE in the post-transitionary period solidified its rise to prominence as an assertive regional power. Indeed, the growth of small GCC states as key players in regional and international politics predates the events of the 'Arab Spring'. However, the outbreak of the Arab uprisings provided these states with a new, potent dimension in their foreign policies. Led by the UAE and Qatar, the Gulf countries became the region's new centre of power as they grappled with the wide array of

political and economic challenges that surfaced after the Arab protests (Kamrava, 2013; Ulrichsen, 2015; Ulrichsen, 2016b).

The origins of the UAE's foreign policy can be traced back to the period following Sheikh Zayed's passing: the government was in the midst of a challenge to rebrand itself through giving greater meaning to the notion of Emirati identity while emphasising the country's position as an open society founded upon historical roots, beliefs and culture (WAM, 2007). This resulted in a shift in the NRCs of the country, thereby transforming the UAE's role from a follower to a fully-fledged leader and role model for states in the region. Indeed, the announcement of ambitious future plans and visions such as the UAE Vision 2021,[48] as well as Abu Dhabi Vision 2030, supports this view as it provides an important insight into how the powerful sheikhs of the UAE view the country and also makes it abundantly clear that decision-makers in the country view the UAE as one of the most advanced nations in the globe (UAE Vision 2021 Charter). This view stands in stark contrast to the 1970s assessment of the UAE as a state seeking to attain a place among civilised countries, as expressed by the UAE constitution (Pinto, 2014). Despite the apparent departure from its earlier foreign policy ideals, Emirati leaders and decision-makers continue to pay tribute to Sheikh Zayed's wisdom, moderation, ambition and openness in dealing with foreign affairs, which had helped his country avoid threats to its security (Gargash, 2014).

One example of the UAE taking the lead on regional issues was the role it played in convincing the international community to attack Gaddafi and in securing Arab support to avert the

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[48] The UAE Vision 2021 aims to make the UAE among the best countries in the world by 2021. In order to translate the vision into reality, its pillars have been mapped into six national priorities, which represent the key focus of the government over the next few years.

occurrence of another Western intervention in the Middle East. As such, Rickli has argued that 'the UAE's contribution to NATO's Operation Unified Protector and its wider role in Libya should be seen as an attempt to maintain the regional stability of the Gulf while at the same time shaping perceptions as a reliable partner with NATO.' (2016, pp. 146-147) He went on to argue that Mubarak's fall has prompted the GCC states to be more proactive in terms of managing their strategic alliances whilst ensuring to secure themselves. The UAE was presented with a great opportunity to become a key regional partner to the Western states, as the process of assembling an international coalition to topple Gaddafi was taking root. Furthermore, the growing rivalry between the UAE and Qatar (Khatib, 2013), which grew noticeably in the post-Arab uprisings era, put a considerable amount of pressure on the UAE to take part in the coalition against Gaddafi. Having already noted how the UAE's NRCs had shifted prior to the outbreak of the 'Arab Spring', I believe that Qatar decided to take part in the coalition put pressure on the UAE to reciprocate and live up to its perceived regional leader status (Ulrichsen, 2016b). Indeed, the UAE committed 130 F-16s and Mirage 2000 jets, which helped it to exceed the Qataris' contribution. The Emirati participation in the NATO-led coalition was in line with the UAE's newfound NRCs of regional leadership and also gave its policymakers increased leverage over Western foreign policy towards the Arab uprisings in particular and the region in general.

Along with the Qataris, the UAE's leadership was well aware of the value of their support for the operation against Gaddafi, especially in terms of cultivating Arab support for what could have ended up being another Western military intervention in the region. In addition to that, Emirati policymakers have strategically used their involvement in Libya to influence the Obama administration's view of the protests that broke out in Bahrain as being part of the Arab uprisings, thereby further solidifying the belief shared among Emirati policymaking circles

with regard to the UAE's leader status at the GCC and regional levels (Rickli, 2016; Ulrichsen, 2015; Ulrichsen, 2016a). Indeed, after the then US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, criticised the GCC decision to dispatch the Peninsula Shield Force to Bahrain, it was reported that UAE officials 'promptly threatened to withdraw from the coalition then being assembled to support a NATO-led strike' in Libya and 'quickly named their price for staying on board … Mrs. Clinton must issue a statement that would pull back from any criticism of the Bahrain operation' (Clinton, 2014). The UAE's official news agency WAM announced that the UAE was sending a force to Bahrain as part of the Peninsula Shield Force. Gargash, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, said the move reflected the UAE's commitment towards its fellow GCC member and neighbour (WAM, 2011).

In an interview with Fox News in 2014, Foreign Minister of the UAE Abdullah bin Zayed provided an important insight into his country's perspective regarding the unfolding process of post-intervention policy in Libya:

> We believe especially the countries who played a role in getting rid of Gaddafi, first of all, should have played a far bigger role the day after. They haven't … I don't want to mention one country or the other, but the entire coalition had a bigger responsibility, which it unfortunately didn't live up to (WAM, 2014).

Such assertiveness in regional policymaking also characterised the UAE's foreign politics towards Egypt following the end of Hosni Mubarak's thirty-year long reign in 2011. UAE officials preferred regime-type continuity as opposed to an Islamist takeover, which explains why it backed the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) that was set up to manage the post-Mubarak transition. Following Morsi's fall, the UAE backed El-Sisi in a bid to limit the impact of rapid and unexpected political change. Just as in Libya, this stance was in stark contrast with the one adopted by Qatar, which threw its political weight behind the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as it won both the parliamentary elections at the end of 2011 before

emerging victorious in the presidential election in 2012. Indeed, Morsi's election win over former regime figure Ahmed Shafiq symbolised the clash not only between the Brotherhood and the old regime but also between the Qatar and UAE backed sides as Shafiq sought political asylum in the UAE following his defeat (Ulrichsen, 2016b).

Following the fall of the Mubarak regime, the UAE pledged to donate US$3.3 billion in aid for Egypt, before putting it on hold after Morsi won the presidency in 2012. The UAE's direct regional rival, Qatar, was Morsi's main supporter and is believed to have transferred more than US$7 billion in emergency loans and direct monetary transfers to Egypt during Morsi's one-year rule and provided further support through the supply of large quantities liquefied natural gas to meet domestic demand for energy. Qatari influence in Egyptian politics reached a peak in September 2012 with its Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani's visit to Egypt and his pledge that Qatar would invest US$18 billion in Egypt over the next five years (Gulf States Newsletter, 2012).

Relations between the UAE and Egypt inevitably were affected by the domestic crackdown on local MB-affiliated activists in the UAE, who were perceived by policymakers in the country to be a chief security threat. The domestic anti-MB policies the UAE elected to implement at the time helped re-shape the country's NRCs and ultimately its foreign policy. Indeed, in a speech made by Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed in October 2012, the brotherhood was deemed 'an organisation which encroaches upon the sovereignty and integrity of nations.' (*The Guardian,* 2012). As discussed in a previous chapter, the UAE moved swiftly against what it considered to be local MB affiliates. Eleven Egyptians were arrested in early 2013 for conspiring to destabilise the country. Local newspapers and media outlets who reported the arrests claimed that the group had been receiving orders from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which, in turn, prompted a diplomatic crisis between the UAE and Egypt after a leading figure in the

Egyptian Brotherhood accused the UAE of being part of a conspiracy against the organisation (Forstenlechner, Rutledge and Alnuaimi, 2012). The ousting of Morsi signalled the defeat of political Islam and the reassertion of authoritarian rule in Egypt. This period witnessed great political and financial support being offered by the UAE and Saudi Arabia to the new government of El-Sisi. The swiftness with which the UAE and Saudi Arabia backed the restoration of military rule in Egypt with direct budgetary support, shipments of fuel products and large amounts of bilateral aid spoke of the former's desire to seize the regional initiative away from its fierce rivals in Qatar. Over US$12 billion was promised in the week following Morsi's fall and was swiftly disbursed. However, the UAE was growing frustrated at Sisi's regime despite being its main strategic supporter. UAE decision-makers were unhappy about the slow pace of economic reform under Sisi while large UAE-financed projects ran into difficulties following the fall of oil prices. Indeed, Egypt's housing minister indicated that the US$40 billion housing project involving regional real estate giant Arabtec had been scaled back to just 10 percent of its original size, as the company suffered heavy losses following a change in its leadership (The National, 2015)

The examples of Libya and Egypt encapsulated not only the sharp contrast between Emirati and Qatari foreign policies in the post-Arab uprisings era, but also reflected the dramatic shift in the NRCs of small Gulf states. Both states were keen to promote themselves as the Middle East's hub in areas such as finance, infrastructure and aviation (Davidson, 2012: Ulrichsen, 2015). However, that rivalry led to enmity between the UAE and Qatar, especially after the latter declared its full support for the Muslim Brotherhood in the region, much to the dismay of the UAE, which sought to defeat the Brotherhood domestically and regionally (Ulrichsen, 2015). Also, officials in the UAE were antagonised by the comments made by the Qatar-based spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, when he criticised the UAE

on his weekly *Sharia and Life* TV programme on the Al Jazeera network: 'the Emiratis are humans like us, if they think they are superior, they are wrong … They do not have rule over people more powerful than the others.' (Gulf States Newsletter, 2012: Issue 36) Following Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani's decision to hand the throne over to his son, Tamim, the UAE hopes that this would change Qatar's foreign policy. Tamim had initially hoped to reassure GCC members that Qatar intended to abandon the unilateralism of its 2011-2013 foreign policy and replace it with a more cooperative and multilateral approach. This also meant that Qatar would be less ideological in its foreign policy (Ulrichsen, 2013). However, Tamim's struggle to amend the errors his father had committed left the Emiratis and Saudis frustrated. The UAE played a leading role in the GCC as it continued to pressure its Qatari counterparts to stop supporting the remnants of the Egyptian Brotherhood who had managed to escape Egypt following the fall of Morsi and the subsequent anti-MB crackdown. Indeed, the *Washington Post* reported in 2013 that 'an exiled leadership is starting to take shape here among the shimmering high-rises of Doha' as several of the MB exiles were being accommodated at Al Jazeera's expense in the capital's hotels.

The UAE continued to play a leading role in rallying regional and international support against the brotherhood after the UAE Cabinet announced approved Federal Law No.7 for 2014 on combating terrorist crimes (WAM, 2014). Prior to that, the UAE had played a major role in the establishment of a GCC-wide security agreement, which it had pressured Qatar to sign, ensuring the protection of sovereignty of GCC states by preventing interference in the internal affairs of GCC countries. However, this did not prevent the diplomatic crisis of March 2014, when the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain announced the withdrawal of their ambassadors to Qatar. This decision was taken in the name of the security and stability of the GCC as Emirati and Saudi leaders judged that Tamim's government had violated the security agreement that

was agreed in November 2013 (Roberts, 2015; Ulrichsen, 2016a). The constant diplomatic pressure by the UAE and Saudi Arabia resulted in a number of concessions being made by Qatar, among which were the reinstatement of the GCC Internal Security Pact,[49] and increased cooperation with other GCC states – mainly UAE and KSA – on matters of intelligence and internal policing, such as the extradition of Emirati MB-affiliated activists who had fled the UAE and settled in Doha following the domestic crackdown on the Islah organisation. The UAE continued its concentrated diplomatic efforts to pressure Qatar in the period leading up to the restoration of diplomatic relations among GCC members in November 2014. The diplomatic crisis was resolved during a meeting of Gulf leaders in Riyadh, which included the Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed and Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed, after Qatar agreed to relocate Muslim Brotherhood figures to Turkey and shut down its controversial pro-Brotherhood Egyptian television affiliate of Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr (Ulrichsen, 2015).

The post-Arab uprisings evolution of the UAE's NRCs

The UAE and its regional counterparts faced two security dilemmas in 2014, the threat of the Islamic State and the advance of the Houthis in Yemen. Thus, the UAE was faced with the prospect of having to use military force on a hitherto unprecedented scale. The emergence of these new threats coincided with a period of collective uncertainty regarding Obama's foreign policy towards the Middle East in general and the Gulf in particular. The Gulf states were disappointed by the withdrawal of US support for Hosni Mubarak at the beginning of the 'Arab Spring' and American criticism of their handling of the uprising in Bahrain following their

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[49] The internal security pact was a separate agreement made by GCC Interior Ministers in November 2012, endorsed by GCC rulers at their annual Summit in Bahrain in December 2012

decision to dispatch troops as part of Operation Peninsula Shield. Indeed, decision-makers in the UAE and the Gulf continued to question:

> whether, after such a long period of close relations, the US still perceives a vital interest in the stability of the Gulf region as in the past … even if there are statements from Washington underscoring its continued commitment, it is not clear whether the GCC states can continue to rely on US policy to not only protect the region but to also move it toward a more stable future. Instead, the prevailing mood appears to be that the terms are beginning to change to such a degree that the GCC states have no choice but to act on their own and without consideration of US interests and concerns (Sager, 2013).

Such sentiments were reinforced by Obama's failure to act on Syria and the announcement of a nuclear agreement between Iran and the 5+1 states in summer 2015. The publishing of the 'Obama Doctrine' report in the *Atlantic* magazine provoked a furious reaction by the GCC following Obama's description of them as 'free riders' (Goldberg, 2016). Two years prior to the release of this report, the UAE's ambassador to Washington, Yousef al-Otaiba, captured the leadership's frustration with Obama's changing geopolitical priorities in an op-ed for *Foreign Policy*. Furthermore, al-Otaiba bemoaned Obama's aloofness towards the Gulf when he called for better and more regular communication between the Obama administration and key decision-makers in the Gulf: 'relationships in the Middle East are built on personal contact, and maintaining a candid and vibrant dialogue with regular leader-to-leader contact is essential.'

As stated, the emergence of Islamic state posed a new security challenge to the UAE and its Gulf neighbours, particularly Saudi Arabia, but also Bahrain and Kuwait, as policymakers found themselves dealing with a new terrorist group, following the defeat of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and subsequent banishment to Yemen. IS was radically different to Al-Qaeda in that its goal was to maximise its territorial gains and expand its caliphate. Al Qaeda, on the other hand, targeted Western citizens and interests in Saudi Arabia. There was

also growing evidence of flows of recruits and networks of financing for IS from within Gulf societies, which culminated in a series of 'lone wolf' attacks and organised mass-casualty bombings in 2014 and 2015. There was a clear indication that IS cells had both the capability and the intent to launch terrorist attacks and recruit fighters within the GCC states. Indeed, a string of attacks in Saudi Arabia and one in Abu Dhabi in late 2014 suggested initially that the IS would rely upon 'lone wolf' operations and run and gun attacks to attack the GCC states. Two shootings involving American citizens left one dead and another wounded in Riyadh in November 2014 while two more were wounded in the Eastern Province in early 2015 (Ulrichsen, 2016b). In Abu Dhabi, an American teacher was stabbed to death weeks after the American Embassy in Abu Dhabi warned its citizens of a possible attack in the country. Although there was little or no evidence that links these attacks to broader networks of ISIS cells, the pattern in which they were carried out was noticeably consistent, and they rattled Western residents and the security apparatuses of the GCC states (The Guardian, 2014). The UAE took an important step towards consolidating its role as a regional power in the period when regional and international policy responses to confront IS were being formulated in summer 2014. The UAE contributed a squadron of fighter jets to the anti-IS coalition in September 2014 and carried out air strikes against IS territory. In line with the UAE's NRC as a regional model for female empowerment,[50] the UAE's first female fighter pilot, Major Mariam al-Mansouri, featured prominently in those attacks. The UAE also took the initiative as a regional de-radicalisation hub when it created and hosted the Global Centre for Excellence in Countering Violent Extremism, also known as Hedayah. The centre was initially launched

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[50] In 2015, the UAE Cabinet approved the establishment of the UAE's Gender Balance Council, which aims to empower Emirati women in line with the UAE's leadership NRCs of the country as being the regional leader in female empowerment.

in 2012 during the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and has won the UAE praise from US civil and military officials for its role in formulating anti-radicalisation initiatives aimed at uprooting extremism in all its forms (Ibish, 2017).

The UAE's increasing willingness to rely on hard power to secure its regional interests is best reflected in its intervention in Yemen, led by the Saudis in the north and the Emiratis in the south. This willingness to intervene unilaterally without having to rely on support from the US shows not only a lack of trust of the latter but also the changing NRCs shared amongst the UAE's key policymakers regarding its strength and capabilities. The emergence of self-reliance in the making of the UAE's foreign policy has presented both significant challenges and opportunities for the US. On the one hand, the UAE's willingness to use military force to secure its regional interests realises the longstanding US goal to help its Gulf allies become less reliant on its support to defend them against outside threats. On the other hand, it signals an independence of decision-making by the UAE and its GCC neighbours, albeit with the expectation of American support, as the intervention in Yemen proves. Thus, for America, the gain of having its GCC allies pursue a proactive foreign policy comes, at least to some extent, at the concomitant cost of a decline in leverage over the decision-making process in the Gulf (Ibish, 2017).

In Yemen, the UAE and Saudi Arabia had to react to the takeover of large swathes of Yemeni territory by Houthi fighters. However, the Gulf's backing did not prevent the Houthi capture of the capital, Sana'a, in autumn, 2014, and the ousting of President Hadi in January 2015. Following Hadi's escape and subsequent effort to establish control over Aden, a further Houthi advance in March 2015 threatened to overrun the city and establish full Houthi control over

Yemen.[51]

This led the UAE, Saudi Arabia and nine other Arab states to launch airstrikes against Houthi targets in Operation Decisive Storm as the regional proxy war with Iran escalated into a direct military confrontation (Ulrichsen, 2016a). With the initial operation phase giving way to a secondary phase entitled Operation Restoring Hope a month later, the UAE troops assumed a leading role in the ground war and in combat and humanitarian operations, especially in the southern provinces of Yemen. Emirati and UAE-trained local forces formed the most competent element of Operation Golden Arrow, the land offensive that was launched to retake Aden and southern Yemen from the Houthis, with more than 3,000 troops taking part in it with the support of Apache attack helicopters, tanks and armoured personnel carriers, as well as an amphibious assault which was executed with tactical proficiency (Ulrichsen, 2016a; Knights and Mello, 2015; Ibish, 2017).

Figure 11: The official commemoration day logo (WAM)

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[51] The GCC states regard the Houthi fighters as acting on behalf of Iran in Yemen, as Anwar Gargash stated in a post on Twitter.

Nevertheless, the UAE experienced its first battle casualties in Yemen. This marked a significant development in the way the UAE presents itself in international as well as domestic arenas. Not a single Emirati soldier had died in battle, despite the UAE's long involvement in foreign military, until First Lieutenant Tariq al-Shehhi was killed in a bomb attack in Bahrain in 2014 (WAM, 2014). Al-Shehhi became the first Emirati serviceman to die in an operation since police officer Salim Suhail bin Khamis died while defending the Greater Tunb Island against Iranian occupation a few days prior to the establishment of the UAE itself (Al-Nahyan, 2013). By September 2015, the number of fallen servicemen had risen to 76, 80% of whom were from the less affluent northern emirates, and up to 157 by December. A total of 52 Emirati soldiers were killed in a missile attack on a coalition base at Safer in the eastern Marib province on the 5th September 2015, a day dubbed 'the UAE's Pearl Harbour moment'. It marked an unprecedented loss of soldiers, the most on a single day since the nation was founded in 1971 (Al Qassemi, 2015).

The country's first experience of battle casualties had a cathartic impact on the UAE domestically as the notion of a 'blood sacrifice' became a mainstay at the domestic level, especially on Twitter, where users created hashtags with the names of the martyrs that saw hundreds of retweets (Gulf News, 2015). Several government-led initiatives were launched to reduce the risk of domestic unrest. These included the announcement of a Martyrs Commemoration Day, which will be observed on 30th November every year, as well as the establishment of the Martyrs Families Affairs Office (MFAO) on the orders of Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (WAM, 2015). In line with the evolution of the UAE's NRCs, the government's response sought to honour the fallen servicemen and link their sacrifice to a more assertive and broader discourse on national identity, which resembled the role of war and state

making in European societies during the 19th and 20th centuries (Diwan, 2015). An official at the UAE National Defence College, stated that the UAE has matured as a state in that it could develop its own discourse to commemorate its fallen soldiers, marking the natural progression for any country whose soldiers have fallen in battle (Al-Shatheri in Ulrichsen, 2016b).

In conclusion, the goal of this chapter was to analyse the UAE's foreign policy and trace it back to the main research question on legitimacy and survival in the post-Arab uprisings era. The chapter provides a chronological framework of the evolution of Emirati foreign policy since its establishment until the period leading up to the Arab uprisings. In doing so, the goal was to demonstrate the extent to which the UAE's foreign policy has changed in the post-Arab uprisings era, which, as far as the thesis is concerned, is rooted in the country's efforts to survive the post-Arab uprisings era. Through the use of role theory, the chapter's aim was to showcase the internal dynamics of foreign policy making in the UAE by examining the country's national role conceptions.

The UAE is developing its own foreign policy, as seen in Bahrain, Libya, Egypt and Yemen, where it is substantively contributing to the Saudi-led coalition intervention in Yemen to restore the ousted President Hadi to power. This complements its post-Arab uprisings security strategy, which will be examined in the next chapter. Its contributions include direct counter-insurgency efforts on the ground, air support, land mine clearance, military hardware provisions, aid and intelligence.

Overall, the UAE leaders believe that the growing UAE-Saudi partnership will have a positive impact on Gulf security (Salem, 2015). The ability of the UAE and Saudi Arabia to take the lead when it comes to the Gulf's security has changed the political landscape. The UAE's decisiveness is earning it a reputation as a regional player and its newfound security policy challenges conventional small-state wisdom, as the next chapter explains.

Chapter Five: The UAE's post-Arab uprisings security approach

The goal of this chapter is to draw attention to the UAE's evolving security and defence strategy in a post-Arab uprisings context. The purpose is to build on the foreign policy chapter by analysing the UAE's post-Arab uprisings security policy. Both the UAE's foreign and security policies are inextricably linked. Given that the UAE is geographically small, the chapter explores the UAE's position in a changing regional landscape while demonstrating an awareness of the literature regarding small state security. Indeed, there is an opportunity to make a contribution to the understanding of small states and their behaviour on a domestic and international level. The core argument falls in line with that of the thesis in general, that the UAE is on a steady path to long-term survival. As this chapter explores, the UAE has carved out a security strategy that exceeds its military and size constraints. The perceived withdrawal of the US proved to be a turning point in that regard as it prompted the UAE to expand its alliances and become more assertive on a regional level. Overall, the UAE has invested a considerable amount of time and effort in building strategic and military alliances, especially with Saudi Arabia, the United States, China and India. The UAE's assertiveness has been on display in Libya and Yemen. But what is worth studying and analysing is the sophisticated and multifaceted approach the UAE has adopted in its security policy. The establishment of overseas military bases represents a defining moment in the UAE's history, as does its newly founded space programme.

Defying conventional small-state wisdom: new trends in the UAE's survival formula

Small states such as the UAE have long played a marginal role in the making and maintenance of international security orders. Small states have pursued pragmatic and reactive security strategies while being at the mercy of their more powerful and influential allies and adversaries.

In the decades after the Second World War, size played a fundamental role in determining whether a territorial unit qualified for statehood: '[i]n the international relations literature and in world politics size has generally been connected to capability and influence. Whilst being big is correlated with power, being small has been viewed as a handicap to station action and even state survival' (Browning, 2006, p. 669).

Military power and population size played an equally important role as well. There was a consensus among scholars of international relations and security that unless a state had more than ten million citizens, over one per cent of the global gross domestic product, a large territory and a strong military force, it was treated as a small state no matter what other attributes it possessed or roles it played (Miller, 2017). When the UAE and a few small Gulf states gained statehood in the beginning of the 1970s, they were among some of the world's smallest countries with a combined population total of just over one million. Their towns and cities had less than 20,000 inhabitants living in them at the time. These newly founded countries were small to the extent that their admission into the UN had led to a debate on whether the UN should actually reject their claims to statehood. The UN Secretary General at the time, U Thant, commented that these 'micro-states' had put the existing international security order in danger, claiming that the effect of this would become more acute as time passed (Bartmann, 1997). But it seems today that many of those concerns were misplaced; the great majority of the world's sovereign states are small. This has ultimately paved the way for a complete reassessment of what does and does not constitute a small state and what said state can and cannot do (Miller, 2017).

Geography makes the UAE a small state, but it also makes it influential. The UAE uses its abundant economic and energy wealth to exert power and employ risk-diversification strategies, which may seem incompatible with the current literature regarding small states.

Nevertheless, the classic small state strategies of bandwagoning and alliance formation have long been key features of the UAE's approach to foreign and defence affairs. Overall, the UAE does not always share the same traits with small states; nor does it fit the mould in terms of existing theory on small state security strategy. There is little in the literature about how security strategies are chosen for a small state like the UAE, whichalternates between proactive and defensive security postures, being powerful and pragmatic at the same time (Sherwood, 2016).

It is known that the UAE adopts distinctive strategies in different areas, and shedding light on those strategies, through a small-state lens, will pave the way for further academic investigation in the future (Soubrier, 2016). Furthermore, as far as this thesis is concerned, it is imperative to be mindful that the UAE's pursuit of those new strategies has occurred against a backdrop of regional turmoil and change, in which the country has found itself dealing with what it deems to be an existential threat to its survival and legitimacy. Overall, the literature argues that small states often face challenges based on the dichotomy between autonomy and influence. Should they choose to become more autonomous, they likely adopt a defensive and neutral stance, whereas if they choose to become more influential, they adopt a cooperative strategy, relying on alliances based on balancing or bandwagoning tactics, which is subject to whether they side against or with the threats (Soubrier, 2016; Rickli 2008; Mouritzen 1997; Walt 1985). In any case, it is assumed that small states cannot combine both autonomy and influence due to lack of resources, this offensive strategy being restricted to great powers, which are the only ones with 'the power to influence the structure of the international system while guaranteeing their security' (Reiter, 1996, p. 65).

In the last decade, especially after the Arab uprisings, the UAE has simultaneously pursued security strategies that, on paper, seem at odds. Based on power in terms of domain, weight,

cost and economic means, the UAE has pursued defensive security strategies and acted independently on the foreign policy front. This neutral defensive security strategy has included diversifying allies, expanding regional influence, leveraging financial resources and playing an active role in shifting power away from the traditional geo-economic and geo-political centres of power (Sherwood, 2016). At the heart of this lies its increased level of internationalisation and reducing its dependency on the US. For the UAE, the 1990s were a turning point as it witnessed the modernisation of its armed forces. This has improved the Emirati defence apparatus' quality through the introduction of high-technology weapon systems and military equipment. This was carried out as the leadership was enacting plans to improve its armed forces through rigorous training. Furthermore, the UAE carved out a military strategy along the lines of 'armed neutrality', in which it pursued a 'two-tier military doctrine composed of dissuasion and territorial defence' (Rickli, 2008, pp. 310-312).

The ultimate goal was to establish a security policy anchored in the idea of credibility; the will to be regarded as a credible player on the global scene is reflected in the participation of the UAE's army in peacekeeping efforts, which enhances their international legitimacy and '[increases] the political cost of violating their neutrality, which in turn [strengthens] their own security' (Sundelius, 1989, p. 110). Indeed, the survival strategies adopted by the UAE since its inception is unique because, as the country's name implies, it is geared towards safeguarding the federation. What sets the UAE apart from its counterparts in the region in that sense is that its survival strategies have been built on two main planks: the consolidation of its territorial integrity and enhancing the credibility of its armed forces. Since the early 1990s, the UAE has been trying to build a strong defence apparatus and a credible army by focusing on safeguarding its territory integrity. Therefore, on examining history, it seems that the UAE's priority was to develop its hard-power capabilities whilst remaining neutral at the regional and international

levels. The end goal was to enhance the country's credibility at both levels.[52]

This idea of credibility was starting to become a salient feature of the UAE's security policy in the late 2000s as the UAE was beginning to invest in a local defence industry. Thus, the UAE implemented a security strategy that prioritises relative autonomy and a defensive strategy (Soubrier, 2016). The UAE's political and security landscape is layered and complex, much like its GCC counterparts, and which, based on its power calculation, is the reason it has also continued to widen its existing network of allies. While it diversifies risk in new ways, it also maintains the same traditional and productive security policies that scholars often associate with small states. The UAE's commitment to international organisations and regional alliances is also an important part of this strategy. The parallel pursuit of these seemingly contradictory strategies is uncommon among small states, but it nevertheless reflects versatility, pragmatism and innovation, which, as this chapter argues, have provided the foundation for the UAE's long-term survival (Sherwood, 2016).

The UAE has recently adopted a new strategy as part of its drive to diversify its strategic alliances in the region. Indeed, the country has established a few military bases in the region in order to maximise the use of hard power. These bases serve another important purpose as well in that they play a role in fulfilling the UAE's foreign policy and security interests. This has been the case since 2014, when the leadership identified the Red Sea, the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean as key strategic regions. The immediate imperative behind the UAE's expansionism in the Horn of Africa is the growing rivalry between the two new Middle Eastern blocs: Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt, on the one hand, and Turkey, Iran and Qatar, on the other. The war in Yemen has a strong naval element, with the Houthi rebels being supplied by

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[52] Author's interview with a researcher on Gulf military affairs. 30th April 2018.

sea. The naval blockade of Yemen has prompted Saudi and the UAE to establish military bases in the area. The UAE involvement in the Indian Ocean predates the Yemen conflict (Brewster, 2018). Indeed, the UAE has given considerable financial and political support to small island states such as Comoros, Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius and Comoros, and it is a major source of foreign direct investment in East Africa. In the Seychelles, the UAE provided funds to the Seychelles government in its fight against Somali piracy. On land, the Seychelles enlisted the Abu Dhabi-based company, Masdar Power, to construct a wind farm. The Seychelles' interest in maritime security and renewable energy is an examples of a growing number of links between it and the United Arab Emirates (Future Directions International, 2011).

Aside from its involvement in Seychelles, the UAE is also playing an influential political role in the Indian Ocean, which will include taking the chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the Indian Ocean's pan-regional political grouping, from 2019. The UAE is projected to continue to be largely involved in the region as strategic competition grows in East Africa and nearby islands. The UAE has recently signed a deal with Uganda to establish agricultural free zones to enhance food security in the UAE. The 2,500-hectare free zone will allow private companies from the UAE to invest in agricultural production and development in Uganda. Mariam Al Mehairi, the Minister for Food Security, stated that this would also act as a launch pad for further investment into East and Central Africa; 'there is a lot of potential to be unlocked in that area.' (Mitchell, 2018) As discussed in the foreign policy chapter, food security is considered an important pillar of political survival in the food-scarce Gulf countries.

To help safeguard those interests, the country has built five military bases along the Gulf of Aden in Socotra and Perim Island in Yemen, the Somaliland and Puntland regions in Somalia and the port of Assab in Eritrea (Telci and Horoz, 2018). As the chapter demonstrates, this expansion forms part of a broader strategy to turn the UAE into a strong regional player and

build on what was achieved during its intervention in Libya (Rickli, 2016). This goes hand in hand with the leadership's goal for the UAE to be recognised as a legitimate regional force as it continues to combat extremism. Another strategic goal the country hopes to achieve is to extend its geopolitical influence through strong military presence in one of the key locations of international trade.

The UAE finds itself facing the need to compete with rivals such as Turkey, Qatar and Iran, a triumvirate which have already established a foothold in the Horn of Africa. Another hitherto rarely discussed aspect of this project concerns the UAE's position within the GCC and the Arab League: Having a military presence in the wider region will strengthen its position within those regional organisations. Finally, being able to use hard power will allow it to confront militant organisations such as the Houthis, ISIS and al-Qaeda (Telci and Horoz, 2018). As discussed in Chapter Four, it is important to note that this ongoing project reflects the shift in the UAE's foreign and security policies, which have occurred in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. The most salient feature of this change was a concern for the stability of the country's political order. As such, the UAE invested heavily in developing its military capabilities, becoming one of the world's highest spenders on military with respect to its GDP53. Thus, the UAE's decision to establish overseas military bases is driven by its need to expand its regional influence, increase its offensive capabilities against the Houthi militias in Yemen, and secure a safe route for its oil exports and food imports in the Bab al-Mandab Strait. Through these newly established military bases, the UAE's goal is to establish a military presence in the Gulf of Aden, the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Red Sea. It aims to further cement its position as a legitimate political, military and economic actor both regionally and internationally. As an

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[53] Author's interview with a researcher on Gulf military affairs. 30th April 2018.

Emirati scholar and commentator stated, the UAE's post-Arab uprisings survival mechanism relies heavily on a proactive approach to regional security. However, this scholar also noted that a balance would have to be struck between the use of hard power and soft power to preserve the UAE's favourable image regionally.[54] The UAE is aware that its current network of allies is not permanent and wants to avoid being heavily reliant on one ally for its security.[55] The alliance with Saudi Arabia is a good example of this; as states begin to contest roles regionally, the nature of their relationships will change, especially with old conflicts resurfacing.

Overall, the Bab al-Mandab Strait is one of the most important routes for global trade, especially for the European, Middle Eastern and Asian markets. Eight percent of global trade passes through the strait from Asia to Europe and vice versa, with hydrocarbons being the most important and strategically valuable export. Oil tankers transport approximately 4.8 million barrels of oil a day through Bab-al Mandab (EIA, 2017). The UAE is one of the leading oil-exporters in the region. Therefore, safeguarding the strait from any threats bolsters its economic security. This explains the proactive approach it has adopted to eliminating any threats to the strait, considering that the countries situated around this chokepoint have been experiencing political instability and insecurity for a long period of time.

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[54] Author's interview with a thinktank director. Abu Dhabi. 5th March 2018.

[55] Ibid.

Crude oil and petroleum products transported through Arabian Peninsula chokepoints
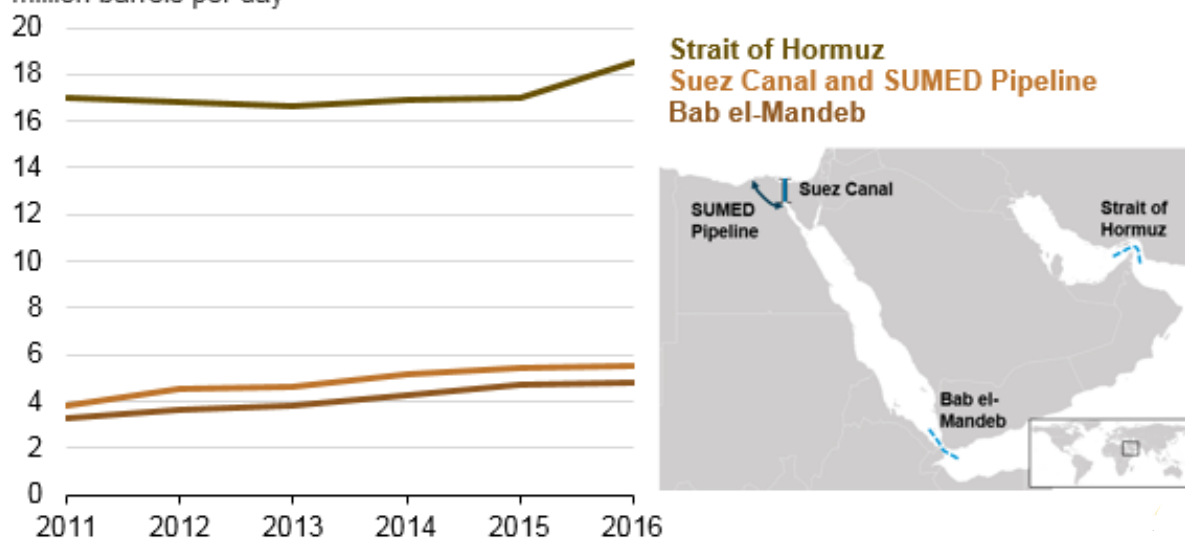million barrels per day

Figure 10. World oil transit chokepoints. Source: US Energy Information Administration (EIA) (2017)

The ongoing civil war in Yemen makes the situation difficult as far as global trade is concerned. As a result of the power vacuum that has been created, the civil war between the Yemeni government, led by Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, and the Iranian-backed Houthis, terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda were able to expand their existing sphere of influence unabated (Johnson, 2012). In addition to relying on its hard power, the UAE continues to employ various soft-power tools to help maintain its strong presence on Yemeni territory. In order to realise its goal to protect its domestic and regional security, the UAE set up two military bases on the Yemeni islands of Socotra and Perim (Telci and Horoz, 2018). The leadership, namely MBZ and MBR, believe in 'eliminating security threats before they reach the UAE's shores.'[56] As such, establishing a strong military presence on those two islands was designed to give the UAE the power to influence the outcome of the conflict, through the use of its hard power capabilities.

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[56] Author's interview with a thinktank director. Abu Dhabi, 5th March 2018.

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UAE officials have pursued what Peterson has termed 'strategies of survival' for small states based on finding a strong security guarantor (the United States) while ensuring to become influential players at both the regional and international levels (Peterson, 2006). While the US-UAE diplomatic relations date back to when the UAE dispatched its first diplomatic mission to Washington DC, in 1974, the military relationship with the US has its roots in the Second Gulf War, which showcased not only the vulnerability of small Gulf states vis-à-vis regional hegemons, but also the need to improve the UAE's defence and security partnerships with powerful states. It is important to recall that Saddam Hussein threatened the Gulf states at the Arab League Summit in summer 1990, and accused the UAE and Kuwait of driving down the price of oil through increasing their production. Saddam was growing impatient with Kuwait, which he accused of drilling into the Iraqi-owned Rumaila oilfield. This resulted in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (Ulrichsen, 2016b).

UAE-US security relations were formalised in a Defence Cooperation Agreement signed between the two countries in summer 1994. The agreement allowed the US to station its troops at the Al-Dhafra base in Abu Dhabi and the freedom to deploy equipment at military bases across the UAE and utilise the port of Jebel Ali for naval visits by American warships patrolling Gulf waters. The number of American forces stationed at Al-Dhafra increased at a steady rate from about 800 prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 to almost 2,000 by 2005 and roughly around 3,500 in 2014. It is important to note that due to the strength of US-UAE relations, Al-Dhafra airbase also was the only base outside the US that could station the advanced F-22 fighter jets (Chandrasekaran, 2014).

That said, UAE-US relations have fluctuated over the years although the the two countries have grown to become close allies in the last decade in comparison to the pre-2004 era (Al Sayegh,

2004; Katzman, 2008; Al-Mezaini, 2012; Ulrichsen, 2016b). Overall, the UAE has been the only country in the Arab world 'to participate with the US in six coalition actions over the last 20 years: Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Bosnia-Kosovo, the 1990 Gulf War and the fight against ISIS' (UAE Embassy in Washington). However, in Sheikh Zayed's final years, UAE-US relations went through a period of turbulence due in part to Zayed's strong opposition to American sanctions on Iraq during the 1990s. Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum was among the first Arab leaders to urge Kuwait to normalise relations with Iraq, in line with Zayed's goal to put an end to the suffering of the Iraqi people (Al-Hosani, 2012).

The suffering of the Iraqis has led many Gulf decision-makers to express discontent at the American policy of dual containment, which escalated into a strong sense of ambivalence regarding the US' role in the region (Al-Shayeji in Ulrichsen, 2016b). Dual containment was a doctrine of American foreign policy which aimed to contain Iraq and Iran. Those two states were considered America and Israel's main adversaries in the region. The US's reasoning for adopting this doctrine was to prevent anti-US regimes from dominating the region and threatening its core interests (Conry, 1994). The UN Security Council imposed economic sanctions on Saddam's regime in an attempt to weaken his grip on power. However, the doctrine came under regional and global scrutiny after it was revealed that more than half a million Iraqi children had died as a result of those sanctions (Crossette, 1995).

The events of 9/11 tested UAE-US relations especially after it was revealed that two of the plane hijackers were UAE citizens. This meant that UAE nationals constituted the second largest group of in the network of terrorists after the 15 Saudis, with Marwan Yousef al-Shehhi of Ras-al-Khaima being the pilot who flew one of the hijacked aircrafts into Tower Two of the World Trade Centre. In addition, at least nine of the 9/11 hijackers travelled to the US via Dubai in the period leading up to the attacks: two UAE-based facilitators had helped them

secure plane tickets and travellers checks (Al Sayegh, 2004). This series of events has led to rapid and concerted efforts by the Emirati government to improve its security infrastructure, causing it to adopt a zero tolerance approach towards anyone or any group suspected of terrorist activities. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan emerged as the leading figure during the UAE's quest to reform its internal and external security policy. The reform was deemed necessary following the revelation that two Emirati citizens had been involved in the 9/11 attacks. Shedding light on the post-911 reformation of the UAE's security policy provides a high level of insight into its post-Arab uprisings policy. Indeed, The UAE launched a sweeping albeit discrete campaign to crack down on suspected extremists, which resulted in hundreds of Imams and school teachers being removed from their jobs. This move was followed by large-scale education reforms aimed at encouraging student-centred learning (Dickson, 2018).

In 2005, Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan made a speech criticising the state of the UAE's public education system, which was based on 'teacher dominated, heavily transmitted teaching styles' at the time (Shaw, Badri and Hukul, 1995). These education reforms were aimed at lessening the influence of Islamist education, not only as a subject but also as a philosophy that permeated all aspects of life and education (Lighton, 2011). During the same period, the UAE cooperated closely with the US government and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to put an end to money laundering and illicit transfers of funds (Ulrichsen, 2016b). The government placed strict regulations on the Hawala system being used by South Asian merchants in some Emirates and developed a strong working relationship between its Central Bank and US Treasury authorities (Gulf States Newsletter, 2002; Al Sayegh, 2004). Hawala is a system by which money is transferred from one part of the world to another without going through traditional banking channels. It was at one point the safest and quickest means to militants for transferring money as it left a minimal trace of its movement (Jamwal, 2002)

This is one reason why the hawala system posed a threat to peace. Before the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the Hawala system was being used by the Islamic world. It is worth noting that al-Qaeda moved much of its money via the hawala system during the 1990s (Raza, Fayaz and Ijaz, 2017).

The UAE has been reliant on its two-pronged 'smart policy' in its relations with Washington (Al Suwaidi, 2011). In small state literature, this is considered typical behaviour, which is designed to cope with vulnerability and a limited ability to exert influence (Prasad, 2009). Following the second Gulf War, the UAE sought security protection from the USA while attempting to establish a presence within the existing network of regional alliances. This is a common survival strategy used by vulnerable small states according to Walt (1987). That said, it is worth noting that security strategies can be expressed as a bilateral and multilateral 'alliance' but they are not mutually exclusive. As this section argues, the UAE is operating along the same lines in its policy towards Iran.

The UAE's doctrine of containment in its relationship with Iran is a good example of this two-pronged and seemingly contradictory approach to its security and foreign policy (Al Suwaidi, 2011; Soubrier, 2016). The UAE's policy towards Iran shows not only its earlier constructive engagement policies, but also its newfound ability to adopt defensive and proactive security policies at the same time (Al Mashat, 2010). For example, Dubai, which has the world's biggest Iranian diaspora, provides the UAE and its allies with good intelligence on Iran. In the context of US-UAE relations, the UAE uses this to its advantage by allowing the US to use this information to gain a closer look at Iran's internal affairs (Sadjadpour, 2011). Thus, the UAE leverages this intelligence to gain influence in US policymaking circles. However this is a double-edged strategy as it somewhat damages the interests of UAE businesses. For example, international sanctions imposed on the Iranian regime prevent big international airlines from

flying directly into Iran while the Dubai-based Emirates airline operates 200 flights to Tehran weekly. Also, much Iranian trade takes place in Dubai's tax-free zones despite US pressure and UN sanctions (Sherwood, 2016). A 400,000-strong Iranian diaspora operates nearly 10,000 businesses in Dubai (The Economist, 2015) UAE-Iran trade ties have increased steadily over the last decade. In 2014, the *Khaleej Times* reported that Emirati-Iranian trade totalled US$17 billion, which made the UAE Iran's fourth largest trading partner. However, this remains lower when compared with pre-sanctions numbers of US$23 billion in 2011 (Sherwood, 2016). In 2011, it was reported in Emirati media that a large amount of Iranian-Chinese bilateral trade, estimated at US$15 billion, was being conducted through the UAE (Kane, 2011). Dubai is Tehran's main connection to the global economy and Dubai continues to use this to contain the Iranian threat. Davidson (2008) states that Dubai was able to build favourable international relations due its historical position as a regional hub for commerce. Through the use of these economic strategies, which tie the economic security of their adversaries into their own survival, small states are able to mitigate threats and contain their adversaries. As such, the UAE policy of containment towards Iran is innovative and contributes to its autonomy (Sherwood, 2016; Baldacchino, 2006; Briguglio et al., 2006). Herein lies the strength of the UAE's foreign policy. Dubai's position as a commercial hub becomes a soft power mechanism of containment that complements Abu Dhabi's hardline stance on Iran. Looking at the UAE security discourse towards Iran, one can observe the duality in terms of its foreign policy. This is made possible because the UAE is a federation, allowing individual Emirates to pursue different foreign policy paths.[57]

Beyond capitalising on the opportunity, the UAE is responding to Iran by strengthening its

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[57] Author's interview with a researcher on Gulf military affairs. 30th April 2018.

partnership with Washington, whilst attempting to exercise control over Iranian trade on its soil. The UAE's security concerns have made it one of the biggest buyers of US weaponry. The benefits of this are twofold: firstly, it prolongs the US-UAE security partnership and, secondly, it ensures that the UAE has access to the most sophisticated weapon systems. Thus, it is projected that the UAE will continue to invest heavily in American weapons (Reuters, 2013). What makes the UAE-US–Iran example worth analysing is the complexity and display of innovation. Dubai has always had longstanding commercial, historical and social ties with Iran, while Abu Dhabi enjoys a robust alliance with Washington (Sherwood, 2016). The UAE has, thus, demonstrated a high degree of dexterity in terms of these economic and political strategies, which are geared towards preserving the country's national security. These strategies represent an example of the indigenous security strategies used by small states (Prasad, 2003), many of whom display a high level of innovation as a result of the different modes of agency available to them (Cooper and Shaw, 2009). Overall, the UAE has a lot to gain from the US-UAE-Iran nexus when it comes to economic growth and domestic security. This shows the UAE's pragmatism and the extent to which its two-pronged, smart-policy approach is mitigating the threats its facing by leveraging the scope and diplomatic means of its power to make up for its lack of military power vis-à-vis its larger adversaries. It also shows that the UAE is capable of deviating from textbook small state security strategies. The UAE's posture transformation, however, has coincided with regional instability. In response to the political events of the Arab uprisings, the UAE developed regional policies which shed light on what risk-diversification strategies look like in practice, especially in the face of revolutions.

The UAE attempted to use its 'smart policy' in Libya, Yemen, Syria and Egypt in the post-Arab uprisings period. The UAE's reaction to Morsi's ascension to power demonstrate how power in scope, cost, weight and economic means can influence political transitions in a

neighbouring country. The UAE suspended its proposed aid to Egypt when the Morsi won the presidency, but as soon as he fell, it provided US$3 billion in loans to Egypt (Ulrichsen, 2016b). This was part of its plan to curb the Muslim Brotherhood's regional influence (Watanabe, 2014). The UAE's effort to influence change in the region by denying certain groups financial aid forms a part of a wider change, namely the departure from Western-derived normative foundations towards a multipolar power structure with different normative perspectives (Ulrichsen, 2013). The UAE's ultimate goal is to simultaneously undercut Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood. As Chapter Two demonstrates, the UAE has come to view the MB as a threat to its domestic and regional survival after the Arab uprisings. This plan does not appear to hinge on Washington's support (Young, 2015; Sherwood, 2016). It is worth emphasising that this coincided with a period of collective uncertainty regarding Obama's foreign policy on the Middle East in general and the Gulf in particular. The Gulf states were disappointed by the withdrawal of US support for Hosni Mubarak at the beginning of the Arab uprisings. Furthermore, American criticism of the GCC's decision to dispatch troops to Manama as part of Operation Peninsula Shield was not well received by Gulf leaders (Clinton, 2014). Indeed, decision-makers in the UAE and the Gulf continued to question:

> …whether, after such a long period of close relations, the US still perceives a vital interest in the stability of the Gulf region as in the past … even if there are statements from Washington underscoring its continued commitment, it is not clear whether the GCC states can continue to rely on US policy to not only protect the region but to also move it toward a more stable future (Sager, 2013).

Such sentiments were reinforced by Obama's failure to act on Syria and the announcement of the nuclear agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and the 5+1 states in summer 2015. On top of this, the publishing of the 'Obama Doctrine' report in the Atlantic magazine confirmed what they had long suspected: America's departure from the

region. What made it worse was Obama's description of them as 'free riders' (Goldberg, 2016).

The UAE expected the 'American security umbrella' to shrink as a result of shifting strategic

priorities.[58] Indeed, two years prior to the release of said report, the UAE's ambassador to

Washington, Yousef al-Otaiba, had captured the leadership's mood regarding Obama's

changing geopolitical priorities in an op-ed for *Foreign Policy*:

> In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), we know also that a security partnership
> can only be strengthened by constant interaction. The UAE has proved its
> value and commitment both on and off the battlefield, alongside the United
> States. As a five-time participant in multinational peacekeeping coalitions,
> we have been fighting together for more than 12 years in Afghanistan, and
> in Libya we conducted joint air missions. Ongoing UAE-U.S. intelligence
> cooperation has disrupted illicit money and arms flows. And joint naval and
> air operations maintain freedom of navigation in the Gulf.

He also stated that a strong partnership was needed between the Gulf and the US to achieve

their collective goals in the region, which al-Otaiba listed as encompassing cooperation on an

economic stabilisation plan for Egypt, cracking down on the transfer of funds to extremist

elements in Syria, building governance capacity in Libya, and ensuring Iran was contained.

Hussein Ibish noted in an op-ed for the UAE's *The National* how the mood among officials

and policymakers in the UAE had continued to worsen, especially after they learned about

Obama's recent 'free riders' remarks:

> The sources and context of friction in the relationship are no mystery,
> especially persistent questions about the Obama administration's intentions
> behind the nuclear agreement with Iran. More surprising was the extent to
> which these anxieties became so entrenched they actually resist reassurances
> and evidence to the contrary (Ibish, 2016).

The stated commitment of Obama during his second-term to a 'pivot to Asia,' and implicitly

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[58] Author's interview with a think-tank director. Abu Dhabi, 5th March 2018.

away from the region was not well received by the US's Gulf Arab partners and signalled that the US was not willing to act, especially militarily, as the guarantor of the regional order that it has been in the past (Ibish, 2017). This prompted the UAE to diversify its network of alliances and avoid relying on a single security guarantor, especially as the GCC's future continues to look bleak and uncertain following the Gulf crisis of 2017. The UAE's decision to bandwagon with Saudi Arabia is evidence of this. Aside from that, and as the next section shows, the UAE also took part in joint Egyptian-Emirati air strikes against Islamist militias in Libya without the knowledge or consent of Obama's administration (Chandrasekaran, 2014; Kingsley et al., 2014). The assertiveness can be attributed to the UAE's risk perception and serves as evidence that the decades-old security order is being rearticulated (Sherwood, 2016; Young, 2015).

Making sense of the UAE's intervention in Libya

The UAE's decision to take part in the military operation against Ghaddafi was motivated by two factors (Rickli, 2016). Firstly, it was to eliminate the threat emanating from the spread of revolutionary forces in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. The country viewed the short-lived Islamist gains with disdain as they posed a direct threat to its security.[59] According to a prominent Emirati scholar, the Emirati approach favoured stability and regime continuity in the region over change, in stark contrast to the Qatari approach, which leaned towards wholesale political change.[60] The second factor relates to the country's management of military and security alliances, which dates to the 1990s. As mentioned, the decline of traditional Arab powers in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings has left a power vacuum, which the UAE has since sought to fill. Whether the UAE has succeeded in filling that vacuum is still up for debate

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[59] Author's interview with an expert on regional political Islam. Dubai, 8th March 2018.
[60] Author's interview with a thinktank director. Abu Dhabi, 5th March 2018.

according to various Emirati and non-Emirati scholars of the Middle East. Nevertheless, a few of the Emirati participants who took part in this study have argued that the UAE is now a major regional force.[61]

The rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Libya convinced the UAE to take part in the international coalition against Ghaddafi. The late Libyan strongman was not popular in the Gulf due to his hawkish policies. The UAE chaired the GCC meeting which called for the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya in March 2011. At the political level, the UAE was one of the Arab states who responded to Clinton's call to take part in the military operation. The UAE's participation and endorsement of the military operation was key in terms of providing legitimacy for NATO's intervention. However, when the first strikes against Ghaddafi's regime were televised, the UAE said that it would no longer take part in the military campaign and would only provide humanitarian aid to the Libyan people instead. The decision was taken to avoid being portrayed as taking part in an operation that attracted fierce criticism in the Arab world. The country's regional standing was at stake and the country did not wish to tarnish its image (Rickli, 2016). Although Hilary Clinton succeeded in convincing the UAE to fulfil its military commitments, the UAE continued to portray its contribution as humanitarian. The UAE foreign minister stated that the UAE wanted to see a united Libyan nation that enjoyed 'peace and stability and striving to employ its natural resources to achieve a true renaissance for its suffering people' (Abdullah bin Zayed in UAE Interact, 2011).

Overall, Libya also represented a good opportunity for the UAE to shape the perceptions of its allies that it had what it took to be a reliable military partner which would bear the costs of its

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[61] After conducting extensive interviews with nearly 20 Emirati and non-Emirati experts and decision-makers, the general consensus was that the UAE is still in the process of filling said vacuum.

participation in a NATO-led operation (Rickli, 2016). The UAE took the lead within the GCC on Libya and lobbied the Arab League to back the air campaign, which, in conjunction with a UN mandate, signalled the beginning of the military operation against Ghaddafi. The GCC, represented by the UAE and Qatar, deployed special operations forces on the ground to arm and train the rebel forced before their march to Tripoli (Larrabee, 2013). The UAE dispatched its fighter jets to take part in the NATO-led no-fly zone enforcement, supported ground target strike operations and launched direct air-strikes against regime targets (Rickli, 2016). Aside from its military contributions, the UAE formally accepted the Benghazi-based Transitional National Council as the single representative of the Libyan people and promised to provide it with financial backing. In March 2012, it transferred old combat aircraft to the post-Ghaddafi government (Katzman, 2013). This holistic type of engagement, which involves political, military, diplomatic and economic aspects – from beginning to end – is unconventional according to small state literature. The UAE's initial plan was to approach the Libya issue multilaterally instead of going down the bilateral route.

In 2014, the situation in Libya worsened after the second Libyan Civil War broke out. The conflict had its roots in the controversial election of the government of the House of Representatives and its rival, the General National Congress-endorsed government, which was established following the conclusion of the NATO-led military campaign. The House of Representatives was backed by the Libyan National Army, led by General Khalifa Haftar, who was supported by the UAE and Egypt. The UAE's support of Haftar came in the form of airstrikes being launched against Islamist groups. The mission has been covert for the most part. Nevertheless, the UAE's involvement in it was a watershed moment in Emirati history. (Sanger and Schmitt, 2011), especially given that it did not seek America's endorsement prior to taking part in the conflict. Symbolically, it was significant because it showed that the UAE

was willing to diverge with Washington on policy matters.[62] Furthermore, as stated above, this bold move was a manifestation of the Gulf's stance towards Washington's lack of interest in Gulf security. However, it must be noted that the UAE realises that it needs Washington's assistance to keep the Iranian regime at bay. Still, the UAE's security policy was gravitating more towards a Gulf-centric one with less bandwagoning, which shows that the UAE realised that it needs to be self-reliant when it comes to its security (Ibish, 2017). This development extends to all the Gulf states, which agreed to form a joint GCC military command in Riyadh based on the NATO military structure model. However, the recent Gulf crisis of 2017 has cast a shadow of doubt over its future. Still, there might be the possibility of a UAE-Saudi joint military command as bilateral relations continue to improve between the two countries. This proposal also led to the creation of a coalition of Islamic countries led by Saudi Arabia to counter terrorism (CNN, 2017) Although recent development were perceived as damaging to US-UAE relations, their partnership still forms the backbone of the UAE's security policy in spite of the changes.[63]

Overall, Emirati leadership's decision to take part in the NATO-led military campaign in Libya has its roots in the UAE's investment in enhancing its hard-power capabilities and the leadership's willingness to improve its military strength through experience. As stated, the recent involvement of the UAE in Libya marked a move away from its long-standing 'armed neutrality' status (Rickli, 2008). This, however, can be interpreted as the logical way forward for the leadership's chosen survival strategy, relying on credibility and focusing on state-building exercises. As far as this thesis is concerned, it is necessary to underline the weight of

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[62] Author's interview with a DC-based expert on regional affairs, 13th April 2018.
[63] Author's interview with a leading expert on small state security, 19th April 2018.

legitimacy concerns in the decision to dispatch forces to Libya.

The UAE was not immune to the effects of the Arab uprisings both at the domestic and regional levels. Therefore, it can be argued that the UAE's military campaign in Libya prioritised securing legitimacy at a domestic level. Credibility remains a driving factor of Emirati security policies, but a case can be made for the leadership moving away from territorial defence to internal security. This is why scholars often argue that the state moved from a strategy relying on regime security to a main concern for state security (Soubrier, 2016). But this argument loses its strength when we understand the UAE's security strategy sees regime security as being inextricably linked with the security of the state. The UAE's response to the Bahraini uprisings points to similar, broader concerns regarding a legitimacy crisis within the Gulf. It is worth mentioning that the UAE threatened to withdraw from a NATO-led coalition in Libya if former US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton did not refrain from criticising the GCC's decision to dispatch police forces to Bahrain (Cooper and Worth, 2012). The UAE thus leveraged its participation in the military campaign against Ghaddafi to prevent any attempts to criticise its security policies.

The UAE has gradually become more assertive and used its unique resources – natural resources, strategic location and trade – to create tangible forms of power. As mentioned previously, this transformation began in 2004. The shift is visible in the approach the UAE is adopting to deal with its external opportunities and challenges (Sherwood, 2016). According to the literature, foreign policy in the Arabian Gulf, which involves security and diplomatic decisions, is said to be linked the personalities of the leaders, in contrast to most other countries, where the concerned state institutions are more mature (Kamrava, 2011). Since 2004, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, among others, began pursuing a more ambitious, globalised foreign policy, expanding Sheikh Zayed's policy without changing its core ideals (Abdulla,

2012). In terms of its scope, the UAE prioritises the Gulf, the Arab world and the Muslim world while constantly striving to build favourable ties with states outside the Arab and Muslim world. In the last decade, the UAE began to pursue a security, economy and identity-oriented foreign policy strategy. According to Abdulla (2012), the UAE focuses on 'the Arab world for identity, the West for security and most recently Asia for the economy', and among these, the economic aspect reflects a realistic approach to international relations. From the perspective of relational power, the UAE's vast financial resources give it power, enabling it to spread its cultural, diplomatic and political influence, and also power in terms of costs, domain and scope (Sherwood, 2016). It is imperative in order to simplify this to draw a distinction between the country's soft and hard power capabilities. Aside from its financial resources, the country's economic model is its main tool of soft power on a regional level. Many neighbouring countries aspire to emulate the UAE's development model, according to an Emirati commentator.[64] Since the country has long been prioritising territorial integrity and the modernisation of its armed forces, its hard power capabilities have grown alongside its existing soft power reservoir, creating a security strategy that relies on hard and soft power for survival. It is worth noting, once again, that the rise of the UAE coincided with the fall of the traditional centres of power in the region.[65]

The UAE's role as a producer of global economic security

Globalisation has played an important role in modifying small states' external environments, facilitating political innovation and domestic restructuring to foster economic growth and technological development, which, in a way, challenges traditional notions of power. Indeed,

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[64] Author's interview with a leading local commentator. Dubai, 10th of February 2018
[65] Author's interview with a thinktank director. Abu Dhabi, 5th March 2018.

some small states have been able to take advantage of this to go from being strictly security consumers to security producers by contributing to the production of other types of security than defence capabilities, such as economic security (Steinmetz and Wivel, 2010). The UAE, as a case in point, has been at the forefront of the production of global economic security since the establishment of its sovereign wealth fund in 1976. The translation of economic security into power allows states to carve out new and unique security strategies. During the period between 2002 and 2006, the UAE nearly doubled its annual oil revenue to about US$327 billion per year (Sherwood, 2016). As the UAE's wealth increased, this dimension of the UAE's national profile began to transcend its 'smallness' and gave it a sufficient amount of leverage at the international level. Beyond the classic small-state constraints such as low population and finite military resources or land, wealth can bestow power upon a state actor if goals are defined in terms of scope and domain. This was the role the UAE leaders wanted for their country: to be an influential player regionally and internationally (Al-Suwaidi, 2011). As stated, the state's ability to use its financial resources to influence others to act in its interest is important as far as risk diversification strategies are concerned. This is important for a state like the UAE, which is still in the process of consolidating itself as a military power in the region (Baldwin, 2013; Sherwood, 2016). Much has been made of the assertiveness that has come to define the UAE's recent approach to regional affairs, but as this thesis explains, this assertiveness predates the Arab uprisings and has its roots in the few years that preceded Sheikh Zayed's passing. If anything, the post-Arab uprisings period showcased the extent to which the UAE's approach has changed.

The UAE's foreign and security policies do not exist in a vacuum; they exist in a setting of economic globalisation and the aftermath of the 2007-2008 financial crisis. The UAE, along with a few GCC states, have emerged as pivots around which shifts in the global balance of

power took place. This was the case after the financial crisis. At a macro level, the UAE, especially Abu Dhabi, did not feel the impact of the 2007-2008 crisis as much as other countries did. This allowed the UAE to strategically use its wealth at a time of global recession to shift future geo-economic patterns in a manner that fulfils its goals and interests. Importantly, this was not achieved by strictly relying on wealth. Indeed, the UAE's leverage in terms of energy and trade were combined with strategic overseas investment geared towards increasing the UAE's growing influence in the global economy. This was made possible by the world's second-largest sovereign wealth fund (SWF): the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) (Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, 2014). Established in 1976, ADIA currently manages assets worth an estimated US$700 billion (SWF Institute, 2019).

Country	Sovereign Wealth Fund Name	Assets USD-Bil	Inception	Origin
Norway	Government Pension Fund – Global	1074.60	1990	Oil
China	China Investment Corporation	941.4	2007	Non-Commodity
UAE – Abu Dhabi	Abu Dhabi Investment Authority	697	1976	Oil
Kuwait	Kuwait Investment Authority	592	1953	Oil
China – Hong Kong	Hong Kong Monetary Authority Investment Portfolio	522.6	1993	Non-Commodity
Saudi Arabia	SAMA Foreign Holdings	515.6	1952	Oil
China	SAFE Investment Company	441**	1997	Non-Commodity
Singapore	Government of Singapore Investment Corporation	390	1981	Non-Commodity
Singapore	Temasek Holdings	375**	1974	Non-Commodity

Figure 11. SWF ranking by assets under management (source: SWF Institute, 2019)

In recent years, Khaleeji SWFs have injected billions of dollars into some of the world's biggest investment banks. These include Abu Dhabi's acquisition of a stake in Citigroup and Kuwait's

injection of capital into Merrill Lynch. These investments are supposed to help stabilise financial markets. John Lipsky, former deputy managing director at the IMF, once stated that SWFs from oil-rich nations tended to be long-term investors who rarely withdrew their funds and thus were able 'to withstand market pressure in times of crisis and dampen volatility' (Bahgat, 2008).

According to Al-Bishi (2014), ADIA wealth provided a lifeline to financial markets during the 2007-2008 global crisis. It provided liquidity to US firms such as Merrill Lynch and Citigroup and later provided emergency funding to European governments which were on the brink of bankruptcy (Sherwood, 2016). The survival formula for small states includes efforts to spread their influence on the global stage, and the UAE was capable of doing that. It even competed with larger and traditionally more influential states. As the UAE emerged as an influential player following the global crisis, it aimed to convince the International Monetary Fund to make reforms which would reflect its weight in the global economy in exchange for money (Ulrichsen, 2012). As the governor of the UAE Central Bank stated: if the GCC states were given more voice, they would provide funds. But they would not be doing so without being acknowledged and recognised (Reuters, 2008). Overall, the UAE is now part of the global system of power, politics and policymaking. Oversight of international financial institutions and energy governance became staples of the UAE's foreign policy (Ulrichsen, 2013). This remodelling has transformed the UAE as an active player in the global debate on climate change, showcasing its innovative approach to constructively promoting security (Al Suwaidi, 2011). Small states commonly use membership in international organisations as a means of exerting influence.[66]

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[66] Examples of this include the UAE's civil nuclear programme and that it hosts the headquarters of the

SWFs serve a multitude of important functions, especially for a small state such as the UAE. First, they provide a source of capital for future generations, especially in countries where future generations may no longer be able to rely on natural resources for a steady flow of revenue. Indeed, the UAE believes that long-term economic security can be achieved through economic diversification.[67] The country does not want to fall victim to the 'Dutch disease' and squander short-lived oil wealth in a way that severely undermines the economy's long-run potential.

A good example of a successful economic diversification strategy is the small nation of Kiribati. Kirbati is a collection of islands in the Pacific Ocean (formerly known as the Gilbert Islands) with a population of under 100,000 (Bernstein, Lerner and Schoar, 2013). For many decades, the country's number one export was guano (bird droppings), which was used as fertiliser. The authorities there established the Kiribati Revenue Equalization Reserve Fund in the 1950s and imposed a tax on production by foreign firms. Although the last guano was produced in the late 1970s, this sovereign fund remains a key economic contributor. Having amassed nearly $600 million, it is ten times the size of the country's GDP, and the interest generated by the fund represents 30 percent of the country's revenue.

Secondly, SWFs can play a stabilising role by reducing the volatility of government revenues. Countries whose economic security relies on the export of commodities can be harmed if the price of the commodities decreases. For instance, the UAE suffered considerable economic loss in the mid-1980s and late 1990s when oil prices plummeted. SWFs can serve as holding companies, in which the government places its strategic investments. Examples of these

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International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

[67] See Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 and UAE Vision 2021.

include Abu-Dhabi based investment vehicles Mubadala and Tawazun Economic Council. Indeed, leaders may see fit to invest in domestic or foreign firms for strategic purposes,[68] and the sovereign funds provide a way to hold and manage these stakes. Earmarking a percentage of revenues as an investment fund may reduce the risk of wealth being squandered, assuming the SWF is properly managed (Bernstein, Lerner and Schoar, 2013).

In recent years, GCC leaders have become important players in terms of the governance of globalisation, and the UAE is now an active player when it comes to global governance. This has been identified as one of the UAE's strategic goals by its vice president, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed Al-Maktoum, in his book, *My Vision*, in which he stresses the importance of being innovative to reap the benefits of the 'globalised era' (2006). It is in this vein that the UAE has shifted towards being a 'player' in cooperative security schemes without being completely reliant on its allies or security guarantors. Within those cooperative schemes, the UAE supports the strategic interests of its allies. For instance, it cooperates with the US on energy policy, which enables it to avert an economic crisis with its global influence remaining intact (Sherwood, 2016). Another component of the UAE's survival formula lies in its proactive approach to relations with fast growing countries. The UAE believes that improving relations with these states is key, as it sees them as being at the heart of re-articulating international governance structures. As the next section, which analyses recent China-Emirati relations shows, the UAE has adopted a holistic approach to foreign relations, which now includes security cooperation. The aim is to expand and diversify the UAE's current network of allies and avoid being reliant on a single security guarantor. The UAE's Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Minister Sheikh Abdulla bin Zayed, has stated: 'The UAE looks

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[68] As a matter of practice, ADIA does not invest in the United Arab Emirates (ADIA's official website).

forward to bolstering our relations with the fast growing countries, such as India, Russia, China, Brazil and South Africa' (The Business Year, 2012).

Indeed, establishing strong economic and security ties with emerging economies is an important step for the Emirati leadership as it seeks to cement the country's position in a new multipolar world order. In effect, the UAE is hoping to play a role in redirecting old geo-economic power set-ups, which conceptually translates into the 'economic centre of gravity' of the world and global economic 'hot spots' (Grether and Mathys, 2010; Quah, 2011; Sherwood, 2016). It is worth reiterating that this reflects the UAE's broader strategy of building amicable relations with states which have plenty to offer by means of defence and economic security in return.

Trade relations form an integral part of the UAE's constructive engagement policy as well. The UAE's focus was to build new trade relations, especially with emerging countries, but not at the expense of its traditional allies. The emerging Asian economies provide a good example of this. Non-oil US-UAE trade in 2011 reached US$20 billion compared to US$11 billion in 2010 (ECSSR, 2012). In spite of the economic crisis, UAE-EU trade relations improved noticeably. Over the last few years, the UAE has successfully established strong relations with various international powers, which, in turn, have allowed it to realise its soft power capabilities to their full potential. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2014), the UAE's trade diplomacy has expanded in recent years to new regions such as South and Central America, Africa, Central Asia and the Pacific, where several embassies and consulates are now established.

In this sense, the UAE is growing its influence, not 'swapping' it, and this should be understood as a risk-diversification strategy. Another way to leverage finance is through providing financial aid, which has been shown to bolster security through scope, domain, weight, costs

and symbolic means (Sherwood, 2016). In 2010, the UAE provided AED 2.81 billion to help its development, humanitarian and charity programmes abroad (Al-Awadhi, 2010). The UAE prioritised this aspect of its foreign policy and became the world's largest provider of developmental aid in 2017 according to a report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The UAE's total contribution of developmental aid increased nine-fold between 2010 and 2017. With a total contribution of AED 19.32 billion of foreign developmental aid in 2017, the UAE spent 1.31 per cent of its GDP on foreign aid – almost twice the global target of 0.7 per cent set by the United Nations. The total contributions made in 2017 represent a 23.72 per cent increase from the previous year, when the country contributed AED 15.57 billion (*The National*, 2018). Nearly 43 per cent of the UAE's aid was distributed across Asia; about 28 per cent was provided to African nations and 23 per cent to Europe. Also, the UAE donated nearly AED 3 billion to Yemen (WAM, 2017). The reason for prioritising foreign aid in Emirati diplomacy has been described by its vice president as follows: 'The good of the UAE is for all humanity, that is how [UAE Founding Father Sheikh] Zayed founded [the country].' (Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed's official Twitter account, 2017) The UAE sees itself as a legitimate force for the good in a region mired in conflict and turmoil.

According to bin Rashed, Sheikh Zayed's name was synonymous with generosity and kindness, and the current generation of Emirati leaders hope to extend this legacy. It goes without saying that this is also an attempt to garner domestic, regional and international legitimacy. As diplomacy assumes greater importance in small states' survival strategies, aid-based diplomacy enables a state to build institutional alliances with international organisations and test its diplomatic capabilities (Badrakhan, 2013; Archer, 2010). For example, Japan used its aid-based diplomacy to achieve its commercial goals –expanding exports and ensuring

access to required raw materials imports. Indeed, commerce has played a significant role in the allocation and use of its foreign aid. However, this purpose formed a part of the government's fundamental goals of prosperity, autonomy and international prestige (Lancaster, 2007).

However, aid disbursement must also be viewed as a security strategy, especially when tied to military forces or given in the context of conflict or conflict resolution (O'Hanlon, 1994). The Arab uprisings demonstrated how aid has political and military dimensions. Furthermore, aid distribution enables access to the global political stage, which can balance internal and external pressures (Archer, 2010). In another example, the UAE has used economic investment as a tool to garner support and direct it. It gave a $3 billion line of credit to the Serbian government to help it avoid defaulting, but the money was tied to a commitment. Serbia was required to support UAE defence, food and aviation interests (Karasik, 2013). Food security in the UAE remains a key strategic security consideration (Bailey and Willoughby, 2013).

The motives of aid giving have long been discussed in the literature on foreign aid. Much of the discussion has centred on the opposition between the self-interest of the donor and altruistic dimension, which relates to the recipient's needs (Berthelemy, 2005). The former refers to the geopolitical and economic gains pursued by the donor, whereas the altruistic dimension reflects the morality of aid giving as well as an appreciation of the recipient's needs. To help conceptualise why the UAE continues to provide foreign aid, it is important to identify the overarching goals that inform the process and situate it in a region-friendly setting: Arabism and Islam are the main legitimising agents in this formula due to their strong popular appeal. Bearing these questions in mind will enable researchers and scholars to tie this into broader discussions on the state's legitimacy and survival.
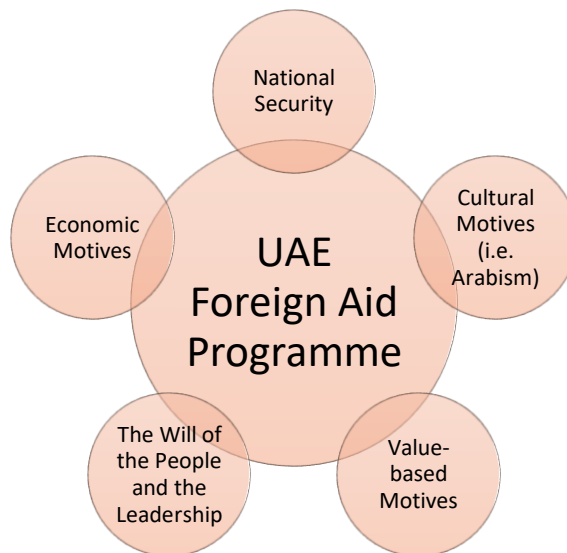
Figure 12: What does the UAE's foreign-aid programme reflect? (Source: Al-Mezaini, 2012)

How the UAE's space programme ties into its long-term survival

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the role envisaged by the leadership for the UAE lies at the heart of these efforts to cement its position as a leading player in a turbulent region. This also extends to state-led efforts to reshape Emirati identity by teaching citizens the principles of entrepreneurship and risk taking, as Chapter Three explains. In line with this, the government announced the launch of the Emirates Mars Mission Project, with the President establishing the UAE Space Agency (UAESA). Work on developing the first Arabic-Islamic probe to be sent to Mars is well under way. It is worth noting the emphasis on the Arab and Islamic aspect of this mission: the UAE is communicating to the Arab and Muslim nations that it is willing to contribute to the advancement of the region. This explains the reason the probe was named the 'Hope Probe.' (MBRSC, 2018). The country is therefore carrying the hopes of the Arab and Muslim world in this mission, which will have an overall positive impact on its regional prestige and legitimacy. The probe will be built by an Emirati team of engineers and

experts before it is sent to explore Mars. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum announced: 'We chose the epic challenge of reaching Mars because epic challenges inspire us and motivate us. The moment we stop taking on such challenges is the moment we stop moving forward' (Mohammed Bin Rashid's official Twitter account in MBRSC, 2014).

As the UAE continues to diversify its economy, the study of space science and technology have become increasingly important. According to the chairman of the UAE Space Agency, Khalifa Al-Romaithi, the space sector is seen as a pillar of diversity, both in terms of education and technological development: 'Entering the space industry is about much more than rocket launches; it also requires advanced facilities and specialised research and education programmes' (Oxford Business Group, 2017). Al-Romaithi revealed that the UAE is developing a long-term strategic plan for space innovation and exploration, both of which have been identified as key national security and economic priorities.

It is interesting how advancement in the space sector has been identified as a national security priority by the UAE's leadership. This shows an awareness of the growing importance of the space industry on a global scale: it is currently valued between US$205 and $250 billion and is projected to increase to $552 billion by 2030, according to a report issued by the UK Parliament in 2017. The UAE aims to achieve greater economic security and global prestige by becoming a major player in the global space industry. Identifying space sector advancement as a national security priority reveals the duality that lies at the heart of the UAE's security policy. First of all, it showcases its pioneering approach to domestic and external security on a regional scale. Secondly, it provides another example of small-state pragmatism and bandwagoning found in the literature. Indeed, the UAE has followed in the United States' footsteps. The US has long prioritised the advancement of its domestic space sector as part of its National Security Strategy. While unveiling the strategy, President Trump emphasised the

need to maintain US leadership in space and encourage a healthy domestic space sector (National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2017).

Al-Romaithi further states that the UAE aims to become one of the top countries worldwide in space technology by 2021, and that the Hope Probe's journey represents an important step in that direction. The Hope Probe's mission is encouraging domestic innovation in advanced technologies, boosting cooperation between the UAE and its international partners, as well as inspiring a generation of Emirati youth to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. This goes hand in hand with what was discussed in Chapter Three regarding the leadership's goal to create a science-oriented Emirati workforce. According to Al-Romaithi, the government has always felt that such an initiative was needed at a time of regional turmoil and instability as it inspires the Arab and Muslim youth and gives them something to strive for in the future (Oxford Business Group, 2017).

The UAE is the only Arab country pursuing space-oriented diplomacy, with the goal of boosting its international and regional reputation. The KhalifaSat project[69] is the most recent example of this. It is expected to mark a breakthrough for the national space industry (WAM, 2018b). People around the world will be able to tune in to the live launch of the satellite built by a team of young Emirati engineers in their late twenties. The leadership has high hopes for the launch of KhalifaSat. It will improve the UAE's position among world's leading countries in space technology, according to the UAE's official news agency (WAM, 2018b). Currently, China, India, Japan and South Korea are the most influential states in the realm of space diplomacy; they have a wealth of experience when it comes to using it in their foreign policies.

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[69] KhalifaSat is the first ever Emirati-built satellite. It has been named after the country's president, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, and was scheduled to be launched into space on 29th October 2018.

This explains in part why the UAE has been keen to improve relations with these countries. Overall, Janardhan (2018) identifies five key benefits of having a robust space diplomacy:

1. It is a tool of soft power and global and regional prestige.

2. It is an instrument of foreign aid and assistance, which can help the UAE further diversify the type of foreign aid it provides.

3. It can attract foreign direct investment (FDI) towards the development of the local space industry.

4. It can promote commerce in areas of science and technology. The Japanese model is perhaps the most relevant to the UAE, as the country is using its space programme to fulfil its commercial and national security goals.

5. Space diplomacy can enable the UAE to play a bigger role in the global space governance regime.

The UAE's ongoing expansion of its network of allies: a case study of Emirati-Chinese relations

Due to the GCC countries' dependence on Britain for its security, China was highly critical of the Trucial States prior to the establishment of the UAE. This was evident as China used its political, ideological and material resources to offer support for the South Yemenis and the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf's[70] (PFLOAG) efforts to liberate the region from imperialist British rule and their so-called 'lackeys', namely the Gulf sheikdoms. However, as China's foreign policy on the Gulf became more pragmatic in nature, China became keen to help the newly established Gulf states to unite and manage their own

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[70] This was later renamed the 'Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf'.

affairs following the departure of the British from the region (Binhuwaidin, 2001).

The first documented event in UAE-Chinese relations took place when the UAE's founder, Sheikh Zayed, sent a message to the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai on December 3, 1971, a day after the UAE was founded. The UAE's message was generic yet positive at the same time. Premier Zhou responded with a message to inform Sheikh Zayed of China's recognition of the UAE (Binhuwaidin, 2001). Both parties expressed willingness to further political and economic relations between the two countries, although the establishment of diplomatic relations happened at a later stage. China preferred to wait for several days before formally recognising the UAE. This was mainly due to its existing relations with the Shah government in Tehran. The Chinese did want to antagonise Iran lest they refuse to recognise the UAE. This was a possibility due to Iran and the emirates of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, who later joined the federation in 1972, having an ongoing dispute over the Iranian occupation of Sharjah's island of Abu Musa and Ras al-Khaimah's islands of the Greater and Lesser Tunbs (Al-Alkim, 1989).

Commercial ties grew stronger between the two countries despite the lack of formal diplomatic relations. The value of Chinese exports to the emirates increased from US$3.81 million in 1969 to US$34.86 million in 1974, then to US$80.71 million in 1979 and to US$100.67 million in 1981. Improving trade relations led to the establishment of formal political ties between the countries. Overall, the growth of Emirati-Chinese commercial ties can be attributed to the following: 1. Dubai's growing status as a trade-point in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula; and 2. The lack of political tension between both parties due to the absence of political relations between the UAE and Taiwan (Binhuwaidin, 2001). The past decade has witnessed a significant increase in the number of Chinese tourists traveling to the Gulf, with the majority heading for Dubai. Given Dubai's popularity as a global hotspot for tourism, it was inevitable

that China's rapidly growing numbers of international tourists would begin visiting the city at some point. Further facilitating this was the decision made by the Chinese government to grant the UAE approved destination status (Armijo, 2012). This has officially allowed the UAE to advertise itself as a tourist destination in the Chinese market. In 2010, approximately 150,000 Chinese citizens visited Dubai; that number rose to 300,000 in 2011 according to the Dubai government (Kapur, 2011).

As of 2012, Emirati-Chinese trade made up a third of the total trade between China and the GCC, which amounts to $100 billion; and nearly 70 per cent of Chinese exports to the Emirates were re-exported, making it a key economic and strategic partner to China (ECSSR, 2012). Accordingly, a 30 per cent increase in bilateral trade with China took place over the past five years; total trade increased from US$46 billion in 2013 and to US$53.5 billion in 2017 (Rahman, 2019). Economic co-operation is expanding into areas such as renewable energy and telecommunications. The broadening relationship reflects deepening political ties (Bardsley, 2010). The strategic importance of this bilateral relationship is clear to both parties as China relies on oil to help grow its already growing economy. The UAE leaders also aim to use China's position as a permanent member at the UN Security Council. Thus, building favourable relations with China fulfils the UAE's strategic goal of expanding its current network of allies, considering that overreliance on the US as a security guarantor has proven unsustainable (Sherwood, 2016). This has become an attainable goal for the Emirati leadership following President Xi Jinping's visit to the UAE in July 2018. This was Xi's first overseas visit since he secured a second five-year term as President in March. The main reasons behind the visit were clear from the beginning: China hoped to expand its influence in the region and meet its domestic energy demands. Just ahead of Xi's visit, the government-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) announced it had awarded contracts worth $1.6 billion to its Chinese

counterpart, the China National Petroleum Company, to conduct a massive offshore and onshore seismic survey. CNPC is China's largest state-run oil company and has already invested money in both onshore and offshore oil concessions in the UAE. The UAE is also home to 200,000 Chinese expatriate workers according to Emirati government statistics (Rising, 2018).

Dr. Ali Obaid Al Dhaheri, the UAE Ambassador to China, has emphasised that the volume of economic and trade exchange between the UAE and China reached more than $50 billion in 2017 and has expressed the wish that this figure would double over the next ten years. This statement was confirmed by the UAE's Minister for Economic Affairs, Sultan Al-Mansoori, during his speech at the UAE-China Economic Forum, organised as part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to the UAE (Rahman, 2019). President Xi concluded his three-day visit to the UAE by signing a raft of deals that aim to further bilateral relations in the following areas:[71]

1. Political field

2. Economic and financial fields

3. Enhancing cooperation in innovation, technology transfer, economic diversification and data exchange areas and relevant information

4. Education, science and technology fields

5. Renewable energy and water

6. Oil and gas

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[71] As this chapter addresses the UAE's post-Arab uprisings security strategy, the following analysis focuses on the areas that relate to the chapter and, by extension, the thesis.

7. Military and law enforcement and security

8. Cultural and humanitarian field

9. Consular cooperation and facilitating movement of citizens

At the political level, both sides have agreed to enhance coordination and communication on issues of mutual concern, especially as the region is undergoing a period of change. The Chinese leadership acknowledged the constructive role played by the UAE in the region and the Emiratis have shown an appreciation of China's 'positive role' on international issues (WAM, 2018). Economically, the UAE voiced its support for the Chinese 'Belt and Road Initiative.' When it comes to military, law enforcement and security cooperation, the UAE has expressed its willingness to improve the existing military ties between the countries. The next step would be to enhance practical cooperation between both armies in various forces and weapons, joint training and training of personnel and other domains through setting up a cooperation mechanism. The UAE is keen to take advantage of Chinese expertise to continue developing its own defence industry. Perhaps what is important here is the commitment to combat all forms of terrorism that threaten peace and security, and ensure security cooperation in this regard. This will definitely aid the UAE in its quest to defeat Islamists in the region, especially given the Chinese's government highly antagonistic view of religion. As the UAE deems political Islam a threat, it is keen to have a strong ally which shares the same perception of Islamists, even though both states may not share the same stance towards religion (WAM, 2018). The UAE's ties with Asian heavyweights such as China and India are no longer confined to just economic, cultural and political ties as recent developments show. There is plenty of evidence that security collaboration is taking place. The UAE is aware that the economic growth of India and China will entail an increased naval presence to protect supply routes in the Indian Ocean, which means they could be called upon to play a protective role in the region.

This undoubtedly presents an opportunity to study this emerging security order. Thus, in the wake of the perceived regional withdrawal of the US, it makes sense that up and coming economic giants such as India and China will be part of the new international security system in the region. Indeed, increased Sino-Indian involvement in the region will benefit the UAE in many ways (Janardhan, 2017).

In conclusion, the UAE's state-building strategies have been evolving quite rapidly since the 1990s following the emergence of new influential actors on the domestic scene. Sheikh Zayed trusted his sons when it came to handling external and internal security, which put them at the forefront of the efforts to strengthen Abu Dhabi's position in the federation and its overall position in the region. At the top of the military institution, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed played a pivotal role in the modernisation of the Emirati armed forces. Thus, the armed forces are at the heart of state-building strategies as these new actors have sought to consolidate their position domestically (Gervais 201).

It is important to understand the dilemma that lies at the heart of the UAE's efforts to survive in this region: there is a double dimension in the UAE's and, by extension, the GCC's, security concerns: the leadership is striving to maintain national security against conventional or asymmetric regional threats and to preserve domestic stability and legitimacy against threats, namely transnational ideological movements. Chief among these is the Muslim Brotherhood, which the UAE continues to view as a threat to its stability (Soubrier 2014a: 67). The events of the 'Arab Spring' had an impact on both aspects: the UAE's leadership treated the regional disorder as a threat to national security, blaming its events for the proliferation of armed groups and terrorism. As far as its political stability is concerned, the UAE viewed the popular uprisings which swept the region with antagonism, especially when protests broke out in neighbouring Bahrain. The concomitant resurgence of political Islam was deemed a threat as

well as the local Islah movement sought to capitalise on the regional victories achieved by fellow Islamists across the region.[72]

Finally, at the crossroads of these two dimensions lies Iran; Emirati leaders feared that the regional disorder would be exploited by the Iranian regime to destabilise them internally and to threaten their interests in the region (Soubrier, 2016). The UAE's overall military policy before the Arab uprisings has been described as 'armed neutrality' with no projection of hard-power capabilities except for peacekeeping purposes. However, after assessing the threats emanating from the Arab uprisings , the Emirati approach to regional security witnessed a display of goal-oriented hard-power capabilities devoid of neutrality.[73] Examples of this are to be found in Bahrain, to which the UAE dispatched law-enforcement personnel to maintain order in Bahrain. However, in Libya, and more recently in Yemen, the UAE has demonstrated clear examples of its willingness to rely on hard power to protect its interests. The rise of the UAE as an assertive military power has its roots in the UAE's proactive use of its soft power capabilities throughout the years (Soubrier, 2016). According to a prominent Emirati scholar, the UAE possesses 'transformative power' in the region, which, in the scholar's own words, can be described as the ability to achieve a favourable outcome in its foreign and security policies. This is courtesy of the UAE's ability to combine soft power with hard power in its security strategy.[74]

In conclusion, the 'Arab Spring' prompted the UAE to develop its security policy and adopt not only a more assertive approach, but also a holistic one which takes into account the

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[72] Author's interview with a think-tank director. Abu Dhabi, 5th March 2018.

[73] Author's interview with a leading expert on small state security. 19th April 2018.

[74] Author's interview with a think-tank director. Abu Dhabi, 5th March 2018.

multifaceted nature of regime and state security vis-à-vis different kinds of threats. This, coupled with the perceived American withdrawal, has paved the way for a more self-reliant security strategy, one that seeks to broaden the UAE's existing alliances to diversify risks. Recent developments in Sino-Emirati relations represent a good case study, especially as they go beyond commercial, diplomatic and cultural ties. Indeed, the UAE's efforts to boost its relations with India and China carry the promise of a robust security alliance. As this chapter has explored, the UAE has taken the lead in defencing its own interests in the region. Its military campaigns in Libya and Yemen are examples of this. The establishment of overseas military bases is a watershed event in recent UAE history in that it represents a clear statement of intent; the country is willing to play a proactive role in eliminating perceived and real threats to its security.

This bodes well for the country's plan to ensure its long-term survival in the post-Arab era, at least in theory. However, it remains to be seen whether the UAE can sustain its interventionist defence policy in the long term, limited as it is by its military size and capabilities. Still, the UAE, has the ability to pursue a strategy of selected interventionism whilst maintaining a hedging strategy that relies on diversifying its current network of allies. The diversification of allies has been made possible through the purchase of arms from multiple countries, as opposed to a handful of countries, whilst ensuring the development of a home-grown defence industry.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The recent wave of Arab uprisings has been a major cause for concern for ruling elites across the Gulf. The concomitant revival of political Islam has demonstrated its potential to challenge the status quo. As a result, the government of the UAE spearheaded a nationwide wave of arrests which targeted members of the pan-Islamist Islah organisation. Overall, however, the UAE is regarded as one of the few regional states to emerge from the 'Arab Spring' unscathed (Lucas, 2014). There are two dominant arguments as to why this is so. First, the UAE, like many of its Khaleeji neighbours, is founded upon robust tribal, clan and family allegiances, which have helped it avoid an otherwise certain legitimacy crisis (Lynch, 2012). Secondly, the ruling bargain fulfils the economic needs of the population in terms of job creation and the welfare state. Indeed, the rentier state has proven malleable enough to accommodate a set of quick-fix packages since the beginning of the Arab protests (Forstenlechner, Rutledge and Alnuaimi, 2012).

However, as this thesis has argued, rentier state theory in its various manifestations falls short of capturing the entire picture when it comes to understanding political survival and legitimacy in post-Arab uprisings UAE. This thesis has attempted to offer a more nuanced approach to understanding the emerging legitimacy and survival formula which are exclusive to the UAE, by rejecting the practice of dealing with the Gulf states as a monolithic bloc. In the case of the UAE, the government has enacted a series of reforms to make it a distinctive Gulf state.

The purpose of this thesis was twofold: firstly, to study the impact of the Arab protests on regime legitimacy in a modernising monarchy, and, secondly, to address the knowledge gaps caused by the paucity of Emirati-led research on post-Arab uprisings UAE. The thesis has focused on the internal and external legitimacy of the state by studying its domestic and

regional response to the Arab uprisings.

To summarise, Chapter One provided an overview of the study of legitimacy in non-democratic states using a Weberian framework. It reviewed the literature on the topics to be discussed in subsequent chapters in order to showcase the current state of understanding regarding regime legitimacy constructs in the UAE. The chapter's main goal was to lay a conceptual foundation for the rest of the thesis.

The second chapter shed light on the MB-affiliated Islah movement. The purpose of this chapter was to showcase the manner in which Islah attempted to contest the legitimacy of the state following the Arab uprisings and the impact this had on the state's domestic and foreign policies. As a result, the UAE changed its domestic and foreign policies in order to defeat Islamists both domestically and regionally. Domestically, the country disbanded the Islah society and arrested its key members. The downfall of UAE's Islamists coincided with the start of a state-led social reform agenda aiming to rearticulate the domestic legitimacy formula by moving away from traditional sources of legitimacy such as religion and the tribe. This reform agenda seeks to foster a new sense of identity reinforced by a modern construct of Emirati citizenship. Chapter Three picked up where the previous chapter ended: its purpose was to critically discuss the topic of state-led citizen building in non-democratic states. In doing so, it drew attention to state-led social reform initiatives in the UAE, which aim to carve out a new meaning of citizenry that adheres to liberal notions and values. The chapter contributed to our understanding of the changing local dynamics in the UAE by arguing that the main driver behind state-led social reform is to reengineer the decades-old rentier mentality, which is viewed with disdain by the leaders. This, as mentioned, represents an evolution of the Emirati national identity, as the government's aim here is to do away with traditional sources of identity which tie into the traditional legitimacy formula. The driving force behind such initiatives is

the country's willingness to weaken the appeal of transnational Islamist movements and to create a more robust sense of national consciousness and belonging to the state and its rulers. It is worth noting that this state-led reform is primarily geared towards the youth; it has come to be viewed as the essence of the UAE's post-Arab uprisings strategy.[75]

Perhaps the country's newfound assertive foreign policy is the best example of this. Chapter Four studied the emergence of the UAE as a key regional player in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. Through the use of role theory, the chapter's goal was to showcase the evolution of the UAE's foreign policy and its approach towards regional issues. This has its roots in the country's national role conceptions, which reflect the way the UAE's rulers view their own country. Chapter Five built on Chapter Four by examining the UAE's evolving security and defence strategy in a post-Arab uprisings context, as the UAE's foreign and security policies are inextricably linked. Indeed, the UAE has carved out a security strategy that exceeds its military and size constraints. The sophisticated and multifaceted approach that the UAE has opted for in its security policy merits study and analysis. For example, the establishment of overseas military bases represents a defining moment in the UAE's history, as do its newly founded space programme and risk diversification strategies. The chapter argued that the UAE has pursued security strategies which defy our conventional understanding of small-state security. The core argument of the chapter was aligned with that of the thesis in general: the UAE is on a steady path to long-term survival. The chapter explored the primary drivers behind the UAE's current security strategy while taking a look at its role as a global producer of economic security. It also stated that the perceived withdrawal of the US from the region has prompted the establishment of relations with emerging global powers such as China and India.

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[75] Author's interview with a leading local commentator. Dubai, 10th February 2018.

The rationale behind exploring these topics was the belief that the UAE's proactive approach to dealing with the perceived threat of the Arab uprisings merits close examination. As the UAE is a geographically small state with far-reaching ambitions, it represents an interesting example of how a small state can alternate between the use of hard power and soft power to achieve its regional ambitions. This duality has broader implications for the study of the UAE's foreign policy and can be examined further in future publications or research papers.

Furthermore, this thesis has aimed to offer an alternative explanation for political legitimacy in the UAE which goes beyond notions of rentierism. This is not to say that rentierism is not an integral part of the legitimacy formula; but the thesis aims to dispel a widely-held belief that a state's legitimacy hinges upon its ability to 'buy off' citizens. As the literature review shows, the tendency to exaggerate the importance of rentierism, while treating citizens as passive subjects whose consent can simply be bought, limits the understanding of the evolving internal and external facets of political legitimacy in the UAE and in other Gulf states. The conceptual framework[76] aims to fill this knowledge gap by drawing the reader's attention to emerging sources of political legitimacy in the UAE at a time when the state is beginning to rely less on traditional sources of legitimacy such as rentierism, tribalism and Islam. What accentuates the emergence of these new pillars of political legitimacy is the redefinition of Emirati identity through state-led citizen-building projects, as Chapter Four explains. While these new facets of legitimacy might at first glance seem unrelated, it is important to be aware of the context and the environment in which they emerged, which was in the aftermath of a watershed event

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[76] The conceptual framework can be found in Chapter One.

that swept the whole region.

To understand the impact the 'Arab Spring' has had on the UAE's stability, we have to examine the UAE's reaction to it, which was driven by the need to maintain the domestic and regional status quo. The response need not be seen as anti-revolutionary: rather, the Arab uprisings forced the country to adopt a more proactive approach to security, one that is at odds with Qatar's approach. Recent changes in the UAE's survival strategy can be traced to external and internal developments.

However, this new legitimacy formula is neither perfect nor set in stone. It is a context-specific model that is exclusive to the UAE, which means that it may not fit other Gulf states. It is also still crystallising: its success or lack thereof will depend on the UAE's ability to continue its efforts to diversify its economy, project power and utilise its foreign aid and investment budgets in the correct manner. The UAE's long-term regional stability will depend on the quality of its allies and the future of its partnerships. Its allies and partnerships will continue to change as the state's strategy evolves and shifts, which might lead to a reorientation of its foreign and regional policies. This can be explored in depth in future research.

The new Emirati identity that is being constructed is worth studying in detail. It is politically conservative, economically neo-liberal and socially progressive. Politically, it favours order even over potentially positive change, because change is seen as disruptive and this new political identity favours stability over change. Economically, it is neo-liberal, very much a believer in free trade, openness and economic growth. This also means that Emiratis have become very critical of the welfare state in an interesting way. Socially, the country is becoming very progressive now – and Emiratis now draw a very clear line on social issues that have their roots in the current political mindset. If social change poses a threat to the status quo, then it is challenged; but if it does not, then the change is accepted. So, fundamentally, as

the UAE is in the process of preserving the state, it is following in the footsteps of Prussia. In Prussia, there was a strong focus on cultural enlightenment: Frederick the Great is famous for saying 'Give me people,' and when the Edict of Nantes was revoked and Huguenots were being slaughtered, he issued the Edict of Potsdam and hosted the Protestants. According to a leading local commentator: 'We do this here – we are willing to accept people who want to work for us and contribute. So in that way, we are continuously accepting people from different places who work within the model that we're building, who share the values we share.[77]

That is, the identity that is being developed stresses the importance of maximising the output of the average Emirati. There is a strong commitment to that new notion of citizenship, which is underpinned by a strong sense of national consciousness.[78] The rhetoric of *tarkeeba*, of Emiratis being a minority under threat, has lost its appeal; the leadership has gone beyond it in such a way that there is now the recognition that expats will always be part of the UAE due to their role in helping the country develop. As such, the old narratives are changing. Many of the debates Emiratis had in the nineties, for instance, have ceased to exist. An Abu Dhabi-based think-tank director has argued that this represents positive change because people will no longer invoke tribal and religious arguments during transitory periods or watershed events; they will instead focus on bettering their own nation.[79]

For Emiratis, loyalty is no longer based on the welfare state: leadership and legitimacy are garnered on the basis of overall performance. It used to be the case that political apathy guaranteed access to the welfare state, but that is no longer the case as the formula has changed;

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[77] Author's interview with a Dubai-based local commentator, 10th February 2018

[78] Author's interview with a DC-based regional expert, 13th April 2018.

[79] Author's interview with a thinktank director. Abu Dhabi, 5th March 2018.

political acquiescence guarantees access to security nowadays, especially after the Arab uprisings.[80] While it is understandable that scholars would attribute the UAE's stability over the years to its unique socio-political structure and its rulers' ability to redistribute oil wealth to the population, it is important to note that the UAE's legitimacy formula is not static. As this thesis has shown, the leaders of the country have carved out a new legitimacy formula which responds to the demands of a changing regional political landscape in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings; and interestingly, that new legitimacy formula draws more on secular notions of identity and citizenry and less on notions of tribal and religious identity.

Overall, it was key for this research to consider the context in which this paradigmatic shift in state behaviour took place. Therefore, by shedding light on the new pillars of legitimacy, whilst being mindful of the context in which they emerged, this work opens up new avenues for Emirati-led research on the topic of political legitimacy in the post-Arab uprisings UAE.

The UAE is also a good case study of top-down political reforms without having self-imposed regime change. Overall, there has been a state-led effort to enfranchise people by giving them the chance to vote [in local elections], to open up the system, albeit very gradually, to different kinds of popular participation without bringing about regime change. Moreover, in terms of international relations, the commonality of interest in responding to these events between the UAE and other Arab monarchies, such as Saudi Arabia, especially in the post-Muslim Brotherhood (post-Morsi) era, merits close examination. While the UAE's response is seen as counter-revolutionary, it is worth noting that the Morsi reign was far from revolutionary or a representation of the uprisings. Nevertheless, the UAE has been trying to stop Islamists from achieving gains, as well as others who may not have been involved in masterminding or

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[80] Author's interview with a leading local commentator. Dubai, 10th of February 2018.

conceptualising the uprisings but took advantage of the power vacuum that appeared following the fall of a number of Arab regimes.[81] This thesis attempted to shed light on the UAE's response to the Arab uprisings without invoking the counter-revolutionary rhetoric.

There is a real effort internationally, both in terms of the UAE's foreign policy, in terms of hard and soft power, and in conjunction with other countries such as Saudi Arabia and, in some cases, Egypt, to push back against Islamists. This came to a head in summer 2017 when the boycott against Qatar took place. The boycott has its roots in two events which happened more or less simultaneously. Those were the squeezing of Hamas, which the UAE was involved in, and the heating up of the war in Libya. The common denominator between these events was the desire to push back against Islamists. The UAE was involved in these three post-'Arab Spring' redoubts of the brotherhood. It was centrally involved in the Qatar affair, which was an attempt to remove the microphone and the funding sources from Islamists. It was less involved, but still had a role to play in the Gaza affair. It was certainly involved in backing Haftar, which was going after militant Islamists in Libya. The UAE has always claimed that it was targeting negative aspects of the uprisings, which continued to reverberate well after 2011, especially with terrorist groups gaining a foothold in the region. Through interviewing Emirati policymakers and foreign policy practitioners, the researcher's aim was to capture the Emirati perspective regarding the changing regional scene.

This thesis also has utility for researchers who intend to explore the UAE's ideational and ideological interventions in the post-Arab uprisings era. Perhaps the chapter on state-led reform can be a good starting point for them. As far as the study of small states is concerned, this thesis has shown how a small country can maintain its territorial integrity and exert influence

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[81] Author's interview with a DC-based regional expert, 13th April 2018.

internationally. A country of a few million people is not going to be a hegemonic power, but it can project influence in a myriad ways. There are hard limits for a country that is geographically and demographically small, but it can be very influential in terms of persuading its allies to adopt its views. This a line has to be drawn between what took place in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings and the role played by the UAE in convincing others to adopt its diagnosis of the aftermath.

The Arab uprisings have shown that national consciousness and national identity are weak, as seen in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, where sub-national identities trump the wider national identities. The UAE perhaps wary of a repeat of those scenarios, had focused on cultivating a strong national identity through state-led reform.

While the UAE did not suffer the same fate as these states, it does have a confederation of city states which is relatively new and took a long time to consolidate militarily. There is still some degree of decentralisation on some issues; however, the foreign and defence policies of the federation remain integrated. So, there is still potential in having a unified and well-integrated national identity which will inevitably in this generation and in the next trump sub-national identities, in this case Emirate-centric ones.

As this thesis has shown, if a country is going to have a proactive defence policy and undertake a project as big as Yemen, where it will be losing troops, it needs to cultivate a strong sense of national consciousness. This could be expanded upon in the form of a thesis, as it is a recent phenomenon. It can be seen in terms of the change in which the UAE has conceptualised its self-reliance and regional role. The regional power vacuum has given the UAE a new impetus to play a more influential role.

As this research sheds light on the UAE's legitimacy and survival formula in the post-Arab uprisings era, there is the opportunity to explore this at a deeper level by examining the leaders'

tone of rhetoric and their NRCs, namely MBZ and MBR. It is important to be mindful of the consolidation and cohesion of security and defence policies around the idea of Abu Dhabi-Dubai partnership. In foreign and defence policies, Abu Dhabi remains the most influential. The remainder of the Emirates are now pushing against this much less than they used to do in the past. The UAE's assertive defence policy is the result of the integration of its military and its decision makers. The military is less decentralised and disintegrated than it was 30 years ago, and one of the reasons why this is not contested anymore is that there is a need for integration because there is a need for a strong defence policy.

The use of role theory has provided insight into the evolution of UAE roles over the years using an identity-based approach. This was helpful to understand not only how the rulers think but also how the state has sought to legitimise its evolving foreign policy. As role theory reveals the connection between the national identity that the UAE is attempting to construct and its newfound foreign policy behaviour, the questions of who we are and how we are perceived by others bring identity to the forefront of foreign policy analysis in this case of the UAE. This marks a departure from conventional means of discussing UAE foreign policy and provides new opportunities for scholars who wish to study this topic extensively.

Role theory gives us the conceptual tools to understand why the leaders of the UAE view their country as a model for the region and how that is being used as a legitimising agent domestically and regionally. As it takes into account the unique characteristics of each society and the role of the ruling elite when it comes to the conception of the self, self-related roles and the performances of these roles, it is key to our understanding of the UAE and by extension the GCC. Here, the thesis has been able to emphasise the uniqueness of the UAE as an independent state within the GCC bloc. This broadens our understanding of the diverse nature of politics in the GCC states, especially when it comes to foreign policy: the GCC is not a

monolithic bloc of states with identical foreign policies.

Given the autocratic nature of UAE politics, its leaders have sought to foster and to cultivate a strong sense of national consciousness, to support its post-Arab uprisings foreign policy. The use of role theory has provided a segue into understanding this state-led effort, which was also driven by the desire to redefine what it means to be an Emirati citizen. This is where the national service comes into play as a galvanising and corrective force as far as state-society relations are concerned, hence why this thesis has argued that one of its roles is to move away from rentierism.

The conceptual utility of role theory is that it can be used alongside state-led reform to understand the UAE's antagonism towards political Islam. Given how foreign policy making in the UAE is controlled by a handful of decision makers, role theory provides an insight into how the Emirati leadership has sought to conceptualise its regional role in the post-Arab uprisings era. Furthermore, following America's perceived withdrawal from the region, which convinced the UAE not to rely too much on one security guarantor, role theory provides an insight into how the elite have diversified their network of allies in an uncertain era. This presents a case study for those who wish to study how a wealthy, geographically small state goes about expanding its current network of allies and partners to avoid being heavily reliant on a sole security guarantor.

The UAE has been influential partly because it has clear, consistent, plainly articulated policies about two of the most important issues – defeating terrorism and pushing back against Iran – on which it has taken a very long-term and comprehensive stance. Compared to other countries, the UAE has not shown any ambivalence or indifference to these questions. Chapters Two and Five could be expanded on, with a focus on the UAE's diagnosis and prescription for how to deal with Sunni political Islam and terrorism over the last five years, which has become more

influential than it was at the beginning of the 'Arab Spring'. Even the Obama administration was coming around to it, albeit very grudgingly.

On Iran, there are many countries, especially in the Gulf, which have the same kind of policies. In spite of the well-established trade and cultural ties between Dubai and Iran, the UAE's stance on Iran has been well articulated and categorical. Chapter Five explored this duality in depth..

Regarding the war in Yemen, it is worth mentioning that there are two wars taking place there. There is a war with the Houthis in the North, which is a very difficult, protracted conflict that is looking more like a quagmire; and:

> …there's a different war in the South that has now become a counter-insurgency against AQAP and it is going much better. Everyone knows who's in charge of the effort in the North and who's in charge of the effort in the South. And it has rebounded to the credit of the UAE and makes people ask questions about the credibility of Saudi Arabia. These successes have made other countries take the UAE very seriously and look to you as an important partner.[82]

Commentators nowadays argue that the UAE and Saudi Arabia have identical foreign policies. It is worth emphasising that this is not the case and that there are interesting differences between the two on a number of issues. Their priorities are not the same because they are two different countries. Therefore, the view that the UAE is now an appendage of Saudi Arabia is not true. One could say that about Bahrain, though, which lacks an independent foreign policy.[83] Overall, it is true that small states rely on a series of international partners and security guarantors for their survival. This is an aspect of international relations, one that cannot be avoided except by a superpower or a highly militarised garrison state such as Israel. But even

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[82] Author's interview with a DC-based regional expert, 13th April 2018.

[83] Author's interview with an Abu-Dhabi based think tank director, 5th March 2018.

the Israelis have relied on the USA as a guarantor.[84]

In addition, the UAE's ability to build lasting relationships with its current allies is very important. The relationship with Saudi Arabia is very important; the relationship with the US is very important. These are the interlocking sets of relationship that the UAE wants to maintain. So while the UAE is starting to become more independent, it is becoming increasingly aware that its policies should not clash with those of its larger partners.

The UAE has shown both the ability to act unilaterally and the ability to take action with seemingly unlikely partners against the better judgment of its larger partners. For example, the missions in Libya, which were undertaken unilaterally and sometimes in concert with Egypt, were carried out against the better judgment of the US. It is worth noting that the UAE did not decline to take those actions because Washington was displeased with them. So, that is an example of the UAE taking a major action unilaterally or in conjunction with an unlikely partner such as Egypt – unlikely because Egypt rarely gets involved in affairs outside its borders.[85]

It is important to be mindful of the fact that there is no ideal formula for regime legitimacy and survival – this is politics and an ideal does not exist. However, further research on the UAE's effective combination of foreign and domestic policies has to be conducted. I think socially it is quite well integrated and stable. I think it has developed a consensus about its foreign policy and foreign policymaking processes, which are functional, and it has been the most successful of the small states which have tried to influence others. Its influence can be attributed to its

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[84] Author's interview with a leading expert on small state security, 19th April 2018.
[85] Author's interview with a leading local commentator. Dubai, 10th February 2018.

competency and having a very strong point of view on regional issues.

The UAE has developed just about as much military capability as it was supposed to have. As far as national consciousness building is concerned, the country seems to be on a steady path of instilling a strong sense of belonging in its youth. There are still some issues. However, there is a need in the Arab world to create a real dynamic private sector and this has a strong national security component to it. This is a challenge for the country in the next 20 years, as it needs to create a dynamic private sector. Much of this will have to do with developing a domestic defence industry, which is being developed at the time of writing. It will involve changing the way Emiratis think about these matters. This is important to the economic health of the state. Still, one of the key security challenges to the UAE's stability is the question of its population and the current status of migrant workers – the country has to make important decisions on these issues in the long run. This has a major political and national security component to it..

Overall, the survival strategies of the UAE are unique in a sense because, as the country's name implies, they are geared towards safeguarding the federation. The UAE is not a monolithic state as it consists of seven Emirates, and the survival strategies that have been adopted by the leaders since its inception take this aspect into account. The country has built its survival strategies on the consolidation of territorial integrity and the credibility of its armed forces, which is lacking in other Gulf states. Since the early nineties, the UAE leaders have been trying to build a strong defence apparatus and a credible army by focusing on safeguarding their territorial integrity. The credibility of the armed forces was enhanced due to the UAE pursuing a policy of armed neutrality, as its focus was to safeguard its territorial integrity whilst being neutral on the regional and international stage.

The evolution of the UAE's foreign policy can be attributed to multiple determinants, as the shift occurred strictly in response to the Arab uprisings. One needs to look at what happened

in the aftermath of the financial crisis to trace the evolution of UAE foreign policy. As countries around the world faced economic distress as a result of the crisis, the UAE, along with its neighbours (namely Qatar and KSA), moved forward and showed the world that they could be relied upon in times of economic distress. As a result, the UAE injected liquidity into Western markets and this allowed it to have a more assertive foreign policy. It is correct to say that this can be attributed to the changing conceptions of its leaders, but it has to be emphasised that these changing conceptions happened as a result of two things: 1) the Arab uprisings represented a multifaceted threat to the UAE's domestic and regional stability, and 2) the Arab uprisings represented an opportunity to play a bigger role in the region, especially after the power vacuum left by the fall of the traditional centres of power in the region. The UAE leaders were trying to counter perceived threats.,butthey were also taking advantage of the regional power vacuum.[86]

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[86] Author's interview with a researcher on Gulf military affairs. 30th April 2018.

Given that it has been established that rentierism does not, on its own, explain state-society relations and regime legitimacy in the UAE and the GCC, it was important to provide a more nuanced explanation for regime legitimacy. And this was the goal of this thesis, which it sought to fulfil through putting forth the four frames of analysis of the UAE's reimagined regime legitimacy formula. It is not an overstatement to argue, that even in an autocratic political system, legitimacy is not a static concept. Autocracies need to obtain popular to sustain their rule.

When examining the broader literature on legitimacy in the Gulf, two major shortcomings become apparent. Firstly, while many Western scholars understand the region, their approaches reflect their own understanding of regime legitimacy and state-society relations, which draws on Western constructs of legitimacy where parliamentary sovereignty and strong civil societies determine regime legitimacy. As such, the literature presupposes a bottom-up notion of legitimacy, driven by political emancipation, rather than being channelled from the top down. Indeed, Western scholars view top-down reform in a negative light, mainly as an attempt to impose technical solutions to what are in essence, socio-political problems.

It is worth emphasising again that, just because the momentum for a reform process is top down, it does not follow that the wider population in the UAE remains passive. If anything, the regime uses top-down reform to reimagine the legitimacy formula as a way to accommodate the evolving nature of society, demographic shifts, and the way in which new technologies, not least social media platforms, have globalised the flow of and access to information beyond state control.   Still, it hopes to lessen dependence on traditional modes of legitimacy. It does not call for their outright abolition. Rather, it seeks to build upon them in reimagining the future citizen.

Understanding this top down process of political reform in an autocratic state and how, in the process, it has recast our understanding of legitimacy, was the main contribution made by this thesis to the literature.. This survival of the regime was not achieved through material means alone. Thus it is important to understand this emerging legitimacy formula. For while it is undoubtedly a top down process, it does not mean it is being imposed on the population in an arbitrary manner. One of the most unique features of top-down reform in the UAE, is that, despite it taking place in a closed political system, the process is being negotiated between the state's institutions and the wider population.

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