The United Arab Emirates Foreign Policy Change In The Post 2011 Middle East: A Role Theory Approach

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Abstract

The United Arab Emirates' foreign policy changed from a low-key policy that fits with small state standards to an active policy that is sometimes attributed to an interventionist player. Since the 2011 uprisings, the UAE emerged as a crucial regional player seeking influence over Middle Eastern affairs using an assertive discourse of regional leadership. This conduct of foreign policy illustrates role change alongside new identity affirmation. This dissertation examines the UAE as a heuristic case study to answer the following questions: (1) why do some small states pursue greater roles in foreign policy? (2) How do they conduct this change in foreign policy role? (3) What impact does this change have on their state's identity? This dissertation attempts to complement existing research and literature on the UAE by examining its new regional approach since the 2011 uprisings, which has been studied scarcely. This dissertation intends to uncover how the UAE challenges existing theories of small states' roles in the international system. It will explore why and how, despite being a small state, the UAE behaved like a great power in the Middle East. In this dissertation, I argue that the power vacuum caused by the fall of traditional Arab regimes following the 2011 uprisings led to structural changes, such as the rise of political Islam and liberal democratic sentiments that pressured political changes. The fall of Arab power centres, such as Egypt, led to the fragmentation of the region. This structural change endangered the UAE's identity and its regional interests as a Gulf monarchy. This was considered a foreign policy dilemma that prompted the Emirati leadership to pursue external and internal changes while adopting new regional roles and embracing a new identity. These changes led to the transformation of this small state into an influential regional player and a competing actor. The disaggregation of the Arab order influenced the UAE to step in and take up a leading role to restore the previous status quo, and counter regional rivals such as state and non-state actors to secure its regional interests. The UAE's behaviour showed that it no longer perceived itself as a small state that requires the protection of others, and was now affirming its status as a regional power that traditional regional, and international actors, can depend on and cooperate with to achieve

regional security. This study employed interactionist role theory to interpret this change in the UAE's foreign policy. Applying role theory would explain the UAE leadership's agency, its foreign policy making, the role it played, and the identity it affirmed. This theoretical framework will be applied to three case studies: the UAE's role in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. These three Arab states represent the manifestation of the UAE's foreign policy change in which it affirmed itself as a capable military actor, reliable partner, anti-terrorist actor, and status-quo power.

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“This thesis is the result of my own work. Material from the published or unpublished work of others which is used in the thesis is credited to the author in question in the text.”

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List of Abbreviations

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1. Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a wealthy monarchy located in the Arabian Peninsula. It is part of a regional alliance known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC is a regional organisation that brings the Gulf States, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman together under a security umbrella, providing protection and deterring mutual threats, particularly, the Iranian threat. Since its inception in 1971, the UAE has adopted a typical small state foreign policy behaviour. For instance, it bandwagoned with Saudi Arabia and followed its regional leadership for decades, asserting the Saudi role of 'Al Shaqeeqa Al Kubra' (The Elder Sister). The UAE also created a security alliance with the United States (US) to guarantee its own protection. Furthermore, as a newly established state in the 70s, it adopted elements of Arabism in its foreign policy identity, pursuing the recognition of other Arab states, particularly Egypt. As a result, the UAE committed itself to Muslim and Arab issues, such as the Palestinian cause. Thus, the UAE's foreign policy approach depended on its economic power, developing a humanitarian aid program that dedicated most of its wealth to poorer Arab and Muslim states.

However, the UAE's foreign policy changed radically since the spread of the 2011 uprisings and shifted towards individualism, independence, and leadership. This led to the fall of Arab centres causing a severe regional fragmentation as a result of the power vacuum. The small state had to face off against revolutionary Islamist powers, rebel groups, and calls for liberal democratic reforms in Middle East. In this context, the UAE rose to become a military power in multiple regional theatres. This suggests that it is neither was satisfied with deriving its security from others, nor content with being a follower. For example, in 2013, the UAE intervened financially in support of the Tamarod uprisings against the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) government in Egypt (Butter, 2020, p. 7). This new Emirati role influenced the political scene in Egypt, leading to the return of elements of the Mubarak regime and the containment of the MB. In addition, in 2014 and 2015, the UAE participated, as a member of the US-led coalition, in attacking Islamic States in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) bases in Syria. Katzman (2017, p. 14) explained that the UAE was the only Arab state that had permission by the US to 'command airstrikes'. In addition, the UAE was a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) mission in Libya to overthrow Gaddafi in 2012. In 2014, the UAE's role in Libya emerged as an anti-Islamist actor that supported national and secular forces. This led the small state to engage, for the first time, in a proxy war against other pro-Islamist actors, such as

Turkey, and Qatar. This role expanded, making the UAE a recognizable stakeholder in the peace talks led by the United Nations (UN) Support Mission in Libya next to great powers such as Russia, Egypt, China, France, Turkey, and Qatar. Furthermore, in 2015, the UAE joined Saudi Arabia as a junior actor in its war against the Houthi rebellion in Yemen to reinstate the legitimate government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. As the war progressed, the UAE's role expanded, carrying multiple responsibilities and revealing its greater role capabilities. For instance, it participated with the United States of America in attacking Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Moreover, it emerged as a security guarantor in the South of Yemen, affirming itself as a regional power. Thus, following its intervention in the war, and its effort to combat the Houthi movement, the UAE started building military bases in Yemen and the Horn of Africa (Manek, 2018; Riedal, 2021). This series of regional interventions marked a turning point in UAE history. The country's status and regional role evolved from a low-key small state to a growing military power and regional competitor in the Middle East. In parallel, the Emirati leadership oversaw dramatic internal changes. It transformed the social contract of the rentier state by engaging its citizenry in state-building projects. This is evidenced by the start of compulsory military conscription in 2014, which had until that point been deliberately delayed. This policy suggests that the Emirati leadership was willing to embark on socio-political changes, despite the risk that this participation would give a say to the public in foreign policy. This indicates the leadership's commitment to transforming the country, on the domestic and regional fronts, to carry a greater role, which indicates the advent of a new identity.

This foreign policy change led to the UAE's role being described as 'Little Sparta' and subsequently became the 'Little Singapore' of the Middle East. These notable developments should be considered in the study of small states in international relations (IR) (Ignatius, 2021). Islam Hassan's work refers to the UAE as a 'small state with regional middle power aspirations' (Islam, 2020, p. 190). Mason (2020, p. 158) supports this notion, and argues that 'the UAE is found to be approaching a 'tipping point' to middle-power-hood'. Nevertheless, this debate around ranking the UAE as a small or middle power is still in the early stages of the UAE's development and, as such, requires a longer period to observe real change. This discussion, however, suggests a point of disagreement among scholars on states ranking variables within the international system hierarchy. In addition, the debate on the concept of smallness and middlness is regarded as relative in IR, which makes this discussion secondary to research questions on the UAE's role change.

Therefore, the necessity of this study is borne out of the fact that there are limited references to the UAE as a middle power at a time when the UAE's foreign policymakers are acting as regional leaders, who continually expand their web of influence by playing multiple roles militarily, financially, theologically/religiously and culturally. While other small states, particularly Gulf States, have been asserting their influence, the UAE in particular, has undergone shifts in foreign policy and identity change. This new foreign policy approach requires strong commitment, manpower, resources, military preparedness, and international support. This role change is quite puzzling, given the fact that it is being carried out by a small state such as the UAE. This conduct of foreign policy illustrates role change alongside new identity affirmation, which makes it a heuristic case worth investigating. Therefore, this study examines the UAE as a heuristic case to answer why some small states pursue greater roles in foreign policy. This leads to examining how do they conduct this change in their foreign policy role and the impact of these changes on their state identity.

Traditionally, the UAE's foreign policy has been described in academia as small state foreign policy behaviour. For instance, Al-Alkim (1984) adopted a realist approach in studying the UAE's foreign policy, stating that the UAE would need to bandwagon and maintain alliances with greater international and regional states for its survival, such as the United States and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), due to its structural weakness as a small state. In addition, other scholars, such as Almezaini (2012) focused on the UAE's humanitarian aid program combined with identity explanations, particularly Constructivism, as a foreign policy tool to exert influence. Ulrichsen (2017, p. 151) observed that the UAE's foreign policy follows a capitalist approach. He argued that the UAE sought influence via diplomacy and trade with global partners. In addition, Soubrier (2017) conducted a comparative study between the Emirati and Qatari foreign policy using the prince-state framework and called to focus on perception to study the Gulf. While these publications have added to the small state – the Gulf States and the UAE – literature, the recent changes in the UAE's role in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa challenges these explanations. In particular, the existing literature on the UAE's foreign policy approach does not answer why and how small states adopt larger roles. For instance, realists believe that small states refrain from using power and seek instead protection from larger states. The UAE's growing militarism – evidenced by the construction of military bases and military interventions in Yemen, Syria, and Libya – reveals that Realism does not fully capture small states' behaviour, particularly the UAE post-2011. Furthermore, Constructivism suggests that identities control the conduct of small states' foreign policy. In

the case of the Middle East 'Arab Leaders competed to win the hearts and minds of Arab populations at home and abroad' (Barnett, 1998, p. 10). However, the UAE's smallness did not prevent it from rising as an anti-Islamist actor engaged in an ideational war with the MB, the largest and oldest Middle Eastern opposition group. In addition, the UAE did not hesitate to integrate Abu Dhabi's old Sufi heritage in its foreign policy to compete with other dominant schools of Islam. It engaged itself in a new theological/ideational competition to promote its own model of Islam as part of its regional competition with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, the MB, and Salafism, which are perceived by the UAE as ideational threats to its own identity. The UAE's normalization of its relations with Israel suggests a move away from the historic boycott rhetoric. It has risked losing Arab support to affirm its foreign policy liberty, independence, and individualism, after it being influenced by commitments to Arabism for decades.

On the other hand, while Liberal Institutionalism explained the foreign policy approach adopted by the UAE for status-seeking and exercising influence, it failed to explain why small states seek foreign policy change. It also does not address why small states adopt greater roles than their sizes allow. There is, therefore, a need to study the UAE using a different theoretical framework that can interpret the internal and external influences that push small states to embark on complete role change and carry larger responsibilities. A diligent study of the UAE must take into consideration the political culture and the leadership's philosophy that influence foreign policy decisions. Therefore, taking the UAE as a case study is crucial to reveal the elements of role change, how the self and the others are perceived, and how roles are made, to understand the UAE's current foreign policy. The study also requires a framework of social theories, since roles are formed in a social context and in relation to other actors, which influences foreign policy outcomes. In this study, I use the interactionist role theory to interpret the UAE's foreign policy, and its associated new roles that are exercising greater influence on multiple fronts of the region. In addition, I examine the roles taken up by the UAE and the identity it is affirming, to understand how foreign policy changes were made in a small timeframe. Interactionist role theory also has the methodological and conceptual ability to uncover the roots and the influences behind the manifestation of this role and identity change, which resulted in multiple role commitments and responsibilities for a country traditionally regarded as a small state. Another key contribution by this approach is the notion of the 'other' and its interactions with the 'agent'. This 'other' and its interactions are crucial in shaping the agent's perception of itself, by influencing the latter to adopt specific roles. This process of

socialisation with the other in an interaction has transformed the UAE's role into that of a small state with a middle power influence. Thus, within this framework, the agent, the Emirati leadership, will be considered an independent variable and the UAE's foreign policy a dependent variable. Studying this topic through a social theory of IR will elucidate the relationship between this new identity affirmation and the multiple interactions that the UAE has engaged in, and its emergence as a small state with a middle power influence. The UAE's role change will be examined through the study of three cases that examine the Emirati role change in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. The first case study on Egypt will examine the UAE's role change in relation to the events of 2011 and its emergence as a status quo power and anti-Islamist actor. It will also analyse the influence of political Islam in Egypt on the UAE's new self and its foreign policy identity. The second case study will focus on the UAE's military role as a NATO partner in 2011. The UAE will also test its new role change post-2014 and emerge as a counterterrorism actor and a pro-nationalist regional power. The third case study examines the UAE's role change that resulted from its intervention in Yemen against the Houthis in 2015 as Saudi Arabia's military partner. This chapter will examine how the war in Yemen influenced the UAE to take up multiple roles, and the resulting impact on its foreign policy identity, which culminated in the UAE's emergence as a growing military power in the region.

The power vacuum left by the fall of traditional Arab regimes, following the 2011 uprisings, led to structural changes, such as the rise of political Islam and regime change demands driven by calls for democratic and liberal reforms. The disaggregation of the Arab order led to the rise of non-state actors, the intervention of regional actors, and the spread of civil wars which fed into the state of chaos in the region and digressed into further Arab fragmentation. In addition, these revolutionary demands reached the high-income and politically stable Gulf states, including the UAE, thereby endangering the established tribal social contact between the monarchies and the public and threating the ontological Emirati identity and regional interests. Therefore, to protect its regime, its allies, and the regional order, the Emirati leadership interpreted the structural changes as a policy dilemma that needs to be solved which, in turn, led to the adoption of a new regional role to restore the previous regional order. Thus, the Emirati leadership pursued external and internal changes to fulfil its new regional roles and to affirm its new identity as an assertive regional actor. These changes led to the rise of this small state as an influential regional player and competitor. Furthermore, this study found that, unlike larger states in the region, such as KSA, Egypt, and Turkey that suffer from the burden of huge populations, historical commitments, and internal challenges, the UAE's smallness allowed it

to seize opportunities to expand its foreign policy and carry greater roles in a short amount of time. The UAE's small size and its limited indigenous population reduced the risk of dissent and opposition to its internal and external role change, as is usually common when bigger populations are concerned. This role change was enabled by the malleability of identity and the possibility of adopting new narratives in newly established states. Elements of this new identity have always been embedded in the country's national psyche, particularly in Abu Dhabi. However, these elements were emboldened to surpass other national religious values to meet the requirements and ensure the success of this new role, that of an anti-Islamist, military, Sufi actor. That is why I argue that nations must have elements of their desired role embedded in their national identities for any role change to be pursued successfully. The UAE, as a nation, has always had these elements and political vision, however, they remained dormant due to the pre-2011 regional climate that prioritised other security issues and stability under the dual regional leadership of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The growing state of regional anarchy after 2011 pushed the UAE to seek its own individual foreign policy, with its own identity, and new role. In reaction to the fragmentation of the region, the UAE's new identity affirmed that it is no longer a purchaser of security, nor is it a traditional small state that seeks the protection of hegemonic regional and international powers. The UAE affirmed itself as a regional security provider, a capable military power, and a regional actor that regional and international powers will need cooperate and consult with regarding regional matters.

Although there have been publications and reports on the post-2011 UAE role, they remain limited and theoretically deficient, particularly when it comes to the theoretical analysis of the recent Emirati role change. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on small state foreign policy, foreign policy change, as well as the literature on the GCC and the UAE. The particularity of this thesis is its use of interactionist role theory which employs a heuristic and social approach that elucidates how material changes in the international system are interpreted and processed in the UAE's foreign policy decision making. The value of this study lies in how it synthesises most of the empirical work conducted on the UAE's role in the selected case studies and explores them through a theoretical framework of interactionist role theory. This study also provides a heuristic analysis of foreign policy change, a rarely used approach to analysing the UAE's and GCC's foreign policy behaviour. This is particularly interesting since roles in these nations are determined by a small foreign policy elite. This requires scholars of GCC and Middle Eastern foreign policy to scientifically and academically investigate how these elites perceive the world and shape their roles from a psychological,

social, and heuristic perspective. This approach seeks to fill important gaps in the literature. This is a niche study since interactionist role theory has rarely been adopted to study IR and the conduct of foreign policy in the Global South. Using a single case-study design, and incorporating three embedded case studies, provides an in-depth analysis of foreign policy change in three different geographic locations, historical backgrounds, and political contexts. It also offers a comparative perspective of the chronological, and theoretical, understanding of the roots and elements of the foreign policy changes adopted by the UAE. The study theorises a turning point in the UAE's foreign policy history, spanning a decade, and documents the change from a low-impact small state, into a regional actor described as a 'small state with regional middle power aspiration' (Hassan, 2020, p. 183). This study will, therefore, serve as a basis for future studies to theoretically track the roots of this foreign policy change in three different locations including Egypt, Libya and Yemen.

This thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 examines the literature, starting with an in-depth look at how theoretical approaches to IR have tackled the research question of this thesis. The chapter begins with an introduction of the classical theories of IR, and approaches to foreign policy analysis (FPA), and tracks the evolution of the discourse on small states and their behaviours in the international system. The theoretical part of the literature review will present the core publications on Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, and Constructivism. The second half of the literature review introduces the key empirical studies discussing the UAE from thematic angles tailored to the GCC as an area of study. This will lead to the formulation of a broader perspective on how scholars studied and analysed the UAE. Chapter 3 presents the main theoretical argument and methodology, using interactionist role theory, which will be used to analyse three embedded case studies. Once established, these key themes will be explored through three sub case studies that explore the UAE's role in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, respectively.

Chapter 4 is a case study of the UAE's role in Egypt. It analyses the UAE's role change in relation to the 2011 revolution. It also investigates the UAE's role enactment vis-à-vis the rise of an Islamist government, the counter anti-Brotherhood revolution in 2013, and post-revolutionary Egypt. Furthermore, it investigates how the UAE's interaction in Egypt contributed to the former's identity making and its entry into the regional competition by incorporating Sufi Islam into its foreign policy approach. Chapter 5 describes the UAE's role in Libya and investigates its identity affirmation as a military actor, and counterterrorism actor.

It also proves how Libya became a platform in which the UAE's identity was constructed in relation to its significant others: Turkey, Qatar, Islamist militias, and the UN in Libya. Chapter 6 is a case study of Yemen that highlights the evolution of the Emirati role into a war state. It also explores the impact of this foreign policy change on the UAE's domestic national role conception, and national identity. This chapter also delves into the UAE's role transformation, from Saudi Arabia's junior partner at the start of the war, to adopt the roles of counterterrorism actor and security guarantor in the South of Yemen. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes this thesis. It summarises the key observations and outcomes of this research and recommends areas for future academic exploration.

2. Literature Review on Theoretical Approaches of Small States Foreign Policy: Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, and Social Constructivism

Introduction

The international system is hierarchic in nature, consisting of different states stratified as great, middle and small powers. In this vein, different classifications in IR agree that small states are dominant, representing 'a half and two thirds' of world states (Kurečić, Kozina, and Kokotović, 2017, p. 1). Although, small powers constitute the majority of states in the system, IR scholars gave more attention to the study of great powers. Traditionally, it is well established that the greater the state, the more influence and power it has on shaping the international system. The growing number of small states and rise of small powers playing influential roles in international disputes and crises requires an in-depth study of small states foreign policy and its influence on the international community.

The existing literature does not provide a commonly accepted definition of small states, the vagueness and disagreement about what smallness is and how it should be measured, produced different criteria of study among IR scholars. The availability of different definitions shed light on the differences among small states in terms of their characteristics, power, threats, national interests, and international activism, which, in turn, enriches the discussion and deepens scholarly understating of small states and their influence on world affairs, particularly in the post-Cold War era. In light of these issues, the chapter presents a map of the established discourse on the behaviour of small states in the international system, and the methods that they use to seek influence. It is organised as follows. Section 1 provides key definitions of small states, including the three different criteria: quantitative, qualitative, and relational, which are predominant in the literature. The chapter continues to discuss the following established theories in IR: Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, and Constructivism. Section 2 discusses how Realism interprets and analyses small states roles in the international system. Section 3 and 4 investigate small states behaviour to seek influence in the global and regional scene using Liberal Institutionalism and Constructivism. The final section will restate the main contribution of the main IR theories as conclusion. Following that, an overview of the empirical literature produced on the UAE foreign policy will be presented using major themes adopted in GCC studies, such as: regime type, leadership perception and foreign policy identity, state

capabilities and domestic structure. This will be discussed in relation to the IR theories mentioned above. Finally, a summary of the main findings of empirical literature will be presented in the concluding section.

Small States Definitions

Scholars have developed different methodologies to define small states. These definitions evolved over time and were influenced by the developmental stages of the international system. The first stage was influenced by a quantitative analysis of states, where states' power and influence were measured by quantifiable factors such as size, population, and resources. For instance, Kose and Prasad (2003, p. 38) explains that small states are states with a population 'fewer than one and a half million people', and they also mentioned that they range from micro-states with 40,000 people, like Botswana, to bigger states with more than a million people, such as Tobago. In addition, the UN classified small states as 'a state of not more than 100,000 km^2' (Galal, 2019, p. 42). Over time, the analysis of small states has included a more qualitative approach, using characteristics and capabilities such as the Gross National Product (GNP), per capita income, military and economic power, to rank states in the hierarchy of the international system. For example, Vellut (1967, p. 254) categorises states as great powers, medium powers, small powers, and smaller powers. He added the 'population figure' and 'Gross Domestic Product' as indicators in measuring states' rank within the international system (Vellut, 1967, p. 254). In addition, East (1973, p. 557) explained that the general model in foreign affairs perceives small states to have common characteristics such as 'small land area, small total population, small total GNP (or other measure of total productive capacity), and a low level of military capabilities'.

With the development of the international system, the perception of 'power' shifted. For instance, the rise of technology, culture, diplomacy, values, and cooperation via international organisation, changed how power is defined, perceived, and achieved. This change led to the rise of a new generation of scholars who turned their attention towards proposing a more nuanced approach to understanding power in relation to other states, focusing more on the perception of the self, and it impacts on role, actions, and behaviours enacted towards others (Kurečić, Kozina and Kokotović, 2017, p. 6). In light of this, a qualitative approach was developed to address these changes in terms of state 'power' to overcome the limitations of the quantitative definitions. For instance, Nye (1990) proposed a new meaning of what power is in the twentieth century in his work, *Soft Power*. He differentiates between power as a 'possession

of capabilities' and power as an 'influence', suggesting that influence needs to be considered as a source of power, emerging from the state's own perception of itself. Nye (1990, p. 154) stated that:

> 'Today, however, the definition of power is losing its emphasis on military force and conquest that marked earlier eras. The factors of technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more significant in international power, while geography, population, and raw materials are becoming somewhat less important'.

These developments in the literature, led to the evolution of a new strand in the scholarship on small states, applying a qualitative criterion to the analysis of small states by introducing a psychological approach, which tests the state's perception of itself, usually referred to as the perceptual approach.

The perceptual approach argues that the perception of the state leadership of their role and power is what determines its influence, not its size. Perceptions are crucial since they precede the roles states take before getting involved in one policy issue or a region. Keohane (1969, p. 296) defines small states as 'a small powers, whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in small groups, make a significant impact on the system'. Also, Hey (2003, p. 3) explains that 'if states, people and institutions generally perceive themselves to be small, or if any other state, peoples or institutions perceive that state as small, it shall be so considered'. Both Keohane and Hey agree that a small state is a state with leadership that belives that it can not influence the international system at both indivual and collective level. Galal (2019, p. 44) discussed that small states are states that 'adjust their foreign politics according to the policies and strategies of the international system'. Thus, 'the leaders of [these] states realize [they can] affect the international system by joining regional and international alliances, not by their unilateral action' (Galal, 2019, p. 44). Furthermore, Kurečić, Kozina and Kokotović (2017, p. 6) explained that the main goal of the perceptual approach is to determine 'whether [the state] considers itself small or not, [and whether] this awareness of its [size] influences its [behaviour towards other states in its surrounding region], and the world in general. Thus, perceptions in foreign policy are crucial to determine the level of influence that the state will have, whether it is big or small in size and resources.

The third approach used to define small states is the relational one. Relationalists argue that the concept of smallness 'is meaningless unless we take into consideration relations with other

states, or the size of other states' (Kurečić, Kozina, Kokotović, 2017, p. 3). For instance, Panke (2012, p. 315) noted that when being in a negotiation setting, a state would be defined as small if it has less than average capacities compared to other states involved in the negotiation. Furthermore, it is argued that 'a state may be influential in one relation but simultaneously weak in another, i.e., it may be considered small in one policy area but large in another' (Kurečić, Kozina, Kokotović, 2017, p. 3). The importance of the relational approach is that it connects small state behaviour to the nature of the international system, and its position within it. The regional approach is necessary here, since the track record of small states behaviour suggests a high level of activism in their regions. The influence of small states, in this case, can be studied through policy, as they may be able to exert more influence on, or in competition with larger states through the leverage of one 'issue-specific' policy (Kurečić, Kozina, Kokotović, 2017, p. 4). For instance, the influence of Switzerland in the financial services sector, or of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the oil sector (Neumann and Gstöhl, 2004, p. 5).

This relational approach, does not consider smallness to be equitable to weakness; addressing that large states may be weak if they lack strong institutions, at the same time, small states can be strong if they have strong institutions (Kurečić, Kozina, Kokotović, 2017, p. 6). Thus, weakness should be viewed as 'an expression of quality and not of quantity' (Kurečić, Kozina, Kokotović, 2017, p. 6). The importance of the relational approach is that it connects small states' behaviour to their influence on the system, compared to the states of great power in relation to specific issue areas, and the regions they belong to. This approach suggests a move away from measuring power as passion to power as exrisce of influence.

The criteria in classifying a state as small are various, ranging from classic material variables, to adopting psychological elements, to the relational approach that measures the influence of a small state in relation to greater power. This suggests that the topic of smallness may remain debatable due to the different theories in IR. However, to classify a state as small will always depend on the question that is being asked, and the topic that needs investigation. It will be a matter of an educated selection. The following section will present the discussion of classic IR theories on the role of small states foreign policy role, including Realism, Constructivism, and Liberal Institutionalism. In addition, it will continue to discuss empirical literature produced on the UAE's foreign policy approach, in light of a theoretical approach to IR.

Realism and Small States

The realist's analysis of states' foreign policy stems from the belief that the international system influences the shape of international affairs, and that power is measured on a material basis. The classic Realism of Morgenthau and Thomsons's work *Politics Among Nations* (1945) and the neo-Realism by Waltz (1959) in his work *Man, the State, and the War*, and *Theory of International Politics* (Waltz 1979), created the two movemnts in Realism. These trends include classic and neo-Realism, which view the international system as being anarchic, characterised by a self-help dynamic. Rickli and Almezaini (2017, p. 9) explained that realists consider the international system to consist of states, which are unitary rational actors with no single authority above them (Rickli and Almezaini, 2017, p. 9). Therefore, this state of anarchy creates a state of competition within which all states must engage for their ultimate goal: survival. This competition lead to the balance of power which determine the shape of the inertnational system to become either unipolar, bipolar or multi-polar. Thus, to measure states' power within the system, scholars should consider their physical attributes such as their geographic and demographic sizes, and GDP (Rickli and Almezaini, 2017, p. 9). The existence of such resources in one state places it in a superior position with fewer restrictions that could pressure or hinder its foreign policy decisions, compared to other weaker states in the system. Such a well-resourced state will be able to act independently and influence IR. Mainstream realists assume that domestic factors and systemic constraints of balancing power between greater powers leaves small states with limited options, occupied with security and survival. However, in her critique of Realism, Elman (1995, p. 172) reviewed realist assumptions in her article 'Challenging Realism in its Backyard', stating that external constraints of the international environment will influence small state foreign policy outcomes, making small state behaviour either a product of 'fluctuations in the structure and/or the degree of threat posed by the great powers'. Moreover, Realism explains that, due to small states' lack of power compared to bigger states, their role in the international system is marginal (Rickli and Almezaini, 2017, p. 10). Realism suggests that the systematic and structural level of analysis will provide a better understanding of small states' foreign policy, compared to domestic-level factors. For instance, small states' foreign policy elite would have to pay close attention to international changes and constraints in order to maintain their survival. In addition, domestic factors, such as regime identity, play a less influential role to deterinne small states foreign policy strategy. On the other hand, their counterparts in great states are freer from

the burden of external structure and are subject to domestic factors such as leadership, constituencies and public opinion (Elman, 1995, p. 174).

Realism offers security strategies that are traditionally adapted by small states to seek survival and security. Al-ebraheem (1984, p. 54) discusses certain strategies for small states to maintain their survival. He stated that small states first adopt neutrality as a policy to achieve security. Secondly, small states refrain from using force to avoid the anger of greater states, relying instead on negotiations and international norms. Thirdly, survival of small states should be guaranteed by the international system via the UN. In addition, Rickli and Almezaini (2017, p. 12) mentioned that small states are usually threatened 'by their neighbouring states, rather than distant ones' when it comes to protecting their security.

Realists discuss that the deficit in their power and their rank in the hierarchical system, leaves small states preoccupied with survival. Due to this structural deficit in their power, Al-ebraheem (1984, p. 102) explained that they carry smaller foreign policy circles that are exercised within their region and neighbouring countries. Consequently, small states have few strategic security options to compensate for this power deficit. These security options include 'balancing', 'bandwagoning', and 'hedging'. The type of international system and the geopolitical surroundings dictate the best security policy option for the small states. First, 'Balancing' is defined as 'allying with others against the prevailing threat' (Walt, 1987, p. 17). In addition, small states adopt balancing to achieve security 'equilibrium' in the international system by engaging in countervailing behaviour (Suorsa, 2017, p. 3). However, small states with fewer resources could suffer from the economic burden of international balancing. As a result, they would align their strategic interests temporarily with one, or more than one state.

The second policy option that mainstream realists suggested for small states is 'bandwagoning'. Walt (1987, p. 17) defined bandwagoing as '[an] alignment with the source of danger'. He suggested that small states would seek to bandwagon with a greater state that they perceive as a threat, as a solution to avoid a possible attack and become a member of its block. In contrast with balancing, where all states engage in countervailing strategy behaviour, bandwagoning suggests that small or weaker states submit to a subordinate role with greater power in this security arrangement (Walt, 1987, p. 55). In addition, he claimed that bandwagoning is favoured, or is a common strategy by small states when threatened by a big power. Since their domestic weakness hinders them from adding any strength to the coalition, they will, therefore, always choose the winning side. However, he suggested that small states

would choose to balance if they are faced by an equal power (Walt, 1987, pp. 29-30).

In addition, Schweller (1994, p. 74) differentiates between balancing and bandwagoning in his work 'Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In', stating that all sides in the debate are mistaken to assume that the different security strategies lead to the same goal: security. He distinguished between the two, explaining that balancing maintains 'self-preservation and protection of values already possessed' (Schweller, 1994, p. 74). Bandwagoning, by contrast, is a means for a state to pursue status seeking or 'self-extension: to obtain values coveted' (Schweller, 1994, p. 74). It is argued that bandwagoning and balancing are risky policy options to small states, due to the limited freedom of action it leaves them with. Therefore, the term 'hedging' as a foreign policy option grew in popularity amongst small states to avoid the risks placed by balancing and bandwagoning, and has received scholarly attention.

Hedging, as a policy option, is demonstrated best in Hiep's published work, *Vietnam's Hedging Strategy against China since Normalization* (2013). He shows that the evolution of Vietnam's foreign policy towards China went from bandwagoning or balancing to hedging, after normalization of relations between the two states in 1991. Following different security strategies was Vietnam's policy alternative to contain China's re-emergence as a threat, while maintaining good economic relations with Beijing. Le Hong (2013, p. 337) explains that hedging is 'a strategy to enable states to deal with uncertainties in their partners' future behaviour by relaying on a basket of policy tools that, while helping to promote bilateral cooperation, also entails competitive elements aimed at preparing themselves against potential security threats posed by their partners'. Chong (2003, p. 2) supports this notion by stating that 'weaker states, for instance, appear to display much greater diversity in their strategies vis-à-vis the powerful than either balancing or bandwagoning captures'.

In conclusion, realist discourse showed how the state of anarchy, and the competition among great powers, leave small states with fewer options to play any meaningful role. In this framework, small state behaviour is dictated by their ultimate goal to survive and achieve security. Thus, Realism provided a number of strategies in which small states can achieve these goals. Balancing and bandwagoning limit state influence, as they remain vulnerable to the competition of greater powers, and to the fluctuations of the international environment. Although these two policy options are adopted, they are not favoured, due to their role in continually limiting small states as small, rather than empowering them to seek more influence

and independence in the pursuit of their survival. Hedging, therefore, is becoming a desired policy option by small states, as it provides them with more room and diverse policy options with the source of threat by benefiting from this relation economically and diplomatically, while keeping the source of the threat at bay. While I agree with the realists that states are the main international actors in the system, the realists seem to neglect or downgrade the rise of other players, ignoring how heterogeneous the international system has become since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, while military security controls, and will continue to control world affairs, nevertheless, other aspects of security, such as environmental, logistic, food, financial, and energy security also govern state and inter-state relations. I argue here that realists' assumptions could be limiting when analysing state relations. States did compete, and will continue to compete with each other. However, we should not neglect that states, including rivals, did cooperate, and will continue to cooperate with each other in terms of military, security, and economic aspects. This will be discussed in the later section on Liberal Institutionalism, and Constructivism.

Liberal Institutionalism and Small States

Liberal Institutionalism is a school of thought in international relations that focuses on the study of the rise of international organisations, their role in regulating states' intra-relations, and governing the international system. This theoretical approach is significant when investigating the influence of these international organisations on small states' behaviours, and how they take advantage of them as platforms to seek influence. The world witnessed an increasing number of more independent small states that are becoming members of existing international organisations, playing roles that are influential next to other greater states. The establishment of the UN as the most ambitious supranational governing body post World War II - and has since become a model for other forms of international cooperation –suggests a movement towards collective cooperation, peace, global security and interdependence. In addition, liberal institutionalism proposes that democracy, interdependence, and international cooperation are methods to achieve global peace and security. These organisations are becoming influential in shaping the security, economy, and ideologies that are dictating the international system. They became microcosmic international communities that have hierarchies of their own and a system of rule. Liberal institutionalists argue that states as units are not are not the only influential actors that exist. An example of that is multinational corporations, political leaders, and international political and religious groups. Liberal

institutionalism contrasts with the realists' assumption that conflict is within the nature of the international system. They explain that states, through cooperation seek to achieve maximum 'absolute gains', making them less concerned with competition, and what the other state has gained (Devitt, 2011, p. 2). In addition, they have empowered small states in particular by providing them with more room and creative tools to play greater roles, in which fewer material resources that realists discuss can be compensated with other tools of power and influence, such as culture, diplomacy, technology, and knowledge etc. The movement away from traditional interpretations of power towards growing interdependence and influence, demonstrates the contributions made by Liberal Institutionalism. This gave small states the ability to exert influence and accumulate power via a variety of means. Liberal institutionalists' emphasis on the ability of cooperation to bind member states together adds to the IR discourse, and the study of small states, since they explained how small states seek influence through these international platforms (Rickli and Almezaini, 2017, p. 10). In light of this, Al-ebraheem (1984, p. 34) discussed the importance of international organisations, such as the UN, for small states, arguing that they need it more than the greater states. He maintained that such an organisation is an attractive platform for small states because they will achieve an equal status internationally, gain developmental and security support, and will enable them to expand their network (Al-ebraheem, 1984, p. 34).

Therefore, this indicated how small states, under the umbrella of international organisations and acting within a group dynamic, could seize opportunities to seek influence and achieve foreign policy goals. East found, in her study 'Size and Foreign Policy Behavior: A Test of Two Models in 1973', that small states' foreign policy shows more 'joined behaviour' compared to larger states (East, 1973, p. 565). She also described that the majority of small states' 'foreign policy events' are 'joint undertaking[s]' (East, 1973, p. 565). In addition, economic and political resilience can allow small states to 'punch above their weight', meaning that sometimes they dare to take bold foreign policy actions (Scheldrup, 2014, p. 11). In addition, this system provided small states with a number of strategies to achieve their goals.

Liberal Institutionalism scholars argue that the concept of power has shifted to non-material dimensions in the post-Cold War era. For example, Nye (2008, p. 94) proposed that soft power is a new form of power, defining it, as 'the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment'. In addition, he stated three sources of a country's soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policies (Nye, 2008, p. 96). For

instance, mediation is a form of soft power used in foreign policy that is increasingly adapted by small states. Mediation has been accepted as an international norm for peacebuilding, however, adapting it as a tradition in foreign policy strengthens states' status and influence: the new forms of power today. McKeown (2015, pp. 19-20) stated that, historically, mediation has been adopted and practiced by great powers, such as the US and the United Kingdom (UK). However, smaller states are adopting mediation in their foreign policy, such as Norway, Switzerland and Qatar, which are emerging as the new mediators. Baxter, Jordan & Rubin (2018, p. 209) referred to mediation as a social creativity strategy to seek power, influence, and gain 'centrality' through networking. Therefore, recently, small states invested in mediation as a statecraft in order to elevate their ranking in their respective regions. Baxter, Jordan & Rubin (2018, p. 92) stated that 'Acting as mediator for international conflict can enhance small state's status relative to its peers by demonstrating its relevance and importance in the regional and international system'. This change in the rise of small powers as mediators has also been observed in the politics of the Middle East. Kamrava (2011, p. 541) mentioned that mediation in the Middle East has been played by traditional powers that are considered 'heavyweight' in the regional dynamics, however, the small state Qatar emerged as a regional mediator, describing its 'prolific mediation efforts' as 'unique', compared to its size at the regional and global setting.

In conclusion, Liberal Institutionalism advanced the discourse of IR, by acknowledging the changes in the system, manifested by the rise of multinational corporations, supra-international institutions and the proliferation of small states in the post-Cold War era. In addition, Liberal Institutionalism established a novel contribution, taking into consideration how these changes of the system transformed the perspective towards power. Their discussion of the evolution of power to consider influence in forms of culture, technology, diplomacy, and international organisations encapsulates the small states behaviour in the international system using these international organisations as platforms to seek influence and play equal, and in some cases, greater roles compared to larger powers. Also, this school of thought revealed the importance of networks that a small state can gain, forming a social power which has been proved to be adapted. Liberal Institutionalism has proved to be an effective theoretical approach in studying small states, particularly if we want to investigate how they seek influence and manipulate their areas of issue, acting as a mediator to their advantage, and seeking greater power.

The Social Constructivism and Small States

Constructivism is an approach was introduced in the study of IR by Nicholas Onuf's *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (1989) [1]and Alexander Wendt's '*Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics'* (1992) and '*Social Theory of International Politics*' (1999). Constructivism contributed to the study of foreign policy and IR discourse by adding a social and human element into their analysis. This is achieved via including the agency of the FP elite and their role in conducting state behaviour in the international community. It is argued that Constructivism arose as a response to the gaps in Realism, which did not foresee the outcome of the Cold War and its implications on the international system. For instance, Theys (2018, p. 1) stated that '[...] it was the actions of ordinary people that ensured the end of the Cold War, not those of states or international organizations'. Constructivism challenges the conventional wisdom of realists' emphasis on the material variable in dictating state relations, and they direct their attention to social relations influence on states intra-relations. They reject the realists' argument that the 'anarchy' and 'chaos' are features of the international system and that states' behaviour are constrained by this material fact. They do, however, provide an alternative explanation, stating that shared ideas are what influences IR, not material forces (Wendt, 1999). They offered a different explanation of 'material facts', suggesting that, rather than being inherent within the international system, they are in fact, socially constructed. In addition, they explained that these social facts are determined by social forces such as values, identities, and practices that are grounded in the culture of every society.

Constructivism focuses on the study of a state's identity and its foreign policy elite. The study of identity as a variable is crucial, as it identifies states' interests. Identities are shaped by culture, science, normative beliefs, and religion, which constitutes the ideational factors. It is important to note that constructivists do not neglect the role of the material setting as the sole producer of identities, however, they argue that the material setting matters due to the interplays it has on the 'evolving ideas and beliefs inside the heads of people' which, as a consequence, shapes state identities (Grieo, Ikenberry and Mastanduno, 2014, p. 93). In the constructivist framework, identities are considered 'prerequisites for interests because an actor can not know what he wants until he know who he is' (Mengshu, 2020, p. 2). Constructivists changed the discourse in the study of IR and provided a new lens by incorporating the role of human agency

[1] As dicussed by Behravish in Constuctivism: An Introduction.

in shaping the international system. For instance, state elites are another variable used by Constructivism to analyse the foreign policy of nations, which in turn, influences interactions among states (Grieo, Ikenberry and Mastanduno, 2014, p. 93). For instance, Galal (2019, p. 51) reviwed that constructivists analysis focuse on: First, the prerecptions of the leadership toward the international system, that define what they consider to be challenges, threats, and solutions to address these challenges and, in turn, achieve state interests and security (Galal, 2019, p. 51). Second, the leadership definition of their state role, such as 'international mediator, or ally with regional or international powers' (Galal, 2019, p. 51). Following this discussion, Galal (2019, p. 51) argued that Constructivism is the most suitable theoretical framework to study small states' foreign policy, due to the fact that, in the developing world, totalitarian regimes are a majority when compared to the developed world. He explained that 'identity, ideas, and values have a priority for decision makers in these countries and present an essential determinant in the behaviour of their foreign politics' (Galal, 2019, p. 51).

In the context of small states in the Middle East, Telhami & Barnett (2002, p. 2) argued that 'no student of Middle Eastern International Politics can begin to understand the region without taking into account the ebb and flow of identity politics'. Cultural and social norms were adopted by these movements, such as Pan-Arabism, and found support from the Arab masses to achieve their desired political ends. Pan-Arabism called for the unification of all Arab citizens and shared the concern of 'protect[ing] Arab nations from the West, confront[ing] Zionism and strengthen[ing] the political community' (Barnett, 1998, p. 6). Pan-Arabism presented a threat to the status-quo of the region, and shaped the nature of the conflict among these states for many decades.

Although the region is described as a high conflict zone. In such a threatening environment, Arab leaders would be expected to increase their weaponry and military arsenal, as realists argue. Nevertheless, these states have abstained from building up their security capabilities (Barnett, 1998, p. 2). In contrast, conflict among Arab states was based on symbolism and the images of the desired regional order, as 'security […] [is tied] to presentational politics' (Barnett, 1998, p. 2). In addition, Barnett (Barnett, 1998, p. 7) discussed that 'the threat [to Arab leaders] was not the barrel of a gun but from the establishment of a norm or vision of political life that was contrary to the regimes interests'. In this regard, Barnett (1998, p. 10) explained that 'Arab Leaders competed to win the hearts and minds of Arab populations at home and abroad'.

The constructive theory uses different methods of analysis compared to Realism and Liberal Institutionalism. It looks closely at the ideational factors, providing us with tools to understand interstate relations. The normative changes that this theory discusses is of crucial importance to understand the evolution of politics in the region and the world. While it gives a detailed explanation on the role of cultural factors, societal identities, and the view of leaders as actors in the conduction of IR, it has limitations when studying the rise of militarization and securitization. However, I believe that it is necessary to apply this theory in order to understand IR in the Middle East.

Conclusion

The discussion above showed that the systemic and structural reality presents small states with limited foreign policy options, such as balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging to achieve security, avoid dangerous attacks, and counter rising threats. However, it is worth noting that realists neither suggested nor agreed on the best security strategy for small states. They discussed that the anarchy within the international system leaves small states concerned with their own survival, and drives them to play a limited role globally compared to greater states in the system. Realism values the study of great states and their influence on IR. Also, their emphasis on the material capabilities, as a condition for a state to be considered strong or great, led to the conclusion that small states' role can be considered insignificant. In addition, realists' approach could be misleading since they assume that small states role would remain marginal placing this group of state at the bottom of state's hierarchy. These are the two main flaws that I consider to be misleading, as they miss the changes that the state's affairs are experiencing. In this regard, East's earlier discussion that small states would keep a low level of international participation, refrain from the use of force, and keep a limited geographic interest for avid clashes with greater states, contrasts with the small states of the Arabian Peninsula; namely Qatar and the UAE. For instance, the small state of Qatar expanded its social network, and its global presence, promoting its political agenda, in opposition to greater states in the Middle East such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Realism does not present a sufficient explanation of Qatar's behaviour, despite it being smaller and weaker than the aforementioned states. This is best illustrated in the Gulf crisis of 2017, where, despite the sanctions imposed against Qatar by other regional players such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Egypt, the Qatari leadership did not respond easily to the demands of changing its allies and stopping their support of Islamists in the region (Qiblawi, Tawfeeq, Roberts, Alhashli, 2017). It took three years for GCC member

states to reach reconciliation and put an end to the blockade against Qatar. This represents a gap in the Realism literature, as it does not provide a solid interpretation of how and why the small state of Qatar keeps challenging bigger states, such as Egypt and KSA, who hold stronger armies, bigger populations, and larger territories. Furthermore, the UAE is considered a small state, however, despite its smallness, the UAE joined the war in Yemen, provided military support for general Haftar in Libya, intervened in Egypt after the 2011 uprisings, and established military bases in the Horn of Africa and Yemen. This aggressive competition for regional presence did not stop the UAE from pitting itself against the traditional powers of Saudi, Egypt, Turkey and Iran. These examples show that the international system does not limit small states, they can punch above their weight to seek influence and regional roles, while challenging bigger states. Therefore, I argue that Realism falls short in its interpretation of small states foreign policy behaviour, which makes a sufficient theoretical approach for this thesis research question. On the other hand, Liberal Institutionalism takes into consideration the rise of international organisations as global actors, and the proliferation of interdependence among states. It has a more optimistic view towards the possibility of cooperation, and small states' potential in the 21st century international system. It argues that small states can influence the globe and achieve their goals if they take advantage of their membership in these organisations, where they can implement niche strategies to serve their security goals. Nevertheless, Liberal Institutionalism has serious limitations when investigating the states of the Middle East in an attempt to answer why the UAE changed its foreign policy role. Liberal institutionalism prioritised the study of western democracies and their internal environment. Liberal institutionalists focus on the internal political aspects of liberal democracies such as interdependence, democracy and institutionalism, while overlooking other parts of the world. Their emphasis on the internal determinants of states and how states behave in these platforms inherently ignores how they act and get informed about their roles outside these organisations, nor why small states change their foreign policy. In this regard, the research question investigates the UAE, which has a conservative monarchic system and no democratic participation. This presents a gap in the literature of Liberal Institutionalism, which makes it an inappropriate approach for this study. Lastly, Constructivism represents the new school of thought in analysing small states. It provides them with the means to gain power and enrich the discipline with creative analytical tools to evaluate small states' actual role and capacity to act within the international system, and influence it. I agree with Galal (2019, p. 51) in his statement that Constructivism is the closest theory to explain small states behaviour. Nonetheless, its limitations lie in its focus on the internal context of identity, and neglects the

power of the international environment, international structure, and the influence of foreign states on foreign policy. However, their emphasis on identity could be a challenge, since identity, as a variable is difficult to test. In light of this, Constructivism is not a suitable approach to investigate foreign policy changes of small states, particularly the UAE. These theories of IR will remain crucial to the study of small states. However, the discussion above showed gaps in the literature, which makes them fall short in explaining why small states seek larger roles, why they adopt foreign policy changes, and the influence of these changes on their identities. Therefore, a different theoretical approach, that of international role theory, that addresses both the internal and external aspects, and their influence on foreign policy change, is required for this academic investigation.

3. Empirical Literature on the UAE's Foreign Policy

Introduction

The UAE has been discussed and studied by scholars of the Middle East, particularly, in the area of Gulf studies. The Gulf as a region has its own variables of analysis compared to the rest of Middle Eastern countries. These factors include systemic, domestic, social, cultural, economic, and leadership aspects, which makes the Gulf a separate area of study with its own experts. Therefore, this section is intended to serve as a literature review of the major empirical work produced which would support answering why the UAE seeks a greater role. The section will provide an overview of the main publications that discuss the UAE's foreign policy from various thematic perspectives, from its inception in 1971 to the present day. This section will shed light on the evolution of UAE's foreign policy role, and would serve to understand why and how it sought a greater role. The key themes through which these publications will be presented include the monarchical regime, leadership perception, economic capabilities, and the domestic structure of the federal system.

Regime Type – Monarchy

The UAE has a monarchic system of rule that originates from the tribal culture embedded in its societal context. Historically, tribes represented an independent political unit in which members of the group appointed a head of the tribe known as '*Sheikh Aqabila'*. These tribal units formulated an alliance consisting of a number of tribes. In Abu Dhabi, tribes that originally inhabited the Emirate were led by the Al-Nahyan clan for centuries. In the modern day UAE, the head of the state is the ruler of Abu Dhabi, who comes from the Al-Nahyan Family. Thus, variables such as cultural and societal context had been applied in the study of FPA of the UAE. For instance, some authors discussed that the making of UAE's foreign policy is influenced by the monarchical regime type. Khaled Almezaini (2012, p. 36), for example, noted that in an absolute monarchy system, the leader tends to hold absolute power over the state. Additionally, Rugh (1996, p. 58) mentioned in his work 'Foreign Policy of the United Arab Emirates' that 'an endorsement in the constitution allowed Sheikh Zayed to control the country's foreign policy affairs virtually unchallenged'. Furthermore, Al Alkim (1989, p. 37) concluded that tribalism is an important component of the political system. In addition, Ehteshami (2015, p. 14) referred to tribalism as salient element in foreign policy. Ehteshami discussed that 'the way in which tribal communities were forged into nation-states has left

security imprint in the resultant territorial state' particularly in the 'newer' GCC states such as the UAE. In the Gulf region, tribalism has a hierarchical component where it appoints one person usually, the 'Sheikh' who has the status of the leader, or the head of the tribe. The hierarchy in tribalism promotes monarchic culture, where the Sheikh has an equivalent role to that of the king or the head of state.

Majority of authors seem to reach the general conclusion that the foundation of early UAE foreign policy was influenced by the leader's regional and international preferences. This view was influenced by pro-Arab and pro-Muslim sentiments, which both directed the foreign policy of the UAE in its early years of formations. Almezaini (2012, p. 107) argues that the 'UAE foreign policy is highly personalised and remained so under the control of the late Sheikh Zayed until 2004'. Sheikh Zayed was influenced by the spread of Arabism and the threats that dictated the region, which made him construct a foreign policy that tackled Arab and Muslim issues, such as the Palestinian cause; while focusing on building his federation after the departure of the British forces from the Gulf in the late 1960s.

The death of Sheikh Zayed in 2004 and the transition of power to his sons was a transformational point in the country's history, which led to a gradual change in the pre-established foreign policy. Almezaini explained that the absence of Sheikh Zayed made the foreign policy of UAE concentrated in the few ruling figures of his sons in Abu Dhabi, and that the foreign policy became more fragmented during the post-2004 period (Almezaini, 2012, p. 45). Moreover, the second generation of foreign policy leaders in the UAE in the early 2000s were facing different structural changes, such as war on terror, war in Iraq, invasion of Afghanistan, and growing Iranian interference. These threats, coupled with an era of statism after the invasion of Kuwait motivated his sons to restructure the state's foreign policy strategy by moving away from commitments of Arabism, as it was no longer a threat compared to the aforementioned challenges. Almezaini (2012, p. 46) discussed that the UAE started diversifying its relations and focused on strengthening its alliances with influential western countries such as the US, and France (Almezaini, 2012, p. 46). Similarly, Sherwood (2017, p. 151) added that the UAE started a gradual change since 2004 as it became more active than the first three decades, stating that the UAE shifted in every aspect, particularly in their approach to addressing external opportunities and challenges. In light of this, the literature suggests that the shift in foreign policy behaviour was a result of the rise of new leaders in 2004.

Leadership Perception

The UAE's approach to foreign policy has been discussed through leadership individual traits due to the role that small elite groups play in foreign policy formulation. For instance, Soubrier (2017, p. 131) discussed the concept of 'prince state' to understand the foreign policy of small states, and she argued that 'individuals have not just replaced institutions. They become institutions'. Therefore, she called scholars to focus on the perception of the leaders in power due to the personalised decision-making process of the monarchies (Soubrier, 2017, p. 127). Similarly, Ehteshami (2015, p. 15) discussed that elites in the Gulf are in control of the state wealth, and their 'perceived interests' is 'entangled' with 'ruling establishment as whole'. Thus, the interest of the elites in power are internalised in the interests of the state. In other words, the interests of state can mirror the perceived interests of these elites. Furthermore, Ulrichsen (2017, p. 138) discussed that a formative feature of UAE foreign policy was the commitment to 'Arabness', particularly in relation to Palestine. Almezaini (2012, p. 109) explained that the 'personality [of Sheikh Zayed] reflected in most of his speeches on certain issues, particularly Arab concerns'. Additionally, he [sheikh Zayed] 'stressed the priority of Arab interest in the UAE foreign policy. This was reflected in the UAE foreign aid, which was motivated by Arabism' (Almezaini, 2012, p. 104). However, 2001 marked a shift in foreign aid politics where it shifted towards security issues (Almezaini, 2012, p. 109). Under the new leadership, whose main figures come from military backgrounds, the UAE began to distance itself from Arab issues (Almezaini, 2012, p. 46). In this regard, the new leadership shifted its focus away from the perception previously held by their father, which centred around supporting Arabism, Muslim issues, the Palestinian cause and towards expanding the scope of their foreign policy to other regions of the world. In this context, Soubrier (2017, p. 127) explained that 'the [main] factor shaping Qatar and UAE's responses to the external environment is their leaders' perception'. She maintained that '[UAE] policies should not only be read in relation to systemic/structural determinants, but rather in light of [its] regime's perception of international domestic entanglement' (Soubrier, 2017, p. 134). Thus, the leadership's perception of threats and security influenced the creation of a new strategy of investments in militarisation and securitization of the state.

Perception is important as it influences the human agency responsible for interpreting structural challenges, setting strategy, and shaping behaviours. The leadership's perception has transformed the UAE to become an economic and commercial hub presented in Dubai city, as

well as upgrading its military via creating partnerships with various military allies. This changed the UAE, making scholars as Soubrier (2017, p. 124) stated that 'it is assumed that small states cannot combine autonomy and influence due to lack of resources, […]'. However, he commented that the UAE is not a perfect match for theories of small state security. Nevertheless, Sherwood (2017, p. 144) discussed that 'the UAE leverages the power of economy and energy to exert power and employ risk-diversification strategies'. She continued that 'this makes the UAE strategy incompatible with behaviour of small states' (Sherwood, 2017:144). She added that the 'traditional power constructs fail to explain the security strategies of small states' (Sherwood, 2017, p. 146). Thus, Sherwood (2017, p. 146) used the concept of 'relational power' to analyse the UAE's foreign policy, explaining that the relational power perspective views power as multidimensional, and allows one dimension of power to decrease while another increases. This gives more room for scoring 'power dimensions', which could give a better explanation for small states behaviour (Sherwood, 2017, p. 146). By contrast, Soubrier (2017, p. 124) noted the UAE does not consider itself small, but rather a middle power. She concluded that it is the leader's perception of relative power that matters, not in physical resources (Soubrier, 2017, p. 124). Therefore, Sherwood (2017, p. 150) argues that the UAE's role in Egypt is more influential than any other small state, and its military role in Libya was unconventional.

The leadership's control over foreign policy in the UAE is constitutional as well as cultural. This makes personal preferences, perceptions, and beliefs dictate all aspects of foreign policy philosophy and conduct. Therefore, analysing the UAE's behaviour by applying leadership individual traits and focusing on their perception, informs us on the roots of foreign policy changes, since the leaders are the human agency that is responsible for interpretation of structural changes, emergence of threats.

Capabilities: Oil and Size of State

Material indicators, such as size, location, and resources of the country are other aspects discussed in the literature to study the UAE's foreign policy in relation to others in the system. Al Alkim (1989, p. 57) described the UAE as a mini-state, which depends on the outside world. In addition, Almezaini (2012, p. 21) argued that to overcome this weakness; the UAE adopted foreign policy tools that included diplomacy of alliances, and foreign aid in relation to other countries. For example, he mentioned that the UAE joined the GCC, under the leadership of KSA, with other Gulf States, to counter the threat of the Iranian revolutionary government (Al-

Alkim, 1989, p. 61). He argued that relations with Saudi Arabia represented one of the important determinants of the UAE's foreign policy, due to the country's size, economic role internationally, and regional weight (Al Alkim, 1989, p. 60). Additionally, Soubrier (2017, p. 125) writes that the UAE bandwagoned with Saudi to counter Iraqi and Iranian threats. Moreover, the UAE signed a security contract with the US to achieve autonomy from Saudi Arabia, another source of threat (Soubrier, 2017, p. 126). This shows that the UAE adopted a diversified strategy to balance and counter regional threats by establishing ties with great powers like the US, and bandwagoning with the sources of threat, like Saudi Arabia in its early years of formation. While these strategies are still being followed by the UAE today, its definition of threats has evolved over the years, and the government has created avenues of influence to achieve security.

The UAE's economic capabilities are also an important element of its foreign policy strategy. Soubrier (2017, p. 128) explained that in order to overcome their weakness as microstates, Gulf country leaders focused their strategy on the use of their one and only power, economic power. Also, Almezaini (2012, p. 59) discussed that 'creating a foreign aid fund was a foreign policy tool that supported the UAE to obtain support and recognition of itself at a time when it was newly established, and the fund operated as a diplomatic tool and provided an opportunity for the UAE to react against the regional changes at that time'. In other words, the UAE used its economic capabilities to gain its recognition from other states, and used it as a tool for regional influence.

As Sherwood (2017, p. 152) argued, globalisation benefited small states such as the UAE. For instance, it enabled them to make policy innovations in order to use opportunities provided by globalisation and the external environment for economic growth, domestic restructuring and technological progress (Sherwood, 2017, p. 152). Comparably, Ulrichsen (2017, p. 157) discussed how 'new poles of geo-economic gravity' presented more opportunities for new international players, such as the UAE, to benefit from international development that created new coalitions and realignments. The rapid growth of communicative technologies over the course of the past decade also enabled smaller states with smaller populations to have a disproportionate impact on international systems (Ulrichsen, 2017, p. 157). Sherwood (2017, p. 153) stated the UAE used its economic power to influence the international system and consolidate its position. He uses the example of how the Abu Dhabi Investment authority helped rescue the global financial markets during the 2008-2009 economic crisis. In addition,

Sherwood (2017, p. 152) argued that small states, like the UAE, were able to transform from 'security consumers to security producers', specifically economic security. This was possible due to the new avenues of globalisation, and the chances it offers small states to exercise their influence. In addition, the UAE engaged as an 'equal player' alongside larger states, Sherwood (2017, p. 153) noted however that this was a rare occurrence. As a result, the UAE demanded to restructure the governance of the IMF to reflect its weight in the global economy, in exchange for financial backing.

The fall of governments in the Middle East after the 2011 revolutions caused a 'vacuum of leadership' in the region that the UAE had to fill (Ibish, 2017, p. 14). Al Suwaidi (2011) noted that the UAE followed a 'smart policy' dynamic, in which it implemented a mix of hard and soft power approaches to protect its interests.[2] For example, Ibish (2017, p. 2) argues that the UAE's participation in the war in Yemen and its recent establishment of military bases in the Horn of Africa shows the country's willingness to act militarily to secure its interests and seek expansion. Ibish (2017, p. 4) argues that 'the UAE has increasingly used its military muscle and other resources to defend and advance its national interests, rather than relying on, and hence deferring to, larger neighbours or global powers'. Sherwood (2017, p. 150) argued the UAE's autonomous policy decision was derived from its willingness to diverge from the US to secure its interests, given the changing perspective of the US administration towards the region. In addition, the UAE military's neutrality shifted to a strategy of power projection presented in Bahrain's law enforcement operation in 2011, and in Yemen (Soubrier, 2017, p. 133). However, Ulrichsen (2017, p. 148) said that 'the UAE involvement in Afghanistan since 2001 illustrates the evolution in the country's approach toward international affairs […] in the combination of "hard" and "soft" power projection along with a strong public relations component'.

Ibish (2017, p. 4) explained that the UAE adopted a soft power approach where it engaged in public diplomacy, and invested in various international projects involving arts, culture, science, and technology. One way of analysing such a policy of opening global project branches in the UAE, is that the country is committed to building its international prestige by promoting a modern global image of itself; one that is equal to other cultural centres in the world. It is important to note that soft power refers to the state's ability to attract others using 'non-material

[2] As mentioned by Sherwood in 'Risk Diversification and the United Arab Emirates Foreign Policy', in Almezaini, K, S., Rickli, J, M., (eds), 2017, *The Small Gulf States: Foreign and Security Policies Before and After the Arab Spring*.

means' such as values, reputation and culture (Viotti & Kauppi, 2013, p. 207). UAE cultural projects could increase its soft power by becoming a cultural centre in the Middle East.

The UAE's economic power, as an oil-rich country, enabled it to overcome its structural vulnerability of being a small-sized, low populated country, sandwiched between Saudi Arabia and Iran. UAE's leadership used their wealth to build their military and security apparatus, as well as maintain their aid program, and continue the country's transformation to the cultural centre of the Middle East by hosting world-class museums such as the Louvre. In addition, the emergence of Dubai as an economic and commercial centre in the Middle East played a role in transforming the country's image into an international and open society that attracts foreign investments, which generates wealth and expands the UAE's social network adding to the country's strength. Although scholars discussed oil as a cursed resource, the UAE's wealth enabled it to transform military, commercially and culturally, thereby improving its status as a regional actor in the Middle East.

Domestic Structure of the Federal System

The literature also tackles the federal system of the UAE' government, with Almezaini (2012, p. 36), for example, explaining that the federal system of the country enabled individual Emirates to conduct their own international affairs in certain aspects, which made the UAE a country with multiple foreign policies. For instance, the UAE maintains good economic relations with Iran, particularly Dubai, despite the security challenge it presents to the leadership of Abu Dhabi. Indeed, Ehteshami (2015, p. 14) de-constructed UAE's federalism arguing that 'the ruling elites' role conceptions are in turn shaped by the conditions of the territorial state's formation and are therefore subject to domestic pressures, which traditionally has led to fierce disputes as much as compromises on foreign policy priorities'. This is manifested in the conflicted visions between, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai towards Iran. For instance, while Abu Dhabi lean towards limiting its relations with Iran, Dubai as trade hub, prefer closer relations with the Islamic republic (Ehteshami, 2015, p. 14). Similarly, Al-Alkim (2012, p. 21) argued that this multidimensional aspect of the bilateral relations with Iran presents a domestic policy challenge between Dubai, and the federal government in Abu Dhabi. In contrast, Almezaini commented that the federal nature of the UAE produced constructive foreign policy, which has led to the survival of the UAE despite its vulnerabilities. It seems that the work of the authors suggests that the UAE, during its early days in a troubled region, had to make multiple alliances and bilateral relations to overcome its disadvantageous smaller size,

surrounded by competing regional rivals: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq.

Following the death of Sheikh bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi, and Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid of Dubai, there was a development in the nature of federalism in the UAE. Ulrichsen (2017, p. 7) argued that the UAE, particularly Dubai and Abu Dhabi, overcame obstacles due to the emergence of an alliance between Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) crown prince of Abu Dhabi, and Sheikh Mohammed bin Rahsid ruler of Dubai and prime minister of the UAE; which ultimately strengthened the federal unity among the Emirates. This was reflected in the UAE's foreign policy, as it shifted in every aspect and became more proactive in addressing external opportunities and challenges. Similarly, this shift was described by Ulrichsen (2017, pp. 151-152) as a 'state capitalist approach', in which the UAE expanded its global presence by establishing diplomatic and trade ties with new partners such as India, China, and Latin American countries, all of which are areas of key regional interest.

Conclusion

The literature review discussed different explanations, in order to analyse the UAE's foreign policy from multiple thematic perspectives. It demonstrated the changes undergone within the country since its early establishment - in order to protect itself from regional and international powers - from a fragile new state to an internationally influential economic player. Scholars seem to agree that monarchy is an important aspect in UAE foreign policy making, particularly during its early stages, where it was highly influenced by the rule of the late Sheikh Zayed. Also, realists' criteria such as state's size, oil, resources were used to analyse the UAE's foreign policy. In particular, Al-Alkim referred to the UAE as a 'mini-state' that depended on the outside world for protection. Others referred to UAE's economic power, and how it supported the country throughout the years to achieve its interests using foreign aid. For example, the UAE in its early stages used its aid funds and diplomacy to achieve recognition at the regional and international levels. Soubrier added to the discussion by suggesting how the UAE used its economic power to position itself as a middle power, which was highly influenced by the leaders of the country in the past decade. Also, the state identity and leadership perception is another important component of studying the UAE's regional and international behaviours. The authors explained how Sheikh Zayed's vision shaped the foreign policy of the UAE to be in support of Arab and Muslim issues in the early years of federation. The literature explained how the new leadership's perception shifted the country's commitment from Arabness to having a global presence and playing an international role. To conclude, while there are

relatively few publications that discuss the subject of UAE's foreign policy, throughout its history, the ones that are available, which have been presented here, provide an excellent foundation on the subject, from which further study could be made. In addition, these explanations represented different aspects in studying the UAE and have shown how the UAE's foreign policy and status as a small state have developed. However, they still fall short of reporting the change in the UAE's foreign policy role. In addition, the above discussion did not explain why the UAE, as a small state, pursued foreign policy change, and its emergence as an influential regional player post-2011. Furthermore, the empirical literature does not discuss the current role that the UAE is playing and its impact on the UAE's identity. Thus, tackling this research question via a heuristic approach is critical to uncover determinants, influences, the decisions behind any pursued change in foreign policy role, the enactment of this change, and its impact on the UAE internally and externally. To that end, applying interactions role theory will seek to answer why and how this change in foreign policy role was pursued, what is this new Emirati identity, and whether it is shaping the regional politics of the Middle East.

4. Theoretical Framework: Interactionist Role Theory

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the evolution of foreign policy roles using the interactive approach in role theory, particularly foreign policy change. It aims to shed light on the rapid and sudden foreign policy changes that states pursue, and their effect on identity. This chapter seeks to elucidate first why states change their foreign policy approach. Secondly, why some small states pursue greater roles in foreign policy and how this change is conducted. Thirdly, the impacts of this change on identity.

The analysis explores how some foreign policy elites were able to implement role changes suddenly and quickly, as opposed to the lengthy process that is usually required. The UAE's foreign policy identity shifted from being a low-key policy, compatible with the standard small state foreign policy (as discussed in the literature review chapter), to an active foreign policy that is sometimes described as interventionist, and as that of a small state with middle power influence in the Middle East. Thus, the recent emergence of the UAE as a regional player, and the level of influence that it has over Middle Eastern affairs, suggests that the UAE, as an agent, is seeking role change alongside new identity affirmation. In other words, the shift in the agent's role-playing required it to discard its pre-established foreign policy and affirm a new identity. It should be addressed here that the agent in this case study is the foreign policy elite, the UAE's state leadership.

In this framework, the leaders are considered the interpretive agency of the interactions and structural changes around them, making them the main drivers of any foreign policy changes. Gustavsson (1998, p. 24) rightly states that 'the government of a state is an organization, and, as such, it is not in itself capable of seeing, thinking, learning, or preferring. Only the human beings that make up the organization can do that'. State leaders, who run the agency in the international system and decide on its interactions with other actors, vary in their behaviours since the influential individuals that make up state governments are unique in how they perceive international affairs and how they interact with it. However, there are external factors, which play a role in influencing leadership that, in turn, influences foreign policy. In other words, the leadership is the filter through which these factors are processed.

Considered the agent of change, the foreign policy elite is motivated by the interactionist nature of international affairs. It is the environment where agents learn what roles are suitable for them, and what identity they should express in their foreign policy conduct. Therefore, this chapter will apply an interactionist role theory approach for its capacity to incorporate the two-level aspects (International and domestic levels), the human capital of the agency, and the external factors of international society where the interaction occurs, resulting in new foreign policy roles. Furthermore, the interactionist role approach of the theory applies the core sociological properties of role theory. These are crucial in understanding how the perception of actors, towards the self and the other, defines the roles that are shaping the international affairs of world politics. Thus, within this framework, the agent, the Emirati leadership is the independent variable, and the UAE foreign policy is the dependent variable.

Before delving into the details of this thesis' theoretical framework, understating FPA is required, since role theory is considered a theoretical and analytical tool under the umbrella of FPA. Hudson (2005, p. 3) stated that 'the single most important contribution of FPA to IR theory is to identify the point of theoretical intersection between the primary determinants of state behaviour: material and ideational factors. The point of intersection is not the state, it is human decision makers'. FPA underwent development due to generational, structural, and international changes. This brought about a multidisciplinary field that includes different analytical methods and approaches that vary from IR: organisational behaviour of decision-making, sociology, and psychology. This realist notion of analysis and black boxing the state, or billiard balls model, faced increased criticism as the system moved towards unipolarity. Thus, scholars started moving away from the level of analysis model of viewing the state as a 'metaphysical abstraction', or billiard balls model, to unboxing the state in pursuit of a constructivist understanding of the 'making' of foreign policy within a state (Hudson, 2005:6). Therefore, IR scholars called for the inclusion of domestic and individual variables in the study of foreign policy.

For instance, Hudson (2005, p. 3) argued that 'if our IR theories contain no human beings, they will erroneously paint for us a world of no change, no creativity, no persuasion, and no accountability. [...] Adding human decision-makers as the key theoretical intersection confers some advantages generally lacking in IR theory'. In the case of the small states of the Gulf, the psychological and individual matrix is also considered. For instance, Al-ebraheem (1984, p. 49) argued that 'to understand the foreign policy of small states, one has to understand the

psychology of their leaders and decision makers'. He also adds that 'the personality of the leader is what determines the foreign policy in small states, […] the political process of very small communities is characterised by a highly personalised form of government and an authoritarian form of decision making' (Al-ebraheem, 1984, p. 49). Similarly, Al-ebraheem (1984, p. 49) argues that 'in personal government one individual may be predominantly influential in choosing government policies and may often assume complete responsibility for the execution of these policies as well', concluding that politics is a one-man show in this context. Therefore, Al-Ebraheem (1984, p. 49) called for human factor in FPA to understand how these human actors perceive the world. He added that analysts should 'examine [leadership] behaviour in order to determine how the leaders choose one course of action from among a number of competing alternatives' (Al-ebraheem, 1984, p. 49). Similarly, Galal (2019, p. 52) wrote:

> 'The personality of political leadership plays a prominent role in determining and shaping the state's vision and perception of the international system, and thus in shaping their behaviour and external movement. Therefore, the element of perception plays a central role in determining the foreign policy of small states where non-democratic regimes in developing countries allow the political leader to play a greater role in specifying foreign policy priorities than institutional democratic systems that limit the political leader's role in determining the priorities of foreign policy'.

Influenced by the inclusion of FPA, scholars started using role theory in FPA due to its ability to reveal states' social roles within the international system such as leader, mediator, follower and aggressor (Harnisch, 2011). Role theory is a social theory that emerged in the field of IR and FPA in the 1970s. Holsti (1970) was the first to elaborate on the cognitive concepts of role theory, which was developed decades earlier in the field of sociology and political psychology. In the early stages, role theory focused on the domestic context that influenced the roles adopted by states, specifically that of its leaders. Thies (2009, p. 2) noted that Holsti focused on the beliefs and images that leaders possess to determine a nation's identity, which in turn influences foreign policy. The domestic context of role theory is crucial, as it influences states relations in the international environment. In addition, second-generation role theorists developed the interactionist role theory and focused on the interactionist approach of the role. They investigated how states develop their role through interaction with others in specific areas. In this context, roles are not fixed. They are subject to change and in constant re-creation

due to the changes in the interaction, which could reflect how and why roles change. This interactionist approach could bridge the domestic context (National Role Conceptions - NRC) with the international structure and investigate the influence of each on the identity of the state and the role it adopts. States perform their roles in the environment of the interaction (the stage), where they can influence and be influenced by others. Thies and Breuning (2012, p. 1) explained that role theory 'tends to focus on the agent–structure debate from a slightly different, albeit complementary, vantage point'. For instance, the role theory's study of role expectation can 'provide the conceptual bridge between the individual and the social structure' (Thies, 2009, p. 9). Thus, interactionist role theory can reveal how roles are developed, enacted, and changed. It connects the domestic aspect, embedded in the national role conception and the leadership's interpretation of the self, with the other's expectations and perceptions of the self as well.

The chapter is divided into eight sections. Section one will discuss the origins of foreign policy roles, section two will explain roles in an interaction, section three will discuss how roles are constructed, then the chapter will move to elaborate on how roles bridge between the agency and the structure. Furthermore, the chapter will discuss identity affirmation in section five. Then, section six will elaborate on why states pursue role change. Section seven will discuss the origins of foreign policy change, and finally a conclusion.

The Origins of Foreign Policy Roles

The 'role' is a terminology that originated in the theatre and is used by foreign policy analysts to refer to states' positions towards other states (Thies, 2009, p. 3). These positions are performed by states via their agents – the foreign policy elite. When applying this in the context of IR, states are the role holders, and the international system is the stage where roles are performed. Therefore, states are considered the actors who perform a 'foreign policy script' written by the agent (foreign policy elite) in order to achieve national objectives. For instance, it has been explained that actors construct 'role scenarios' or 'action scripts' and choose one among many to determine which role should be adopted by their state (Thies, 2009, p. 7). However, these roles develop and change based on their scenarios and actions over time, making roles hard to predict (Thies, 2009, p. 7). In addition, state roles are the result of different structural, external, and – most importantly – domestic realities that lead to different, and sometimes surprising, foreign policy outcomes that can influence the international system. These surprising outcomes can be role positions that classic IR theories failed to explain.

Interactionist role theory scholars disagree that agents are restricted by fixed scenarios and that they follow and argue that roles are 'sets of expectations about the proper behaviour of an actor in a given social position' (McCourt, 2011, p. 1607). These scholars suggest that states playing roles provide them with an opportunity to acquire a sense of the structure and therefore realise the 'possibilities and constraints' of being part of that structure (McCourt, 2011, p. 1607). Moreover, any shift in a state's international behaviour reflects changes that could be traced back to alterations in the agency or interaction in each situation that led to the adoption of said foreign policy changes. Stryker and Statham (1985, p. 312) explain that 'the scripts are not detailed directives to be played as given but constructed in the course of the play itself and are constrained only in an outline form by the culture and social organization within which the play takes place'. Therefore, McCourt (2011, p. 1607) stated that scholars need to adopt a more 'fluid conceptualisation' in the study of foreign policy behaviour in order to understand the actual states' roles and how they were formed or changed. As McCourt (2012, p. 376) explained that 'role-playing, for the most part, is [...] about doing what is expected, appropriate, and possible in a given situation'.

This discussion suggests that role-playing is not solely derived from domestic idealism regarding what must be done, but it also introduces the influence of others in forming states roles in an interaction. Therefore, the interactionist approach has a sophisticated theoretical capacity to reveal the complexity of how roles are made within an interaction, which is necessary since roles are products of the agent and its relation to others.

Harnisch (2012, p. 52) contributed that roles are not resultant of '[…] material economic conditions or immaterial discourses. Ego and alter-expectations [are components of roles] as ascriptions of social position and function. They regulate actors, structures, and their interaction through practice'. Thus, the interactionist role approach focuses on the agent's cognition and interpretation of 'external influences of the others' that engage in an interaction. Therefore, understating interactionism in relation to the UAE's foreign policy role would deconstruct the roots and triggers of the policy changes and shifts it has implemented in the last decade. The case of the UAE could elucidate why small states seek foreign policy roles bigger than their capabilities. It could also clarify why and how role change incites small states to take bigger roles and lead them to change into middle powers.

Explaining Roles in Interaction (the Self and the Other)

The interactionist approach, developed by George Herbert Mead, investigates the relationship between the agency and the action from a different angle than the sociological description of actors as automatons playing out pre-written scripts (McCourt, 2012, p. 378). The interactionist approach discusses the interpretive side of the 'I' and the 'me' of the agency within the interaction process. The 'me' here, refers to the agent's action of viewing itself through the eyes of others (Klose, 2020, pp. 855). This requires, in its use, an interpretation of how others see the self. The result of this interpretation translates into the 'I' which would solicit the agents' creativity to identify its reaction to the 'me' it has interpreted (Klose, 2020, pp. 855). The 'I' and the 'me' are aspects of the self and are considered a stream of consciousness. This dialogue between the 'me' and the 'I', within an interaction, provides the actor with a first learning venue, which is cognitive in its nature, to realise itself as an international actor and create its most suitable role.

The Meadian interactionist approach, which investigates the agent's interaction with others in a particular context, is at the core of this analysis. Klose (2020, p. 856) describes that this as 'a reflectively intelligent process' in which an actor develops 'a sense of who it is' and 'what it wants […] which then provides its conduct and in society with meaning and orientation'. Thus, taking roles in relation to others within an interaction is core in the actor's pursuit of self-realisation, role discovery, and self-actualisation. In this framework, 'others' are crucial to understanding identity formation within interactions and foreign policy roles. However, Wendt (1999, p. 327) argued that 'not all others are equally significant, so power and dependency relations play an important role in the story'. [3]This points to the fact that the 'other' in an interaction differs in terms of its importance, power, and relevance to the self in a given context that influences the agent's behaviour towards that other and the role adopted. Therefore, interactionist role theory identifies two types of others: the significant other and the generalised other. They are considered key elements of role learning, as they define the degree to which the other is considered in a given situation (Beneš & Harnisch, 2015, p. 50). The significant other, on one hand, is a state that plays the largest role in defining the self, through comparing and relating themselves to it; it is considered a socialising agent. Significant other can be former colonial power, or an influential neighbour (Beneš & Harnisch, 2015, p. 50). This could be

[3] As quoted by Beneš & Harnisch in Role Theory in Symbolic Interactionsim: Cezch Republic, Germany and the EU.

both a positive or negative differentiation with the other (Beneš & Harnisch, 2015, p. 50). On the other hand, the generalised other represents the group the agent belongs to, with whom they share a common identity (Beneš & Harnisch, 2015, p. 50). States usually formulate their role and affirm identities against a negative significant (an enemy) or in support of a positive significant other. It does so, either to earn recognition or play an equal role and prove its value by playing a meaningful role in an interaction. Thus, the most crucial others the study will refer to are the significant others, including negative and positive others, and the generalised other. For instance, McCourt (2012) provided a role-based and an indemnity affirmation analysis of the reinvasion of the Falklands in 1982 after its seizure by Argentina. McCourt (2012) argued that for the UK to able to re-invade the Falkland's needed to make role in relation key others, its European allies and the US, who are considered part of the UK group. Thus, it affirmed itself as status qua oriented power of American led west. In addition, this role was taken within a context of the cold war (McCourt, 2012, p. 1060). The approval of key others was crucial for the UK to succeed in its operation against Argentina who described the UK role as colonialist.

The interactionist approach takes into consideration 'interpretation' as the foundational cognitive aspect of the interaction between agents and their influence on the emergence of the role in reference to a particular situation. Mead's interactionist framework defined three core aspects of role theory: 1) Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; 2), the meaning these objects have is a product of interaction; 3), interaction conveys meaning through a process of interpretation on the part of the actor' (McCourt, 2012, p. 377). Thus, the other's recognition and approval are crucial for the success of the roles that states play in an interaction. This is reflected in the interplay between the three core elements of the interactionist role approach, which include role taking, role making, and alter casting. These three core steps best reflect the dialogue between the me, the I, and the other. Moreover, in interactionist role theory, material and creative power come second after the interpretation, which refers to the agents' ability to persuade others of its newly developed 'I'.

Stages of Role Construction (Role Taking, Role Making, and Alter Casting)

Agents do not always know what roles to play when they are faced with new demanding situations that require attention. Therefore, to overcome this knowledge deficit, they stimulate their imaginations in pursuit of informed decisions. This process is referred to as role taking, which includes defining the self through the eyes of the other. Harnisch (2012, p. 53) explains

that ‘role taking is part of the process of individuation. Self-consciousness rests upon the (growing) ability to take the role of the other’. The imaginative and interpretive element of role taking informs the agent on what others are expected to think and do with regard to the agent’s ‘self’ in a particular situation. During this process, the agent, considered the self, adopts the perspective of the other in a given situation. In other words, the agent puts himself in the other’s shoes (McCourt, 2011, p. 1607). In role taking, the self seeks to interpret the words, gestures and actions of the other to choose a representation of the self, among other available representations. It is the process of choosing ‘who one will be, and thus what interests one intends to pursue, in an interaction’ (McCourt, 2011, p. 379). The significance of the other in foreign policy confirms Wendt’s (1999, p. 227) argument that ‘we carry others around with us in our heads’. Furthermore, role taking ‘asks which and what type of ‘others’ the state in question ‘took’ and what expectations about behaviour this process betrayed’ (McCourt, 2011, p. 381). At this stage, the agent determines if the other is a significant or a generalised other and plans the role that should be taken accordingly (McCourt, 2011, p. 381). In addition, Harnisch (2012, p. 53) referred to the individuation embedded in role taking as a social process that allows the agent to examine the self by taking the role of the other. He explained that ‘the self becomes an object to itself only when an actor learns “to take the role of other” and examines oneself from this other’s perspective’. Harnisch (2011, p. 39) adds that ‘the individual and society, neither of which can exist, ontologically speaking, without the other, because of the prior conceptualisation of the other facilities the experience of the self’. Therefore, the existence of the other defines the grounding base of the self and role taking. In addition, role taking, in an interaction, is considered a venue that could influence the success of roles adopted by the agents.

What has been learnt through role taking leaves the agent with action options to fit his definition of the self in a particular situation. This step is referred to as role making which comes second in an interaction. In role making, the self would need to act creatively in order to make a role for itself in the particular interaction or situation. Furthermore, roles would need to be accepted by others. Therefore, an actor would engage in a persuasion process to convince others of an interaction according to their own definition of the self and roles by casting each other into corresponding roles. This step is called alter casting which is the final stage in an interaction. In this stage, the agent works to have his desired role legitimised by others. Here, the agent is engaged in persuading ‘significant others to take corresponding roles’ (Klose, 2018a, p. 2). Furthermore, the process of alter casting reflects the learning aspect of the

interactionist role theory. Harnisch (2012, p. 55) explained that 'alter casting is the conscious manipulation of one's own role taking behaviour to (re)shape the role of another actor, presumably a counter or commensurate role'. In addition, McCourt (2012, p. 380) explained that for agents to perform their appropriate role, they 'seek to 'cast' a certain 'alter' onto the Other, an alter that accords with their particular vision of themselves'. The other becomes, therefore, a participant in this process by doing the very same thing that the self is doing. Thus, role taking is the product of interaction whereby each player attempts to 'correspond [their roles] to the best 'fit''. (McCourt, 2012, p. 380). In addition, Klose (2018b, p. 1149) clarified that 'the interplay between resources, role expectations, and creative action' can influence actor's capacity to cast other into alter and adopt roles accordingly. He clarified that role expectations need to be compatible with roles of others in an interaction for alter casting to be successful'. Thus, the interactionist perspective suggests an interplay of these three aspects of role expectation in role taking, creative action of role making, and alter casting can determine the type and success of the role adopted by the self/agent.

The Agency-Structure Bridge (the Other and the Self)

In the interactionist context, states are provided with an opportunity to observe and evaluate what roles are the most suitable to perform to achieve their interests through the process of socialisation with other agents in the international system. For instance, Aggestam (2006, p. 25) argued that 'role theory applied to foreign-policy analysis stresses how foreign policy is both purposeful and shaped by institutions and structures'. This suggests that while roles can face contestations domestically, similarly, they can be subject to the contestation of external others since the self is a part of an international community as well. In this context, external contestations contribute to the type and shape of roles that are adopted. According to Breuning (2011, p. 24) 'National Role Conceptions, in other words, must simultaneously resonate with domestic audience and be credible in state relations with other'. The other is important because of his significance in enabling the role-taker to achieve self-realisation and role discovery. Also, the other is a participant in role prescription influencing the roles performed by the actor under the study. Thus, the agency-structure relation is crucial as it has power over the national self-construction of roles held by the agent through interaction, and the feedback it gets from other actors within a particular situation. The agents should take into consideration the norms, culture, and narratives embedded in the international environment when constructing their

roles, the same way they do domestically as the role performed might be subject to external contestation.

Nevertheless, others argue that the agent has the capability and power to influence the external interaction/structure as well. They stress on the agent's creativity to do so. Sandstrom, Martin, and Fine (2010, p. 14) explain:

> 'You have an important element of freedom as you interact with others and formulate your actions. You can improvise to some degree as you negotiate identities, define situations, and perform roles (such as student, friend, or employee) in your everyday interactions. In turn, you can resist, avoid, or overcome some of the constraints you face in various situations'.

Within this context, roles are product prescribtions of external significant and generalised others as well as NRC of the demostic contexts where roles are made. Role theory also highlights the importance of human activity over the structure, since it role theory is 'primary humanist and historicist' interpretive approach (Wehner and Thies, 2014, p. 416). They add that 'individuals are not passive actors and supporters of institutions, discourses, and a given social order but rather agents that can modify inherited norms and languages following their own reasoning and their inherent creativity' (Wehner and Thies, 2014, p. 416). Thus, Interactionism in role theory can reveal the power of actors/states in influencing the international structure. This shows that the conduction of IR is a two-way street (structural and individual).

Wenher and Thies (2014, p. 415) discussed that enabling side of roles empires the agency to achieve influence as it has 'capacity to create, modify, and violate expectations that emerge from and within relations with others and from the limitations of structures'. The agency's power to influence the structure originated from the fact that it is led by individuals with their perceptions and cognitions, which control the type of decisions taken towards other agents within the structure, and the nature of the role that a state should pursue. While the structure does influence the roles and agency of the state, it is secondary to the multifaceted human capital of the elite, and their ability to perceive the international structure and make decisions. This shows that the interaction of the agent influences the formulation and outcome of the role, and this should be considered in the study. In addition, the shifts that may influence the

interaction change the roles and identities expressed outside. This makes the current international system a product of the series of intra-states interactions.

Identity and Identity Affirmation

The interactionist role theory can reveal how individual states affirm their identity on the international stage. This can dictate actors' behaviours and their relations with others leading to the adoption of foreign policies compatible with their identities. The Meadian interactionist approach suggests that defining the social role of a state should be established before any identity-based action. This makes roles the origins identity. In other words, roles precede identity. Therefore, as foreign policy scholars, it is crucial to analyse the role in order to reveal what identity the state/agent has adopted. In the interactionist framework, roles reveal the state/actor's identity, which is expressed through role performance in a specific area/region of foreign policy interest. McCourt (2011, p. 370) argues that 'roles are thus the necessary social vehicle for action in its meaning-creating, identity-affirming sense'. In addition, 'identity-based action requires the prior existence of social roles to render both the action itself and the underlying identity socially meaningful' (McCourt, 2011, p. 1600). While the agency governs and practices the role of the state, it does not control other factors that play a determining role in the outcome of that role. The agent is only one part of a bigger international society that contributes and shapes the state's role. The international society, where the interaction of the agent occurs, influences the role of the state as much as the agent himself. Therefore, McCourt (2012, p. 378) argues that:

> 'We need not view the roles that states play as existing a priori in the form of a fixed international system, as do Wendt and Waltz; nor as simply conceived by national decision-makers, as does Holsti; nor exclusively as taking the form of institutional roles, as does Barnet'.

However, he explained that states' identities are affirmed through roles that reflect the social types and categories (McCourt, 2011, p. 1600). In other words, for a state identity to exist, a social role is required first (McCourt, 2011, p. 1600). In addition, Interactionists explained that the agency role is crucial in bringing meaning to the roles they adopt since 'identity by its has no action at its heart'. (McCourt, 2011, p. 1605). This clarifies that social role, made by agents, are give an identity meaning. Thus, studying the agency is required to obtain identity-based analysis, as explained by McCourt (2011, p. 1605).

Therefore, the changes in identity affirmation can be traced back to the foreign policy makers' interpretation of the self in a particular context. Nevertheless, in role construction, foreign policy makers use the ruling narratives of their domestic societies as the basis of roles geared toward other states (Wehner &Thies, 2014, p. 421). Usually, this happens in the role taking stage where domestic debate takes precedence over the state's role in foreign affairs. At this stage, the varying policy proposals reflect the differing roles a state can play to affirm its preferred identity (McCourt, 2012, p. 380). The 'common identity' that is shared with a group of states and allies that constitute the generalised other is also part of this debate. While the interactionist role approach is not a leadership-based analysis, it can be linked to leadership theory as both stipulate that the role needs to be legitimised by other actors. Also, both require a level of cognition, interpretation, and imagination in role taking which requires considering these individualistic traits by the elite. For example, studies have shown that leaders can overlook the values that dominate the societies they govern by manipulating public opinion to support their favoured policies (Cantir and Kaarbo, 2012, p. 12). In other words, identities can be used to justify and legitimise actions by the leadership/agency. For instance, Turkey experienced a foreign policy change when Recep Tayyip Erdogan became president. Since then, Turkey started gradually increasing its activity in the Middle East as a regional leader and Arab role model while diminishing its secular Kemalist ideology (Ovali, 2013, pp. 4-11). Ovali (2013, p. 6) argued that 'in the foreign policy domain, AKP [Justice and Development Party] first engaged in a re-formulation of Turkish national identity and then diminished the role of the Kemalist military and secular elites, which had previously been influential in the foreign policy making process'. This foreign policy role change is influenced by the philosophy of its former minister of foreign affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu who pushed for redirecting Turkey's role and reviving its Islamist identity. Ovali (2013, p. 6) explained that 'In Davutoğlu's lexicon, the term 'redefining' refers to the societal reformulation of Turkish identity based on Islamic-Ottoman culture and related foreign policy preferences, previously ignored by secular elites. For him, in order to cope with the challenges of globalism, it is necessary to construct a link between local and national identities'.

This indicates that the internal environment of a state is governed by factors such as ruling identities, narratives, public perceptions, preferences, the influence of the elite and state actions. States are enticed by an identity-based justification. During the course of interest formulation, identities go through assumption, interpretation, and narration by the agent (McCourt, 2011, p. 1605). This process shows the state's socialisation, which influences the

agency, the executive body of the state, to determine the scope, choice, and nature of the narration of a role conception embedded in the externally performed role (Wehner and Thies, 2014, p. 416)

Roles are crucial in foreign policy as they provide reasons for action in a justificatory sense (Harnisch & Beneš, 2015, p. 48). For example, Harnisch and Beneš (2015, p. 48) explained that national roles are inherently relational, as roles exist before interests, 'as national roles define "who the actor actually is" and "what he or she may/should do" in and for the group' (Wendt, 1992, p. 398). This provides a national purpose, where roles are incorporated in the domestic discourse to justify foreign policy actions, such as waging a war to bring justice or protect the national identity. In other words, role-playing is ideational in nature, and identity construction is the pre-quest of defining the national interests of a state.

It can be argued that Mead's concept of identity affirmation may hold some similarities with K. J. Holsti's incorporation of the national role conception and foreign policy as a contextual tool, which he borrowed from the fields of sociology and psychology to understand the individual cognition and domestic social aspect of foreign policymaking. Holsti (1970, p. 245) summarised the national role performance as 'the general foreign policy behaviour of governments, including patterns of attitudes, decisions, responses, functions and commitments towards other states'. Hence, national role conception is crucial to the nature of roles as it informs on the role's performance on the international stage. (Holsti 1970, p. 246). NRC are defined as 'consisting of policymaker's attitudes towards the certain role the state should play, the policies based on these perceptions, and how the state should act in concordance with this' (Holsti, 1970, p. 298). Furthermore, Krotz (2002, p. 6) discussed that national role conception can be understood as 'domestically shared views and understandings regarding the proper role and purpose of one's own state as a social collectively in the international arena'. Their significance comes from their ability to serve as strategies constructed by the elite to frame and cast roles according to their interests. Thus, Ovah (2013, p. 2) summarised that 'national role conception refers to foreign policy elite's domestic construction of the national-self and self-related roles that a nation is assumed to perform'. Also, NRC serves as a methodological tool to decode states actions at the international stage, which in turn influences the construction of the roles performed and the identity expressed externally. In an interactionism, NRC are manipulated by the use of other actor that a state is making role in relation to. For example, significant and generalised others are used by the political elite to construct the NRC (Harnisch

and Beneš, 2015, p. 50). In relation to this, significant other can be cased in national political discuses as a challenge, on the hand, generalised other can used in 'the political discourse as through references to abstract entities such as humanity or Europe' (Harnisch and Beneš, 2015, p. 50) .

Why and How Foreign Policy Change Occurs

Empirical literature shows that states go through foreign policy changes, manifested in a prominent leadership that comes into power in several different states and succeeds in changing their states' roles. A great example is that of Russia under Gorbachev's leadership, and his adaptation of the 'new thinking' approach to build closer relationships with Western states and find a 'common ground' with them 'to break the mould of the Cold War rivalry' (Halliday, 2005, p. 100). However, implementing foreign policy change requires a large investment in time and political capital for these changes to be internalised in the foreign policy identity of these states. The case of the UAE appeared unusual compared to other states where foreign policy changed in a relativity short period. The UAE quickly started competing with traditional regional actors, took on huge regional commitments, and affirmed a new identity and regional role. By applying an interactionist role theory approach coupled with elements of FPA, the why and how behind that change will be examined.

Foreign policy refers to the state's identity, which reflects its aspirations, fears, and the type of behaviour it follows. For example, a friend, a cooperate, an aggressor, or neutral actor, all of these behaviours can tell something about the evolution of such foreign policy and motives behind them. Thus, it can be defined as 'a set of goals and directives or intentions, formulated by persons in official or authoritative positions, directed at some actor or condition in the environment beyond the sovereign nation state, for the purpose of affecting the target in the manner desired by the policy makers' (Cohen and Harris, 1975).[4] Hermann (1990, p. 5) also explained that it is 'a goal oriented or problem-oriented program by authoritative policymakers […] directed toward entities outside the policy-makers' political jurisdiction'. However, elites cannot construct the foreign policy role that they prefer as they are bound by the governing narratives of their societies' role making (or national conceptions). Therefore, they must build their decisions on the existing cultural resources and the shared domestic perceptions (Wehner and Thies, 2014, p. 19). Kaarbo (1997, p. 564) explained the influence of leadership on foreign

[4] As qouted by Gustavsson in the *Politics of Foreign Policy Change: Explaining the Swedish Reoriantaion of on EC Memebership*.

policy by pointing out that leaders who are interested in the field of foreign policy and have experience in it, will not hesitate when making their own decisions, and will be more committed to them. The discussed definitions share a common aspect: authoritative policymakers set and enforce foreign policy programs on the external environment to achieve their goals. Kaarbo (1997, p. 564) argued that the 'area of foreign policy would be more considered in isolation, and there is a likelihood of change'. In addition, he explained that the 'leadership style can influence the foreign policy output and bring about foreign policy change' (Kaarbo, 1997, p. 564). However, certain personality traits must be available for the leadership to be able to implement foreign policy change. Hermann (1990, p. 11) argued that the traits required of a leader for foreign policy change to occur include 'conviction, power, and energy', to persuade their government to achieve the desired change. This can occur when an authoritative policy maker strives to impose their own idea on the direction of change (Hermann, 1990, p. 11). The style of leadership indeed influences the state's interactions with other actors, as it is the leadership who constitutes the agency, and their interpretation is what informs the self. However, Kaarbo's statement that foreign policy is considered in an isolation contradicts the understanding of foreign affairs with 'interactionism' at its core. If Kaarbo's assumptions were to be true, then cooperation, conflict, war, and peace would not have a place in the international society, as states would be living in isolation. Interaction with others is the venue where new roles are learnt, where new information is found. It is the stage on which who the others are and what the others want, are learnt. Through the process of interaction, the self-realises who it is, where it finds meaning, discovers its role, and achieves self-actualisation. It is through interaction that the new self is re-imagined and new roles are prescribed concerning the roles that others acquire. It is the platform on which roles shift and change, where triggers are found, roles are enacted, and identities are affirmed. It is a scene where actors are involved in asserting their value to others and safeguarding their continuity. Holsti (1970, p. 246) explains that 'foreign policy behaviour of a state is determined not only by domestically self-constructed perceptions but also by the expectations of others, which he names as 'role prescriptions''. Elites are, therefore, not free from other actors in determining their foreign policy since the latter's perceptions are also influencing factors in shaping their foreign policy roles. Accordingly, scholars need to apply interactionist role theory analysis to reveal the origins of the roles embedded in domestic and external components of the interaction, which translates into foreign policy actions in a particular context to affirm actors. This discussion suggests that foreign policy change is not only led and motivated by the agency/leadership at home. However, it can be interactionist, resulting from the agents' socialisation with actors, allowing

the leadership to discover new roles for itself and others, who, in turn, influence the state to take on role change.

The Origins of Roles Change

When states are faced with threats and uncertainty, actors seek a re-interpretation and re-creation of foreign policy scripts in order to stabilise their 'self' in society by finding a new and more appropriate role in a new play. These new scripts that develop and change over time as a result of the shifts and changes in the interactionist process lead to foreign policy changes. In addition, change in foreign policy can be thought of as an urgent response by state foreign policymakers (agency) that originated from the onset of a dilemma. Klose (2020, p. 857) states that 'moments of uncertainty' can push an actor 'out of their established routines'. Wehner and Thies (2014, p. 714) add that 'we expect roles to change or to be adapted and adjusted depending on the magnitude of the current dilemma vis-à-vis the traditions in foreign policymaking'. These dilemma-facing roles would force identity shifts as well since roles are associated with states identities. On this note, Wehner and Thies (2014, p. 417) pointed to the structural influences on identity claiming that 'since roles encompass identity [beliefs would go through the process of change] as evolving through the relation between different agents'. These dilemmas, or others structural changes can emerge due to the rise of new others, new leaderships, change in NRC leading to change in the dialogue between 'me' and 'I' resulting in a new perception of the self and new roles.

This change could result from '(1) processes of domestic role contestation, (2) shifts in the role expectations of 'significant others', or (3) shifts in (relative) social and material resources' (Klose, 2018b, p. 1149). Therefore, a change in the status quo would challenge the agents situated within the traditional setting (the state), to either 'accommodate the new belief into the tradition or to adopt a more radical posture of reforming the tradition' (Wehner and Thies, 2014, p. 417). This suggests that an element of crisis needs to exist for an extreme shift to manifest in foreign policy. Gustavsson (1998, p. 27) discussed that 'crises are associated with a sense of fear and urgency'. For a problem to be classified as a crisis, it must include '(1) the perception of a threat to some established value, (2) uncertainty over the outcome, and (3) a shortage of time'. This shortage of time pressures leaders into reacting quickly and makes them more susceptible to adopting role changes. The perception of threat does not necessarily come from structural external forces and domestic upheavals. Dilemmas may also arise from the individual leaders' (decision-makers) own practices and experiences (Wehner and Thies, 2014,

p. 417). Although the region was experiencing relative stability after the liberation of Kuwait, Qatar witnessed a coup d'état against Emir Khalifa Al Thani led by his son the crown prince Hamad bin Khalifa in 1995. The rise of the new Qatari role was not yet witnessed until it experienced its first regional role as a mediator in the 2006 Lebanon war, 11 years after regime change. It is argued that the leadership of Saudi Arabia over the smaller Gulf states' foreign policies was the trigger behind the 1995 regime change. Indeed, Ehteshami (2015, p. 16) discussed the leadership role stating that 'we have in the case of Qatar how the change of emir in 1995 transformed the country into a forward-looking and extrovert monarchy.' Since then. Qatari leadership was motivated to pursue an independent foreign policy identity positioning itself as Saudi Arabia's regional competitor as a Wahhabi and pro-Islamist state. For example, in 2011, Qatar built and named its biggest mosque after Imam Mohammed bin AbdulWahhab, a Saudi theological scholar and the founder of Wahabism, the official Islamic doctrine of Saudi Arabia. However, this step came 18 years after asserting itself as a regional player and leading mediations in several regional conflicts.

The stable regional context rules out an external emergency that incited regime change in Qatar, suggesting the role of the leadership's own interpretation to push for role change. In many cases, others view dilemmas as 'policy windows', where problems are an opportunity to introduce policy reforms domestically, in this case foreign policy makers would act as 'policy entrepreneurs' and seize the moment of an environmental shift to undertake a political reform (Gustavsson, 1998, pp. 25-26). In this approach, the individual leaders at the core of the analysis, where decision-makers are policy entrepreneurs committed to reforms.

The individuals in foreign policymaking are the ones who decide whether to respond to the pressure of the system or neglect it. After all, they are the human capital of the agency, which interprets, learns, shapes, and decides which role/identities are appropriate and should be affirmed. Additionally, they are the ones who, when implementing any change, decide if they will pursue radical or minor change, this is usually done through the enabling side of roles. This could be conducted through the manipulation of NRC of the domestic environment to serve a certain foreign policy role, or through becoming a member of the group, a 'generalised other', and ascribe to its social responsibility in pursuit of an external agenda, or embedding new values into the foreign policy role or the national conceptions of domestic society. Thus, to implement a change, a capable decision-maker would be able to act strategically to capitalise on the sources of change and implement a favourable and desired political proposal. According

to interactionists, this usually happens through a dialogue between the 'I' and the 'me', in an interaction between the actor's constituent units such as government agencies, political parties, and citizens. In response, they would generate, assert, and assess their expectations of an international actor's 'self' in society. However, in the case of the UAE, political parties do not exist, and the consideration of public opinion compared to Western democracies is measured differently. Therefore, the domestic resources would serve this purpose in which the leadership/agency would refer to cultural sources, Islamic culture, traditional political environment, the Federal National Council, local governments, other allies, or generalised other. In addition, this demands that they would be able to form coalitions with other political agents who share their interests (Gustavsson, 1998, p. 26). Thus, Gustavsson (1998, p. 23) argues that the sources of change must be 'mediated' through the 'individual decision makers' for a change in foreign policy to be realised. Furthermore, Gustavsson (1998, p. 26) relates the concept of policy opportunity and change to the 'garbage can model of Kingdon'. He explained that 'solutions' are floating around, waiting to be hooked up to some 'problem' (Gustavsson, 1998, p. 26). This suggests that foreign policy program changes are always available; however, they need to be connected to a problem, while stressing the importance of the cognition of the decision-makers. In addition, it would require a re-definition and re-interpretation of the significant other. This could lead to shaping a new significant other in the public discourse and NRC for the new foreign policy role to be legitimised by the generalised other. Similarly, Harnisch (2012, p. 50) suggests that ' "problematic situation" for the role beholder may arise if role expectations are vague or inconsistent'. This problematic situation leads the role holder to re-engage in new role learning. This problematic situation coupled with role learning reflects a societal change. Thus, agents would correspond by changing 'roles and counter roles' through 'the conscious manipulation of role taking' (Harnisch, 2012, p. 55). This manipulation of role taking can lead to 'new role taking' manifesting role change compatible with this societal change or to overcome the rise of the problematic situation. The agent would seek role retaking to adjust itself, which requires a re-imagination of the established self and the other's expectations. This is usually done through the agent's 'I', which generates the creative impulse for a certain course of action, while its 'me' grasps that impulse's social significance as it anticipates the reactions of others (Kolse,2020, pp. 430). Thus, the agent would re-engage in interaction to reflect on the new changes of the established routine and re-imagine the expectations of others regarding its appropriate role in the particular situation, which stimulated this change. This suggests that role changes in their initial stages are associated with role learning. Thus, examining the stage in which an actor is engaged in role learning would reveal

how a role, and why and how an identity come into existence.

This change will result in, as Holsti (1982, p. 2) discussed, 'reorientation', 'intent', 'restructuring'. In addition, Holsti (1982, p. 2) described foreign policy restructuring as a 'foreign policy behaviour where governments seek to change, the total pattern of their them to restructuring foreign policy. Restructuring is a reorientation of the country's worldview'. Also, he distinguishes between foreign policy change and foreign policy restructuring. He explained that the latter is slow, and the former, which usually occurs 'more quickly, expresses an intent for fundamental change and is "non-incremental" and usually involves the conscious linking of different sectors' (Holsti, 1982, p. 2). Change in foreign policy role is not only the result of the domestic agent's interaction with an external actor. However, Klose (2018a, p. 6) explained that 'external actors, moreover, may directly intervene in the domestic (re)imagination process through the alter-casting of specific constituent units as well as through the strengthening of a particular constituent units' alter-casting capacity'. Therefore, interactionist role theory can deconstruct external others' influences at the domestic level of the actors' role making. In other words, role change can be a result of powerful actors alter casting the role behaviour that a certain actor has recently adopted. In terms of structural hierarchy, McCourt (2012, p. 379) discussed that role making has always been associated with great powers due to their ability to act freely and make the role that they choose compared to others. The hierarchy of international systems indeed divides states into big, middle, small, and micro-power states. However, less powerful states have always manoeuvred adopting tactics and platforms provided by the structure to influence powerful states and the international system for their own interests. For instance, small states in certain regions of the world are performing roles that are greater than their capabilities, playing equal and – in many areas of foreign policy – competitive roles with larger states in their geographic neighbourhood. In a changing international structure, they are preferment roles and affirming 'identities' that did not exist in their recent history making them be perceived as 'new' and sometimes 'puzzling'. Interactionist role theory can serve as a sufficient methodological and theoretical approach to studying small states' roles in the world. In addition, role theory can show the interactionist element rooted in the structure, which allowed weaker states to influence the system given their international ties, wealth, geographic location, soft power, and diplomacy.

Research Design and Methodology

The UAE has become significantly more active and daring in its diplomatic affairs. This change is surprising considering its previous approach and its small size. The UAE's growing regional ambitions have made its role more influential in the Arab World. This role has greatly impacted regional politics, as the UAE has become increasingly involved in the affairs of Arab Spring countries. This has been spearheaded by a series of assertive diplomatic and military actions undertaken by the UAE in the Middle East and North Africa region in pursuit of its foreign policy objectives. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate the UAE's foreign policy behaviour using an interactionist approach. It focuses on analysing the roots of foreign policy change in the UAE's regional role. In addition, it intends to provide an interpretation of the identity the UAE is affirming along with its new role in the Middle East. The study sheds light on the UAE's foreign policy change progression by tracing the domestic and structural variables that influenced the small state to pursue foreign policy change in an interactionist context. This study provides a key contribution to the current literature on the foreign policy of small states, and the GCC in particular, in order to deliver a better understanding of the current role that the UAE is playing in the region. In sum, this research seeks to understand how small states pursue greater roles in foreign policy and clarify how they conduct this change and its impact on their state identity.

The thesis will examine the UAE as a case study. The case of the UAE will be studied using role theory as the theoretical framework to provide a heuristic understanding of this country's foreign policy. The constructivist analysis of role theory used in this study perceives the state as a social actor that can influence and be influenced by the international community. The UAE, as the primary case study of this research, is, therefore, the social actor that will be scrutinised through its involvement in the three subcases of Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, opening the 'black-box' of the realist assumption. This research adopts a qualitative methodology, to achieve a better understanding of the UAE's foreign policy role as a social phenomenon. A qualitative approach applies four functions of research, which are contextual, explanatory, evaluative, and generative (Alagha, 2014, p. 51). Alagha (2014, p. 51) explains that these functions 'shed light on how identity and self-other perception influence the making of foreign policy and make sense of the efficiency of qualitative research in ways that others cannot'. This design acknowledges that foreign policy is socially constructed, and reveals the meaning and context of its construction.

In addition, the study will adopt the interactionist role theory as its theoretical framework using the role theory's analytical tools. Using the *me and the I*, the *significant other*, *role taking*, *role making*, and *alter casting*, we may trace the roots of this change and the shift in identity. By examining how interacting with the other, we can identify the triggers of the UAE's foreign policy change and the influences behind its identity making. Through this social theory, we can understand how the interaction with others has influenced the UAE to take on big and new role responsibilities in multiple regional platforms.

Through different geographical, political, historical, and interactionist contexts, the primary research question may be explored in a more targeted way that is tailored to each respective state. As mentioned earlier, the thesis is a single case study of the UAE. It also incorporates embedded case studies of three Arab states (Egypt, Libya, and Yemen) to trace the changes and evolution of the UAE's role. These countries are the loci where role change manifested. These embedded cases are presented and analysed chronologically. Starting with the UAE's role in Egypt in 2011, then its role change in Libya during the revolution against the Gaddafi regime in 2011, and, finally, its role in Yemen with the Saudi war against the Houthis in 2015. Following these events in this manner is crucial to understand how others influence the UAE's role in relation to the research question, showcasing how roles were made and enacted by tracing the chain of events as well as analysing the UAE foreign policy elite's reactions in public statements, interviews, and social media posts.

The collected data revealed Egypt as the platform that informed and influenced the UAE to change its foreign policy behaviour following the rise of the MB government, and then in 2013 following the spread of Tamarod and the emergence of Al-Sisi as the elected president. Libya was the second stage on which the UAE's role changed to adopt a more militarised approach specifically after the spread of the revolution against the Gaddafi regime in 2012. This shift culminated in the UAE's military involvement in Yemen, which was initiated by the Saudi-Emirati war against the Houthis in 2015. Presenting these three loci, and tracing the UAE's involvement within them chronologically, reveals the progression and evolution of the Emirates' role change and regional behaviour. It also clarifies how each embedded case study influenced the UAE's role enactment in the other cases. For instance, understanding how the UAE's role-change in Libya under the umbrella of the NATO coalition, sheds light on its emergence as a military power in Yemen post-2015. Moreover, understanding the significance of the UAE's role in Egypt informs us about the UAE's role development in Libya as a

counterterrorism actor. In other words, these three subcases are interconnected, representing components of the new UAE foreign policy role.

The focus of this dissertation is to provide an interpretation rather than an explanation of the new foreign policy role adopted by the UAE leadership, which, in turn, facilitates our understanding of its position towards the Middle East and its international allies. It also shows how the UAE justifies its actions, convincing the international community of its capability to take on such critical regional responsibilities that it had never undertaken before as a small state. The UAE sought a surprising role changes in its foreign policy, simultaneously adopting major domestic changes. This revealed the UAE leadership's commitment to rebuilding a national identity and domestic environment that are coherent with the new foreign policy role of a regional actor. In order to better understand these shifts, a collection of leader speeches, interviews, national, and foreign policy archives, leaders' tweets, and actions are considered for analysis in order to uncover meanings and interpret decisions. Also, verbal communication and actions taken by states could create meaning in foreign policy that also needs to be analysed. The significance of this collected data lies in its ability to relay the new foreign policy narrative that was under construction during a time of change in Emirati identity. In addition, the study uses process tracing to follow the chain of events that led to this foreign policy change, shed light on the identity that the UAE is affirming, and the role it is playing. Empirical data was mainly sourced from the internet, drawing on reports and empirical studies on the UAE, social media posts, interviews, and other textual sources.

Conclusion

Interactionist role theory has rich contextual and theoretical lenses for studying foreign policy changes, identity making, and role construction. It provides a combination of domestic, as well as external, analysis of how a foreign policy role is made and enacted. The study of the agent and the interactionist environment within role theory demonstrates these two levels of analysis, the domestic and international levels. These two levels form the core of FPA. In addition, through the study of 'me', and 'I', the interactionist role theory moves the discussion in foreign policy forward by including how others inform 'the self' in interaction about what roles should be taken and performed. This reveals interactionist factors that lead to a role change, and identity formation. Moreover, role taking, role making, and altercating, as components of interactionist role theory, can serve as 'process tracing' tools that reveal the stages of role making before its enactment allowing scholars of foreign policy to understand the roots of the

role. The interactionist approach can identify which identity is being affirmed by an actor concerning his significant or generalised other. Furthermore, the study of NRC, combining elements of leadership analysis, would shed light on the social and domestic components of the identity and how they are used and manipulated by the leadership to make a role come into existence.

5. The UAE's Role in Egypt:

Introduction:

This chapter discusses the UAE's role change in Egypt and the implication of its interaction on its role learning and role enactment of its new regional identity as an anti-Islamist actor and promoter of Wassatiya[5]. The UAE's role in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Egypt is worth academic investigation as it features the quick foreign policy change undertaken by Abu Dhabi's leadership. For instance, Sherwood (2017, p. 150) argues that the UAE's role in Egypt is more influential than any other small state. The UAE's role in Egypt demonstrates the quick transformation in UAE foreign policy and its influence on their identity and NRC. The rise of the MB in Egypt was interpreted as a regional and national threat to the UAE self. Thus, the leadership in Abu Dhabi adopted a new identity narrative to counter the spread of the MB and its regional supporters by adopting new roles. In this vein, I argue that Egypt was the first interactionist stage in which the UAE unleashed its new self by affirming its role as a pro-status quo power and anti-Islamist actor, capable of redefining its interests in Egypt and beyond. This new role was created as a result of dramatic regional changes and the fall of Hosni Mubarak's regime following the so-called Arab Spring of 2011. This caused a vacuum of power in the Middle East, leading to the fragmentation of the region and the spread of transnational threats and non-state actors. This context pushed the UAE to change its foreign policy and step into the regional theatre by affirming itself as status quo power that would fill the void caused by the absence of Egypt as a traditional central Arab state and former regional protector. Thus, the UAE created a role in relation to its non-state actor in Egypt, the Muslim brotherhood, by asserting itself as an anti-Islamist actor.

Thus, the UAE, in collaboration with other GCC members, was able to influence the course of

[5] Refers to moderation in Islam and calls for a more balanced approach towards religion promoting tolerance towards others (non-Muslims) and rejecting extremist interpretations of Islam such as Jihad. The term started to be widely used in the Muslim world post-September 11 and called for revisionism and the re-interpretation of Islam.

events in Egypt, and bring elements of the old regime back to power. The UAE's constant confrontations and clashes with the MB led the Emirati leadership to revive its Muslim Sufi tradition and adopt it as statecraft. Post-revolutionary Egypt influenced the UAE to step into the regional scene as a theological competitor, playing roles vis-a-vis other players. This reveals the UAE's creativity and commitment to its role as a status quo power next to the MB, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. The chapter will present a historical background on the UAE's role in Egypt from the late 1960s until 2011. It will then discuss Egypt-UAE relations, under the MB rule, which represented a new interactionist environment that turned Egypt into a space for new role learning. This phase influenced the Emirati leadership to re-think its pre-established approach, which resulted in the UAE's intervention in the 2013 Tamarod events[6]. Finally, the last section will discuss how the UAE created a new regional alliance with Egypt under Al-Sisi. This alliance included military cooperation against terrorists based in North Africa, and a religious/theological cooperation with Al-Azhar to revive Sufism domestically and regionally.

Historical Background

The Influence of Egypt on the UAE's New Identity

The influence of Egypt on the UAE's national role conception and its identity started to form prior to the latter's founding in 1971. The country was known as the Trucial States of the Arabian Gulf, and each of the seven emirates was governed by a separate tribal ruling family. During the 1950s and the 1960s, the political environment in the region was dictated by anti-colonialism and the Palestinian cause, particularly in the Trucial States under the British protectorate. In addition, Gamal Abdel Nasser, who emerged as Egypt's leader following the 1952 revolution, ascribed a new regional role casting Egypt as an Arab leader and a liberation force. To fulfil that role, Nasser adopted Arabism, 'a political ideology referring to the cultural uniformity of the Arab countries, and the desire for political unity in a specified demarcated territory (Arab Nationalism)' (Almezaini, 2017, p. 229). Arabism won the hearts and minds of Arab nationals and soon became a social, cultural, and political force. Arab elites were either influenced or forced to ascribe to this discourse to affirm themselves in the region and play a role that is recognised and accepted by the members of the group – the community of Arab states. For instance, Lootah (2017, p. 29) stated that 'in the 1950s, the people in the Trucial

[6] Often referred to as a coup d'état but Al-Sisi supporters call it a revolution.

Emirates viewed Nasser as an inspiring leader who supports the Arab people in their struggle against the colonizer and their demands for liberation'[7]. The Trucial Emirates were also influenced by 'Nasserism' through the curriculum, which was injected with national values, and by Arab teachers who came to the region via Kuwait and Egypt's efforts to promote education in the Emirates since 1953 (Lootah, 2017, p. 29). The Voice of Arab Radio strengthened Arabist and nationalist sentiments among the people of the region and connected them with larger national causes, such as the causes of Palestine and liberation (Lootah, 2017, p. 29). This regional climate oriented the leaders of the Emirates, particularly the ruler of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan, on the roles that are most suitable for them to take on, given their weak standing in the international and regional context as British protectorate aspiring for independence. In addition, Sheikh Zayed's role taking during the years that preceded the establishment of the federation of the UAE concentrated diplomatic efforts to secure Arab state support and the recognition of the new state.

Egypt's recognition was particularly crucial for Sheikh Zayed to counter Saudi Arabia's contestation of his role in uniting the seven emirates under one banner. Al-Ulama (1994, p. 128) pointed out that Saudi Arabia disputed Abu Dhabi's borders, and was the only state with an interest in weakening the Abu Dhabi-led federation. In this interaction, Sheikh Zayed ascribed to Egypt the role of leader of the region and constructed a role in support of Egypt and Arabism. He affirmed his position as a member of the group as a pro-Arab actor. In order to perform this role towards Egypt, Sheikh Zayed capitalised on Abu Dhabi's economic power and affirmed his country's Pan-Arab identity. Huda Abdel Nasser recently unveiled unpublished papers, documenting meetings between Gaddafi and Nasser, where they discussed the region, and Sheikh Zayed. In regards to Sheikh Zayed's role of supporting Nasser during his war against Israel, Nasser tells Gaddafi that 'Sheikh Zayed is a really good man, he sent us 17 million dollars, but he asked for one condition which is to not to publicise it'[8] (Khattab, 2017). The rulers of the Trucial States needed to find support for their project of establishing a new country, after Britain's withdrawal from the region. They also realised that being part of a group was essential to achieving their aspirations. That is why they engaged in role learning to formulate a foreign policy in alignment with their national interests. That role was eventually constructed in relation to Egypt, with the UAE affirming itself as a proponent of the Arabism

[7] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis
[8] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

project. This process of socialisation made the UAE aware of Egypt's fundamental role in defining its identity. Prior to and throughout the formation of the state, Arabism was the cornerstone of the UAE self. Playing a pan-Arab role and casting Egypt as its positive other was the social vehicle that the founders needed to adopt, as it intersected with their NRC, their aspirations of forming a new unified state after the departure of the British, and their need to contain regional competition led by their negative other, Saudi Arabia.

This role was strengthened during Egypt's war against Israel in 1973. The UAE joined the Gulf States in imposing a total oil boycott on pro-Israeli states in support of Egypt (Joffe, 2004). In addition, the UAE's Arab identity was reiterated in Sheikh Zayed's famous statement that 'Arab oil is not dearer than Arab blood', which afforded him the respect and recognition of Arab nationals and leaders, and validated the UAE's role (Joffe, 2004). The oil boycott supported Egypt in its victory against Israel in the 1973 war, making Sadat another hero of the Arab people. Since then, the UAE's role enactment in Egypt was dominated by its economic role, with UAE's aid to Egypt reaching its highest level after the 1973 war (Elmassah, 2019, p. 43). However, the interaction within the Middle East changed when President Sadat shifted his foreign policy position towards Israel and the US by signing the 1979 peace treaty with Israel. This change in Egypt's position was contested by the Arab public and elites who were influenced by the pan-Arab narrative that viewed Israel as the ultimate enemy of the Arab nation. In response, the UAE joined its Arab community, at the Baghdad summit of 1979, in declaring the suspension of their relations with Egypt (Lootah, 2017, p. 35). The UAE honoured the Arab League's decision to suspend Egypt's membership and diminished its economic contributions to Egypt, affirming once again its pro-Arab identity. After the Camp David Accords in 1976, the UAE's foreign aid to Egypt declined by 99 percent (Elmassah, 2019, p. 43). This demonstrates that despite the UAE's wealth, other variables such as smallness, the power of transnational identity, and the influence of its generalised other, had a role in shaping the UAE self during the first decade of its founding.

However, following the 1979 revolution, the UAE's position towards Egypt changed in support of the Mubarak regime. Mubarak, Sadat's successor, cast the Arab League as members of the group, thus upholding pan-Arabism in his new foreign policy, and resuming the defence of Arab causes despite the boycott. By playing this role, Egypt adopted a shared narrative with the Gulf that cast the revolutionary Islamic Republic of Iran as the negative significant other. Cairo also reinstated its leadership and military role by sending a large number of arms,

thousands of military advisors, and civilian workers to assist Iraq. These regional structural shifts resulted in interactionist changes that influenced the UAE's perception of who its enemies and allies were. This socialisation process, inclined the UAE to adopt a mediator role in Arab League meetings, to restore relations with Egypt and put an end to the Arab boycott. These were Sheikh Zayed's and Sultan Qaboos of Oman's proposals (Lootah, 2017, p. 37). Following the restoration of relations with Egypt, the UAE restored its economic role in Egypt. In the post-2003 Middle East, new interactions placed further weight and responsibilities on Egypt. Given its structural position and powerful army, Egypt had to secure the identity of the region and contain Iranian competition. In a coordinated response, the UAE and Gulf states cast Egypt as the Gulf's security guarantor and Iran's deterrent, which meant offering Egypt economic support.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the UAE's foreign policy role was influenced by its desire to be recognised and integrated into a community. To achieve these goals, the UAE adopted a pro-Arabism role, and enacted a foreign policy supportive of Nasser and then Sadat in an effort to play a meaningful role, and further integrate into the group of Arab nations. The decline of Arabism motivated the UAE to take advantage of the changing interaction and bring back Egypt into the Arab group by playing a mediator role alongside Oman. The UAE's role learning and the socializing process led to the restoration of its relations with Cairo by affirming itself as an economic and a political supporter, casting Egypt as a regional security guarantor, and Mubarak as a strong and faithful ally.

Competing Narratives, Role Learning, and the Rise of Interventionism

The UAE's New Self and The Rise of the Anti-Islamist Actor

On January 25, 2011, revolution broke out against Mubarak's regime in Egypt. Due to the domestic nature of the protests' triggers, the UAE contended to watch events unfold from afar, separating its state-to-state alliance from its personal relations with Mubarak. The UAE's foreign policy towards revolutionary Egypt maintained its small state non-interventionist role. However, anxiety was mounting in the UAE concerning the political implications of such a change given the historic role that Egypt play as central ctate in security complex of the regional and as regional leader in the Middle East. The UAE leadership opted for a slow and careful approach, distantly observing changes within Egypt and its interactions with other players, before formulating a suitable role that is compatible with the new Egyptian identity.

These changes would affect both the UAE's ontological self and the regional order. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed's visit to Mubarak on the 9th of February was interpreted as a 'sign of unconditional support of his regime' (Farouk, 2014:7). However, Sheikh Abdullah refrained from making any public statements on his visit. Two days later, Mubarak agreed to step down (Farouk, 2014, p. 7). This reflects the UAE leadership's realisation that it needed to separate its personal relationship with Mubarak from its strategic interests in Egypt, particularly during this critical moment. The rationale behind this role making can be that the UAE examined its actions through the eyes of the Egyptian people and international players, who both supported the revolution. Mubarak's allies, such as the US and the UK, did rush to his support, signalling their approval of the revolution's demands. This interaction shifted the balance of power in favour of the Egyptian public and toppled Mubarak's regime. The UAE was therefore inclined to cast the revolutionaries as their significant other and abstain from supporting Mubarak publicly and internationally. In order to please its new significant other, the UAE opted to consider the Egyptian revolution and the demand to overthrow Mubarak as Egypt's internal affairs. Egypt's domestic political context also played in favour of the UAE's non-interventionist role. The fall of Mubarak did not alter the power dynamics in Egypt due to the constitutional powers retained by the military institution. Farouk (2014, p. 4) explained that:

> 'The military doctrine of the Egyptian army remained intact after the fall of Mubarak despite the access to power of a civilian president for the first time since 1952 […] Furthermore, any political regime, including the Muslim Brotherhood's, would be unable to penetrate the military establishment for years to come. […], the recruitment system allows top ranks tight control over the military establishment and secures its autonomy. The military establishment was therefore able to preserve not only its integrity but also its sheltered status within the Egyptian political system. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries hence did not need to review their strategic relations with the Egyptian army after Mubarak's fall'.

The structural stability of Egypt's power comforted the UAE. This was demonstrated in the UAE's official statement following Mubarak's stepping down: 'The UAE, which has closely monitored developments in Egypt, confirms its confidence in the ability of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in running the country's affairs in these delicate circumstances in such a way that would realize aspirations and hopes of the Egyptian people' (Reuters, 2011). The UAE's support for the armed forces came as a result of their shared views

on regional threats such as Islamism, Iran, its proxies, and their shared desire to maintain the status quo. El Esrawi (2019, p. 57) points out that 'a couple of months after Mubarak's regime downfall, […] (SCAF) assured in an official declaration its commitment to maintain a strong relation between their country and the GCC'. The SCAF's role as a guarantor of the status quo allowed the UAE to continue with its established role towards Egypt in the post-Mubarak era.

The MB candidate, Mohammed Morsi won the 2012 elections with 51.7 percent of the votes (Butter, 2020, p. 5). This was a turning point for both Egypt and the MB as Egyptians chose their first-ever democratically elected president. The success of the MB in Egypt was expected, but it was also perceived with anxiety and concern. The first cause for concern was the possible changes in Egypt's regional role as a security guarantor under an Islamist regime. The second was that the Islamist discourse would trigger an ideational conflict between the UAE's leadership and domestic Emirati Islamists that would jeopardize the tribal social contract. Under Mubarak's regime, the role Egypt played in the liberation of Kuwait made the Gulf leaders realise its significance for the protection of their fragile security from rough states such as Iran and Iraq. In addition, the spread of Iranian influence in the Levant since the 1980s and the war in Iraq leading to Baghdad's fall in 2003, further accentuated Egypt's centrality in the Arab world. Since then, Egyptian-Emirati relations grew stronger to the point where the UAE leadership cast Mubarak's Egypt as a regional security guarantor. The so-called Arab spring altered the regional order of the Middle East and threatened both the Gulf and the UAE domestically by raising a new actor into power, the Muslim Brotherhood. In light of this, Morsi attempted to address these concerns by confirming that Egypt will continue with its pre-established policy towards the Gulf and that it will not export the revolution to other Arab states (Saleh & Hall, 2012). The UAE met this position with appreciation, as evidenced by Sheikh Abdullah's statement, 'this is the direction of a capable statesman, and this the direction of Egypt, the country that all Arabs want to see stable and prosperous'[9] (Alkhaleej, 2012a). That, however, did not stop the UAE from adopting a domestic hard-line approach to contain the *de facto* inspirational effects of the Egyptian revolution. The Emirati authorities stripped six UAE nationals of their citizenship in 2011, claiming that they were 'threatening the national security of the UAE' through their 'connections with suspicious terrorism financing organisations' (Merza, 2011). The Emirati government also deported 100 Syrian families for their participation in an anti-Assad protest in Abu Dhabi, which violates state laws forbidding any

[9] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

form of political protest. The rise of Morsi in Egypt did validate the UAE's concerns that such structural changes would lead to the domestic resurfacing of Islamist discourse. The MB's victory in Egypt turned the domestic interactions within the UAE into a battlefield between two major identities: 'Political Islam' led by al-Islah and 'status quo' led by the government. Within this interaction, al-Islah viewed itself as a 'local democratic force' that can compete politically with the government as an Islamist power, reviving the 'Islam is the solution' narrative within. To play a meaningful role, al-Islah challenged the government by increasing their demands for 'democratic rights and political participation'. The government chose not to respond to these demands as it considered them a facade exploited by Islamists to compete with the current political system, reach power, and establish their 'Utopic' Islamic state. The MB's political philosophy contradicts the UAE's socio-economic model that mixes economic openness with political conservatism. It is both a threat to the UAE's identity and its tribal social contract. Roberts (2016) explained that '[The MB], UAE thinkers argue, takes advantage of financial inequalities to amass a following and claim a divine mandate. In this line of reasoning, the [MB] and its peers seek power for their own ends, do not respect national boundaries, and inevitably stoke the slow but sure radicalization of society'. This cognitive and socializing process motivated the UAE to cast Islamists as its negative significate other, and to tighten its powerful grip on internal affairs. As a result, the UAE affirmed itself as a status quo power, forbidding any domestic revolutionary or Islamist sentiment.

The UAE's domestic approach was contested by Islamist figures in Egypt who were gaining momentum and popularity at that time. Thus, transnational ideational threats over the UAE's internal affairs began to surface, leading to several diplomatic crises between the UAE and Islamist Egypt. This interaction provided a role learning opportunity for the UAE to incorporate its domestic status quo into its regional mission. Thus, the UAE shaped its roles in relation to Morsi's government and its regional ally Qatar, adopting an anti-Islamism role and affirming itself as a status quo power. The triggers of this policy change can be traced back to the first diplomatic crisis between the UAE, and its others, namely Egypt and Qatar. For instance, Yusuf al-Qaradawi – the MB leader and Islamist theologian – contested Abu Dhabi's domestic anti-Islamist and anti-revolutionary role. On his Al Jazeera TV program, *Al Sharea Wa Al Haya*, he placed the UAE leadership on notice and revealed that he had been blacklisted from entering the UAE since the events of September 11 (IGulfI, 2012). He criticised the decision to strip the six UAE nationals of their citizenship and warned against the deportation of the 100 Syrian families since the UAE leadership is responsible for their wellbeing as Muslims. He also

criticised the ban of Islamists from making public statements on official media outlets (IGulfI, 2012). Al-Qaradawi shamed the UAE's treatment of Islamists, saying that the UAE's leaders are 'not Gods' and that they simply have 'more [money] than other people' (IGulfI, 2012). He added that, as a Muslim scholar, it was his duty to remind the UAE leadership that its attitude is not coherent with Islam, quoting the Quranic verse: 'these are the limits ordained by Allah; so do not transgress them, and those who do transgress the limits ordained by Allah are the unjust' (2012). The UAE perceived this as a threat and an affront to its standing. It was also warned against using spiritual platforms, such as Friday prayers. Its political position and rejection of the MB and political Islam were criticised as being in violation of Islamic teachings, which demonised its image among Muslims. He concluded with 'this is all I have to say for now. I might make a statement if nothing changes, […] in Friday's prayer speech' (IGulfI, 2012)[10].

Al-Qaradawi's statements created a shockwave of anger and outrage among the UAE's public and elite. Particularly when his contestation of the UAE's role employed religious arguments and was publicised on Al Jazeera's platform. With an alleged viewership of over sixty million, Al-Qaradawi's programme was Al Jazeera's most popular show during the Arab Spring. The UAE's leadership recognised Al-Qaradawi's influence. As a theologian and Mufti, he had the authority to issue religious decrees (fatwas) to pressure his political opponents. His religious aura afforded to him by his high rank in the clergy, as one of the 'Muslim Scholars' (Al Ulama Al Muslmeen), gave weight and legitimacy to his words. His opinions rivalled those of state leaders in weight. Al-Qaradawi's aforementioned statements on the UAE were interpreted as subliminal decrees that could have ruined the UAE's role and reputation among Muslims. Arab public opinion was easily swayed by Al-Qaradawi's opinions on the UAE leadership's treatment of dissidents and Islamists. His claims that the UAE's domestic role enactment was un-Islamic and incompatible with the religion of Allah, made him a real national security threat. In response to al-Qaradawi's statements, the former Dubai Chief of Police Dhahi Khalfan tweeted that 'I will hunt down anyone who insults the UAE as a country or government, and makes defamatory remarks about the country' (DW, 2012). He even threatened al-Qaradawi with 'issuing an arrest warrant through Interpol' (DW, 2012).[11] Even though these remarks were not official, they reflected the UAE's disregard for al-Qaradawi's religious status and the

[10] Translated from Arabic by the author of the thesis. Part of Al-Qarawadi's program on Al-Jazeera. The episode can be found on IGulfI YouTube channel.
[11] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis

sway he held over Muslims. The UAE affirmed its role independence from any Islamist influence. Although the UAE leadership refrained from making any official public response to al-Qaradawi's remarks, this incident was the start of an ongoing saga between the UAE, Egypt, and MB members across the region, culminating in the first diplomatic crisis between Egypt and the UAE. The official spokesperson for the MB in Egypt, Mahmoud Ghazlan, described Khalfan's tweets as shameful and threatened the UAE, saying 'we will move the whole Islamic world and not just the MB, against the UAE, in defence of al-Qaradawi', affirming Egypt's new role as the defender of Islam (RT Online, 2012).[12] Ghazlan's intervention confirmed the UAE's fears that, under the Brotherhood, Egypt's elite will use religion as a political weapon to defend Qatar's al-Qaradawi and undermine the UAE.

Within this interaction, GCC elites were remaking their role enactments with regards to the MB's threats of mobilizing the Muslim world against the UAE. The UAE was confronting the MB's threats who used religion as a weapon, and their position as leaders of the new Egypt and the most organised dissident group in the Middle East. Mandaville & Hamid (2018:3) suggested that 'once "Islam" is inserted into public debates, how citizens interpret their religion becomes, in effect, a matter of national security'. This was proven true when the GCC rose to the UAE's defence. In an official statement, the general secretary of the GCC Council, Abdullatif Al Zayeni, said that Ghazlan's statements were 'irresponsible' [..] 'and do not serve the efforts made by the GCC states and Egypt to strengthen their relations that have been built on solid foundations over the years' (Alkhaleej, 2012b).[13] He added that 'whatever threatens the UAE, threats the Gulf states as a whole', forming a new perception of Egypt under its Islamist government (Alkhaleej, 2012b)[14]. In addition, the UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, Gargash, commented that 'the statement made by the Muslim Brotherhood's spokesperson, Mahmoud Ghazlan, damages our historic bilateral relations, and incites against the Emirates, preferring his party's interests over the national interest'(Emarat alyoum, 2012) [15]. He also added that the interests of the UAE and Egypt should be above partisan discourse and that a positive partnership should be built on the mutual respect of sovereignty (Emarat alyoum, 2012).[16] Sheikh Abdullah demanded clarifications and referred to Ghazlan's threats in a tweet saying that, 'what Ghazlan said is, sadly, evidence of bad intention' (Abudulla bin

[12] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis
[13] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis
[14] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis
[15] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis
[16] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis

Zayed, 2012)[17]. The diplomatic crisis in the Gulf only increased the GCC's fear of the MB, with its extended networks and transnational character already posing a significant threat.

Another diplomatic crisis between Egypt and the UAE erupted when the UAE's Federal Supreme Court convicted and imprisoned most of the 94 Emiratis accused of fomenting a coup, with sentences ranging between 3 and 10 years (Bayoumy, 2013). In addition, the UAE authorities reported uncovering a MB cell of over ten Egyptian nationals and claimed that they were working with al-Islah, under the MB's leadership in Egypt (Sky News Arabia, 2013)[18]. In response, Essam Al Aryan, vice president of the Freedom and Justice Party and the leader of the majority in Egypt's Shoura Council, replied that the patience of the Egyptians had run out and that the UAE's behaviour was shameful. While commenting on the Egyptian prisoners crisis, he said that 'nuclear Iran is coming and that a tsunami is on its way from Iran and Pakistan, not from Egypt' (Abdulradi, 2013).[19] Al-Qaradawi did not relent in his attacks against the UAE's leaders saying, 'be kings among Arabs instead of slaves to the Persians' (Abdulradi, 2013).[20] This resulted in the UAE changing its economic role in Egypt by drastically reducing its economic support for the first time since the Arab boycott of Sadat's regime. Elmassah (2019, p. 41) argued that an 'aligned political vision between Egypt and the UAE has been a core component of the economic relations between the two economies'. Furthermore, the UAE's troubled relations with the MB government influenced it to publicise its anti-MB brotherhood narrative on international platforms. In an official statement, the UAE accused the organization of threatening the security of the region. This reflected the clash between the UAE self and the MB, as Abdullah bin Zayed pointed out: '[the] Arab Gulf countries should work together to stop Islamist group the Muslim Brotherhood plotting to undermine governments in the region' (Reuters, 2012). He also said 'that the [MB] does not believe in the nation-state. It does not believe in the sovereignty of the state' (Reuters, 2012). He warned that they use their 'prestige and capabilities to violate the sovereignty, laws, and rules of other states' (Reuters, 2012). Adding that 'we need to communicate to see if there were individuals or organizations who were using these countries, […] without naming the countries he was referring to' (Reuters, 2012).

[17] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.
[18] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.
[19] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis
[20] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis

The UAE's role transformation began with the onset of the diplomatic crisis with Egypt over the Emirati leadership's treatment of Islamic activists who were perceived as a security threat to the established UAE identity. The clash of roles between the UAE, as status quo actor, and revolutionary Egypt, under Islamist rule, impeded the continuation of the two states' pre-established relations as regional security allies. The contestation of the UAE's role vis-à-vis the MB's local affiliates, and its condemnation as un-Islamic, were perceived as transnational interventions and dangerous national security threats. The UAE dropped its small state approach to carry the bigger regional responsibility of restoring the previous regional order. This new reality cast the MB and their supporters as the UAE's negative significant other and saw the UAE step into the regional competition to assert its regional power status. The UAE, therefore, adopted an international anti-Islamist role and declared itself a status quo power.

The Rise of Interventionism

The interaction with the MB in Egypt was a learning phase in which the UAE realised that it needed to shift its approach and intervene on the Egyptian scene, to unveil its identity and play a role in support of its allies. The state of anarchy and the reactionary rise of fundamentalism prompted the stable Gulf states, particularly the UAE, to pursue security measures that would incorporate its domestic status quo policy into its regional strategy particularly in post-revolutionary Egypt. Stabilising Egypt from within became a priority to counter the regional spread of revolution and rise of political Islam. Sever (2019, p. 4) discussed the impact of the Arab Spring on the Middle East stating that '[…] with an increasing number of fragile states, civil wars, violent non-state actors, sectarian tensions, and new self-determination-seeking regions. A power shift towards transnational, non-state and non-Arab actors has gained further prominence since the Arab Spring in 2011'. Thus, the leadership enacted a status quo role in Egypt that required an interventionist approach. This was triggered by the Tamarod revolution in 2013, which demanded Morsi's stepping down (BCC News, 2013). In this context, the UAE stepped into the revolution by casting itself as pro-Egyptian people, by supporting anti-Islamist elements and shaping Tamarod's outcome for its benefit. To legitimise its role, the UAE leadership referred to Tamarod as a 'revolution of the people' (Xin, 2017). Gargash tweeted that 'The revolution of the Egyptian people on June 30 is an important step in restoring the balance... and despite the difficulty of the path [to] stability and prosperity, popular support remains the largest balance' (Xin, 2017). The suspension of the constitution, the removal of President Morsi, and calls for early presidential elections were announced by SCAF (BCC,

2013). The UAE shifted one of its major foreign policy tools, the foreign aid program, to best fit its interventionist role and achieve its role goals in the post MB era. It emancipated itself from its historic identity discourse, such as Arabism and Islamism, and became pragmatic in safeguarding its interests. This was a transformational point in which the UAE acted as an interventionist for the first time in its history. Within this interaction, the UAE enacted a role in relation to the Tamarod leadership and the SCAF that would validate the movement. This was aptly stated by Almezaini (2017, pp. 235-236):

> 'For the leaders of the UAE, the MB posed a serious threat to state stability and called for the securitization of foreign policy. Consequently, it has influenced, to a great extent, the orientation and objectives of the UAE aid programme. By mid-2011, a great percentage of aid began to be dictated by political interests and security priorities in the region. […]. Therefore, between 2011 and 2015, foreign aid objectives can best be described as the interrelationship between ideas, identities, interests, and political orientations'.

The UAE emerged as a financial interventionist to empower the military institution, preventing Egypt's economic collapse during the transitional period, while affirming itself as a force for good and its pro-Arab identity. For instance, Pleșa (2020, pp. 93-94) stated that 'the hypothesis according to which the Egyptian secret services and the UAE played an important role in organizing the protests and of coup d'état in Egypt is very interesting'. For instance, Ketchley (2017) mentioned that the UAE financed a bank account run by Egyptian military generals, which was revealed through unconfirmed leaked audio recordings. However, playing this role was in cooperation with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the UAE's generalised others suggested collective scripted roles ascribed to each actor. This role came into play by casting Qatar, the MB's regional ally and financer, as the negative other, using economic power as a weapon in their competition. Roll (2016, p. 34) speculated that the speed and amount of financial support indicate to prior consultations with SCAF generals. Also, he stated that 'Twenty-four hours after the coup, these three countries promised some $12bn in financial assistance and energy supplies' (Roll, 2016, p. 33). Furthermore, the economic role of the Arab states compensated for the inaccessible IMF loan. Arab financing was three times larger and safe than the western intervention that usually takes place in such international organisations (Farouk, 2014, p. 12). The UAE, and its group members, achieved role success by weakening Qatar's influence and its pro-Islamist role, as evidenced by Egypt's decision to return '$2bn deposited by Qatar in its

central bank' due to disagreements in negotiations, a decision that was made after receiving support from the GCC actors (Saleh, 2013).

Egypt, as a significate other, has played a determinate role in the creation of the UAE's new anti-Islamist role. The situation in Egypt was perceived as problematic for the UAE, which influenced the latter to shift its behaviour and emerge as a financial interventionist with a status quo role, in support of Tamarod. The UAE emerged as an interventionist actor using its financial power to influence and change the direction of events in Egypt. However, for this role to be successful, the UAE acted in a group dynamic, joining Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Egypt was the other that motivated the UAE to re-write its foreign policy script, and the external power that pushed to re-define its narrative, re-shape its identity and ascribe to new roles that are compatible with revolutionary Egypt.

Pro Al-Sisi Actor and the Rise of New Sufi Regional Competitor

Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi was elected as president in June 2014, his rise to power was considered a coup in the Western world and for the region's revolutionary factions. However, the UAE and other Gulf actors perceived this as a strategic political correction that ensured domestic and regional security. Al-Sisi's priorities focused on preventing the MB's re-emergence, improving the economy, and containing extremism, these goals were shared by the UAE (Pleșa, 2020, p. 93). The UAE cast Egypt under Al-Sisi as a generalised other, constructing a collective role in different regional fronts to counter political Islam, and maintain the status quo militarily, intellectually, and theologically, as members of one group. The UAE declared its full support to Al-Sisi, referring to him as a 'new hope' (Alarabiya News, 2014). Gargash tweeted:

> 'We all need to support Egypt as a nation and people... Egypt and its people are dear to us. The challenges are great and the expectations are huge, but [there is more hope today than we saw during the past] three years' (Alarabiya News, 2014).

To strengthen the group, the UAE allocated its resources in support of Al-Sisi's agenda by affirming itself as a force of good and expanding its economic role. In a discussion over the UAE's role in Egypt, Almezaini (2017, p. 237) said: 'because of the threats the [MB] posed towards the UAE and the instability in the region, the UAE increased its financial aid. In particular, it has made aid available to countries who were against the MB'. This action aimed to aid the government in fighting the MB and to contribute to Egypt's economic development.

In addition, during that phase, the UAE established the 'Egypt Task Force' (LeBaron, 2014). This task force aimed investigating the economic situation by doing 'due diligence [...] on the economic crisis and supporting 'quick win' development projects' (LeBaron, 2014). The UAE restored its traditional economic role as an aid provider to strengthen Al-Sisi's government in the eyes of the Egyptians after the failure of the Morsi government.

The success in influencing Tamarod's outcome by restoring the status quo in Egypt inspired the UAE to carry out the same role in Libya. The spread of extremism in neighbouring Libya was threatening Egypt's borders. In addition, the emergence of Turkey as a supporter of the MB motived both the UAE and Egypt to intervene on the Libyan scene to contain Ankara's role. However, the nature of the interaction in Libya was different than in Egypt, as it required militant power. Thus, the UAE and Egypt created a military partnership, as members of one group, to fight extremism in Libya. For instance, Gargash stated in his article, *Our Solution in Libya*, that 'Chaos in Libya has already led to the re-emergence of Al-Qaeda and ISIS in the capital, Tripoli. If that chaos continues, it could be contagious in ways that are hard to predict' (Gargash, 2019). Thus, the UAE constructed a role in relation to Egypt as a generalised other by becoming its counterterrorist actor in Libya. Libya, as a security threat, reiterated the importance of having Egypt as an ally to the Emiratis for them to achieve their policy goals in North Africa. Sims & Bergen (2018, p. 47) pointed out that 'like the Egyptians, Emirati leaders were deeply concerned with the potential, as they saw it, of Islamist-led instability in Libya to threaten stability at home'. That is why they formed a shared role in supporting General Haftar, as a local anti-Islamist actor and partner, to acquire political and military power in Libya. For instance, the UAE used Egyptian air bases to lunch strikes against the Libya Dawn militia, which was supported by Qatar and Turkey and aimed to take Tripoli from General Haftar (Sims & Bergen, 2018, p. 47). It was reported that the US warned the UAE and Egypt against any military intervention (McGregor, 2014). That, however, did not stop them from carrying out airstrikes despite their American allies' reservations, which reveals a disagreement with Washington. This step confirmed both actors' autonomies as regional players willing to go as far as it is necessary, even ignoring their allies in Washington, to achieve their security objectives in the region by seeking a greater Arab role in Libya.

The UAE's strong role in Egypt during Tamaroud and its ability to bring back the old regime originated from its political stability, economic power, and its crisis management manoeuvres that enabled the government to counter the threat of Arab Spring within its borders. Sever

(2019, p. 8) stated that 'the Arab spring split the regional states into three: "The Arab Spring countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria), the countries that withstood the Arab Spring (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar), and the countries that introduced constitutional reform (Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain) ". However, the Gulf states joined each other in one group prioritising the defeat of the MB in Egypt to preserve the former status quo. Thus, during the time of crisis the UAE and its group members, the GCC, emerged as the new central states in the Middle East after the fall of traditional Arab states, particularly Egypt, by taking on bold roles and new regional responsibilities, first to protect their domestic fronts, then to achieve their regional goals, and expand their influence. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla (2019) refers to the Gulf states' rise as 'The Gulf Moment in the Arab Contemporary history'[21]. He discussed that in the last decade, Gulf soft power in the form of culture, fashion, music, art, and media outlets, was spreading across the region and gaining popularity among Arab nationals. However, the regional turmoil of 2011 strengthened the Gulf states' momentum which allowed them to emerge as regional leaders and capable actors in shaping the post-2011 Middle East as the former Arab states such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria once did. These former centres of power would instead rely on the smaller Gulf states to achieve their own political and economic security. It should be noted here that retracing the revolutions' chain of events indicates that Iran was not considered a source of threat, which has been, and still is viewed by GCC literature as the ultimate security threat to the Gulf states. The UAE's investment in Egypt suggests that Iran came in second on the UAE's list of security priorities during the revolution and MB rule in Egypt. The main source of threat to the UAE was within the Arab region, represented by the MB, their negative other.

The Emirati role success in overthrowing the MB, despite its smallness and lack of role intervention experience, made the Emirati leadership realise that the UAE was capable of change at the service of its identity. In addition, their anti-Islamist stance and status quo vision was encouraged and supported by others, within and without Egypt, who joined the UAE in one group to restore the previous regional order and contain Islamism. These interaction factors inspired and informed the UAE that it can become a regional leader. In its role learning, Egypt's influence on the UAE made it realise that its regional mission was to counter Islamism and achieve a status quo while asserting itself as a regional competitor.

[21] Originally Arabic Source translated by the author of this thesis.

The New Self

Egypt was the platform in which the UAE engaged for the first time in an ideational war with a political Islamic party. This interaction informed the UAE that its foreign policy is lacking the 'Islam' component, when compared to other regional players such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. In light of this, the UAE created a new 'theological role' to influence the Islamic discourse and include religion in its soft power apparatus. The UAE realised the necessity of including this component to assert its regional role and contain Islamist revolutionary movements. Concerning this, Mandaville & Hamid (2018, p. 2) argued that 'in nearly every Muslim-majority country that aspires to regional or global influence, Islam is an important and sometimes the only ideological currency that "mixes" effectively with more narrowly defined *realpolitik'*. In creating an alternative Islamic narrative, the UAE dug into its heritage and revived its Sufi tradition on the domestic front, and later in its regional role. The discussion below will give an overview of the UAE's enactment of its 'theological role', affirming itself as a centre of Wassatiyya[22] (Islamic moderation) in the region through Sufism and creating a soft power alliance with Egypt's Al-Azhar.

The roots of Sufism in the UAE, a form of mysticism that began in early Islamic history, dates back 300 years (Amasha, 2018, p. 4; Mouzahem, 2018). The Sufi tradition in the UAE and the region declined with the rise of Wahabism in the Gulf. Sufi traditions and teachings were marginalised with the expansion of Salafism and the MB during the 1980s and 1990s. Mouzahem (2018) explained that 'with the rise of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahhab's hardline ideology alongside the expansion of the first Saudi state, Saudi forces encircled Seer and forced its inhabitants to follow the Wahhabi school and destroyed their Sufi shrines. As a result, [Sufi way of life] […] disappeared from the area, and only a few descendants of the founder remained — in present-day Bahrain and the UAE' (Mouzahem, 2018). Nevertheless, Sufism remained strong and influential in leadership circles, particularly in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and other segments of Emirati society. Domestically, Abu Dhabi's leadership started reviving Sufism after the events of 2001. The spread of terrorist attacks in Muslim and Western states following 2001, informed the UAE on the threat of radical Islam and its association with Islamist political philosophy – such as that of the MB that promotes Jihad – and lead to it

[22] Wassatiyya in the context of the UAE promotes embracing a form of Islam on the basis of accepting others and rejecting Islamic fundamentalism and extremism. It values the centrality of the Imam of the state ruler and respects state boundaries by asserting loyalty to the state, not Islamic political parties or militias. Also, it promotes engaging in dialogue with other religions, women empowerment, and promotes openness and tolerance.

adopting security measures. Thus, the UAE excluded MB figures from the educational sector, mentored mosques, and established state-owned Imams' training centres as part of its reformist program to mentor and regulate religion domestically. In addition, Abu Dhabi was influenced to invest in its own Islamic version in an attempt to protect its youth from radicalisation, and maintain its NRC that created an open economic model capable of hosting its huge expatriate population. In relation to this, Diwan (2021, p. 958) discussed that:

> 'There is an internal coherence to the Emirati strategic emphasis on multiculturalism and religious tolerance, which aligns with its economic interests as a global hub dependent on diverse foreign residents, and with its international outreach to influential Jewish and Christian stakeholders. The Emiratis have made a significant investment in constructing this narrative: building nationalism consonant with the UAE global economic posture that functions as a positive counter to Islamist rivals in the region and a potent resource in international diplomacy'.

Abu Dhabi saw Sufism as an authentic alternative to radical Sunni Islam models that threaten its identity. For instance, Mandaville & Hamid (2018, p. 3) noted that 'If these governments didn't directly involve themselves in debates around the nature and purpose of Islam, they would be leaving an ideological vacuum that domestic challengers can take advantage of'. Therefore, since 2001, it started giving platforms to Sufi scholars through teaching, media presence, and publishing in an effort to revive this tradition of Islam to deter transitional radical Islam movements. Moreover, in recent years, UAE society started witnessing a revival of old Sufi traditions such as Al Mawled, a popular celebration of the Prophet's birthday, celebrated and broadcasted on official state media. In addition, research on Sufism and its roots was given more attention than in previous decades. For instance, Emirati researcher Rashed Ahmed Al-Jumairi, published the study 'Sufism in Dubai, from Al-Afghani to Abd al-Rahim al-Murid' in 2011 as part of the Al-Mesbar Center's book *Sufism in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf* (Mouzahem, 2018). This rise of the state's involvement in religious affairs, and the inclusion of Sufism into statecraft, can be understood as the result of the interaction in the war on terror dynamic and the efforts of the UAE to reclaim its original religious identity.

Religion was alienated from UAE foreign policy, and its Sufi-revival strategy was strictly domestic until the spread of the revolutions in 2011. However, the UAE learned a new role that inspired it to incorporate its domestic policy into its regional role to fill the 'Islam vacuum' after 2011. Thus, it took on a theological responsibility by adopting Sufism in its soft power

approach. This new role discovery was the result of its interaction with revolutionary and post-revolutionary Egypt. To the UAE, Egypt is crucial for the success of its new theological role, since the most respected Sufi establishment, Al-Azhar, is located in Egypt. Amasha (2018, p. 1) discusses that 'the relationship of the UAE and accordingly the Egyptian regime with the religious discourse, especially that of Sufism, is in fact based on achievement of interests. While regimes seek maintaining survival, maximizing their benefits and reducing their losses, Sufism seeks prominence and spread of Sufi ideas'. The inclusion of Al-Azhar in the UAE's role can be interpreted as the leadership's realisation of their role limitations in relation to Islam in the region.

The UAE, compared to other regional actors, is new to the game. It lacks both the experience and historic religious legacy when compared to other actors, which weakened its stance as a regional power. For instance, Saudi Arabia hosts the holy cities of Mecca and Madina. In addition, the inclusion of its Wahhabi doctrine 'as part of the kingdom's expansive foreign policy' as well as 'serve[ing] al-Saud expansionist regional foreign policy and desire for regional hegemony in the Arabian Peninsula' which affirmed Saudi Identity as religious state (Menshawy & Mabon, 2021, pp. 55-52). Turkey has its historic legacy of being the centre of the Ottoman Empire, and Iran has its religious sites and adopted Shia Islam in its foreign policy to strengthen its centrality for Shia Muslims across the world. In contrast, Qatar, which shares similar state characteristics with the UAE, and with Saudi Arabia same Wahhabi/Hanbali Islamic jurisprudence, created in the 1990s a strong alliance with the MB, the most popular and organised political group in the region, which compensated for its lack of religious historic legacy, and boosted its ability to manoeuvre and compete with other rivals in the region. Furthermore, Menshawy & Mabon (2021, pp. 52-55) argued the although Wahhabism served Qatar's leadership in term of forming public opinion and achieving legitimacy and survival in a conservative tribal society. However, it presented a domestic and regional dilemma due to al-Saud's entanglement with Wahhabism as the former could exercise influence through religious scholars. Therefore, associating with the brotherhood as a populist bottom-up Sunni Islam came as a solution to counter the Saudi tops-down political Islam (Menshawy & Mabon, 2021, p. 56). Therefore, Religion and Al-Azhar, in this case, emerged as essential in the competition with others, to assert the UAE's influence and reform revolutionary Islam.

Al-Azhar was perceived as the UAE solution to compete with the aforementioned religious identities. Thus, in its 'statecraft of Islam', and as new actor in this regional, Egypt's Al-Azhar

was cast as a partner and member of the group, since its prominent figures share a similar religious doctrine as the UAE. This self-realisation generated the UAE's reflective and creative capacity to construct a cooperative role with Egypt's Al-Azhar as an ideal 'other' to compensate for its role limitation.

For its ambitious role to succeed, the UAE leadership realised the need to construct such a role in relation to respected theological institutions, such as Al-Azhar, to gain legitimacy, weight, and respect in the Muslim world. Amasha (2018, p. 3) explained that 'there is an organic relationship between Sufism and Al-Azhar, as many senior Azhar officials adopt Sufi thought'. Similarly, Amasha (2018, p. 1) pointed out that 'Egypt has witnessed a boom in Sufi discourse in the last few years. [..]. However, this proliferation of Sufism coincided with the imposition of full restrictions on other Islamic trends, such as the Muslim Brotherhood as well as some Salafist groups'. This was evidenced by Egypt's role enactment against the MB and its regional and international affiliates. Egypt followed by the UAE denounced the party as a terrorist organisation (Hassan, 2020; Gulf News, 2014). Darwich (2017, p. 1290) discussed the Egyptian case stating that 'although the group was never granted formal judicial authorization for their decades-long political participation, it was to some degree accepted both by the regime and society since President Gamal Abdel Nasser until President Hosni Mubarak. The group was labelled neither a threat to national security nor a terrorist organization'. This step is part of the UAE-Egypt alliance to contain the MB and reshape the Islam narrative and its role in politics, throughout the region. Therefore, Al-Azhar figures played major roles for the UAE in the different regional events it organised. This is demonstrated by the influential positions granted to them by the UAE in its statecraft of Islam. For instance, Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb [was appointed] 'as the Chairman of the Muslim Council of Elders (MSE)' (Amasha, 2018, p. 3). In addition, 'Hassan Al-Shafei the former head of Al-Azhar Sheikh Office, and Mahmoud Zaqzouq former Awqaf Chairman, are also members of the MSE' (Amasha, 2018, p. 3). Moreover, the Tabah Foundation's board of advisory includes Ali Gomaa, the former Grand Mufti of Egypt (Amasha, 2018, p. 3). Furthermore, 'Shawki Allam, (current Grand Mufti of Egypt) is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, and the head of the General Secretariat for Fatwa Authorities Worldwide' (Amasha, 2018, p. 3). This partnership role in restructuring the religious narrative in NRC would bring Egypt and the UAE together in their shared religious identity. This, of course, is viewed as a political success for the UAE, which brought it close to Egypt, a central state in the region, and the most populated in the Middel East. In this context, Diwan (2021, p. 957)

discussed the emergence of this new soft power alliance:

> 'Through the partnership with al-Tayeb of Al-Azhar […], in soft power form, the close ties that the UAE has developed with post-revolutionary Egypt. It also explicitly supports the Emarati project to rehabilitate and strengthen the authority of Al-Azhar and its scholars within the Islamic world. This project has two aims: (1) to build a counterweight to jihadist groups and the more activist forms of Political Islam such as the [MB], often conflated as different aspects of extremism; and (2) to restore a more traditional approach to Islam, characterized by respect for the schools of law as well as more rationalist credal tenets'.

In addition, in its role enactment, the UAE capitalised on soft power tools, affirming itself as a Sufi theological competitor. For Instance, Abu Dhabi's Tabah Foundation, organised a conference titled '*Who is Sunni?*' in Chechnya (Diwan, 2016). Diwan (2016) mentioned that the conference's closing statement denounced extremism and the 'takfiri' practice of declaring some Islamic traditions outside of Islam. Also, it was reported that the conference excluded Salafi scholars (Diwan, 2016). Consequently, the conference was met with contestations in many theological circles of the Gulf and the region (Diwan, 2016). Yusuf al-Qardawi declared his disagreement with the exclusion of Wahhabis and Salafis, Ahl Al-Sunnah Wa Al Jammaa, who are a major component of the Sunni community (Aljazeera, 2016).[23] The conference's closing statement signalled the formation of a new movement, led by Egypt's Al-Azhar and the UAE, that aims to 'neutralise Islam'. In addition, in 2014, the UAE established the MSE, of which Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb, Sheikh of Al-Azhar, was the chairman. Diwan (2016) argued that the creation of the council came to counter the influence of the 'Qatar-based International Union of Muslim Scholars, another transnational network headed by the MB's spiritual leader, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi'. In addition, in 2014, The UAE established the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, calling for the respect of nation-state systems and the political authority, as conditions of stability, which asserts 'the credal position against rebellion or Khuruj' (Diwan, 2021, p. 956).

The revival of Sufism in the UAE was shaped and influenced by Egyptian Azhari scholars who gained the Emirati leadership's trust in constructing the UAE's statecraft of religion in both its foreign and domestic policies. This new role construction proves again the significance of

[23] Arabic Source

Egypt's influence on the UAE's discovery of new roles for itself, in terms of identity construction and role enactment. The success of the UAE as a Sufi actor in the Middle East will depend on its ability to maintain its alliance with Al-Azhar. This indicates that the UAE's relations with Egypt will continue to be a top foreign policy priority.

Conclusion

The UAE's foreign policy role in Egypt is a great example of how roles develop and change with the rise of significant others and the emergence of foreign policy dilemmas. Egypt witnessed the transformation of the UAE from its beginnings as a small state that sought Egypt's pro-Arab support, to an anti-Islamist actor that would not hesitate to step into the Egyptian political scene and cast supportive and partnership roles with its Egyptian allies, that share its security philosophy, to play meaningful roles and affirm itself as a pro-status quo power. In addition, this case proves that roles are not fixed, but are subject to remaking, depending on the social and structural changes of the system, and dismisses historical context, ideational, and material factors. Also, it shows how the rise of a new significant other could present a policy dilemma that pushes the agent to engage in a new dialogue between the 'me', and the 'I' in pursuit of a new self, concerning this new other, and of a role that is suitable for a new interactionist environment. However, it is crucial to link the UAE influence in Egypt and vice versa to the broader regional context. The fragmentation of the Arab social fabric after 2011 encouraged the UAE to take on the same role it took in Egypt. However, what distinguished Egypt in the UAE's new role is that it was the interactionist field where the UAE engaged in new role learning, which resulted in a change towards pursuing an interventionist approach. Egypt, as a theatre, was the first interactionist stage in which the UAE leadership went through re-role taking, and reviewed its older foreign policy role in Egypt. The rise of a new significant other, the MB, represented a policy dilemma that required a policy change and pushed for the emergence of a new Emirati self – an interventionist self. The year 2012-2013 was the socialisation period and the learning venue to the UAE's understanding and constitution of an informed perception of the MB. Within this context, the UAE agent was engaged in learning, interpretation, and observation, to form an informed perception about its significant other, the MB. During that phase, the constant diplomatic clashes between the UAE and Egyptian officials resulted in a new role making, influencing the UAE to take on the role of anti-Islamist actor, as demonstrated by its domestic measures against local MB affiliates that threaten its pre-established national identity and its monarchic political culture. In addition, its

economic role change, of reducing Egypt's financial support, disclosed its negative perception of the MB. This socialisation process-learning phase pushed the UAE to view the Tamarod events as an opportunity to restore the old regime and achieve a status quo by taking on an anti-Islamist and pro-Egyptian people role. This was manifested in its role making, which adopted a financial intervention to influence the course of events in support of Tamarod elements, who shared the UAE's regional vision in 2013. In addition, the election of Al-Sisi as Egypt's president suggests a role success, which was a turning point in Emirati foreign policy history, by which it realised its role capacity and power. This led to the UAE expanding this role to other regional fronts where the MB and other Islamist powers were also a threat.

Egypt was the first 'Arab Spring' state in which the UAE's anti-Islamist role was unleashed. It was the environment in which this role tested its ability to change and influence. In addition, the UAE's role enactment in Egypt and the region reveals that it was an essential step in its definition of itself and the making of its identity on the domestic level, in Egypt, and beyond. The UAE's interaction with Egypt during the Mohammed Morsi era and the rise of local MB affiliates competing with the government alarmed the leadership regarding an identity threat that could grow in the future. Thus, the UAE altered its foreign policy to perform a bigger role to secure its national identity, and rid the Middle East of Islamism. Moreover, this interaction enabled the UAE to undertake a reflective process. It achieved self-realisation and acknowledged the vacuum in its foreign policy that could hamper its anti-Islamist role. The revival of Sufism domestically and regionally was the creative solution to fill that gap and enable the UAE's achievement of its aspirations to perform a bigger competitive role in the region. In addition to its regional military partner role, Egypt along with Al-Azhar were cast as the UAE's theological partners in its ideational war with Islamists in the region. Egypt, once again, was perceived as a crucial component of the 'new' UAE's success in its 'new regional role'.

6. The UAE's Role in Libya

Introduction

The UAE's foreign policy role in Libya is a perfect example of how the rise of 'others' in an interactionist field triggers the agent to undergo a new dialogue between the 'Me' and the 'I' that culminates in the elaboration of a new script of identity affirmation in relation to this other. It is the others in Libya that informed the UAE about its role enactment and inspired changes in its identity to play a meaningful role that would best suits its developing NRC. The UAE's foreign policy in Libya can be described as complex. Ever since its intervention under NATO, the UAE's role script has been created and recreated in relation to the rise of other actors, and the changes in the interaction. Thus, the UAE carried multiple roles in pursuit of finding a meaningful role and a new identity. This foreign policy transformation in Libya is puzzling, given the fact that the UAE shares no borders with Libya and has always maintained limited interaction with the Gaddafi regime. Structural threats, such as the vacuum of power and the rise of external players – Qatar and Turkey – adopting proxy roles in support of their favoured political fraction, pushed the UAE to construct a countering role to pursue its regional security agenda in Libya. The chapter seeks to investigate why the UAE established a role there despite its limited historic relations with Libya before the revolution. This chapter also attempts to understand what roles the UAE took on from its intervention in the war against Gaddafi until 2020, how the nature of this interaction influenced the UAE into constructing a new self, and the impact of this new self on the UAE's identity in relation to others in Libya.

The UAE saw an appropriate moment for regime change in the 2011 revolution. It intervened to overthrow Gaddafi and install a friendly regime in the region. The UAE also considered the interaction in Libya an opportunity for role learning where it could acquire military training as part of a NATO coalition, which would highlight its value as a militant actor. That is why the UAE declared itself a NATO partner during the war against Gaddafi in 2011. However, the post-2014 UAE role in Libya suggested an identity change into a counterterrorist actor. From that perspective, the Emirati leadership constructed a role in relation to its negative significant others, the pro-Islamist states of Turkey and Qatar, to affirm its counterterrorism role. In playing this role, the UAE cast Libyan national and secular leaders as allies, providing them with military and financial support. In addition, the rise of Turkey was perceived by the UAE agent as the emergence of a 'neo-Ottoman' power in the region. Thus, the UAE constructed a

role as an Arab regional protector and anti-neo-Ottoman power. Therefore, it continued its military support of Haftar against Turkey's proxies, the Islamist forces. The UAE's performance in Libya captures its role essence of countering political Islam, which the Emiratis considered equivalent to terrorism. The Libyan case shows how the changes of the interaction influenced the UAE to play multiple roles in pursuit of finding its most appropriate role that included a NATO partner, a status quo and counterterrorist actor, and a regional Arab protector.

This chapter will first present a background on UAE-Libyan historic relations. Second, it will discuss the UAE's role during the war against Gaddafi under the NATO coalition and its counterterrorism role during the civil war in 2014. The chapter will, thirdly, elaborate on the UAE's parallel roles of mediator and counterterrorism actor. Following with the UAE's role emergence as an anti-neo-Ottoman actor and Arab protector. Fifth, the chapter will discuss the UAE's military role retreat. The conclusion will, finally, summarise this chapter's findings.

Background

Since its establishment in the 1970s, the UAE maintained limited relations with the former ruler of Libya. Gaddafi acceded to power in a military coup d'état that ended the Sanussi monarchy in 1961. As a new young leader inspired to become the next Gamal Abdel Nasser, Gaddafi weaponised oil in his anti-Western narrative while Nasser was nationalizing the Suez Canal from colonial powers (Asser, 2011). Gaddafi declared that republics should be established all over the Middle East, thereby threatening the remaining conservative monarchies of the region and creating hostile relations with them (Genugten, 2017, p. 45). For instance, he was directly implicated in plotting the assassination of the Saudi crown prince Abdullah al Saud. This incident intensified the UAE leadership's distrust of Gaddafi, as the former considered Saudi Arabia as 'Al Shaqeeqa Al Kubra' ('The Older Sister'), and an extension of the UAE's stability (Genugten, 2017, p. 45). Moreover, during the 2003 Arab summit that was held to discuss the Iraq war, Gaddafi attacked King Abdullah by saying 'you are propelled by fibs towards the grave and you were made by Britain and protected by the US' (Genugten, 2017, p. 45). He called him 'a British product and American ally' and accused him of having brought the Americans to occupy Iraq (Genugten, 2017, p. 45). Gaddafi's hostility towards Saudi Arabia made Gulf leaders suspicious of his intentions. He also portrayed himself as an anti-imperialist, revolutionary leader and was hostile to the West. For instance, President Ronald Reagan described him as 'The mad dog of the Middle East' and that his goal was a global Muslim-fundamentalist revolution (Asser, 2011). Furthermore, Gaddafi was accused of

supporting international terrorism leading Libya to be sanctioned for its responsibility in the Lockerbie bombing in Scotland in 1988. He was also accused of sponsoring the 'West Berlin discotheque bombing' (Asser, 2011).

Aside from Gaddafi's IR, even after reaching out to the West and having the ban lifted off Libya, he failed to paint himself as a capable leader and to maintain positive relations with the UAE. In an excerpt of the UAE's Prime minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's book, *'My Story'*, an excerpt recalls how difficult it was to cooperate with Gaddafi:

> 'I am reminded of the late Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, who called me one day saying he wanted to build a new Dubai-style city in Libya to serve as Africa's economic capital. […] I sent Mohammed Al Gergawi, the head of my executive office at the time, to carry a message to Libya. […] He specifically asked that we look at transforming Tripoli and the airport of Mitiga to make a new capital for Africa. They talked together, during which time my envoy formed the impression that Gaddafi had little knowledge of history […]. My envoy summed it up saying: "Gaddafi admires no nation, nor any leader. He expresses his opinions with a fanaticism that makes it hard to have any type of discussion. He does not talk like a leader". After reading Al Gergawi's report, I decided to go myself. […] I visited Gaddafi in his tent in the city of Sirte and, just like the last time we had met, he monopolized the entire conversation. […] after the visit ended, […] I withdrew from the talks about the new project after I realised that we were running around in circles' (Al Maktoum, 2019, pp. 178-180).

The statement above reveals how Gaddafi's character was perceived by the UAE leadership. Compared to other Arab leaders during the 2011 revolutions, Gaddafi had no allies nor friends to stand by him. His main constraint was his 'egoistic unstable personality' that greatly influenced his foreign policy. This difference of worldviews and style in maintaining IR, between the Emirati and Libyan leaderships, estranged the UAE from Libya. In addition, Gaddafi's anti-imperialist approach antagonised the UAE's role as an international economic centre that cast the US and the UK as allies. His involvement in the aforementioned terrorist incidents made the UAE perceive Gaddafi as an unpredictable 'rogue leader', a threat, and a source of instability in the region. These incidents, along with the hostile relations with Gulf monarchies cemented the divergence of Gaddafi's foreign policy identity from the UAE's, as it did not align with the UAE's vision of IR based on security and cooperation with the West. Backed by the Arab League and NATO, the UN Security Council issued resolution

1973 against the Libyan regime and imposed a no-fly zone on Libyan airspace to put an end to what might constitute 'crimes against humanity' as a 'response to the Libyan people's cry for help' (United Nations Security Council, 2011). In parallel, the UAE mustered regional and international support for the Libyan revolution that called for democratic change and demanded Gaddafi's stepping down. The UAE was motivated to play a meaningful role in support of the Libyan people and saw a historic opportunity for self-discovery, role capacity realisation, and role learning in Libya. It shared a common goal with its partners, 'the removal of Gaddafi and the establishment of a friendly regime'. The UAE's 'me' was influenced by its generalised others, the GCC, the Arab League, and the West's negative perception of Gaddafi.

The UAE adopted a role to which its generalised other subscribed to as a pro-revolution actor. It enacted this role in the GCC, the Arab League and with Western nations. The UAE affirmed itself as a pro-Arab leader by siding with the Libyan people and supporting the Arab League decision. It also successfully performed its NATO partner role and gained experience and role learning by conducting airstrikes, as a result. However, nothing in the UAE's behaviour, up to this point, is in contradiction with the literature of small states' foreign policy. During the early stages of the Libyan war, the UAE performed the role of a small power. It acted under the umbrella of a larger alliance, NATO, in support of the group it belonged to, the UN and the Arab League, as they were casted as UAE generalised other at at the stage of taking its role.

The War Against Gaddafi

NATO Partner and Pro-Arab Actor: The Making of an Enemy

The series of protests that rocked Libya in February 2011, called to end Muammar Gaddafi's four-decade-long authoritative rule. As discussed above, the UAE, backed by its generalised other, joined NATO and supported the no-fly zone resolution adopted by the UN and the Arab League. The UAE's position against Libya, an Arab regime and previous member of the Arab League, did not adhere to the same rhetoric used when other Arab revolutions were concerned. For instance, the UAE refrained from reacting to the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions and resigned itself to observing the developments in these countries. The UAE's newly adopted position required a careful study of the forces in Libya, whether created by its agent or influenced by others within the interaction. This study culminated in the elaboration of an unexpected heavyweight role, in contrast with the UAE's historical pacifist small state foreign

policy. The UAE took on a complex role burdened with military, diplomatic responsibilities. The enactment of this role unfolded in two phases during the war against Gaddafi.

In the first phase, the UAE employed diplomatic activism in the regional and international platforms to overthrow Gaddafi. During the second phase, however, the UAE provided military support to Libyan rebels and affirmed itself as a NATO partner. The fact that the Libyan revolution was considered legitimate in the eyes of most of the international community gave the UAE a historic opportunity to play a meaningful role along with other players who were reshaping the historic Arab context. The UAE affirmed itself as a pro-Arab state, a regional actor, a NATO partner, and an emerging military power. To solidify its supportive stance on the revolution, the UAE asked the Gaddafi-appointed Libyan ambassador, Omar El Ghanai, to leave the Emirates within 72 hours (Das, 2019, p. 7). Moreover, it was the second country, after Qatar, to recognise the National Transitional Council as the legitimate government on 12 June 2011 (Das, 2019, p. 7). As a small state, diplomacy was a crucial aspect of the UAE's role's enactment that aimed to end the Gaddafi regime. Securing the legitimacy of others within the group was also an important determinant for the UAE's ability to play a meaningful role in relation to its generalised other, the Arab League and NATO. Therefore, the UAE coordinated its military role with other players in the region such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and later the US and NATO to bring about the change it sought.

During the second phase, it was essential for Western powers to intervene militarily in support of the revolution's effort to topple Gaddafi's regime. However, this move would not have earned the consensus of Arab League members. Thus, the UAE and other Arab League members coordinated their roles – stating that the international community's intervention is crucial to 'rescue' their 'Arab brothers' – to legitimise the West's role in Libya. Rickli (2016, p. 141) explained that the Arab League requested the UN Security Council's approval of a no-fly zone in Libya. He explained that 'this decision is instrumental to [deflect] criticism of NATO's operation as another Western war on an Arab state' (Rickli, 2016, p. 141). Consequently, Gaddafi was accused by the UN Security Council and the Arab League, of violating human rights and international law for 'refusing humanitarian aid' and using 'weaponry' against his people (Das, 2019, p. 6).

Under the umbrella of the Arab League, the UAE adopted a 'human rights discourse' to legitimise the Western intervention in Libya. Some argue that the UAE's economic power allowed it to change its stance in the Arab League. For instance, Ragab (2017, p. 49) noted that

‘Saudi Arabia and the UAE […] are paying the largest share of the Arab League’s budget and dominating the main positions in the organisation’s specialised agencies’. As a result, Libya under Gaddafi was suspended from the Arab League for human rights violations, making it the first time in the Arab League’s history that a human rights-based argument was used to suspend a member state. Therefore, it is crucial to consider how the demands of the interaction and the influence of others inspired the UAE to review its conduct and rethink its role in light of others’ expectations on what it should and can do in Libya. The UAE’s support of the no-fly zone suggests that the ‘role mind’, which refers to the dialogue between the I and the Me, aimed first to legitimise the intervention in the eyes of the generalised other – the West – to earn its support. This was demonstrated in Hillary Clinton’s statement: ‘We have said from the start that Arab leadership and participation in this effort is crucial, and the Arab League showed, with its pivotal statements on Libya, what that really meant. It changed the diplomatic landscape’ (Rickli, 2016, p. 142). Following that statement, NATO intervened in Libya using American, French, and British military to target Gaddafi’s forces.

In the second phase of the interaction, the UAE played a military role within NATO and affirmed itself as a new military actor in the region. This step came as the UAE was preparing to take on a larger military role in the region since the events of 9/11, and as Iran’s intervention in Arab states was growing. The UAE elaborated a new security strategy to upgrade its military capabilities, and create security partnerships with advanced military actors. For instance, Roberts (2012, pp. 72-73) discussed that:

> ‘Unlike most large platform purchases in the region, […] it is possible to see the UAE’s fighter aircraft squadrons as constituting a meaningful defense. Important questions of pilot training and the numbers of available pilots aside, the UAE’s military doctrine, aside from seeking explicit guarantees of defense from France and America, relies on overwhelming air superiority against the presumed “enemy”, Iran’.

Adopting a military role was a natural and rational step in the UAE’s role construction in Libya and manifested the ‘militant complement’ of a new identity in the making. The war against Gaddafi was an opportunity for the UAE to drop its traditional role in favour of that of a growing military power and a NATO partner. Therefore, for the first time in its military history, the UAE joined NATO in its international air force operation by sending 12 F-16s and 12 Mirage jets to guard the no fly zone (Roberts, 2012, p. 72). As a NATO partner, the UAE cooperated with advanced military actors, such as France, which sponsored the UAE to join,

plan, and execute military strikes in Libya under NATO's banner (Shaheen, 2011). Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed said that 'the UAE Air Force has committed six F-16 and six Mirage aircrafts to participate in the patrols that will enforce the no-fly zone now established over Libya' (Shaheen, 2011). Moreover, working under NATO's umbrella enabled the UAE to actualise itself as a capable NATO partner and military actor. For instance, it participated next to Qatar in support of the Operation Mermaid Dawn during the battle of Tripoli (Nakhoul, 2011). Rickli (2016, p. 146) noted that the UAE's presence was mostly in the western part of Libya as it was providing military training through the deployment of special forces teams and troops in preparation for an advance on Tripoli. Since April 2011, the UAE, in partnership with Qatar, deployed up to forty special forces (Joshi, 2012). The UAE's military and training expenditure kept rising since the early 2000s, suggesting the UAE leadership's longstanding military ambitions just waiting to be unleashed. Playing a military role in Libya was, therefore, a step to achieve these military ambitions by acquiring military training through cooperating with established NATO military powers. On this, Rickli (2016, p. 148) stated:

> 'From an operational point of view, Libya was a fantastic training ground for the UAE air force. The deployment of the UAE aircraft in a context of an international coalition represented an excellent opportunity to test the value and the interoperability of UAE fighter aircraft in the context of real operations. This experience also contributed to reinforcing the UAE's national defence doctrine, which relies on overwhelming air superiority against its most likely enemy, Iran'.

Thus, Libya was the place for the UAE to discover itself as a growing military actor and to gain confidence in its military capabilities and performance. This was recognised in the chairperson of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dempsey's acknowledgement of the UAE's role within NATO in Libya. He stated that 'the UAE is our most credible and capable allies, especially in the Gulf region' (Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2013). Following that, the UAE opened its mission to NATO headquarters and appointed an ambassador, indicating success in both its military role and its roles as a capable NATO partner and member of the group.

In addition, Libya was a training ground for the UAE agent to test and actualise itself through taking on greater roles on a platform where international actors perform military roles. Rickli (2016, p. 135) argued that 'OUP [Operation Unified Protector] enabled the UAE to remove psychological barriers preventing it from adopting a more interventionist foreign policy'. When the US Secretary of State criticised the GCC's military intervention in the 2011 Bahraini revolution, the UAE contested the US' position and threatened to withdraw from the NATO coalition if the US retract its criticism of the Peninsula Shield Force, the GCC joint military force. This threatened to weaken NATO's intervention in Libya. The loss of Arab approval would have painted NATO's intervention as another Western invasion of a Muslim country (Rickli, 2016, p. 147). This was a transformational moment during which a small state, the UAE, used its military advantage to exercise power over a regional ally and world superpower, the US, to defend another Arab regime, Bahrain, which in many ways shares a similar political culture with the UAE. This role performance suggests the UAE's commitment to pursuing a 'role discovery' and confirms its ability to maintain the status quo in the changing regional order. Despite its smallness and lack of experience, the UAE exercised an influential foreign policy that enabled it to influence Libya and achieve its goal of overthrowing Gaddafi. The discussion above showed that the UAE's role behaviour reflects how small states behave to influence. It also reflects how complex interactions are used as a venue for new role learning which materialised in the UAE's growing military role.

The Post-Gaddafi Era: The Rise of a Counterterrorism Role During the Civil War

The UAE's role re-emerged with the start of the first civil war in Tripoli between Islamists and nationalists in 2014. Since then, the UAE adopted a fairly new role in its foreign policy when it came to role taking, role making, and role enactment. In addition, the civil war environment in which the interaction took place was new to the UAE. After 2014, the UAE has served to reorient the UAE's self-conception, to a self that it is willing to take part in, its lack of experience in proxy wars. The UAE played multiple roles in different phases of the interaction since 2014 to affirm its identity and protect itself, of which Libya is considered an extension. These roles included those of a counterterrorism, a mediator or pro-peace process, and an anti-neo-Ottoman expansion actor. At the beginning of the civil war, the UAE constructed a role against Political Islam and its sponsors Qatar and Turkey. Then, it adopted the anti-Islamist role while supporting the peace process in relation to its generalised other, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). In 2019, the UAE affirmed its anti-Islamist role against

Turkey by casting it as an emerging conqueror. The UAE's role was instrumental in strengthening Haftar to be considered by the international community as a local legitimate actor in Libya.

Domestic Context

Libya fell into civil war following the escalation of the conflict between government fractions led by the House of Representatives (HoR) and the General National Congress (GNC). The root of this conflict dates back to 2014 when the GNC was forced to hold elections for a new HoR. These elections had a meagre turnout of 18 percent dominated by secular forces and independent candidates who won the majority of seats. Due to the low turnout, some considered the election results 'not representative', particularly the armed militias and Islamists of the GNC. Following that, The Islamist militias and those remaining in the GNC refused to acknowledge the election results. The Supreme Court confirmed the illegality of the elections of 2014 and the GNC became once again the only legitimate representative power in Libya (Szczepankiewicz-Rudzka, 2016, p. 231). In response, the HoR, which was forced to relocate to the east of the country in Tobruk, declared that the attack against it was illegal and that Libyan Dawn was a terrorist organisation. Consequently, a military alliance, consisting of armed Islamist militias affiliated with the GNC, announced the Libyan Dawn military campaign to control Tripoli and the airport. As a result, the military campaign 'Operation Dignity' was led by the Libyan National Army (LNA) against the Libyan Dawn operation and other armed Islamist militias. This campaign aimed at 'eliminate[ing] Libya from extremist terrorist groups that been disabling the country' (Barfi, 2014) Instead of achieving the revolutionary demands of establishing a democratic state, these developments degenerated into a second civil war in 2014. The civil war later turned into an ideational war between Islamist and national/secular forces leading regional actors to intervene in support of their proxies.

The Rise of the Counterterrorism Actor

The vacuum of power left in Libya changed the interaction from a period of democratic transition to a Cold War zone where the UAE's regional significant others, Qatar and Turkey, played roles affirming their pro-Islamist identities. Similar to its role in Egypt, Iran was not considered a threat in its role construction. It was not included as a negative significant other during the UAE's role creation. It was the Islamist threat in Libya that was perceived as the others to the UAE's role. In addition, Libya shows that new regional actors who had historically

good relations with the UAE, Turkey and Qatar, emerged as a threat to its self on the Libyan scene, pushing the Emirati agent to form roles to counter them. This threatened the UAE's security vision in Libya, North Africa, and the Mediterranean in general. Ragab (2017, p. 41) mentioned that a 'high-ranking Emirati security official stated that Qatari policies at the time were also perceived as a "source of threat" to the Emirates' national security'. Therefore, 'Qatar supports the Islamist faction in Libya and hosts leading Islamist politician Ali Mohammed al-Salabi, an associate of former Libyan Islamic Fighting Group commander Abd al-Hakim Belhadj, now a prominent Islamist militia commander in Tripoli' (McGregor, 2014). As a result, when the civil war between Islamists and Nationalists erupted, 'Qatar, together with Turkey and others supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, threw their weight behind the remaining parts of the GNC and the newly established Libya Dawn coalition' (Genugten, 2017, p. 52). Hill (2019, p. 3) pointed out that Qatar and Turkey 'doubled-down' on their support for the Libyan Dawn coalition and the GNC against Haftar's Dignity campaign. Therefore, their emergence as 'the other' in the interaction was essential in influencing the UAE's leadership to redefine itself and re-think the dialogue between 'Me and I' in Libya. The UAE had to engage in the creation of a new foreign policy script and to take on a new role responsibility in Libya as a counterterrorism actor. Thus, political Islam rose in Tripoli following a coup d'état led by armed Islamist militias who refused to acknowledge electoral results that would paint them as unpopular. The UAE leadership interpreted this as a threat to the stability of the region. Therefore, in its role enactment, the UAE's leadership endorsed the HoR narrative in their fight against Libya Dawn and international terrorism. The UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, Anwar Gargash, stated:

> 'The people have spotted [the Islamists'] failure and recognized their lies. Disregarding the results of the Libyan parliamentary election is nothing but an indication of the isolation of the group, which is seeking a way out of [its] segregation, and [to] justify their mismanagement… Since their seven percent does not form a majority, Islamists in Libya resorted to violence and spread chaos across the country' (McGregor, 2014).

However, it should be noted here that understanding the new UAE role should be considered in relation to the bigger regional changes that started with the spread of the 2011 protests. The roots of the UAE role in Libya is similar to that of its role in Egypt which stems from the status of chaos and fall of traditional power centres in the ME. Moreover, the disaggregation of the Arab fabric, the empty regional space that emerged as a consequence of the 2011 events, and

the regression of the traditional American role in the region pushed the UAE to step into the regional scene by seeking bigger roles and aspiring to gain influence in order to achieve its strategic ends. Hence, I argue that the new Emirati identity in Libya symbolises its broader regional strategy that was born following the 2011 events. In the case of Libya, the UAE's desired end was to contain the rise of the MB and its regional supporters, and set up a friendly regime in power. In addition, UAE's success in Egypt and its shared views with the Sisi regime inspired the Emirati leadership to construct a security role given Libya's shared borders with Egypt thereby making its security an extension of Egypt's security. This indicates that the Emirati role in Libya is a continuation of its anti-Islamist and status quo power in Egypt. Thus, the rise of Qatar and Turkey in Libya in addition to the US' apathy towards the ongoing civil war, incited the UAE to take role responsibility as an Arab protector and counterterrorism actor. This led the UAE to take on this role for the first time in its history and engaged in a proxy war zone. This for example, President Trump continued his predecessor Obama's policy 'of leading from behind' in Libya. This policy alarmed the UAE as it signified a shift in the US foreign policy priorities in the region. Thus, the UAE's role taking in Libya was a consequence of what McGregor described as 'some dissatisfaction with Washington's reluctance to take more decisive action in Libya and elsewhere' leading the UAE to take a hands-on approach in the region to affirm its identity and secure the region (McGregor, 2014). The conflict also revealed the clashing perceptions of terrorism and the MB between the US and the majority of the Western world on one hand, and the UAE on the other. The UAE cast all political Islam groups as terrorist organisations ascribing to fundamentalist interpretations of religion. On the other hand, the US and the West saw the MB as a legitimate political group and a social component that can take part in the democratic process. This change in the 'US role variable' led to the UAE reviewing its perception of the US as a protector of the region. As a result, the UAE took an independent stance by affirming itself as a responsible regional actor to protect its interests and maintain the regional status quo. The UAE's Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, gave voice to his government's concerns when he said:

> 'I believe we have to move away from this perception that Brussels, Washington, London and Paris may know the region better than the people of the region, and I think that is the biggest challenge we face' (Hassan, 2018, p. 9).

To create this new independent role, the UAE coordinated with Egypt and cast it as its generalised other in its stabilization mission of countering terrorism and political Islam in

Libya. On the other hand, the UAE cast the LNA, led by General Khalifa Haftar, into a corresponding commensurate role as a counterterrorism partner.

In its role enactment, the UAE adopted a militant role in the Libyan civil war. The UAE cast Egypt as a counterterrorism ally and partner in its airstrike missions against Qatari-backed Islamist bases. To deter the Libyan Dawn, the UAE conducted two strikes. The first took place on the 17th of August 2014, targeting a small-arms depot of the Misratan militias and their Islamist allies in Tripoli. The second strike took place on the 23rd of August of the same year (McGregor, 2014). Nevertheless, the UAE's military support of Operation Dignity failed to yield tangible results as the Qatar-backed Islamist militias, Ansar al-Sharia and the MB, took the capital only hours after the coup d'état (McGregor, 2014). The UAE did not hesitate to intervene in the civil war, despite the risks of having to face international contestation as its intervention was considered a violation of the UN arms embargo (International Crisis group, 2019a, p. 3). US officials stated that Washington warned both the UAE and Egypt from attacking Tripoli, but the two Arab actors ignored their American ally and proceeded with the operation (McGregor, 2014). The UAE did not declare its participation in the attack, but it was confirmed by a Pentagon spokesperson (McGregor, 2014). To prop up Haftar as a military leader, The Crisis Group reported that the LNA 'received additional aircrafts […] including air tractors fitted with rockets, and helicopters donated allegedly by Egypt and the UAE' (International Crisis Group, 2019a, p. 3).

To strengthen its military role in Libya, the UAE established its first military base at the Al-Khadim airbase in 2014. This was revealed by the UN's 'satellite imagery of Al-Khadim airbase, about 105 km (65 miles) east of Benghazi, between July 2014 and March 2017, showing a gradual build-up of infrastructure and aircraft, including drones "most probably" operated by the UAE' (Lewis, 2017). In this vein, Rickli (2016, p. 146-147) discussed that the UAE's 'wider role in Libya should be seen as an attempt to maintain the regional stability of the Gulf while at the same time shaping perception as a reliable partner with NATO'. However, the events in Libya, in 2014, inspired the UAE to shift its role and enact multiple military tactics. These included supporting Haftar to confirm his local military leadership, conducting airstrikes against Islamist bases in partnership with Egypt, and establishing a military base to support LNA operations. Before 2014, the UAE had not enacted an international military role independently. This changed in Libya as the UAE asserted itself as an independent military actor, a counterterrorism partner, and a regional power equal to other interventionists in Libya.

The Emergence of the Libyan Political Agreement and the Rise of Parallel Roles

The UAE as Mediator and Counterterrorism Actor

The interaction in Libya entered a new phase with the intervention of the UNSMIL acting as a peace guarantor in Libya. In 2015, the UAE joined other external actors in Libya, such as Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, Italy, France, and Russia in their support of the Libya Political Agreement (LPA), which was adopted under the auspices of the UNSMIL in Sakhrit, Morocco, 2015. This meeting aimed to achieve a political solution to the conflict and a ceasefire. The negotiations established three governing bodies that included the Presidency Council (PC) and the Governments of National Accord (GNA), which included in its body ex-GNC members. On the other hand, the HoR was included as the parliament with the power to approve appointments to the GNA (Fitzgerald & Toaldo, 2016). In addition, Faiez al-Sarraj was designated as head of the council and, later, Prime Minister of the GNA that settled in Tripoli. The HoR, led by Aguilah Saleh, continued to serve from Tobruk, recognised General Haftar and included the LPA in its security arrangement (Fitzgerald & Toaldo, 2016).

The adoption of the LPA in 2015 was a historic development in Libya that bound all actors, local and international, to work within its framework. Actors needed their roles to be legitimised by the UNSMIL to seek influence in the 'new LPA order'. As a result, the UAE adjusted its role in relation to the LPA and affirmed itself as a member of the group by casting the UNSMIL as its generalised other. To that end, the UAE joined international and regional players, including its opponents Qatar and Turkey, in their recognition of the PC and GNA despite its opposition to the Islamist affiliations of their members. Gargash expressed his country's support of the international community efforts stating that '[…] a political solution is the only viable option to resolve the conflict. We continue to call for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire agreement and resume a Libyan-led political dialogue, under the UN auspices' (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2020). The UAE's recognition of the PC and the GNA indicated a change through 'self-reflection' for others to legitimise its role to continue to influence events in Libya. This is not a shift in the UAE's policy to tolerate political Islam in Libya. However, in the same statement, Gargash expressed concerns over foreign regional interference in Libya and the threat it posed to security and stability in the region as well as to the peace process declaring that 'this downward spiral is due to continues foreign regional interference in Libya's internal Affairs' (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2020).

Following the change in the Libyan situation, from a civil war to a ceasefire and political solution, the UAE modified its role script in Libya to meet these changes, which led to its recognition of the PC and the GNA. This indicated the addition of a new 'pro-political solution' component to the UAE's pre-established anti-Islamist/counterterrorism role.

The UNSMIL and other Western actors' position towards the development of the peace process and the GNA's performance alarmed the UAE. The PC of the GNA did not establish security forces, relying instead on militias and armed groups from Tripoli and Misrata to secure itself (Lacher, 2018, p. 1). Lacher (2018, p. 1) referred to these groups as 'the militia cartel' and explained that they gained huge influence over state institutions in Tripoli since the arrival of the PC. The UN and the Western powers signalled their support for the expansion of the pro-GNA militias, for the sake of short-term stability. However, this was unacceptable to the UAE, which viewed this decision as a breach of the peace process in favour of strengthening the role of militias in the future apparatus of the country.

The West's acceptance of militias was contested by the HoR and the LNA, which perceived the GNA as a 'rebranding of the Islamist bloc and rival militias' (Das, 2019, p. 12). Nevertheless, Western powers were unconcerned as long as the GNA, supported by the Militias, were able to stabilise the country and control the flow of migration towards Europe. Das (2019, p. 12) discussed that 'the worldview of the external actors on Libya continued to be guided by reserved pragmatism and each state continued to pursue its policy that suited [those] national objectives'. The Western acceptance of armed militias as a source of stability, as opposed to forming a state institution for national security arrangements, influenced the UAE to continue its support of the LNA while still assisting the peace process by constructing parallel roles. Like other actors, the UAE secured its agenda and affirmed itself as a counterterrorism actor within the framework of the LPA in Libya.

The UAE's perception of terrorism and Islamism is more rigid than that of the West. The UAE's interaction in Libya and other platforms in the region informed it that political Islamist groups are capable of becoming armed militias due to their political philosophy that legitimises 'Jihad'. Thus, according to the UAE's reasoning, the majority of political Islamist groups, including those who claim to be democratic and civic, constitutes a regional threat. This reveals the UAE's agnosticism and orthodox view of Islamism in general. For the UAE, terror groups are not only armed religious groups but also political parties such as the MB. This goes back to these parties' common viewpoint on the system of rule, relations with the West, and Jihad

which conflict with the UAE's moderate Muslim identity and its vision of regional security. This explains the UAE's enthusiasm for fighting extremism and countering terrorism. In his observations, Genugten (2017, p. 54) states: '[sceptical] about the efficiency of such multilateral channels alone, the Gulf States tend to explore, in parallel, bilateral and regional initiatives with the objective of steering the UN-led process in the direction that is their most desirable path to stability'. In this context, the UAE's role was concerned with affirming its identity by countering Islamists and containing the rise of Qatar and Turkey as regional competitors. Therefore, it aimed to prop up a 'secular' friendly regime by strengthening like-minded local partners such as Haftar. In an article titled, '*Our Solution in Libya'* Gargash (2019) explained:

> 'If we have learned anything at all about the modern Middle East, it is that the region rarely gets it right when it comes to political transitions and revolutions. More often than not, violent free-for-alls win out over peaceful changes in power. Fragile states collapse into failed ones and the most ruthless actors like ISIS and Al Qaeda gain [an] advantage [….], which plays a disruptive role in the region […]. In the Middle East, there are no easy decisions. Often, we are faced with the "least worse" of difficult choices, choices that are not always exactly as Western commentators would wish'.

The Emirati perspective viewed the Western role that bolstered militia control and influence to achieve stability in Tripoli via the GNA as alarming. This was interpreted by the UAE's leadership as Western naivety and ignorance. The UAE considered this decision a short-term solution that would, at a later stage, create a rogue state, as Iran is to the West and the Arab region.

Therefore, the UAE affirmed its responsibility to maintain security in Libya stemming from its Arab background and its position in the region. It continued to play a competing role with Western powers to assert the form of security it believed would rescue the region. For instance, Gargash (2019) affirmed that 'no outside country will any longer guarantee regional security, as Britain once did, and as the US did until recently. We must step up, and so we have'. Thus, the UAE continued, in coordination with other pro-LNA actors, to provide Haftar with military support and declare him a capable military leader and a local counterterrorism actor in Libya. In this context, Hill (2019, p. 3) explained 'with the support of Egypt and the UAE, Field Marshal Haftar assaulted the city of Benghazi for three years before finally declaring victory. Benghazi was left in ruins but Field Marshal Haftar was able to declare victory over the

Islamists that had been there, demonstrating his usefulness to his supporters in Cairo, Riyadh, and Abu Dhabi'. In addition, the UN panel reported that, in 2016, the UAE delivered '93 armoured personnel carriers and 549 armoured and non-armoured vehicles to the LNA' (Lewis, 2017). In addition, in January and April 2017, 'the LNA in Tobruk received large deliveries of Toyota pick-up trucks and armoured [four-wheel] drive cars' (Lewis, 2017).

In parallel, the UAE played a 'mediator role' in support of the peace process. The conflict between Islamists and national government factions resurfaced as the HoR and LNA refused to include armed groups in Tripoli's institutions. Although the UAE viewed the inclusion of armed Islamist militias in an Arab regime's institution as an ideological threat that contrasts with its NRC and regional identity in general, it hosted mediations led by MBZ in Abu Dhabi, in 2017, between al-Sarraj, head of the internationally recognised government, and General Haftar, (Aljazeera, 2017). The UAE, however, did not announce the talks in any statement. This role can be read as the UAE acting as part of the international community group in support of its generalised other, the UNSMIL, to go back to the status quo (Aljazeera, 2017). During its support of peace talks and mediation, the UAE continued to insist on the importance of Haftar in Libya. To that effect, Gargash (2019) stated 'Khalifa Haftar emerged in the Paris conference as one of the major personas in the Libyan political equation, the attempt to demonise Haftar has failed miserably due to his integrity in fighting terrorism and extremism'. Das (2019, p. 13) pointed here that 'the UAE, with regard to Haftar has maintained its firm position that the General must be included in Libya's national leadership'.

The UAE continued practising its mediator role in 2019, despite its obvious support of the Haftar camp. For instance, MBZ led mediations again between the two leaders, al-Sarraj and Haftar, with the presence of Ghassan Salamé, the UN envoy to Libya, to address differences between the two governments. Two months later, the UAE's reconciliation efforts were not successful and its mediator role failed. This revealed that the UAE took on parallel roles of lobbying for Haftar as an important counterterrorism actor in Libya on the international platform while seeking 'role reconciliation' through the peace process.

The UAE's behaviour indicates its attempt to reconcile its anti-Islamist, pro-Haftar role with its peace process, pro-LNA role. The support of the GNA by other actors informed the UAE to carry on with the peace process and construct a role within the framework of the LPA to play a meaningful role and earn the legitimacy of others in the group. This reflects the UAE's creative capacity to carry multiple roles, by ensuring and promoting its vision while working

with the UN to assert itself as a member of the group in support of the peace process and as a regional actor.

Anti-neo-Ottoman Actor and Arab Protector Role

Like in Egypt, Iran was not considered in the UAE strategic calculation in Libya. The so-called Arab spring in the countries of the revolution showed that classic Iranain threat the gulf monarchs was not a priority at time the region was living an Islamists threat, spread of non-state actors, rise of MB regional powers such as Qatar and Turkey. Turkey, not Iran was the regional threat that UAE was influenced to construct a counter role to its pro-Islamist behaviour. The traditional exstitinatial Shitte-persian threat was marginalized, not silenced, post 2011 in Libya to prioritise the threat of Qatar and Turkey due to their role in supporting MB factions in Libya and rest of the ME. In this vein, the UAE changed its role casting itself as an Anti-neo-Ottoman and an Arab protector against Turkish expansion during the second Libyan civil war in 2019. The civil war started between Islamists (GNA) and nationals (HoR and LNA) and lasted nine months. War sparked when Haftar announced an attack against the GNA and declared a campaign to take Tripoli (Hill, 2019, p. 4). In addition, the passive role of great powers in Libya created a state of anarchy in an interaction where the 'regional ambitious powers' such as the UAE, and its significant other Turkey, engaged in casting each other in countering roles to affirm their identities and establish a rule that aligns with their ontological security. This strengthened the proxy war dynamic and the identity conflict between Turkey and the UAE. The re-emergence of Turkey in support of the GNA was viewed by the UAE as an intervention in Arab affairs. Therefore, it increased its military support to Haftar in an attempt to counter the Turkish influence in the civil war.

The historic Turkish narrative influenced the UAE to construct a role to counter Turkey's role, which was perceived as expansionist. In addition, Turkish support of the GNA and the Islamist militias further demonstrated the necessity of the UAE's backing of Haftar. Thus, the UAE agent constructed a narrative in Libya that cast Islamists and the armed militias as destructive player, which legitimises its role-enactment due to the GNA's affiliation with these groups. Gargash earlier justified his country's position, stating, 'In February we brokered an agreement between Libya's warring parties, […]. Regrettably extremist militias in Tripoli subsequently derailed this agreement in a bid to take control of Libya's future, Islamist and jihadi groups uniting in support of Al-Sarraj' (Gargash, 2019). Haftar's attack comes at a historic moment for the UAE. In response, the UAE affirmed its position towards terrorism and the armed

militias in Libya indicating its support of the LNA. The GNA's weakness at the beginning of the war and the growing Turkish role in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, coupled with the US' approval changed the interaction. The UAE saw Haftar's attack as an opportunity to take down the GNA and establish a friendly government in Tripoli. It was reported that Haftar and Donald Trump had a phone conversation that was interpreted as the US' green light to continue the fight since Trump recognised Haftar's significant role in countering terrorism and securing the oil reserves (Al-Atrush & Jacobs & Talev, 2019; Telegraph, 2019). In consequence, Harchaoui discussed Trump's phone call stating that it 'creat[ed] an environment where a military intervention by foreign states, like Egypt, is likelier' (The Telegraph, 2019). The UAE's direct military support to Haftar intensified with the start of the second civil war between the LNA and the GNA in April 2019. The UAE did not confirm its direct military support on the ground to the LNA, however, reports indicate that the UAE's role-enactment included providing military support by sending military personnel and equipment, the use of military bases, airstrikes, and drones. Gargash justified the UAE's position stating 'there are different militias fighting there [in Tripoli] with different agendas and some of those who are fighting with the GNA scare us' (International Crisis Group, 2019a). Salamé (2019) discussed the UAE's role in Libya stating that:

> 'The UAE believes in crucial fight against political Islam, and Libya is included, and you know that Saudi and UAE have been instrumental in the establishment of the current regime in Egypt and they believe that are helping Egypt… They believe that the present regime in Egypt and the national interest there can be hurt by what is happening in Libya and if the Turks are in control of Libya neither one of the two countries [UAE and Saudi] would be very happy. That is why they have been intervening'.

In addition, Salamé (2020) described the conflict in Libya as a 'war by remote control'. He explained that Libya is not a proxy war in the old style, saying that:

> 'What is done in Libya is not proxy, it's not much more than that. It's a war by remote control where you interfere directly through your own private military firms or mercenaries you bring from here and there like Syria, Sudan, or Darfur, you name it and you let them fight and die in Libya'.

The UAE's role behaviour since 2019 ascribed to this 'remote control war' interaction suggesting an ability to engage in role learning and adapt to the new military situation. The

UAE supported Haftar by providing military aid consisting of French-made fighter jets, drones, Chinese combat drones, with military supplies, and building 'Al-Khadim airbase' in Libya (Fishman and Hiney, 2020). It was reported that the UAE, using the advanced Chinese 'Wing Loong II', conducted more than 900 airstrikes in the greater area of Tripoli (Fishman and Hiney, 2020). It also used the airbase of Al-Khadim to deliver 6,200 tons of weapons and ammunition between January-April 2020 (Ardemagni & Fasanotti, 2020; Harchaoui, 2020a; Fishman and Hiney, 2020). This support from the UAE enabled Haftar to gain an upper hand in the civil war.

In this context, Turkey was simultaneously acting in support of the GNA, affirming its identity as a historic regional player. Therefore, Turkey deployed BayrakatTB2 drones and several dozen Turkish officers, carrying out 250 strikes to counter the progress of the LNA's forces towards Tripoli (Harchaoui, 2020a). Turkey delivered about 3,500 tons' worth of equipment and ammunition using cargo ships during January and February (Harchaoui, 2020a). Turkey also sent several hundred soldiers and 4,000 Turkish-backed Syrian mercenaries to fight against the LNA (Harchaoui, 2020a). Harchaoui explained 'Most of them are battle-hardened Islamist fighters who belong to three large anti-government militias (Harchaoui, 2020a)'. In addition, Turkish troops provided Libyan fighters with training in urban warfare. Turkish support for the LNA and the Islamist militias further demonstrated the necessity of the UAE's backing of Haftar. However, the GNA was able to stop LNA forces after signing a military memorandum of understanding on 27 November 2019, which brought Turkish troops to Libya. Emrullah İşler, Turkey's envoy to Libya, said, after the approval of the memorandum of understanding, that '[Turkish troops] would be deployed like in Somalia or Qatar'. He concluded that 'the waving of a Turkish flag there would give the necessary message to the other side' (Wintour, 2019). When Turkey deployed its troops, President Erdogan declared that:

> 'For long centuries, Libya was a crucial part of the Ottoman empire […] The support of our ancestors' grandsons in North Africa is our top priority […] We are aware of our historic responsibility towards our Arab, Berbers, and Tuareg brothers in Libya. They stood by us in the most critical times of our history, and we must be with them in these difficult times' (CNN Arabic, 2020). [24]

[24] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis

The role conflict in Libya was manifested in the language used by government officials of both countries, indicating the clash of objectives, identities, and visions for the future of Libya. Turkey's role in Libya intensified as a consequence of the UAE's influence, and vice versa. The chairperson of the Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies in Istanbul and a Turkish former diplomat stated to Aljazeera that 'Turkey and the UAE [are] engaged in a regional power struggle. They see it as a zero-sum game, in which there is no way for both sides to win. If one wins, the other one loses' (Uras, 2020). Therefore, from a Turkish perspective, having a military presence in Libya would counter the UAE and weaken Haftar. This was demonstrated by Erdogan's statement that 'Egypt and the UAE's [Crown Prince] Mohammed bin Zayed are supporting Haftar's forces. They were very strong in terms of equipment and drones. Now there is a balance after the latest reprisals. We will update the security agreement we have with Libya' (Thomas, 2020, p. 4). Turkey's Defence Minister, Hulusi Akar, also said 'Abu Dhabi does what it does in Libya, does what it does in Syria. All of it is being recorded. At the right place and time, the accounts will be settled. [..] It is necessary to ask Abu Dhabi, where this hostility, where these intentions, where this jealousy comes from' (Arab News, 2020). The language of Turkish officials reflects the 'othering' of the UAE in the self-affirmation of Turkey in Libya. In contrast to Turkey's narrative in Libya, the UAE's reflection of its position was demonstrated earlier in the conflict by Gargash's analysis: 'the region is plagued by a radical, agitating speech pursued by governments preoccupied with expanding their influence at the expense of the Arab world. [...] Speech of threats from countries, which still dream of their past empires and have no positive messages, are categorically rejected' (Al Sherbini, 2019). He responded to Akar's statement with 'colonialist illusions belong to the archives of history, […]. Relations between states are not conduced with threats' (Arab News, 2020). In its intervention, Turkey was driven by its historic legacy in Libya and the region, using its identity as a Muslim power. Salamé (2020) discussed Turkey's role in the civil war during a conference, saying that:

> 'I remember in 2011, I was in Istanbul we had a meeting with crisis group there and the foreign minister then, Ahmet Davutoğlu, was there and he turned to me and he said: look Ghassan we were kicked out by the Italians out of Libya in 1911 one century 2011 we are back there. So there is this idea of neo-Ottoman re-expansion that you see in the Middle East, in Syria, and Iraq, and elsewhere. But you definitely see in Libya which was an Ottoman provenance until 1911'.

This pushed the UAE to take a role in Libya and affirm itself as a regional protector against another Ottoman expansion. In an interview, Harchaoui (2020b) explains that 'from an ideological perspective, the survival of proponents of political Islam in Tripoli holds immense value for Erdoğan and his supporters. Moderate political Islam wielding some degree of power in a wealthy North African country represents an important'. He continued for Erdogan of the GNA 'would send a strong message to neighbouring countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Somalia and Sudan, which would be intolerable to [MBZ]' (Harchaoui, 2020b). This, he explains, would 'form the basis for Turkey to build a sphere of geopolitical influence over the years. Abu Dhabi has every intention of preventing such a scenario' (Harchaoui, 2020b).

The power struggle between Turkey and the UAE in Libya unleashed a wider war of identities that had been gradually spreading in the region throughout the last decade. Turkey's role change was influenced by Davutoğlu who constructed the new Turkish role as a central power on multiple fronts (Girgoriadis, 2010, p. 4). This new role originated from the multiple identities, such as Middle-Eastern and Mediterranean, that Turkey carried throughout history, enabling Ankara to revive its historic influence over the Middle East, and Mediterranean Sea (Girgoriadis, 2010, p. 4). The UAE interpreted this policy as a revival of Turkey's Ottoman legacy using its Islamist influence and supporting political Islam. The emergence of Turkey as a new power is perceived by the UAE agent as a neo-Ottoman expansion that would strengthen Islamic political groups. In response, the UAE affirmed itself as an Arab protector in Libya and continued its anti-Islamist role through the support of Haftar, who is seen as a bulwark against Turkey and political Islam.

Military Role Retreat and the Return to Diplomacy

The UAE decreased its support of Haftar due to the series of battlefield defeats despite Abu Dhabi's sizeable military support. This led the UAE, in coordination with Moscow, to suggest a military role-retreat from the field and hand over operations to Russia (Thomas, 2020, pp. 14-15). Thomas (2020, p. 15) stated that 'LNA/UAE defeats revealed the UAE's deficiencies in supporting a military campaign, thus propelling Russia into the limelight'. These setbacks allowed the GNA to seize cities in Tripoli forcing the LNA to withdraw (Thomas, 2020, p. 14). Thus, the UAE reconsidered its role-enactment particularly in collaborating with Haftar as a local counterterrorism actor. Haftar's unsatisfactory performance altered the UAE's perception of him as a positive other. The UAE questioned if he was the best candidate among Libya's military elite who could succeed in containing Turkey and deterring political Islam and

terrorism. Thomas (2020, p. 17) discussed that 'Russia, the UAE and Egypt consider the Tripoli offensive a military failure. The protracted conflict and recent defeats are driving Egypt and Russia to reconsider potential candidates to replace Haftar'. This was confirmed in Gargash's statement that 'some of our friends have taken their own unilateral decisions. […] We've seen it with General Haftar in Libya', he continued 'a lot of these unilateral calculations have proven wrong' (Fattah, 2020). This was a new variable in the UAE's self-realisation, role learning, and role-discovery. It suggested that the UAE started to distance itself from Haftar pointing to its disappointment in its ally who created bilateral relations with others and engaged in acts that it did not have control over.

Haftar's military failure led the UAE to pursue a diplomatic role and reconstruct its role as part of the group in support of the peace process. Therefore, the UAE joined the Berlin conference in January 2020 that called for a ceasefire and reasserted the LPA as legitimate actor in Libya. The UAE joined the declaration, with others, which called all actors to refrain from armed interference in Libya (Aljazeera, 2020). The UAE affirmed its role as an Arab protector at the Berlin conference. For instance, Gargash (2020) affirmed his country's Arab protector role and the importance for an Arab presence in Berlin, stating that 'the observer of the Berlin conference on Libya realises that the attendance of Egypt, Algeria, the UAE, and the Arab league is an important guarantee that the Arab dimension is strongly present in the effort of finding peace and stability in this brotherly Arab nation'[25]. He continued that 'the marginalization of the Arab role, as is the case in Syria, is a harsh lesson that will not be repeated' (Gargash, 2020). The UAE was signalling that Arab presence was necessary for Libya not to become another Syria where non-Arab actors, particularly Turkey, are responsible for its chaos.

Although the UAE changed its role-enactment in Libya and pursued diplomacy, it continued to contest Turkey's role in Libya by joining the international community, particularly Greece, in opposing Turkey's activities in the Mediterranean following the treaties Turkey signed with the GNA. This indicated the UAE's shift to diplomacy to contain and weaken Turkey's role in Libya as well as point out the negative role of the GNA in the region. For instance, Gargash published in the French magazine, Le Point, an article titled '*In Libya, Turkey drops the mask'*:

[25] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

> ‘Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made it clear that he has no desire to be a bridge between Europe and the Arab World: he has chosen, rather, to model Turkey’s past imperial position as a competitor and adversary to both’ (Gargash, 2020).

Salamé (2020) explained the influence of Libya on the onset of this crisis that was Turkey and GNA by saying:

> ‘There is also this new definition of economic zone across the Mediterranean. That is why the two agreements signed by the GNA with Turkey in December 2019, when Mr. al-Sarraj and the GNA were in very weak position militarily [due to LNA’s military superiority at that time], are so crucial for the Turks. Because on one hand, there is one of these two agreements that gives them a lot of entry into the Mediterranean, something the Greeks, the Italians and the Egyptians will never accept. [The] demarcation [in] the Mediterranean that makes sort of Turkey and Libya together share a large chunk of the Mediterranean Sea, including some parts of the Crete, it gives them a very important access to oil and the Mediterranean Sea etc. And there is also security agreement that gives them access to military bases in Libya, that is why the Turks have invested a lot on the success of the GNA with whom they signed these two very very important agreements in December 2019’ (2020).

Therefore, the UAE joined Greece, France, Cyprus, and Egypt in denouncing Turkey’s activities in the Mediterranean, particularly the drilling operations in the Cypriot exclusive economic zone (Antonopoulos, 2020). The UAE viewed the crisis between these Mediterranean countries and Turkey as a new interaction theatre whereby the UAE cast these three nations, Greece, France, Cyprus, and Egypt as its generalised other and constructed a role in support of their cause, which was adopted by the UAE as well, to contain Turkey in the Mediterranean. In this new interaction, the UAE constructed a narrative with its new generalised others, the Mediterranean countries. The narrative states that without the GNA in Libya, Turkey would not have been able to sign that agreement in violation of international law. This was demonstrated in Gargash’s statement when he referred to Libya that it is:

> ‘Unquestionably the hub and platform for Turkey’s self-proclaimed “Neo-Ottoman” expansionism. Late last year, Erdogan skilfully exploited divisions within Libya’s Government of National Accord to promulgate bilateral agreements that he then used to justify expansive resource grabs in the Mediterranean and to deliver advanced

> weaponry and thousands of Syrian mercenaries into Western Libya'. In addition, he stated 'the UAE's primary interest in Libya is to make sure outside powers cannot use the country as a lever to destabilize the Arab World' (Gargash, 2020).

In addition, the UAE deployed 'four F-16 fighter jets [in the Souda Bay airbase] to take part in a joint drill with the Hellenic Air Force' (Eurasian Times, 2020). Also, '[the UAE will cooperate] with Greek armed forces in joint military drills over the eastern Mediterranean' (Eurasian Times, 2020). The change in the interaction of imposing arms embargo, and the increased restrictions on UAE role influenced its agent to re-construct a role in support of the peace process to role continuity in pursuit of its interests and affirm its identity in Libya. Thus, The UAE moved the confrontation with Turkey to the Mediterranean, as an extension of the UAE's narrative in Libya. The UAE's role shift to diplomacy indicates its role-realisation in the civil war. It also reveals its role-commitment as an Arab protector and regional actor to explore its role-capacity whether by adopting a hard power approach or following a diplomatic approach to achieve its goal of containing Turkey and political Islam in Libya.

Conclusion

The UAE's role change in Libya was a manifestation of its broader regional role change post-2011. The regional dynamics characterised by a state of anarchy, the disaggregation of the Arab order, and the fall of traditional Arab power centres as a consequence of the Arab revolutions in 2011 should be considered to understand the roots of change in the Emirati identity. Thus, the UAE role change in Libya is an interactive process of the structural changes of the ME and the threats it posed on its domestic front. This led the Emirati leadership to expand its status quo role into Libya, particularly via its neighbouring central state, Egypt, in order to secure itself both domestically and regionally. In this vein, Libya was an interaction platform in which the UAE sought to practice its small state approach and construct a role as part of the group in support of the revolution to bring an end to Gaddafi's regime. In addition, Libya was a new field role learning and role discovery in which the UAE was able to realise its military capacity within the NATO framework. In its war against Gaddafi, the UAE proved successful as it achieved both of its role goals: ending Gaddafi's regime and asserting itself as an emerging military actor. The UAE's performance in Libya as a NATO partner was recognised by its military-experienced partners within the coalition enabling the UAE to gain role confidence. However, the eruption of a civil war in 2014 and the rise of Islamist powers supported by the UAE's regional negative others, such as Qatar and Turkey, marked a

transformational point in the UAE's role in Libya. Fearing the spread of political Islam, the UAE constructed a role in support of the national forces led by the LNA. This led to the UAE taking part in proxy warfare for the first time in its history. Despite the contestations of its direct support of General Haftar, the UAE was able to affirm him and itself as counterterrorism actors through the former's victory against ISIS and other Islamic militias in Benghazi. The UAE, in its role making, was constantly mindful of the international community represented in the UNSMIL. The UAE cast itself as a mediator in 2017 and 2019 between Haftar and al-Sarraj in its effort to affirm itself as part of the group and a pro-peace process actor. These efforts failed, but the UAE remained committed to playing a meaningful role in the interaction and asserting itself as one of the influential powers that should be included in the efforts of finding a solution in Libya. This aspiration complexified the UAE's foreign policy in Libya leading it to play parallel roles in Libya. These roles were met with criticism and characterised as hypocritical by the UAE's dissidents and negative others in Libya. The eruption of the second civil war in 2019 intensified the UAE's military role in Libya by supporting Haftar. This was in contradiction with Turkey's role that supported the GNA and armed Islamist militias. From 2019 to 2020, the UAE was engaged in a proxy war against its negative significant other, Turkey, which was cast by the UAE as an expansionist state seeking to assert its neo-Ottoman legacy. The UAE responded and justified its position by affirming itself as an Arab protector against 'Erdogan's empire illusion'. The UAE prioritised the fight against terrorism – the armed militias of the GNA – using the US and the majority of the international community's silence as a pretext for intervention. This role performance against the MB and Turkey proves that Iran was not considered during the Emirati role making in Libya. The threat, once again, was not that of the classic Shite Iranian threat, it originated instead from within in the form of the Arab Sunni MB supported by Qatar and Turkey. However, The LNA's failure to deter Turkish troops in the fight to take Tripoli revealed to the UAE its role constraints: the LNA's weak performance. On the other hand, the international recognition of the GNA as an official government enabled Turkey to gain the upper hand by signing military, security, and military agreements with the GNA. The UAE, therefore, had to reassign its role on the ground to Russia, which was cast by the UAE as a positive significant other who shared its concern regarding Turkish expansion in Libya. By joining the Berlin conference and declaring its support for a political solution and a ceasefire, the UAE set its military role aside indicating a role realisation and role-rearrangement. To overcome its role restrictions in Libya, the UAE adopted a diplomatic role within international platforms and sought to construct an anti-Turkey role with new generalised others to strengthen its narrative against Turkey as part of the group.

This was demonstrated when the UAE moved to confront Turkey using diplomacy in the Mediterranean, a different sphere of influence yet an extension of the interaction in Libya. The UAE joined Greece, Italy, Cyprus, and Egypt in contesting Turkey's role and condemning its violation of international law. Despite being a newcomer in Libya, the UAE invested many resources during the last decade showing its commitment to role-discovery and role-affirmation as a counterterrorism actor and Arab protector suggesting role responsibility in Libya. The UAE realised that its setbacks were due to structural factors that enabled armed militias to hold power over the GNA thus strengthening Turkey's presence in Libya. However, it was able to prove itself as a counterterrorism actor and affirm the LNA's role in the fight against terrorism. The UAE transitioned from engaging in a proxy war by providing armed support in Libya to adopting diplomacy. It also confronted Turkey by joining Mediterranean countries in their refusal of Turkey's activities in the region, indicating the UAE's capacity for manoeuvring and creative role-enactment by constructing a collective role within a group that adopts its narrative against its negative other, Turkey.

7. The UAE's Role in Yemen

Introduction

The UAE's role in the Yemen war is one aspect of a bigger role-change in the Middle East. However, this role differs in how the 'self' is expressed, and how the 'other' influences role enactment, leading to a different role behaviour. The UAE's military intervention in Yemen contradicts the assumption that small states would always refrain from the use of power. The UAE's role in Yemen was a show of military assertiveness and power projection in pursuit of playing a meaningful role in regional security, according to the UAE's own perspective. The UAE behaved as a regional power, exhibiting confidence and boldness despite its size, shortage in manpower, and limited ground-war experience. This suggests a shift in foreign policy identity from humanitarianism, to a more masculine hard power approach by waging war in Yemen. This behaviour appears to be puzzling. The threat of regime change in Yemen imposed the same structural and security threats on other small Gulf States in the Arabian Peninsula. Nevertheless, the UAE was the only state to act assertively in the Saudi war against the Houthi rebellion. This allowed the UAE to become an equal broker at the negotiations table, along with the Yemeni government, Saudi Arabia, the Houthis, and UN representatives at the Stockholm Agreement meetings. The political crisis in Yemen contributed to an emerging domestic trend within the UAE, influenced by its leadership's vision to take on a military role, and become responsible for the nation and the region's security. This resulted in a top-down re-engineering of NRC in order to align the domestic environment with the aspired military role. Thus, I argue that the UAE's intervention in Yemen is a manifestation of role change that has been gradually taking place since the early 2000s. However, what makes Yemen different in the case of the UAE's regional role, is that unlike Libya and Egypt where the UAE had to face-off against the Sunni Arab MB, Yemen was the first platform where the UAE came in military and ideological confrontation with Iran. It resulted in the emboldening of the country's military confidence and capabilities to play the role it has been playing in the war since 2015. The war in Yemen was an opportunity for the UAE to assert itself as a new military power capable of fighting the Houthi insurgency, deterring the perceived Iranian intervention through their proxies the Houthis, and containing AQAP. The UAE's role gained legitimacy in the eyes of its decision-makers, people, and the international community as a result of positioning themselves as protectors of the region by fighting longstanding enemies; Iran and terrorist groups such as AQAP in Yemen. By assuming this role, the UAE took on a number of other

roles in the context of a continually changing war. It asserted itself as a loyal ally to Saudi Arabia, a capable counterterrorism partner to the US, and a guarantor of security in the South of Yemen. The enactment of these roles has been recognised and supported at times, but was also contested by other players. Thus, the UAE's foreign policy behaviour in Yemen has evolved in accordance with the constraints imposed by interacting with other actors who influenced the enactment of their role, which eventually lead to the withdrawal of their military, indicating a role retreat.

This chapter will apply an interactionist interpretation of the UAE's role behaviour in Yemen. It will attempt to answer why this role has changed, and how it was shaped by other factors in the course of five years. First, a background and the players involved will be presented. Second, the UAE's traditional old self and pre-2000 role will be explained. Third, the rise of a new Emirati leadership and the domestic changes that accompanied it will be discussed. Fourth, the Yemen war and role manifestations will be analysed. Fifth, the UAE's self-exploration and role enactment during the war will be explained. Then, role constraints and role retreat will be discussed. Finally, the conclusion will summarise the main findings of this case study.

Background on the War

In 2015, Saudi Arabia led a military campaign in Yemen against the Houthi militia to restore the legitimate government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. President Hadi fled Yemen to Saudi Arabia and officially asked Saudis to intervene to liberate Yemen from the Houthis, and restore his legitimate government. Similar to Egypt and Libya, the 2011 revolutions reached Yemen where protests demanded former president Saleh to step down in 2011. This left many parts of Yemen in a state of power vacuum for Houthi militias to control. As a result, the Houthis succeeded in reaching the capital and seizing power by expelling the legitimate government in 2015 (Butt, 2021). In response, Saudi Arabia announced that they would be leading a military intervention in Yemen. Hokayem and Roberts (2016:165) noted that 'the stated objectives of the operation were to recapture the entirety of Yemen and destroy the Houthi movement, thus denying Iran a presence on the Arabian Peninsula'. The war underwent two stages. The first was the military phase, with the beginning of the intervention named 'Decisive Storm'. Nevertheless, the Houthis were treated by the international community as an equal to the Yemeni government. During the second phase of the conflict, the tone shifted to focus on the process of finding a political solution. Therefore, on 21 April 2015, the coalition launched 'Operation Renewal of Hope' and announced the end of its military operations. The war, as an

environment of interaction, enabled the UAE to pursue multiple roles that best reflected its capabilities in the war zone. The UAE took on different roles that included a reliable ally to Saudi Arabia, a counterterrorism partner, and a security guarantor in the South of Yemen. There are different domestic and interactionist factors that led to the UAE playing these roles, one of which being the UAE's self-perception, the changes of its self-definition, and how others came to perceive the UAE's role enactment. Hokayem and Roberts (2016, pp. 157-158) explained that 'commentary in Arab media have overemphasised the pernicious influence of Iran expanding through the rebel Houthi movement. Meanwhile, the narrative in Western media and policy circles focuses on personalities at the expense of more structural factors'. Therefore, an interactionist role theory analysis is needed to understand how the actors within the Yemen war influenced each other, and particularly the UAE, to play roles that change the dynamics of the conflict. Moreover, the evolution of the UAE self in the war, will need to be discussed in order to give a clear interpretation of the UAE's role in Yemen.

The Old Self: the UAE's Role in Yemen Pre-2000

Before the advent of the second millennium, the UAE had implemented a soft-power approach that focused on humanitarian aid to affirm its identity as a pro-Arab and pro-Muslim nation. In Yemen, the UAE's role taking prioritised the Gulf States as its significant others, and was in alignment with their security interests. In the 1970s, the regional political climate was dominated by ideologies, such as the Pan-Arab, Pan-Islamist, and Marxist revolutionary sentiments that were threatening Arab monarchies. Yemen was no exception. In fact, Yemen was a theatre where different agents engaged to assert different roles, including the UAE. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan stepped into the Yemeni scene, firstly to assert his country's self as a Gulf ally and integrate the Gulf states group; and secondly, to affirm its identity as a force for good to the Yemeni people in the early 1970s. This regional security context, which was highly influenced by transnational threats, shaped NRC in the UAE from the 1970s to the 1980s. The leadership adopted three defining pillars for its domestic social components that were embedded in the NRC. It employed Arab, Tribal, and Islamic values to muster the support of its own people, and the recognition and legitimacy of other actors in the system. Therefore, the UAE asserted the role of ally to the Gulf. For instance, in 1988, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen's Prime Minister, Haydar Abu Bakr al-Attas, in an interview, acknowledged the UAE's role in bringing about the rapprochement with Oman (Alhosani, 2012, p. 156). In addition, the UAE supported the Kuwaiti mediation between Oman and the

South of Yemen '[using] foreign aid to encourage Yemeni leaders to end their aggression against Oman', which at the time was struggling to contain the Marxist insurgency within its borders (Alhosani, 2012, p. 156). The UAE's role creativity focused on using its economic resources to assert the role of an ally to gain the trust of the Gulf States group members.

Secondly, the UAE focused on providing humanitarian aid to assert itself as a force for good in Yemen. Almezaini (2012, p. 52) explained that 'Islam, in the Arabian Peninsula, contributed not only to making aid-giving an obligation for Muslims to provide for the less fortunate, but also to the construction of a tradition of cooperation and philanthropy. The religiosity prescribed zakat, sadaqa (obligatory almsgiving) and Waqf or Mortmail property (non-obligatory giving) have considerable influence on the UAE's citizens and leaders'. He noted that in his early days, Sheikh Zayed, was able to utilise values of Arab solidarity, tribal generosity, and Islamic teachings that were embedded in the national role conception of the UAE (Almezaini, 2012, p. 52). In addition, tribal traditions promoted generosity, which was significant in emphasising the UAE's role aid practice (Almezaini, 2012, p. 52). For example, Sheikh Zayed ordered the rebuilding of the Ma'arib dam in 1984, promoting the UAE as a benefactor and force for good to the Yemeni people (Vela and Al Qlisi, 2015). The dam holds a symbolic value to people across the region, and is of economic importance to the people of Yemen. The Ma'arib dam dates back 4000 years, and is the birthplace of many Arab tribes, including the Al Nahyan clan from which descended Abu Dhabi's current royalty (Samir, 2018). After its collapse, Arab tribes migrated to settle in other areas of the region. Sheikh Zayed donated $100 million to finance the project, inaugurating it personally in a historic visit in 1986 (Samir, 2018). In his decision to rebuild the project, Sheikh Zayed stated:

> 'We have seen that it is our duty to support Yemen in order to be a tributary of the Arab nation in the present and the future. There is nothing that is as dear and precious to Yemenis as the Ma'arib Dam, therefore, I was determined to rebuild it' (Albayan, 2018).[26]

Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan visited Yemen in the ceremonial opening of the dam, where he was welcomed by the people flying Emirati flags and his pictures in appreciation. When asked about the rebuilding of the dam he said:

[26] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

> ‘All I did for the Yemeni people, was commanded by God. I did it following God’s command in the right place and with deserving brothers.’ (24.ae, 2013)[27]

Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan, the main architect of the UAE’s foreign policy, constructed a foreign policy role based on the economic power of an oil producing country. However, the UAE’s capacity was restricted by the threat of Middle Eastern identity politics, and the country’s fragility as a newly established state. The UAE’s role in Yemen was dominated by the idea that the country is small and needed to become part of a larger group (the Gulf States, and the Arab Ummah), in order to get the necessary recognition to survive. Thus, the UAE’s role focused on humanitarian aid to the Arab people, promoting itself as a force for good, and supporting a soft power approach of mediation led by other states seeking to maintain the status quo.

Military intervention: war as an opportunity, role manifestation, and the rise of a militarised national identity

The rise of the second-generation leadership led by MBZ transformed the country’s identity and the role it should play at the regional and international levels. The events of September 11 and the Iraq war transformed the country’s self-perception and foreign policy, from being an aid provider to a military actor capable of protecting its interests. Therefore, the UAE’s leadership started investing in upgrading its military capabilities and experience, by creating military partnerships and signing military deals with other states. This denotes a shift in perspective towards bandwagoning with the US. Gulf States adopted this policy as a security strategy, and diversified military cooperation with other powers in the international system. Young (2017, p. 115) noted that ‘windfalls in wealth generated from rapid ascent of oil and gas prices between 2003 and 2014 allowed budgets to expand for military expenditure and financial aid’. In this context, the UAE started to invest in building its own military and upgrading its capabilities. In addition, the UAE sought military training and focused on learning and engaging in counterterrorism operations. It is the first Arab country to have a military presence in Afghanistan in 2003 (Ibish, 2017, p. 22). The UAE’s mission was to engage in military actions against Taliban. ‘[The Emiraties] contributed 1,200 military personnel, including special forces, to the international effort in Afghanistan, and their mission continued until 2014’ (Ibish, 2017, pp. 17-18). The cost of this military involvement materialised when five members of the UAE’s diplomatic team were ‘killed in a bomb attack

[27] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

in Kandahar' (Ibish, 2017, p. 18). Despite the loss, the UAE did not hesitate to continue bolstering its military involvement. This shows the country's seriousness in achieving its military goals. Furthermore, it has been reported that the UAE kept its military mission in Afghanistan a secret for 11 years (Ibish, 2017, p. 17). This was crucial to the success of the mission, and to preserve domestic stability and strong leadership-citizen relations. This military intervention was particularly sensitive, given the fact that Afghanistan is a Muslim country, which might stir dissent among the public, since it negates the belief that a Muslim should not fight another Muslim. In addition, Ibish (2017, p. 18) explained that 'in the early stages of developing its international military profile, the government apparently believed that a gradual development of social and political attitudes to support such a policy was required, though by now the concomitant risks, and even sacrifices, appear to be widely accepted among the Emirati citizenry'. Engaging in Afghanistan was the first step taken by the leadership towards military role learning to transform the country from strictly being a humanitarian provider, to a regional military and counterterrorism partner. The fact that this information was not widely publicised to the public by the national media, suggests that the government was undertaking a gradual process towards acquiring military experience, by ensuring the success of its mission in Afghanistan. With the rise of international terrorism, Ibish (2017, p. 15) outlines that 9/11 resulted in a growing antagonism towards radical Islam in the UAE. Thus, the UAE strengthened its security first against Islamist powers, and fundamentalist activities within the country, particularly when two of its own nationals, Marwan Al Shehhi, and Fayez Banihammad were involved in hijacking the plains that destroyed the World Trade Centre (Keay, 2021). This incident also brought to light the UAE's new emerging enemy, religious fundamentalism, which nudged it towards taking on the role of a counterterrorism actor in the context of the global war on terror. Therefore, the UAE committed itself to the requirements of such an aspiring role. For example, it took part in joint air campaigns with NATO against terrorist and ISIS bases in Libya and Iraq, affirming its role as a regional military actor. Prior to 2011, the UAE's behaviour revealed its desire to progress towards militarism and take on a military role. The UAE officials say that they aim at reaching a 'legislation that would declare the key US defence partner' as Katzman mentioned (2019, p. 20). In addition, the UAE diversified its military partnerships with other states, such as India, Malaysia, France, the UK and participated with other Arab states in joint military exercises such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Oman (Ibish, 2017, p. 23). Moreover, the leadership developed scholarship programmes to train its personnel, by sending them to Sandhurst, and the US for training (Ibish, 2017, p. 19). In addition to the war on terror, and containing Islamism, the US

invasion of Iraq led to the fall of the central Arab state and the emergence of a pro-Iranian government in Baghdad. Iran's influence in the domestic Iraqi sphere strengthened Gulf monarchies' perception of the threat in the North. This pushed the UAE leadership to direct their attention to militarism against the growing threat of significant other, Iran. These efforts indicate that the leadership had an established vision to gradually transition the country to a level of sophistication, so that other military actors would consider it a capable and equal player that they would be willing to engage and form military partnerships with. For example, MBZ referred to the regional crisis in his public speech to armed forces candidates. He explained:

> 'I would like to give you an idea about the Middle East and what is happening there. It has been unstable for 60 years, and, recently, it has become even more of a challenge. We are capable of overcoming this, but it requires patience and resilient men. Among these challenges, is the UAE's honourable position in Yemen. The life's purpose of those in the military institution and their duty is to achieve victory, or deter threats. Therefore, I believe that it is crucial to distinguish between a hobby and a specialisation, because what you specialise in gives you expertise. Failing to become experts is unacceptable. […] Expertise in this field is a matter of life or death' (Mohammed bin Zayed youtube channel, 2016).[28]

This speech indicates that the regional climate has influenced the leadership's push to encourage its youth to seek military 'expertise'. MBZ highlighted how a military person should think, deter a threat, and achieve victory. Therefore, failure in achieving specialisation was no longer acceptable, revealing that the leadership preparedness in the case of coming war in the Middle east, which influenced the foreign policy makers in the UAE to add military component to their role abroad.

The Yemen War and National Role Conceptions

The political crisis in Yemen represented a dilemma to the UAE leadership. The crisis finds its roots in a broader regional chaos that found its way to Yemen in 2011, culminating in the Houthi rebellion of 2015. Joining Saudi Arabia in its war against the Houthis contributed to an emerging trend within the UAE to re-invent itself in order to play a role that meets the country's capabilities and regional interests. The Yemen war was perceived as both an opportunity and a challenge for the UAE on multiple domestic and regional policy fronts that ranged from

[28] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

containing Iran and backing Saudi Arabia, to affirming its new military identity, expert military role, and shaping NRC to become of militarised nationalism (Ardemagni, 2019). Therefore, the advent of the foreign policy issue of Yemen motivated the leadership in Abu Dhabi to rethink its approach in Yemen in a way that is compatible with their definition of 'who the UAE is' and 'what it wants' from the changing situation. As a result, the UAE in 2015 shifted its traditional soft power approach towards Yemen when it announced its military intervention to support Saudi Arabia and restore the legitimate Yemeni government. Since its establishment, the UAE was always supportive of the Yemeni government; nevertheless, the UAE adapted its role to a hard power approach in its most assertive form, involving ground-based warfare. This was the first time in its history where the Emirati leadership acted in such an assertive way, risking social, structural, and ideational factors to achieve its purpose in Yemen. As a result, engaging in the war drove the elite to re-define and re-interpret their significant others, in order to play a role in alignment with their 'new self'. Consequently, the UAE shifted its policy in Yemen to fit with its NRC of a military actor.

Domestically, intervening in Yemen came at a time when the UAE was entering a new phase of its NRC, as the social contract of the welfare state was being reconstructed. The government introduced conscription as a means of social engineering, to engage its citizens in national building, military preparedness, and to unify the national identity in order to contain the transnational threats of Shi'a Iran, fundamental Salafism, and the MB. The rise of Islamic sentiments as a result of the 2011 revolutions, coupled with a growing Iranian influence over the internal affairs of Arab states, increased division between Saudi Arabia and the UAE on one hand, and Qatar on the other pushed for an increased military competition within these states. This change suggested the beginning of a new era in nation building, of which UAE nationals were made part by introducing conscription. The UAE was the first country in the Gulf to introduce military conscription. This bold policy challenged the social contract of the rentier state. The arguments made by its proponents were that the regimes of these nations preferred having passive citizens who are isolated from state affairs. This indicated that the UAE leadership was not hesitant to undergo socio-economic changes that require involving and involving citizens in the foreign policy role. This step also resulted from the UAE's aspirations to become a military power by overcoming its deficit in manpower. However, I also believe that this policy intended to push further changes in the NRC to create a force that can counter terrorism, contain Iranian influence, promote moderate Islam, and prepare military

soldiers to meet the UAE's growing military involvements in the region and the Horn of Africa. In relation to this, Diwan (2015) explained:

> 'In the absence of strong national identities, Islamic movements have met the desire of many for political participation and belonging. State concerns about the transnational reach of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi populist movements, and politicized Shia clerical networks have grown along with the collapse of neighboring states and mounting challenges from Islamist reformists and jihadists. The need to tie citizens in a more compelling way to the state and its leadership has motivated Gulf monarchies to experiment in novel forms of nation building and inculcation of patriotism… The initiation of national service sits squarely at the intersection of regional ambition and national integration'.

Barany (2018, p. 21) explained that conscription in the UAE suggests that the country was 'shifting towards a larger reserve force, to be made up of both draftees who have completed their national service and former professional military personnel'. Following the events of 2011, it became crucial for the UAE leadership to invest in state-citizen relations by creating a socialisation programme to instil a sense of national identity in its youth. This was particularly important to counter the romanticised narrative of the Islamists' call for one 'umma' under Sharia law, eliminating state boundaries in the region. This policy came to protect UAE youth from being converted to these groups. Moreover, it is considered a policy of 'Emiratisation' to strengthen national unity, via the introduction of lectures that promote values of loyalty, sacrifice, national identity, and patriotism (Barany, 2018, p. 22). In addition, Ardemagni (2019) stated that the UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait adopted conscription to implement 'militarised nationalism'. This policy, according to her, would strengthen their regime rule (Ardemagni, 2019). Tellingly, conscription can serve as a platform for governments to mould their citizens, and shape their perspectives in alignment with the country's role abroad. ~~Similarly, Barany~~ (2018, p. 21) suggests that 'conscripts constitute a truly captive audience for a regime's propaganda'. Mabon's (2019) study reflected on the regimes' role in countering domestic contestation after the 2011 protests by shaping the domestic context of their societies. He stated that 'Amidst violent contestation across the Middle East leaving regimes facing – or fearing – popular protests, the regulation of political life became increasingly important' (Mabon (2019, p. 284). He continued 'Across the past century, the development of political projects has been driven by regime efforts to maintain power, constructing regime-society relations in such a

way to ensure their survival' (Mabon, 2019, p. 284). Although Mabon'sanalysis referred to sectarian politics in the Middle East, his interpretation can explain the motives behind the top-down domestic changes that had been taking place in the UAE. The timing and the circumstances of the establishing the conscription program symbolised these 'political projects'. Thus, the conscription program revealed that security, in this case, is the elites concerns, which will become the society's concern through different regional and domestic strategies (Mabon, 2019, p. 284). He argued that 'these strategies play on a range of different fears and currents to locate regime interests within broader concerns'. In other words, the political project of the UAE's conscription program served domestically to create the Emirati narrative. Following this discussion, I argue that conscription is one UAE domestic political projects to strengthen in role narrative in Yemen among its citizenry. In addition, the conscription program was developed at a time when the UAE leadership had to direct its attention within its borders to create a national environment that is coherent with its military agenda abroad.

The changing situation in Yemen unleashed a number of threats and opportunities, such as the rise of a constructed enemy in the Emirati national conscience and narrative. The war was also an opportunity for the UAE leadership to put their military capabilities to the test, having built them for over more than a decade, and an opportunity to play a bigger role than was possible with the UAE's capabilities post 2003 and 2011. Thus, intervening in Yemen was the obvious next policy decision in relation to the UAE's developing militarism, and the pillars of its NRC. I argue that the war in Yemen was a manifestation of a role change that had already been taking place since the early 2000s, silently and gradually. Nevertheless, the rise of the Houthis and Saudi Arabia's call for support were viewed as a foreign policy dilemma that required the UAE leadership to act provocatively, unleashing its ability to act aggressively in order to assert itself as a new military power in the region.

The decision to join Saudi Arabia in a ground war was shocking to the Emirati people and others in the region, particularly when the UAE did not share any borders with Yemen, and was backtracking on its established humanitarian approach. Hokayem & Roberts (2016:157) noted that 'Neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE were believed to possess the capability, the skill or the will to engage in as large, dangerous and offensive a mission as the operation in Yemen. Never before had any of the Gulf States, under GCC command, so proactively, provocatively and assertively deployed their military forces on such a scale'. However, the centrality of Iran

as an enemy in the Emirati narrative legitimised and justified this extreme policy change in the UAE. According to the UAE narrative, Houthis are Iran's proxy in Yemen, and are threatening the stability and the religious, Sunni, Arab identity of the Gulf. This identity threat pushed the UAE to undertake such an extreme foreign policy shift in the name of protecting an Arab nation. The identity element was evident in Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed's statement in a press conference in Abu Dhabi:

> 'Yemen has been kidnapped from Yemenis…. it has been kidnapped from the Arabs ... it has been kidnapped from the region… and if we as Arabs love to say that our origin is from Yemen, then we must protect our origins' (Yemen Asl Alarab, 2017)[29].
>
> He also added 'there is no possibility that we accept any strategic threat to the Gulf Arab States. What we have witnessed in terms of the Houthi militia's external relations that have caused corruption while following an external political agenda, proves that they hold no love or loyalty for the nation. That is why I call our brothers and friends to work with us. Those who did not join the Decisive Storm operation should know that this is an opportunity to support the Coalition' (Al Aan TV, 2015b).[30]

The above statement reveals two aspects of the UAE narrative justifying intervention. Firstly, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed included patriotic values, such as the love of the nation and loyalty. He described Yemen as having been kidnapped from the Arabs and the Yemenis themselves. This rhetoric draws similarities with the pan-Arab ideals that were once employed in Egypt to challenge colonial powers, and galvanise people across the region. However, in this case this rhetoric was used to challenge Iran, and for the UAE to take on the role of protector of the region and Arab identity. This is a role that became part of its national role conception, given the fact that the government recognised the Houthi movement as a terrorist organisation in 2014, prior to their taking control of Yemen. Thus, it can be argued that the values embedded in national identity were adopted, used, and manipulated to legitimise the decision to go to war, and convince the public that it is necessary. Secondly, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed stated that they have no loyalty, which is a highly valued trait in the Arab mentality, serving Iran's (the enemy's) agenda. Also, the UAE's decision to take on a military role aimed to deter the threat of an external agenda that does not recognise the love of the nation. Consequently, the UAE had to act aggressively, to support their Saudi brothers in the war, and rescue the Yemeni

[29] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.
[30] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

government and its people. The Houthis' actions threatened and violated the UAE's NRC of protecting the status quo in Yemen. Therefore, the 'protection of our origin' was presented as a moral obligation for the UAE. In this narrative, the UAE's role taking was shaped as a rescue of 'the kidnapped Yemen from its own people, and its own region' as was expressed. This made the UAE's intervention honourable and reasonable for its people and the people of the region, in order to stand in the face of Iran and the Houthis 'who do not know what the love of a nation means'. In addition, the leadership needed to incorporate dominant narratives of Arab identity, which entitled it to use force, in consulting its new role against its enemy who seeks to sabotage its stability to serve a foreign agenda.

To fulfil this pro-Arab role, the UAE sent its own local troops to take part in the ground war. For instance, it was reported that '15,000 Emirati soldiers were sent to Yemen to join the coalition. More than 130,000 air operations were carried out, amounting to half a million-flight hours. Fifty ships carrying 3,000 marine soldiers completed more than 1,000 naval missions to carry aid and military equipment between the UAE and Yemen' (The National, 2020). This suggests that the Yemen war was also perceived as a military training platform, showing the Emirati leadership's commitment to militarism.

There was more to this decision than just restoring Hadi's government and containing the Houthis. The war in Yemen was also seen as an opportunity that can be used to take nation building to a 'militarised level'. Ardemagni (2019) explained that 'Gulf monarchies' post-rentier strategies are increasingly relying on a military dimension to drive their national identity projects. This is a new element in these countries' state formation processes. In the UAE and Qatar, the role of the military was absent from state building, which was instead driven by oil revenues and external powers'. In addition, Ardemagni (2019) continued 'this current complex juncture, which mixes demanding domestic transformations and external challenges, requires stronger national ties and sense of belonging. The traditional social pact no longer seems able to ensure loyalty and cohesion'. The UAE's traditional social contract faced its biggest test when the UAE announced the martyrdom of its soldiers in Houthi attacks. Throughout the war in Yemen, Katzman (2017, p. 16) noted that 'more than 100 UAE military personnel have been killed in the intervention to date – the largest loss of military personnel in any of the UAE's military engagements'. This incident introduced the UAE to the concept of 'martyrdom'. Martyrdom and martyrs were incorporated in the NRC for the first time in the UAE's history. This term that was rarely used to describe the UAE's traditional role abroad by the state

curriculum, including national education and history. In 2016, MBZ pointed to the duty of defending the nation and the role of UAE soldiers in Yemen, in his speech to a batch of new conscripts. He started his speech by saying:

> 'Before I start, I would like to take a minute and read Al Fatiha on the souls of the UAE martyrs. May God protect the UAE and its people. Nations are built and developed by the hands of its men. Men like you, who make sacrifices for their nation's reputation, like your brothers, who are making sacrifices today in Yemen. This puts your country on a level that is different from all other countries. States are not measured by their size, not because they have a population of 10 million or 100 million. States are measured by willpower, my sons, so do not belittle the will of the men. We would like to send a message to those who covet the wealthy state [referring to the UAE and the Gulf states] and its people. We, and our nation, will fulfil our responsibility in protecting it. Protecting our nation is a must. Defending our nation is a must, because a person protects his home and his honour, and this is our honour…' (Oloom al daar youtube channel, 2016)[31]

This narrative indicates the identity transformation that the UAE underwent, a militarisation of its nationalism. The roots of this transformation was embedded in the ambitious perception by the leadership of their country's role. MBZ pointed out that states are not measured by their size nor their population. However, he stressed on the will of the people. He also equated the nation to honour, adding that protecting the former is necessary. This reveals that this transformation was driven by the ambitious perception that the UAE elite regarding the militant role that they should be playing. Therefore, the conscription program and the decision to participate in the war serve that role by instilling militarism, spreading patriotic values, creating one enemy to unify people against in times of crisis. In addition, creating a militarised nation would strengthen the common national identity of nationals of the seven emirates. Thus, creating a nationalist narrative was required to engage people and legitimise this new role. Thus, in its efforts in shaping this new militarised identity and honouring UAE troops in the war, the leadership organised 'welcome ceremonies' for soldiers returning from Yemen, and were described as 'faithful falcons'. They were referred to by the Ruler of Dubai and Prime

[31] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

Minister of the UAE Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, as 'heroes' and 'positive models' for the nation (Ardemagni, 2019).

The war in Yemen broke out at time when the UAE was undertaking a role transformation that began in the early 2000s, and heightened after the events of 2011 revolutions by taking on military roles within the NATO in Libya. In addition, the mandatory military conscription program was introduced in 2014, a year prior to the war, challenging the social contract of the so-called 'rentier state', and finally joined Saudi Arabia as joint allies in its war against Iran and its proxy, the Houthis. All these policy decisions suggest that the war in Yemen was the natural next step for the UAE to take in its mission of role transformation at the domestic and regional levels. The Yemen war came to serve the UAE's military role learning ambitions, in order to affirm itself as a Saudi ally and member of the Arab coalition, to contain Iranian influence in the Gulf. At the domestic level, the Yemen war played a role in unifying people against a common enemy, the Houthis and Iran. It also influenced the government's efforts in post oil national building and strengthening the national identity by sending its own national troops to take part in this war.

Role Enactment and Self Exploration

At the beginning of the war, the UAE insisted on Saudi Arabia's leadership of the coalition against the Houthis. They argued that they intervened in Yemen in response to the call made by Saudi Arabia. For example, Anwar Gargash answered the question pertaining to the UAE government being behind the decision to wage war:

> 'I got a call saying that Saudi Arabia has taken the decision to start the Decisive Storm operation [the battle operation against the Houthis] and that Saudi Arabia wanted to know the political leadership's decision, then I talked to the political leadership and the answer was to send the message that the leadership in the UAE is standing with the Kingdom in the same front, that our security is not divided and that our position is with the Kingdom' (BBC News Arabic, 2018).[32]

It could be suggested that this narrative painted the UAE in a better light, as a loyal ally to Saudi Arabia who would follow them into battle to secure the region. They would not allow Saudi Arabia to stand alone against this threat. In the process of interaction, the UAE's role in

[32] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis

Yemen alter-casted Saudi Arabia to be the leader, and the UAE to be its faithful ally. Thus, the UAE justified its intervention as a response to Saudi Arabia's call for support in the war.

In addition, the US, particularly the Obama administration's non-intervention policy in the Middle East, triggered the UAE's role change in Yemen to stabilise the region according to its own interests. Anwar Gargash commented on the UAE's role in Yemen:

> 'The international system has begun to change tremendously… It seems that the great powers have different commitments today, and the world has become less stable after the Cold War and the foundation of a new international system. That is why the UAE is convinced that there is a responsibility upon the states of the region to guarantee the security of the region' (BBC News Arabic, 2018).[33]

'Great powers' refers to the US, particularly, the Obama administration's lack of interest in meddling with Middle Eastern security. Obama pursued a no-policy approach towards the events of 2011, which was changing the power/security dynamics in the region. Furthermore, Obama favoured dialogue with Iran, which led to the P5+1 negotiations and to the signing of the 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action', known as the nuclear deal with Iran. This was viewed with suspicion in the Gulf, particularly with the rise of distrust towards Iran due to its continuous intervention in internal Gulf affairs, and that the US would no longer serve Gulf States' security interests. The UAE, as an ally was disappointed, however, this changing interactionist environment led to their rise as new interventionists. The UAE, as an agent, was informed of new structural changes pushing it to undergo a process of re-interpretation and re-creation of its foreign policy scripts in order to play a new role and assert a new character, more adapted to the changing regional security complex. Therefore, it can be argued that if the US continued with its former '*modus operandi*' of military interventions in the region when its Gulf allies are being attacked, then the UAE would have not undergone a process of re-definition of its significant others' expectations. Hokayem & Roberts (2016, p. 157) argued that 'a unique combination of factors, most notably the perception of the convergence of an unprecedented regional menace (Iran) and the rise of a hostile non-state actor on the Arabian Peninsula (the Houthis), as well as a sense of greater ownership among the participants of their own security at a time of US retrenchment, provided the impetus to intervene in Yemen'. Thus, the UAE sought to reimagine its established self and re-evaluated others' expectation to

[33] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

overcome the challenges of the new international system dynamics, and to address the lack of great power support to secure its interests, sustain the status quo, and contain Iran in Yemen. As such, the responsibility of the UAE' indicated the shift in the country's self-perception, from being dominated by a 'problematic situation' and that is a change in the priority of great powers and the international system. Taking on the responsibility of its own security was the solution to this problem. This implies a redefinition of the UAE's self by employing its military capabilities in Yemen. Hence, the role re-taking led the UAE to manifest the role of Saudi Arabia's reliable ally and of the capable military actor that is responsible its own and the region's security. The UAE's realisation of itself, and its environment, demanded it to change its role in Yemen in order to overcome the security dilemma and take on a new self, a new role.

This indicates that the Yemen issue was perceived as a dilemma, which manifested the UAE's new role as a regional actor responsible for Middle Eastern security. In addition, the war in Yemen was viewed as an opportunity to perform a military role that asserted the UAE's new character as a capable military power in the region. In FPA, this is considered a foreign policy change, as discussed in the theory chapter. However, it is important to address how the foreign policy elite explained this change. What were their motives, and how did they construct their strategy towards Yemen? In other words, what was the narrative behind this extreme shift in identity that led a small state such as the UAE to rise as a military interventionist state? For example, when asked in an interview, is 'Yemen a national security issue to the UAE?', the minister of state for foreign affairs, Anwar Gargash, answered:

> 'We saw in the 1980s that Hezbullah was formed while we were unaware, it was formed ideologically and militarily, directly by Iranian support since the mid-1980s. We are in a situation of rebellion from a militia that is controlling parts of the Yemeni lands and the Yemeni government, and if this militia receives recognition then be sure that this militia will, in five to ten years, become Hezbollah in the south. I believe that this point is really important! What we see in Yemen today is the Iranian dimension within the current dilemma' (BBC News Arabic, 2018).[34]

This discussion refers to the perceived threat of rising Houthi militias, backed by Iran. The 'Houthis and Iran' set the UAE to follow a new pattern of behaviour in order to overcome its foreign policy dilemma. In other words, the coup d'état created a dilemma with uncertain

[34] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

consequences that could jeopardise the security order of the Gulf, on which the UAE's NRC were founded. Therefore, the foreign policy elite chose to wage a war as an urgent response to the uncertainties of regional security posed by an Irani-backed militia group taking over Yemen at the southern corner of the Gulf. Gargash equated the Houthis as a potential future Hezbollah in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. This discourse suggests that the UAE was building a narrative stating that the Gulf region is in danger of being locked between an Iranian presence in the Levant, Iraq in the north, and a proxy Iranian power in the south, represented by the Houthis in Yemen. The narrative also warned that with the Houthis, Iran could attain the same power and influence it has in the northern Arabian Peninsula. To the UAE, this is a national security threat that cannot be ignored, and is dangerous enough to warrant the country going to war to face it. This suggests the emergence of a problematic situation threatening to the UAE. This threat called for a change in foreign policy in order to achieve the UAE's goals, fight the Houthis and restore the legitimate government. In doing so, the UAE is protecting the status quo of the region and itself.

In addition, the regional shifts and changes influence the magnitude of foreign policy changes that an agent can pursue. This is best manifested in the UAE's material power, coupled with a decline of other historically central actors such as Egypt, which enabled the UAE to emerge and take on the role of a regional state. These structural factors can influence a nation's perception of itself to pursue foreign policy change, such as waging war. However, foreign policy shifts and the making of roles are not built in isolation. Anwar Gargash stated that:

> 'From this stance, we have a responsibility to support Saudi Arabia's position, because there will be no stability and security for the UAE without the stability and security of Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Gulf region…we have a big responsibility!' (BCC News Arabic, 2018).[35]

The UAE's role in Yemen is not solely derived from its domestic perspective and ambitions. As previously discussed in the chapter on foreign policy theory, foreign policy is not made in isolation. Other players in the system, particularly those involved in an interaction such as Saudi Arabia, the US, the Houthis, the Yemeni government, and AQAP have influenced and shaped the role that the UAE performed in Yemen. The existence of others is an essential component of role making, and their interaction is at the heart of that construction. The UAE

[35] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

went through a learning curve to attain a self-realisation of what it can and cannot do in Yemen. Indeed, the UAE shaped its role in accordance with its relations to different significant others, Saudi Arabia being the most important. That is why at the beginning of the war, the UAE leadership insisted on Saudi Arabia's leadership of the coalition against the Houthis. As previously mentioned, they justified their intervention in Yemen by claiming that they were responding to the call made by Saudi Arabia. The UAE's role in Yemen can also be seen as a response to a role prescription made by Saudi Arabia that positioned the UAE as a military ally. In the context of war interaction, the UAE's best-fit role in the coalition was that of the faithful ally. The Houthis militia is another major actor that the UAE built its identity around. They are the UAE's negative significant other, and their existence gave meaning and allowed the continuity of the UAE's role in the war. Therefore, the rise of the Houthis could be interpreted as the emergence of a new negative significant other that did not exist before. Consequently, the UAE stated that it has the power to deter Iran and to protect the Arab region through its intervention. Gargash said that the Saudis called the Emirati leadership for support and the UAE accepted. This, in the interactionist role theory, can be explained as an alter casting made by Saudi Arabia to persuade the UAE to ally with them and take on a military role. During the early days of the war, the UAE defined itself through the eyes of Saudi Arabia in-order to play the role of the faithful ally committed to the unified cause of defeating the Houthis and restoring the Hadi government. When Saudi Arabia assembled a coalition of Arab states to fight the Houthi rebellion and restore the legitimate government of Hadi in 2015, the UAE sent a 3,000-person armoured brigade, armoured vehicles, and participated in airstrikes in close partnership with Saudi Arabia (Katzman, 2018, p. 15). As the war progressed, the UAE started behaving as a power responsible for the military and security order. For instance, the UAE played an influential military role when it trained local forces during the Golden Arrow operation launched to liberate Aden from the Houthis and AQAP. The forces managed and trained by the UAE were considered among the most accomplished (Ulrichsen, 2017, p. 208). The others', particularly Saudi Arabia's acceptance of the role, was an objective in the beginning of the war, since the significant other could influence the role's success. Thus, the UAE was able to behave as a power and take this big military responsibility, because performing such a role was still compatible with its significant other.

Saudi Arabia was invested in protecting its southern border and in pursuing an aerial campaign during the war. Hence, the UAE constructed a military strategy in alignment with Saudi Arabia's objectives of defeating the Houthis in Yemen, hence achieving role success. In

addition, the war allowed the UAE to establish itself as a military actor due to many factors. The UAE does not share a common border with Yemen, and therefore was not under the same pressure as Saudi Arabia. This gave the UAE the liberty to focus its operations on ground-based combat. Therefore, the UAE's role capacity was distinguished in its ability to train local forces and lead them into battle against the Houthis. Within this framework, the Houthi militia became the UAE's negative significant other. The role and the very existence of the Houthis was essential to the UAE leadership's construction and performance of a role founded on the casting Houthis as enemies; or the Arabian Peninsula's evil that must be defeated lest the region would fall into Iran's dominion. In that respect, the UAE justified its intervention as being necessary, as it was 'forced' to use power in response to Iran's continuous meddling in the Arab region. For example, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed explained in a press conference that:

> 'There is a track record that spans years of systematic work to export the idea of the revolution [Iran's Islamic revolution of 1979]. We are looking forward to having positive relations with Iran. However, sadly, Iran does not leave its partners alone… Our brothers in Iran believe in exporting the revolution, since it is at the core of their constitution and their regime. Until they cooperate with us as states, we will have doubts. Iran should deal with the region with the spirit of partnership, however, there are problems that Iran faces with our nations. This is not a coincidence; the majority of Iran's neighbours have problems with it too… In the case of Yemen, we were forced to stand against a group… backed by external forces… that decided to hijack the state, and we should stand by Yemen's legitimate government' (Al Aan TV, 2015a).

The UAE did not hesitate to sacrifice its own soldiers in the fight against the Houthis in order to protect the region and deter Iran's influence. However, taking on the roles of responsible actor and faithful partner came at a cost. In its military engagement against the Houthis, the UAE was met with its first challenge when 52 Emirati soldiers were killed at the Safer military base near Ma'arib. This incident was used to bolster the Emirati narrative. It was romanticised into a reason to pursue the fight in order to reclaim the nation's honour. Yemen as case was casted in the Emirati narrative as a regional responsibility highlighting its significance to the founder of the country, sheikh Zayed and historic humanitarian role there. This was evidenced during a visit to one of the martyrs families, MBZ assertively proclaimed 'as for Zayed's dam, the Marib Dam, today the [UAE] flag will be raised over it, God willing' creating a sense of ownership over the dam since it was re-built by the founder of the UAE, as a threat of retaliation

against the Houthi militia (Vela & Al Qalisi, 2015). In a visit from President Abdrabbuh Hadi, he additionally expressed:

> 'We have never lost sight of our people's revenge… We lost Emiratis as martyrs, and that does not bring us down, your Excellency… This doubles our resolve, determination, and strength to liberate Yemen from the "scum" that currently occupy it. But do not think that we will ever second-guess our first decision… We will be walking alongside you until the end of the road… Yemen, your excellency, is not your country alone, we share Yemen with you' (Sky News Arabia, 2015). [36]

As the war unfolded, and after the Houthis' visit to Iran for talks in August 2019, Khamenei declared his support for the Houthis, describing the rebellion as a Jihad. 'I declare my support for the mujahidah (struggle) of Yemen... Saudi and UAE and their supporters have committed major crimes in Yemen… They seek to divide Yemen. This plot should be strongly resisted and a unified, coherent Yemen with sovereign integrity should be endorsed' (France 24, 2019). This statement revealed the fundamental clash between the Iranian and the UAE narratives. The Iranian discourse described Houthis as Mujahedeen, or holy warriors; whereas the UAE narrative calls them a terrorist organisation that must be contained. That is why the Houthi militia is the UAE's negative significant other, the ultimate evil that is both threatening the UAE and the Arab identity of the Gulf. The UAE therefore constructed a role based on the 'othering' the Houthis and Iran. This process of engaging in counter roles, with Iran on one side, and Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the other, is what defined and created the anti-Iran, pro-Arab actor role that the UAE took on during the intimal stages of the war.

Role Discovery and Role Learning

Through its interaction with others, the UAE started off on a path of self-exploration to elaborate other roles it can play during the war. The UAE continued to assert its military persona by constructing a role favourable to its key other, the US; that of a counterterrorism partner. The practical implications of that role required that the UAE shifts its focus to southern Yemen where it would pursue its counterterrorism agenda. This role was in harmony with its national role conception as a state opposed to extremism. The expansion of the Houthis in Yemen bolstered AQAP's presence in the South, where the tribes were supportive of their role in fighting the Houthis. This situation troubled both the UAE and the US, both considering

[36] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

AQAP a security threat. In 20215, the US announced that, due to the Saudi Arabian campaign against the Houthis, its special operations forces will withdraw from Yemen. This vacuum provided an opportunity for the UAE to sweep in and take up the US' role. In addition, President Trump reduced the US' oversight over military actions in Yemen (Radman, 2019, p. 10). The campaign against the Houthis and the reduction of US forces allowed AQAP to expand. Hokayem & Roberts (2016, p. 163) explained that 'AQAP benefited from the security vacuum as pro-Hadi forces battled the Houthis, as well as from the disbanding of US-backed counterterrorism units, popular anti-Houthi sentiments among the tribes from which AQAP recruits and the initial Saudi–Emirati prioritisation of the Houthi threat'. The UAE leadership subsequently found that taking up the US' role, as a counterterrorism partner was the most compatible role with their domestic, national, and international conceptions of fighting extremism. To that effect, the UAE's role making focused on two approaches in fighting AQAP. The first was militarily focus, and the second was providing security. On the military front, the UAE trained local forces to form a Security Belt that spans Aden, Abyan and Lahj, and trained elite forces in Hadramawt, Shabwa, and Al Mahra (Radman, 2019, p. 11). The UAE also used its financial capabilities to form alliances with the southern tribes. This allowed the UAE to present itself as a force of good and a provider of security, which made it a better alternative to AQAP. Radman (2019, p. 11) 'the UAE has sought out and procured tribal buy-in for this new security arrangement and assistance from local fighters in routing AQAP from various areas by promising local leaders infrastructure reconstruction'. The UAE's development of its interactions, and its exploration efforts thus led to the discovery of a new and more suitable role for it to play. It redefined itself as a security guarantor in the South of Yemen, and an anti-terrorist actor.

The UAE's military policy on working with local Yemeni forces was to 'advise, assist and accompany' them in the battlefield (Knights, 2019). As a consequence of this policy, the UAE-backed Hadramawt elite forces made succeeded in the liberation of the city of Mukalla in 2016. 'In February 2017, UAE-backed Yemeni forces launched two operations targeting AQAP in the areas west of Mukalla, south of Shabwa, and in parts of Abyan' (Radman, 2019, p. 11). In addition, campaigns contunited to reach 'the Dawan district of Hadramawt in May, the Azzan district of Shabwa in August, and the al Mahfad district of Abyan governorate' (Radman, 2019, p. 11). In 2018, The local forces supported by the UAE carried its counterterrorism operations in Abyan Shabwa and Hadramawt (Radman, 2019, p. 11). 'The UAE-backed militias and Yemeni government security forces launched a campaign to drive AQAP out of Aden, which

was successful, [after a series of violent clashes]' (Radman, 2019, p. 7). In addition, Radman (2019, pp. 7-8) pointed out that in 2016, 'thousands of young Yemenis' joined the UAE recruitment in its counterterrorism efforts forming a force that liberated Mukalla suggesting that opposition towards AQPA was there but was 'awaiting the shift in the balance of power to act, which came with the UAE intervention'. The UAE's role in the south was successful in liberating many areas from AQAP control. This success gained the UAE the support of the local southern tribes, and shifted the power dynamics in the south of Yemen in favour of the UAE and its supporters.

Interactionist Constraints and Role Retreat

The UAE's role in Yemen cannot be reduced to the influence of their significant others, Saudi Arabia and the Houthis. The Yemeni government, and the generalised other shaped the UAE's behaviour, and controlled the outcomes of the war against the Houthis to a great extent. The UAE's successful counterterrorist operations and ability to build networks in the south have strengthened the UAE's confidence in its role. Thus, it established military bases in Socotra and the Perim Islands to expand its presence as a security guarantor. Telci and Horoz (2018, p. 148) explained that 'the UAE administration decided to build military bases on Perim Island in the Bab al-Mandab Strait and on Socotra Island, which is located at the eastern entrance of the Gulf of Aden. With these two military bases, the UAE aims both to increase its area of influence in the region and to make an important move toward becoming a strategic actor in a corridor that hosts an important share of the global energy trade'. However, the Yemeni authorities, considered the UAE's partner in the coalition, perceived this act as a threat, and contested the UAE's behaviour. Therefore, in response to the UAE expanding its military presence to Socotra, Prime Minister Bin Daghr visited Socotra Island to reaffirm Yemen's sovereignty over the island. In response, Anwar Gargash tweeted that 'the Yemeni government accused the UAE of sending more than 100 separationist soldiers to a remote island in the Arab sea. One of the fake news I saw in the news today' (Gargash, 2019)[37]. Furthermore, he justified the UAE's presence in the following tweet:

> 'Some have discovered Socotra Island lately, in an attempt to penetrate the Arab alliance and the UAE… We have historical and [familial] links with the residents of Socotra, and we will support them during Yemen's ordeal, which was sparked by the

[37] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis.

> Houthis… We support their stability, their medical care, education and their wellbeing. (Towers, 2018).

It has been reported that the UAE took control of Socotra's airport and that 'four Emirati C-17 military cargo planes landed to unload at least two BMP-3 tanks, armoured vehicles and 100 new troops' (Towers, 2018). The establishment of the UAE military base is considered the UAE's first deployment of forces there (Towers, 2018). In response, the Yemeni Prime Minster stated: 'Our brothers in the UAE have been present on the island in their civil capacity for three years. There is no new situation in the political and military position of the island that requires control of the airport and the port. This dispute is clearly harmful and can no longer be hidden' (Towers, 2018). Gargash responded, saying that 'Such heinous campaigns led by parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood and which relates to Socotra island, fits within a long and repeated scenario to distort the image of the UAE and its efficient contribution to the Arab coalition efforts against the coup perpetrators led by Houthi militias' (Towers, 2018). This led to an escalation between the UAE and the Yemeni government, with protests breaking out on the island that gathered supporters of the UAE raising pictures of MBZ, and supporters of the Yemeni government brandishing pictures of president Hadi. Thus, in an issued statement, Bin Daghr and local political parties demanded the UAE to 'withdraw from the island unconditionally' (Towers, 2018). As a result, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths stated 'we do call on all the parties to refrain from further escalation and remind everybody that the Socotra Archipelago has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2008' (Towers, 2018). He added that '[the] safety of both its people and its environment need to be secured' (Towers, 2018). The UAE's military strategy of supporting and arming local southerners had strengthened secessionist groups, such as the Southern Transitional Council (STC) that is mainly backed by the UAE. The Yemeni government viewed this as a threat to the unity of Yemen. Hadi described the UAE's actions in the south as that of 'occupiers' (Hearst, 2017; Kalin and Ghantous, 2019). In response, the UAE then described the Yemeni government's performance as 'ineffective' (Hearst, 2017; Kalin and Ghantous, 2019). For the UAE, southern Yemen was the region where it had invested its money and military in order to contain terrorism and the Houthis, and create a secure and stable environment. Alongside this mission, the UAE developed a sense of belonging by succeeding in maintaining good relations with the tribes of the south. The UAE's security vision required it to empower southern groups in order to promote its interest, counter terrorism, uphold security, and keep the Houthis out of the South. The bolstered southern powers were seen as

effective by the Emirati government. This lead to a clash between the UAE and Yemeni governments, which lead to the contestation of the UAE's role, as its presence as a competing power was threatening Yemeni sovereignty. The conflict between the two governments originates from conflicting views over the definition of terrorism. The UAE's national role conception forbids Islamic political groups, including the MB, whereas the Yemeni government includes Islamist members that are in conflict with the UAE. The presence of these individuals within the Yemeni spheres of power were incompatible with UAE's identity as a counterterrorism actor in Yemen. Hadi's strong stance against the UAE was one of the constraints on the UAE's role. It led to the rethinking of the UAE's role capacity and a change in its approach of interacting with others in Yemen.

A year later, after Saudi and UAE intervention, the war in Yemen also attracted international attention, including member states of the Stockholm agreement, and the US congress, who became UAE's generalised other and member of the group. The UAE was accused of many human rights violations in Yemen, which allowed the US congress to influence the UAE's activities in Yemen. For instance, the UAE-led military campaign to liberate Hudaydah port from the Houthis, known as 'Operation Golden Victory', spread fears in the international community. Coalition forces and the Houthis were urged to negotiate a ceasefire to avoid a lengthy and bloody battle that would exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. Moreover, nine US senators presented a letter to the then Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, and Secretary of Defence James Mattis stating that they 'are concerned that pending military operations by the UAE and its Yemeni partners will exacerbate the humanitarian crisis by interrupting delivery of humanitarian aid and damaging critical infrastructure. We are also deeply concerned that these operations jeopardise prospects for a near-term political resolution to the conflict' (Congressional Research Service, 2019, p. 12). Furthermore, US senator and member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Robert Menendez, 'placed a hold on the potential sale of precision-guided munitions to [KSA] and the [UAE]' (Congressional Research Service, 2019, p. 12). Another letter was also written by Senator Menendez on June 28th to the Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo and US Secretary of Defence James N. Mattis, persuading them to restrict US support of the coalition due to human rights violations (Congressional Research Service, 2019, p. 12):

> 'I am not confident that these weapons sales will be utilized strategically as effective leverage to push back on Iran's actions in Yemen, assist our partners in their own self-

> defence, or drive the parties toward a political settlement that saves lives and mitigates humanitarian suffering... Even worse, I am concerned that our policies are enabling [the] perpetuation of a conflict that has resulted in the world's worst humanitarian crisis' (Congressional Research Service, 2019, p. 12).

US congress members advised to use all the diplomatic tools at the US' disposal in order to 'help open the Yemeni port of Hodeida to international humanitarian aid organizations' (Congressional Research Service, 2019, p. 8). With the escalation of the war, another key 'generalised other' embodied in the UN-brokered Stockholm Agreement, emerged to influence the UAE's role behaviour. In December 2018, a ceasefire for the city of Hudaydah was brokered by the UN special envoy to Yemen General Martin Griffiths as part of the Stockholm Agreement. This lead to the agreement of Houthi and Coalition forces to withdraw from the city of Hudaydah and its port. The first phase of the Hudaydah Agreement stipulated that both parties would be mutually redeployed outside the port and city of Hudaydah (Congressional Research Service, 2019, p. 14). This marks a shift in the UAE's role behaviour in Yemen, from working to achieve military goals into finding a political solution to ease the pressure of the international community. Anwar Gargash confirmed that change by saying that 'The UAE, as part of the coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen, is clear in its commitment to the Stockholm Agreement and in maintaining the ceasefire we agreed to in Sweden' (Gulf News, 2019). The UAE announced 'strategic deployment' from Hudydada, as a result of US and UN pressure on the UAE to avoid a bloodbath and exacerbating the famine, and to enter the Stockholm Agreement negotiations that aimed to demilitarise the port of Hudaydah (Wintour and McKernan, 2019; crisis group, 2019b, p. 2). In light of this, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed explained:

> 'We always support the efforts of the United Nations and believe that Sir Martin Griffiths is making an effort. We are looking forward to the Stockholm Agreement Negotiations. These negotiations might not be the last round, but we hope that it will be a strong foundation for starting a more serious negotiation, particularly from the Houthi, if they are honest in their efforts to solve the political crisis' (Sky News Arabia, 2018).[38]

The rise of US congressional pressure and the constant reports on the UAE violating

[38] Translated from Arabic by the author of this thesis

international law influenced their role making, and performance. Maintaining a positive image internationally has always been the UAE's foreign policy strategy, it also boosted its commercial and economic strength in the region. The UAE thus responded by changing its strategy, and constructed a role in relation to the generalised other's perspective, by asserting that it is a good nation that seeks stability and cooperation with the international community. After the Hudaydah crisis, the UAE's role construction was vis-a-vis the generalised other, as a UN partner, to overcome international criticism and affirm its commitment to international norms. The UAE integrated humanitarian aid into its role, in accordance with the Stockholm Agreement. It donated $4 billion in humanitarian assistance since 2015. In 2018, it donated $465 million to the UN's Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (UAE mission in UN, 2018). The international community and the international system thus placed a constraint on the UAE's role and intended goals in Yemen.

Taking on this responsibility added another layer to the complex role of the UAE in Yemen, that of playing two contradicting roles. First being security and militarily driven against the Houthis and AQAP. Second, became a part of a group whereby, its negative significant other, the Houthis is part of. Thus, as part of the group that UAE was prescribed a humanitarian role to hand-out donations, in support of the requirements of the group, and demands of the interaction. It therefore continued to support negotiations through the Stockholm Agreement in order to reach a political resolution to the conflict and to appease the growing anger of US congress circles regarding their role in Yemen. It was reported that 'the UAE accepted there could be no military solution due to global criticism of coalition air strikes that killed civilians and the humanitarian crisis. Heightened U.S.-Iran tensions, which risk triggering a war in the Gulf, precipitated the move' (Kalin & Ghantous, 2019). This change in the UAE's behaviour was expected due to the changing variables embedded in the nature of interactions. The UAE was influenced by the generalised other to reshape its role, and to support a political solution over the military approach.

This shift was part of the UAE's self-exploration and role learning in order to correct its behaviour and be accepted by others. The clash between the Emirati and Hadi government over the former's support of southern powers, and the growing opposition to the UAE's role, both re-oriented the UAE towards a role retreat, and hastened its military withdrawal from Yemen. In doing so, the UAE fulfilled its commitment to strategic redeployment that was announced in 2018 (Hidir, 2019). While the UAE proceeded with its redeployment, it also pledged to

continue its operations against ISIS and the AQAP, thereby showing its commitment to its counterterrorism role. Although, the UAE did invest heavily in war, a role retreat was a necessary manoeuvre due to the interaction constraints and the move towards peace process and to uphold the nation's status and international image. In this vein, Kalin and Ghantous (2019) explained that 'The UAE drawdown aimed to cast Abu Dhabi as the more mature partner and peacemaker, diplomats said, as Western allies pressed for an end to the war that has killed tens of thousands and pushed Yemen to the brink of famine'. This denotes a role retreat that the UAE ended up pursuing to avoid continuous contestation from the international community and the Yemeni government. However, under the Riyadh agreement in 2019, the STC (southern powers/separatist backed by the UAE) and the Hadi government signed a deal to end conflict. The agreement formalised the legitimacy the STC as local political player in Yemen (Jalal, 2020). In addition, although the UAE celebrated its 'phased military withdrawal' in 2020 (Jalal, 2020). Nevertheless, the Emiratis existence and influence is strengthening by its strategic investments in the Yemeni Islands. For instance, Riedel (2021) noted that 'the UAE is building a sizable airbase on the island of Mayun island. […]. The island is key to the control of the Bab el-Mandeb' […]. In addition, he mentioned that Abu Dhabi control Socotra and that the UAE collects 'intelligence on maritime traffic in the Bab el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden', through its military base (Riedel, 2021). The recognition of the STC as a stakeholder, and the continuation to operate and invest in its, will serve the UAE role to continue as regional player in Yemen through its proxy the STC, and through its bases. An Emirati official stated that 'We are not worried about a vacuum in Yemen, because we have trained a total of a 90,000 Yemeni forces' (El Yaakoubi, 2019). This is the legacy of UAE role in Yemen, which ensures in future role in shaping the future of the Yemeni government.

Conclusion

The implications of the Arab revolutions hit Yemen three years after the first mass protest took place in the country in 2012. However, the case of Yemen was different as the Houthi insurgency group took over power and expelled the legitimate government by force. Unlike in other Arab states where the UAE constructed a role that prioritised the MB and its regional supporters, for this first time in its history the UAE engaged in a military confrontation with its long-time rival Iran, represented by the Houthi insurgency or Iran's proxy as per the UAE FP narrative. Since the spread of Arab protests in 2011, the UAE's main focus was within Arab borders, investing its resources in countering the transnational political threat of the Arab Sunni

Brotherhood, with Iran remaining as a second priority. However, the Iranian threat surfaced in Yemen which drove the UAE to intervene in Yemen as a military power to counter Iran and its Houthi proxy. In this bold foreign policy move, the UAE affirmed that it will not tolerate an Iranian intervention in the Gulf nor will its small size deter it from using power at the expense of its regional ally Saudi Arabia and the GCC. The UAE is sending a message that it will not allow Houthis to become another Hezbollah in Arabian Peninsula. This foreign policy step altered the UAE's identity and its perception on the domestic, regional, and international stage.

At an operational level, the war in Yemen was the UAE's natural next step in its role transformation into a capable military actor in the Middle East. In addition, taking part in ground operations was a role opportunity to engage its citizens in the war in order to evaluate and prepare their citizens for a post-oil economy, in which they would take on more national responsibilities. Domestically, the war was perceived as the UAE's second stage of nation building that started in the early 2000s, after the Iraq war in particular. It also manifested an opportunity to shape and develop the national identity by incorporating military and patriotic values, described by Ardemagni (2019) as 'militarised nationalism'. At the regional and international level, the war in Yemen became a stage on which the UAE played a meaningful role in support of Saudi Arabia as a faithful ally, affirming itself as an anti-Iranian power, and a pro-Arab actor. However, the unfolding of the war and the emergence of a new generalised other, presented new challenges that required the UAE to adapt to by playing multiple roles throughout the course of the war, ranging from Saudi Arabia's junior partner, counterterrorism partner, to security guarantor. Thus, Yemen was a platform for military role learning. The UAE targeted terrorist bases in cooperation with international actors to gain counterterrorism combat expertise, which aligned with its national role conception and views on armed militia groups. Therefore, when the Houthis, classified as a terrorist organisation in the UAE, took control of Yemen, the new military role was manifested to support Saudi Arabia in deterring Iranian intervention and containing terrorism. The years spent on military role learning were evident in the UAE's performance as a military ally, counterterrorism partner, and security guarantor in the South. The UAE was capable of training and leading local forces against the Houthis and AQAP. However, the UAE's behaviour was rejected by the generalised others and the Yemeni government, which lead to a role contestation that jeopardised its international image. This was a role constraint that prevented the UAE from acting freely to achieve its vision, particularly in dealing with Islam and the Yemeni government. Therefore, the UAE's role

behaviour was shaped and developed during the war in Yemen, with other key actors influencing it to adopt new roles in relation to the emergence of new others, which finally lead to the withdrawal of its forces and seeking a role-retreat.

8. Conclusion

The research focused on investigating foreign policy role change in small states, particularly the UAE. The UAE served as an ideal example of a small state undergoing radical foreign policy role change in a limited period. This concluding chapter will present a general discussion of this research's results. It will restate and summarise the findings of each chapter, and review the thesis' contribution to the existing literature, and avenues for future research. The research attempted to investigate the UAE's foreign policy role change by answering the following questions, (1) why do some small states pursue greater roles in foreign policy, (2) how do they conduct this change, and (3) what is the impact of these changes on their state identity. These questions were tackled using role theory, which provided a social and heuristic interpretation of the UAE's foreign policy role change, and its new identity affirmation.

The study found that the UAE's foreign policy change materialised at the onset of the 2011 events in Egypt. In addition, it emerged as a response to the growing disaggregation of the Arab order and the state of chaos by which non-state actors, regional interventionist, and transnational groups found safe haven. Thus, the UAE found solution to the regional dilemma it was facing with other allies in stepping into the Arab Spring countries and making roles in support of the previous status qua and its regional interests. In this context, the state's role transformed from a small state low-key humanitarian role to a competitive regional actor recently described as a 'small state with middle power influence' (Hassan, 2020), and little Sparta (Chandrasekaran, 2014). This change is even more puzzling when it is analysed using IR theories on small states' behaviour in the international system as they do not explain why and how this role change and influence materialised and was performed by a small state with limited experience such as the UAE.

Applying the heuristic and social interpretation of role theory, I found that small states and larger powers share the same motivations behind their quests to take on bigger roles, and that all states share similar goals from achieving survival, and role expansion, to identity affirmation. Also, I found that triggers of foreign policy change are also similar between large and small powers: threats, the strive for continuity, the desire to discover the self and assert meaningful roles. The UAE is one such small state that sought role change in a short period. An intriguing aspect was its ability to simultaneously carry bigger and multiple roles despite having limited prior experience with these roles. Applying role theory revealed that the UAE

leadership was triggered by the revolutionary wave of 2011 that threatened to alter the security complex and the pre-established status quo in favour of the MB and other democratic forces. This change endangered the UAE self, its identity, and other GCC monarchies in the long run. The fragmentation of the Arab order caused by the protests and the fall of the central power of Egypt, that for long time served as a regional protector and guarantor of the balance of power, pushed the UAE re-create a role that to fill the emptiness that Egypt once had. Therefore, the UAE did not hesitate to recreate a new identity and affirm itself as a regional actor on the domestic, regional, and international stages. The UAE definitely did not shy away from flexing its muscles to set up its new self as regional status quo power that competes with larger and historic rivals in pursuit of its own interests.

The literature review chapter discussed the definitions of small states, and the grounding of the IR theories of Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, and Constructivism. The review of the literature highlighted the differences between these theories. The flaw in Realism is its orthodox perception of power which focuses on its material aspect, and its simplified understanding of reality, siting the state of anarchy – competition and survival – as an inherent feature of the international system. Although this approach has some merit, looking at IR history, realists' 'material facts' need to be theoretically deconstructed since the international system is the product of social interactions among states, and the social order is in constant flux. Realism also overlooks other IR phenomena and does not consider the evolution of the inertnational system since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 which gave small states more power and room to achieve influence. For instance, Realism neglects 'cooperation', interdependence', and 'mutual benefits' as features of inter-state relations and, therefore, does not account for human nature and its ultimate goal of survival, stability, and prosperity. The theory of Realism was limited in its ability to answer why the UAE changed its foreign policy role and how it was capable of carrying the many roles it adopted in the three states discussed in this thesis. The case studies showed how the UAE used interventionism and hard power manifested by waging war in Yemen, intervening financially in Egypt, and taking part in the proxy war in Libya. These actions contradict the realists' argument that small states will always avoid conflict. In addition, Realism solely concerned itself with state 'survival' and overlooked role influence and expansion as means for that survival – means that the UAE adopted. However, Realist analysis does prove useful in interpreting the UAE's foreign policy role during its first three decades, a period that was officially declared 'the formation phase', under Sheik Zayed's rule. Realist foreign policy tools such as bandwagoning, hedging, and alliances

are also remaining features of small state foreign policy, in the case of the UAE in particular. Nevertheless, they will be maintained in parallel with other foreign policy approaches.

On the other hand, Liberal Institutionalism is a valid theory for studying small state behaviour in the international system. It has contributed to the field of small states and IR in general by considering other international actors in the system such as supranational organisations and their impact on the modern world. Liberal Institutionalism analysis is valuable in the case of small states since it focuses on their behaviour and the influence they exercise on others within international platforms. This school takes into account Nye's discussion of influence and power, which must be considered in a complex modern global system (1990, 2008). Nye's inclusion of culture, diplomacy, and technology as forms of influence deconstructs power and explains how small states use these tools to emerge as international players. In addition, Liberal Institutionalism considers how social networks are measured as an indicator of power and how small states use these networks to compensate for their structural deficits. Liberal Institutionalism provided an in-depth analysis of how small states take advantage of these social networks that build on their ability to construct diversified alliances that support their emergence as successful international mediators. However, Liberalism does not explain why, despite the establishment of the UN, the spread of supranational organisations, and the move towards cooperation, international conflicts still exist and states wage wars against one another, and threaten international security. In addition, in the case of this topic study, Liberalism did not offer an explanation of why and how small states seek foreign policy change and why. Also, this theory does not dicuss how do they embark on taking larger roles such as the roles that the UAE carried discussed in this thesis. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the world is moving towards more interdependence and cooperation. Thus, the use of Liberal Institutionalism is still a valid tool to showcase how small states seek to influence and shape world affairs through their growing membership in international blocks in a globalised era.

In addition, Constructivism is particularly useful in the analysis of the Middle East as it focuses on the roles of identities that inform small states' foreign policy behaviour. Constructivism's main contribution is its focus on ideational factors as forms of influence in foreign policy. Constructivists used and deconstructed the Realist analysis of 'material interests', 'interest', and 'threat' arguing that these material facts are not given, but socially constructed. For instance, constructivists showed how Arabism was a threat to the monarchic regimes of the Gulf and a source of influence in the construction of the UAE's foreign policy in its early

stages. This theory will continue to serve Middle Eastern scholars to investigate a region controlled by ideational conflicts. Therefore, the limitations of the classic IR theories, discussed in this section, led to the analysis of small states' behaviour using the FPA of role theory as it singles out the components of roles which reveal the triggers behind foreign policy changes. It does so using a heuristic and social interpretation as roles are constructed by foreign policy elites, human agency, and states that are considered social actors in the international arena. This framework is particularly well adapted to the cases of the UAE and the GCC in general due to their societies' dominating political culture that places the leadership, and human agency, at the top of the decision-making process that shapes the realities of these nations. Therefore, this approach is capable of addressing the lacunas in the literature of small states, which traditionally focuses on the influence of structure on the foreign policy output. Although Interactionist role theory and FPA disregard systemic nature and the balance of power in their analyses, this weakness can be resolved by including other theoretical components such as FPA that is incorporated in the theory of the chapter, as summarised below.

The theoretical framework used in this study is an application of interaction role theory in combination with FPA. Role theory explains how an interaction influences a state/agent to adopt certain roles in relation to others. It also deconstructs the origins of roles through three steps that include role taking, role making, and alter casting. This theoretical approach traces how the existence of others informs an actor on the roles that should be taken on to assert itself and find a meaningful role it is capable of playing. It also reveals the influence of 'the other' in relation to which the actor studies 'who it is' and 'what it wants' in the social interaction (Klose, 2020, p. 856). In addition, role theory discusses two crucial elements of the 'self': the 'Me' and the 'I'. The theory stipulates that roles are first elaborated through the dialogue between the 'Me' and the 'I'. Roles originate from the actor's action of viewing itself through the eyes of the other. This interpretive process will result in the 'I', which originates the creative reaction as a response to the 'Me'. In addition, interactionist role theory discussed others who are essential in influencing states' role namely, the 'positive' or 'negative' significant others, and the 'generalised' other. It discussed that a state defines its role by comparing itself to the significant other that has the most influence over the self and role making. On the other hand, the generalised other refers to the group the actor/agent belongs to, such as an alliance of states, friends, or partners with which it shares a similar identity or strategic interests. Moreover, role theory discussed NRC and their influence on roles. It argues that agents or state leaderships are usually constrained by their domestic context to whose values, beliefs, and societal cultural

components, they should adhere. From that perspective, roles usually reveal actors' identities. In other words, social roles define a state's identity. Thus, for a state to affirm its identity, it should first have a social role. Although interactionist role theory overlooks the power dynamic and the hierarchy of the international system, I tried to overcome this limitation by including components of FPA and foreign policy change to add a structural aspect to the study.

Furthermore, foreign policy change analysis, discussed in the theory chapter, stipulates that the triggers of role change are rooted in internal factors such as leadership change, and foreign policy elite perception. It adds that foreign policy change can be external 'systemic' materialised in the emergence of problematic situations, and in times of crisis. However, the theoretical discussion clarified that the perception of a situation as problematic is highly dependent on the leadership's perception and definition of the problem. The leadership and foreign policy agents can even perceive these problematic situations as opportunities to push for changes they have been eager to implement. Thus, when states perceived a certain external/internal change to be problematic, they would be influenced to adopt a foreign policy change in a short period. Incorporating FPA will provide an in-depth understating of how individualistic, heuristic, and structural elements influence roles and change them. Furthermore, the focus on the human agency is necessary as it bridges FPA with the psychological traits of leaders in a region where foreign policy elites play a major role in shaping their nations' identity roles and realities. Having that understanding allows us to deconstruct the components of the role, its roots, and influences while revealing the triggers of foreign policy change such as how an external change is interpreted by the human agency leading to the creation of a new identity at the domestic, regional, and international levels.

Summary of methodology

The research adopted a qualitative approach analysis treating the UAE as a social actor. The study aimed at providing a heuristic interpretation of the UAE's foreign policy role change. Furthermore, the thesis applied a single case study approach that focused on the UAE's foreign policy. This research is designed to focus on interpreting the UAE's self and how it perceives the me, the other, and the world.

Therefore, this study treated the UAE leadership, the agent, as the independent variable of this study, and the foreign policy role as the dependent variable. However, the key question was explored through a comparative case study applied through the lens of three sub-case studies

namely Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. The discussion of these sub-case studies would provide an in-depth analysis of the progression of the Emirati role in these aforementioned states following a chronological order. It also uncovers the influence of each state on the roles adopted by the UAE and its impact on the UAE's identity. The UAE's role in each case study is tied to and influenced by the domestic and political circumstances of each state, which resulted in different role enactments. In other words, this comparative approach would trace the stages in which the UAE manifested foreign policy changes, performed new roles that carried greater responsibility, and affirmed a new identity. Although each case has its domestic context, one common aspect between the three analysed states is their location in the fragmented regional order, which was reflected the most within their borders compared to other Arab states. In addition, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen together contributed to the overall role that the UAE is currently shaping by being the platforms in which the UAE engaged in role-learning and role-discovery. Furthermore, each case study elaborates on how the existence of others within these three interactions has informed and influenced the UAE to carry the role that it has today. The data analysed in the study are mainly sourced from the internet such as tweets, interviews, and foreign policy elite statements. It also included empirical data on the UAE extracted from news, reports and published books. This collected data will be analysed to understand the foreign policy narrative that was constructed during a time in which the UAE was seeking role discovery and affirming its new self.

Summary of the analytical chapters

The analysis of the first case study begins with the UAE's role in Egypt as the first interactionist environment informing the UAE about the MB as the newcomers on the Egyptian political scene and the wider region. The 2011 revolution led to the fall of Egypt, a central Arab Sunni power, that was long considered an Arab security guarantor and stabilising force against regional threats. Thus, the fall of Egypt and the vacuum of power that ensued led to the disaggregation of the Arab order and the rise of non-state actors, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, that influenced the UAE to step into the regional scene to restore the status quo. In this vein, the interaction between the UAE and Egypt since 2012 has been riddled with multiple diplomatic crises and war of words between MB elites and religious figures such as al-Qaradawi, leading to a complete shift in the UAE's 'me'. Egypt, under the MB, revealed a deep ideational and religious clash between the UAE and political philosophy of the MB. This revived a historic and suppressed conflict that led the UAE, for the first time, to adopt a hands-

on approach and fill the vacuum left by the collapse of traditional central states to contain the Islamist threat. Although this was perceived as a threat and a foreign policy dilemma, this conflict urged the UAE to construct its NRC and new regional role, reshape its national identity, and take on its role capacity as a regional player. In other words, the existence of the MB as the enemy was crucial to the UAE's new self and its identity as a moderate Muslim state, and regional player. The interaction with the MB influenced the UAE to 'other' the brotherhood, casting it as a negative significant other. Therefore, when the Tamarod revolution against Morsi broke out, the UAE intervened to bring back the old regime, enacting the role of a financial interventionist and affirming itself as a status quo power. In addition, after the success of its role enactment during the second revolution in 2013, the rise of its ally Al-Sisi ensured a return to the status quo, influencing the UAE to strengthen its regional role by the inclusion of Islam in its foreign policy. The UAE role in Egypt indicates that Iran was not considered in the UAE's role construction. Shiite Iran, considered a regional external threat to the UAE and the rest of the GCC, was not a priority to the Emirati leaders. However, the perceived threat originated from within the Sunni Arab states as the Arab Sunni Muslim brotherhood party. The UAE's emergence as a regional player during the post-MB government in Egypt enabled it to realise that it is not only competing with an 'Islamist opposition group' but with other regional states that hold religious legitimacy among the Arab populations. The Saudi Wahhabi doctrine, Qatar's support of the MB, Turkey's historic position as a Sunni state, and Iran as a Shiite power all compete in playing a regional role by including Islam as a form of statecraft. The UAE's interaction at this competitive level enabled it to realise that it needed to adopt religion in its statecraft. At this stage, Egypt was crucial as its religious institution Al-Azhar, shared with the UAE the same Sufi doctrine. Thus, in enacting its regional role as a status quo and anti-Islamist power, the UAE allied itself with Al-Azhar to promote its doctrine, playing a similar role to other regional players such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and Iran. The events of 2011, and the success of its role enactment in 2013, informed the UAE that to protect its role achievements and to continue as an influential player, it needed to step into the theological competition in the Middle East with Al-Azhar by its side. This role did not exist before 2016. The interaction in Egypt transformed the UAE into a theological/Sufi power with a mission to contain other extreme versions of their religion, reflecting an ambition to continue this ideational historic competition in the Middle East.

The UAE's actions in Libya bear witness to a shift in its role as a result of the international intervention in Libya in 2011, and two civil wars in 2014 and 2017. The UAE's first role

manifested a small state's behaviour in which it intervened under the NATO umbrella. The UAE sought to affirm its meaningful role as a member of the group and constructed roles in relation to the international community that legitimised the revolution's demands. In light of this, the UAE adopted its traditional role of supporting the group members while seeking military training as a NATO partner. In addition, it adopted a diplomatic role, accepting and strengthening the opposition of leaders in coordination with other group members such as Qatar. However, the first foreign policy shift can be traced back to 2014 with the emergence of the Libyan Dawn led by Islamist militia groups, and the Haftar campaign to cleanse Libya of terrorism. The state of chaos within the Arab order post 2011 was reflected in Libya after the success of the NATO mission that resulted in the fall of Gaddafi. Instead of establishing a democracy, Libya soon fell into a civil war where regional non state actors as well as external external actors emerged. Thus, similar to its intervention in Egypt, the UAE created a role in Libya to bring a friendly secular national government and contain Islamist power in the future order in Libya as it believes would present a threat to Egypt and its interests in North Africa . The civil war mirrored a bigger regional conflict between Islamist and secular/military and national forces, dragging the UAE into the Libyan theatre to affirm its identity as a counterterrorism and anti-Islamist power to secure its regional vision in North Africa. Thus, it constructed a role, casting Haftar as a local ally and capable military actor and Egypt as a counterterrorism partner. In that phase, the UAE played a counterterrorism role in alliance with Egypt and conducted military airstrikes against terrorist bases. Furthermore, the UAE reshaped Haftar into a national leader who competed with Islamists and imposed his demands on the political future of Libya. In 2019, the UAE started casting Turkey as a neo-Ottoman threat to the Arab region by criticising its intervention in Arab land. The ideational and political conflict was reflected in the increase of both proxies' armament. This lead led to the UAE's engagement in a civil war for the first in its history. Later on, the emergence of UNSMIL as a leading actor in the Libyan conflict shifted the UAE's role position to cast it as a generalised other. To affirm itself and preserve its role continuity, the UAE took on a mediator role. However, the UAE's role and its support for Haftar were met with international contestation that weakened its role due to the influence of its generalised other over the UAE's interests. Libya was a platform that revealed both the UAE's role success and failure due to constraints of the interaction as well as the emergence of others. It was an interaction in which the UAE affirmed itself as a regional player while exposing its structural weakness as a small state. Similar to Egypt, Iran was not in the Emirati leadership's regional considerations when constructing their role in Libya. The

main threat perceived by the UAE in Libya was the Islamists supported by their regional allies Turkey and Qatar.

The Arab revolutions reached Yemen in 2011 where Ali Abuddla Saleh did not respond to the protestors' demand for him to step down from power. However, the revolutions caused a vacuum of power in many parts of Yemen leading the Houthi insurgency of 2013, to overthrow the legitimate Yemeni government leading president Mansour to seek refuge in Saudi Arabia. The war in Yemen is a manifestation of a complete role shift, and the UAE's gradual militarization during the decades that preceded that war. Yemen was the stage on which the UAE sought military role discovery. This foreign policy change in Yemen materialised as a result of the UAE's military role in Libya. As the war in Yemen unfolded and its actors changed, the UAE constructed a role in relation to the new other at every stage of the war. In the beginning, the UAE's role was in relation to its positive significant other: Saudi Arabia. Its foreign policy elite declared that their intervention was in response to Saudi Arabia's call for support to deter a common threat to Gulf security: Iran's proxy, the Houthis. Yemen, after Bahrain in 2011, was the only state in the Arabian Peninsula, where the UAE constructed a role to deter any Iranian influence that might spread as result of the political vacuum. In addition, Yemen was the first platform where the UAE had to confront Iran's military by joing the Arab coalition in Yemen. Thus, the UAE's first constructed role was that of a junior partner of Saudi Arabia in its fight against the Houthis to restore the legitimate Yemeni government. In addition, the UAE played a counterterrorism partner role, casting the US as an ally. Their most successful execution of that role was against AQAP in the south, which culminated in the UAE becoming the security guarantor of the region. The UAE's success as a counterterrorism actor and security guarantor lies in its cultural knowledge that allowed it to form alliances with tribal leaders in the South, who fully accepted that role and cooperated against terrorist leaders. This presented a threat to the Yemeni government leading to a role conflict between the self as a pro-Yemeni government and a counterterrorism actor in the South. Thus, Yemen was a platform of role learning for the UAE where it discovered its operational and cultural capacity in fighting terrorism there. This led to the UAE's self-actualisation and the adoption of counterterrorism actor as its most meaningful role. However, the international intervention in the war constrained the UAE with role contestation and threats to its image in allies and international community circles. The humanitarian crisis caused by the war, the conflict with the Yemeni government over the UAE's role in the South, and the general international perception of the Houthis as a legitimate group, barred the UAE from

continuing its role in Yemen. Thus, its role retreat suggests a consideration of bigger international community perceptions that matter to the UAE self the second phase of the war, the UAE role was constricted in relation to the peace process. In addition, the UAE continued to serve its ends by gaining military experience and asserting itself as a capable military partner. Furthermore, the changes in Yemen and the role discovery led the UAE to realise its ability to play a secutiy protector role in the southern region of Yemen. Although the UAE's role in Yemen contradicted the realist assumptions that small states cannot engage in wars, it still showed elements of smallness evidenced by its intervention under the Saudi umbrella, and by seeking a counterterrorism role in partnership with bigger powers like the US. Later on, in 2019, the UAE started its role retreat by downsizing its military troops following the international pressure over the humanitarian crisis. Although the UAE did not achieve its goal of bringing back the legitimate government, it nevertheless managed to gain military expertise, expand its network and realise its role capacity as a capable regional player. The UAE's actions in Yemen showed that it is a small state with middle power aspirations and influences. At an internal level, the war in Yemen and the emergence of the Houthis served the UAE's leadership to push for the inclusion of militant nationalism in its NRC and unify the national identity of the seven emirates under the cause of war. This step shows how external interactions change the perception of the self and influence national identity. In essence, the UAE's identity before the war in Yemen is not the same as after it. The UAE today is considered a small militant power in the Middle East.

The findings of this study suggest that the outcome of the 2011 events led to the resurfacing of an old ideational conflict between Islamist and status-quo power. For the first time in its history, the UAE saw itself play an influential and active role in this struggle. Another common element in all case studies is the Western role, depicted by the US' perception of Islamists as legitimate actors to cement its authority. The UAE visualised the West's perceptual change as a security threat that brought about new policy dilemmas that required foreign policy solutions. To that end, the UAE embarked on a role journey that led to the discovery of its role capacity by adopting an array of roles. This was due to the unpredictable and constantly changing nature of the interaction, the emergence of 'generalised others' that the UAE needed to ascribe to get their recognition or to affirm their identity in relation to negatives others. In addition, the UAE's role-playing, allowed it to carry larger roles in these states, to either achieve expertise, engage in role learning, or affirm itself as a status quo power, and anti-Islamist, counterterrorism actor.

The study found that small states have been marginalised in IR due to the traditional trend that viewed the role of greater powers to be more influential than their smaller counterparts that are now playing increasingly bigger roles. This is evidenced by the evolution of the UAE's foreign policy role in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. In these interactionist platforms, the UAE intervened to overcome policy dilemmas it perceived as threatening The social interactions with others coupled with the dissagrigation of the Arab order post 2011 led the UAE to realise its role capacity, which emerged during its engagement in making roles in the aforementioned states. The UAE, eventually, actualised itself through affirming its role as an anti-Islamist actor, status quo power, as well as asserting itself as a capable military actor, counterterrorism actor, and an emerging small military power in the Gulf. Furthermore, its post-revolution role-playing informed its agency to include religion in its foreign policy to legitimise its regional role and assert itself as a competitor against other historic regional powers. This signalled a major change in its traditionally secular foreign policy approach. This confirms the UAE's power aspirations and its desire to maintain itself as a leading player in the Middle East, a region where religion is considered a matter of national security. Launched by the post-2011 power vacuum, the UAE engaged in a socialisation process and adopted roles to fill that vacuum. To implement these foreign policy changes, the UAE pushed for a new identity affirmation and the reengineering of its national role conception. This allowed the UAE to ascend to the status of influential small power, or a small state with middle power, whose influence plays an equal role to that of traditional regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey. In sum, the social interaction served the UAE as a platform for role discovery leading it to achieve its previously unknown middle power influence.

The three case studies showed unique political considerations tied to their domestic contexts which produced different roles performed by the UAE in each state. However, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen share the same triggers that pushed the UAE to change its role: the vacuum of power that led to the state of chaos in the Middle East. The internal instability in these three states mirrors the broader regional fragmentation following the outbreak of the Arab revolutions in 2011. Thus, the roots of role change in each case study are connected to the general Emirati foreign policy change that led it to take on bigger roles turning it into a regional player and military power. The disaggregation of the Arab order after 2011 led to the emergence of political threats such as the Muslim Brotherhood, non-state actors, and regional interventions from rival actors such as Turkey, Qatar, and Iran. This prompted the UAE to recreate a foreign policy role to intervene in these states in its attempt to restore the previous

regional order. Thus, the UAE directed its attentions domestically creating a new self and internal environment that aligns with its new regional role. As a result, the UAE invested in new national role conceptions that stood upon values of patriotism, militarism, and moderate Islam. In this context, the UAE took security measures to contain the Islamist sentiments led by the Al-Islah group by detaining its members on charges of treason. In addition, the government invested in a new conscription program to build a militarized environment, involving its citizenry, and promoting the leadership's national and strategic vision to its public. This move altered the UAE identity by reshaping the pre-established social contact of what was once described as a welfare state to push nationals to engage in militarism and spreading its version of 'unpolitical Islam' and 'moderate Islam' among its citizenry. These efforts came in its attempt to secure its domestic front from external religious threats that could be activated in the future by unifying its own version of Islam with its national identity. At a regional level, the UAE took an assertive approach by working individually and in cooperation with regional allies to contain Islamism in Egypt and Libya as part of its regional policy to restore the status quo, and to fight the Houthi rebellion as a non-state actor and Iran's proxy in Yemen thereby eliminating any Iranian existence in the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, the element of crisis in the region caused by the fall of the centres of power, such as Egypt, pushed to the UAE to seek the roles it adopted in the aforementioned case studies to fill the political void. Also, it provided the Emirati leadership with an opportunity to discover itself and its capabilities as a regional player. The research outcomes found that the regional threat that was endangering the UAE did not originate from its old regional rival Iran. However, it was the Sunni Arab party, the Muslim Brotherhood, that was a priority for the UAE's regional agenda in the first half-decade since the spread of the 2011 revolutions in the region. The Iranian threat resurfaced after the 2015 war in Yemen. The Houthi insurgency alarmed the UAE that a pro-Iranian government in the Arabian Peninsula would pose a threat to the Gulf monarchies and cause more instability in the Arab region. The UAE identity change and role behaviour shows that it was no longer content with relying on other international and regional powers to secure the region. Thus, it risked its small size and limited military expertise to compete with larger powers and historical groups to achieve its own security and restore the regional status quo.

Contributions

This research opens the door to implementing interactionist role theory in the study of the GCC and the UAE, as it sheds light on how the other influences the self, and how the interaction

influences and shapes role enactment. The strength of role theory is its ability to establish a comparison with a focus on the agent under study, as well as explain how the agent's interactions with others produced the roles that are shaping its reality. Furthermore, the study contributed to the literature on the UAE, GCC, and small states by delivering a synthesis of the empirical work produced on the UAE over the past decade through a theoretical study that attempted to interpret the recent role change adopted by its elite. Using role theory, this research also explained how small states, such as the UAE, overcame their structural and systemic deficit by taking advantage of the interactionist context in which they are involved. Small states achieve that end by playing roles in relation to others and asserting their identities, proving to themselves and others that they are capable of learning new roles and playing meaningful ones, and capable of changing their pre-established roles to serve their own ends. That is where the value of this heuristic and social research lies since this theoretical and methodological framework has rarely been used in the study of UAE and GCC foreign policy. Furthermore, since role making is in the hands of the political elite, this study can be an invitation to incorporate interactionist role theory in the study of the Middle East and the Global South in general, as role theory can be of scientific and academic value to the study of foreign policymaking in the region. As Breuning (2017) stated, 'role theory allows FPA to move beyond a U.S. centric or global-north-centric field to become more broadly comparative'. This theoretical and methodological lens can fill the lacunas in the literature on small states' foreign policy by delivering a heuristic and social interpretation of their realities.

Positionality

I should address that being an Emirati witnessing the fast and sudden changes taken by my country at the domestic and regional levels motivated me to undertake this study. The extreme foreign policy shift that the UAE adopted and the greater responsibilities it took in the midst of the so-called Arab Spring were puzzling to me, first, as an Emirati citizen and, second, as a student of IR. The assertive roles the UAE preformed as a status quo power actor, anti-Islamism, and military small power raised many questions. I often asked myself, while observing all the changes that small states have undertaken, are we as a nation perceived as small country, and model of tourism and commerce in a region? My answer was we are definitely not we are becoming something more!

The UAE role change has often been mentioned and discussed in many of my IR class rooms, conferences I have attended, and also in personal settings among small groups of friends.

Questions such as why and for what ends is the UAE changing? Can the UAE succeed in its wars? And does it have the capacity to carry on with the many roles it has adopted? Is this change only temporary to defeat the MB and will then be reverted or will it be sustained? Those were the common questions in my IR classrooms, conferences, and discussions. Therefore, as a student of IR, committing to an academic study was a requirement to scientifically understand the UAE as a foreign policy phenomenon in a changing regional and international order.

I would like to note that, while pursuing this academic investigation, I realized that my upbringing, as an Emirati woman from Al-Ain in Abu Dhabi, had and will continue to have an influence on how I perceive, understand, and interpret the world around me. It has benefited me as I often considered myself an 'insider of the political culture' which provided me with the understanding of the foreign policy narrative analysed in this research. It also allowed me to make an educated choice of the applied methodology that would enable me to accomplish this study successfully. That is how I was able to demonstrate to the reader the importance of state leadership and human agency in the shaping the Emirati role and its capacity to influence the domestic context by which all external changes were pursed. Furthermore, the decision to choose role theory was based on its methodological capacity to interpret the roles, positions and identities affirmed from the perspective of the role taker, in this case, the UAE. Thus, I attempted to interpret the Emirati worldview and foreign policy narrative to understand how and why these roles came into play. However, the decision to adopt role theory as a theoretical framework required an interpretation of the agent's worldview coupled with my Emirati background which could be a disadvantage. As I attempted to clarify how the Emirati foreign policy narrative was built to justify its roles, I could have been biased. On the other hand, since the research focuses on foreign policy which is usually crafted by small groups of foreign policy makers and in the case of the UAE, this group is even smaller, and as 'an outsider' to these circles, access to the relevant information was hard and sometimes impossible. However, my academic training provided me with the scientific tools to address these issues, analyse the origins of the roles, the triggers of role change and role making, and the implications of the role performance on the UAE and the region as a whole. Thus, focusing on analysing the foreign policy narrative could disclose the rational, heuristic motivations behind most of the UAE's foreign policy decisions. In the field of Middle Eastern foreign policy, I believe that further studies should focus on understanding the leadership's worldviews, heuristics, and narratives in order to reveal the reasons behind their states' behaviours and the implications of their roles on their selves. I hope

that this study would provide the reader insight into the UAE's foreign policy role and the identity associated with it.

Avenues for future research

Applying interactionist role theory in research on the UAE and the Gulf states through a heuristic approach will add valuable information to the literature on foreign policy and small states' IR in general. In the particular case of the UAE, examining its role change in Syria, Qatar, and the Horn of Africa would uncover hidden factors and other interactionist influences that pushed the UAE, for example, to support the revolution against the regime in Syria in 2011, and then to normalising its relation with Syria in 2022. In addition, in 2020, the UAE normalised its relations with Israel, which it had cast as a long-term enemy in the Emirati narrative since the day of its establishment. This extreme foreign policy change for an Arab state requires a heuristic interpretation of the relations between this recent role change and the events of 2011. In addition, role theory requires further investigation by testing its assumptions on states that create roles and affirm their identities. In addition, the UAE's new Sufi, anti-Islamist, and counterterrorism roles had elements in its elite and domestic context which were revived in its new role making post-2011.Thus, examining if identities or social roles come first would be a question worthy of further investigation in the research on the Gulf region and small states in general. In addition, the post-COVID era, the reconciliation with Qatar, the Russia-Ukraine war are new structural changes that are continuing to shape the UAE's foreign policy, while the UAE's established identity will continue to stand, its preparation for a post-hydrocarbon future is influencing its role priorities and making it consider new significant others in its efforts to secure its economic position and regional status, such as its ally and close neighbour Saudi Arabia. In this vein, The UAE government's new strategy titled 'The 50th principles' that highlights the ten principles of the UAE in the coming 50 years placed economic development second after strengthening the union. This indicate that the UAE is moving away from the security concerns of 2011 revolutions era dictated by political-ideological considerations. This suggests that the UAE is prioritising economic diversification which requires it to build up its economic position and find new economic roles which would entail creating new role play and finding new others that best serve their role in the post-oil era. The move towards prioritizing the economy is not only driven by the UAE in region, similarly, Saudi Arabia is also seeking economic diversification and has implemented economic reforms in the fields of tourism, commerce, and investment that have long been

considered Dubai's particularity in the region. Saudi Arabia is moving away from its Wahhabi doctrine and leading social, religious, and economic reforms to position itself as a moderate and forward-looking country. This indicates that, the coming years will witness an economic competition between the biggest two economies of the Middle East, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. This will require the UAE to strengthen its economic role to secure its position and regional status. This shift requires future research to investigate how the transition towards a post-hydrocarbon future in the Gulf will influence interstate relations, social contacts, and their established political roles as status quo powers.

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